

Birkbeck, University of London

*Delirious USA: The Representation of Capital in the Fiction of Don DeLillo*

Thomas William Lynn Travers

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*Declaration*

I, Thomas William Lynn Travers, declare that this thesis is my own work. Where I have drawn upon the work of other researchers, this has been fully acknowledged.

## *Abstract*

In this thesis I offer a new reading of Don DeLillo's fiction through an engagement with contemporary Marxist literary theory and political economy. Beginning in the 1960s, the thesis traces the launch, expansion, and shattering of DeLillo's narrative apparatus as it recomposes itself across the genres of the short story, the conspiratorial thriller, the historical novel, and the novel of time. Developing on theories of the novel as a capitalist epic, the thesis takes the insistent appearance of surplus populations in DeLillo's work as an opportunity to reflect on, but also to revise and reconceptualise, Marxist accounts of the novel and its philosophy of history. The DeLillo that emerges from this thesis is less an exemplar of postmodernism and more a novelist of the dispossessed whose central representational task is the invention of a multitude. Chapter One contends that DeLillo's early short stories from the 1960s acquire a new recognisability in the wake of his late turn towards an aesthetic of suspension. The chapter questions whether the forms of stasis depicted in DeLillo's short fiction generate new historical futures or if they contribute to a de-collectivised eternal present that later consumes his work. Chapter Two addresses DeLillo's off-kilter conspiracy novels and reads their discovery of pockets of uneven development through and against the concept of 'cognitive mapping'. Chapter Three examines the formal means by which DeLillo appropriates Georg Lukács's classic account of the historical novel and reconfigures it through an irrational historicism that hinges on the non-presupposition of the people. Chapter Four considers the extent to which the non-anthropogenic subjects of history that constrain and inform DeLillo's twenty-first century fiction constitute political resignation or if they intimate historical futures beyond a catastrophic present. The thesis concludes with a brief reflection on passages out of DeLillo's epic representation of capitalism.

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## Introduction

### **‘Breathing the Fumes of Free Enterprise Forever’: Don DeLillo and Marxism**

*For many of us, Don DeLillo has been the most interesting and talented of American post-modernist novelists*

My laudatory epigraph is taken from a surprising source: Fredric Jameson’s brief but coruscating review of *The Names* (1982), Don DeLillo’s seventh novel and the first to be situated outside the United States—although, importantly, not beyond the sphere of American economic and political power. Product of a Guggenheim Fellowship, *The Names* is often cited as a pivotal moment in DeLillo’s career: a formal breakthrough which, combined with institutional recognition, marks a transitional stage on the route towards literary canonisation. Jameson, in his contemporaneous review, performs the opposite gesture and reads *The Names* ‘as a determinedly minor work’. The novel is the latest instalment in a literary project which revives and ‘self-consciously’ rewrites popular genres ‘across the distance of pastiche’: post-autonomous artworks that stylistically register the complete commodification of social relations.<sup>1</sup> *The Names*, Jameson adds, underscores the ‘spatial dilemma confronted by contemporary fiction’: namely, the incommensurability ‘between individual experience, existential experience, as we go on looking for it in our individual biological bodies, and structural meaning, which can now ultimately derive only from the world system of multinational capitalism’. An ‘epistemological’ writer, DeLillo takes ‘this ineradicable tension between fragmented, private experience and the “scientific” explanation of the world’, as the fundamental representational problem ‘to be solved formally’ by his novels. *The Names*, though, does not resolve this contradiction through a maximalist ‘totalisation by fiat’ but,

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘*The Names*, and *Richard A*’, *Minnesota Review*, 22 (Spring 1984), 116-122 (p. 119).

rather, investigates the microscopic and unnameable experiences of ‘life among the unlinked fragments of the same untotalisable world’.<sup>2</sup> Instead of a dialectical unity between fragment and immense global totality, the constituent episodic units of *The Names* threaten to de-dialecticise the eternal present of bodily affect from the abstract movements of historical time—scenic fragments that are nonetheless marked ‘with a peculiar structural absence’.<sup>3</sup> What is so tantalising about this review is that it indicates DeLillo’s presence in the formative stages of Jameson’s account of postmodernism, a presence virtually erased from Jameson’s major theorising.<sup>4</sup> A reconstruction of this non-encounter between DeLillo and Jameson is one of the subplots of the following study.

### *Jameson’s Capital and the Theory of the Novel*

In this thesis I offer a new reading of Don DeLillo’s oeuvre through an engagement with contemporary Marxist literary theory and political economy. Beginning in the 1960s, the thesis tracks the launch, expansion, and shattering of DeLillo’s narrative poetics as it adopts and recomposes itself across the genres of short fiction, the conspiratorial thriller, the historical novel, and the philosophical novel of time. The accumulation and subsequent contraction or crisis of narrativity in DeLillo’s work, the thesis will argue, registers conceptually and encodes aesthetically a breakdown in Marxist theories of the novel, whereby the relationship between individual consciousness and the material conditions of embodiment can no longer be presented in terms of rational historical progress. DeLillo’s fiction is both a determinate response to punctual moments of crisis within twentieth and twenty-first century US history

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson, ‘*The Names*’, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 122. ‘Maximalism’ and ‘minimalism’ are two options available to the novel in Jameson’s ‘Literary: Allegoresis in Postmodernity’, in *Allegory and Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), pp. 309-348.

<sup>4</sup> There is a glancing reference to ‘DeLillo’s transitional novels’ and their ‘private languages’ in Jameson’s review of Karl Ove Knausgaard, ‘Itemised’, *London Review of Books*, 40.21 (8 November 2018), 3-8 (p. 5).

and determined by structural transformations within US capital, as representative of capital in general, and the waning of US hegemony, as a metonym for empire in general.

Something of this teleology is captured by Jarold Bradway, the first-person narrator of DeLillo's short story 'Hammer and Sickle' (2010), who reflects that 'we were the end products of the system, the logical outcome, slabs of burnt-out capital'.<sup>5</sup> An inmate at a minimum-security prison, the 'we' refers to Bradway's fellow white-collar criminals, who become obsessed with a children's stock market program and its daily coverage of the 2007-2008 financial crisis as it unfolds across the world system. Bradway relates that the reports conveyed 'the sense of an event, news in high clamour, all the convergences of emotional global forces bringing us here in a wave of complex expectation'.<sup>6</sup> 'Hammer and Sickle' dramatises the perspectival split between individual rogue financiers—who are collectivised through incarceration—and systemic crisis which exceeds figuration and is narrated telegraphically by the television show: 'what is Wall Street? Who is Wall Street?'.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the child presenters demand that 'Peoples of the world, unite', Bradway concludes his narrative on a highway overpass with an alternative 'burst of enlightenment': 'this is civilization, I thought, the thrust of social and material advancement, people in motion, testing the limits of time and space. Never mind the festering stink of burnt fuel, the fouling of the planet'.<sup>8</sup> 'Breathing the fumes of free enterprise forever', Bradway's account frames two crucial moments in DeLillo's project: the narrative search for a not-yet-existent communist people and the scenic description of the by-products of capital's moving contradictions.<sup>9</sup>

Jameson's account of political economy is also attuned to the disease and deterioration of historical futures: of the breakdown and stagnation of development and the disappearance

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<sup>5</sup> Don DeLillo, 'Hammer and Sickle', in *The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories* (London: Picador, 2011), pp. 147-181 (p. 175).

<sup>6</sup> DeLillo, 'Hammer and Sickle', p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175; 179-180.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.



of vast populations into black holes of wage-less misery. At least, the conjoined ruination of the collective and the environment is the message that comes through most powerfully in *Representing Capital* (2011), Jameson's elegant study of volume one of *Capital*. The 'centrepiece of Marx's representation' of the capitalist system, Jameson provocatively contends, is 'the "absolute general law of capital"', a law which 'posits the identity of productivity and misery'.<sup>10</sup> For Marx, the 'accumulation of capital' involves a 'multiplication of the proletariat'; that is to say, advances in the social productivity of labour—through machinery and planning—contribute to an expansion of the industrial reserve army whose active labour-power is surplus to requirements.<sup>11</sup> Whilst this 'doctrine of immiseration' was the 'object of much mockery during the affluent post-war' years, its anticipation of rising levels of pauperism and declining rates of profitability 'seem to renew the actuality today of *Capital* on a world scale'.<sup>12</sup> If Marx's notion of formal subsumption indexes a phase of colonialism and the extraction of absolute surplus-value, and real subsumption captures the intensification of exploitation through mechanisation, immiseration designates yet another 'stage of "subsumption"' in which:

Everything has been subsumed under capitalism, there is no longer anything outside it; and the unemployed—or here the destitute, the paupers—are as it were employed by capital to be unemployed; they fulfil an economic function by way of their very non-functioning (even if they are not paid to do so).<sup>13</sup>

The 'scandalous assertion' that *Capital* 'is a book about unemployment' has implications for Jameson's literary theory, in particular, for the 'single vast unfinished plot' of collective emancipation whose ruses guide *The Political Unconscious* (1981).<sup>14</sup> Philosophies

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<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One. trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 764.

<sup>12</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 71.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. For a periodisation exfoliated out of Marx's concepts see Nathan Brown, 'Postmodernity, Not Yet: Towards a New Periodisation', *Radical Philosophy*, 2.01 (February 2018), 11-27.

<sup>14</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 2; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 4

of history, Jameson notes, yoke together the ‘twin categories of narrative closure (*telos*) and of character (subject of history)’.<sup>15</sup> History ends in classical Marxism with the self-abolition of the working-class and the actualisation of communism, a mission accomplished through the collective agency of industrial labour as subjectivated by trade unions and vanguard parties. In Jameson’s critique of bio-political economy, however, it is not just that workers have dispersed beyond the factory, but that the continued reproduction of capital is secured through the expulsion and exile of labour-power from formal employment. The dialectic of history comes to a standstill and is polarised into enclaves of wealth at one pole and the stagnation of labour into zones of death on the other—collectives at risk of decomposing into ethno-nationalisms. A disjunctive conjunction of surplus capital and surplus population also introduces a new dynamic to Jameson’s observation that ‘Marxist literary criticism [...] has less often tried to analyse its objects in terms of capital and value, in terms of the system of capital itself, than it has in terms of class, and most often of one class in particular, namely the bourgeoisie’.<sup>16</sup> If, as Marx himself writes, the ‘automatic subject’ of *Capital* is self-valorising value, its dialectical other might be thought of as a working class in the process of de-collectivisation; that is, a proletariat.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, ‘in a context in which’, as David Cunningham glosses, social relations are revolutionised by ‘global capitalism rather than either the bourgeoisie *or* the proletariat’, the novel can perhaps be re-presented ‘not as an epic of the bourgeois “people”, but as a displaced account of the “system of capitalism itself”’.<sup>18</sup> To do so, though, not only requires a twisting of much Marxist-Hegelian theorising on the novel, but also a dislocation of the form’s identification with the middle class and the formalisation of the bourgeois subject’s experience

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<sup>15</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 13. (italics in original).

<sup>16</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 255.

<sup>18</sup> David Cunningham, ‘Capitalist Epics: Abstraction, Totality, and The Theory of The Novel’, *Radical Philosophy*, 163 (September/October 2010), 11-23 (p. 13) (italics in original).

of modernity. In *The Theory of the Novel*—a text on which much contemporary theory, including this thesis, relies—Georg Lukács conceptualises the novel as ‘the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality’.<sup>19</sup> The ‘productivity of the spirit’, which in Lukács’s idealist account drives modernity, bores ‘an unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world’, that only the ‘unfettered plasticity’ and ‘non-rhythmic rhythm’ of prose can repair.<sup>20</sup> This void between concrete sensuousness and abstract meaning can be re-historicised, Cunningham argues, as giving artistic shape to the social being of capital, now considered the subject-object of history.

For Lukács, novels formally instantiate the ‘fragmentary nature’ of social relations through one of two types of totality:

[Novels] must either narrow down and volatise whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means.<sup>21</sup>

Novels that ‘narrow down’, Cunningham reflects, ‘escape from the “largeness” of the world, so as to find (critically or otherwise) a “particle” of the whole that can be isolated and encompassed within it’.<sup>22</sup> Such novels are often framed around the individual whose freedom is indexed by virtue of their alienation from the petrified regulative social conventions that confront them. Nancy Armstrong encapsulates this dynamic well, commenting that the individual ‘confronts established systems of value and finds them lacking’; a dilemma that is resolved either through the individual’s reconciliation with the value system of the many or through the recalibration of the ‘field of social possibilities’ in order to include forms of

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<sup>19</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Theory of The Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of The Novel*, p. 34; p. 33; pp. 58-58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, ‘Capitalist Epics’, p. 14.

difference previously excluded or tabooed.<sup>23</sup> With the stress on the private individual, and their struggle to acquire personhood, such novels advance a Foucauldian attention to the production and reproduction of subjectivity and, in doing so, can be considered bourgeois epics.

The ‘novel as “polemical impossibility”’, on the other hand, ‘gestures *towards*’ the ‘very “largeness”’ of a world which can no longer be encompassed ‘in any finite literary form’.<sup>24</sup> Their ‘primary object’, Cunningham sketches, is ‘not so much the unfolding of individual freedom and difference (or their limits), but [...] the impossibility of an adequate “cognitive mapping” of any “total” world *tout court*’.<sup>25</sup> Jameson’s diagnosis of an incommensurability between phenomenological experience and structural intelligibility can thus be seen as ‘simply *the* modern problem of abstraction itself’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, it is the actuality of abstraction, as ‘self-valorising capital’, that is, if anything, the ‘subject of history’ from whose perspective alone totalisation is possible. The ensuing representational dilemma of capitalist societies is that ‘by virtue of their production of ever more complex and extensive forms of interconnectedness’ they ‘assume the structure of a Subject in an objective “inhuman” form, quite different from the form of social subjectivity posited of the collective worker’.<sup>27</sup> If the novel retains its epic form in modernity, then it must necessarily take as its subject, not a particular class consciousness but the abstract forms of social being—money, exchange value, administration of the law—through which experience is nonetheless materially lived. As a ‘capitalist epic’, the novel’s formal task is to render into visibility the ‘irresolvable gap between the forms of abstraction intrinsic to modern social being’ and ‘individual subjective experiences’.<sup>28</sup> This is an epistemological challenge whose success lies not with the

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy Armstrong, ‘The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism’, in *The Novel*, Volume Two: Forms and Themes, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 349-388 (p. 349).

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, ‘Capitalist Epics’, p. 14. (italics in original).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. (italics in original).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. (italics in original).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

representation of totality, but with the presentation of the very impossibility of imagining such a totality.

In *Representing Capital*, capitalism is visible only through its symptoms; one of which being the ‘massive populations around the world who have, as it were, “dropped out of history”’.<sup>29</sup> The inhuman collective subjects that structure the ‘global space of the accumulation of value’ in Cunningham’s work, appear here to be undergoing a process of de-collectivisation and de-dialecticisation as surplus populations—hence Jameson’s efforts to dramatically expand the political constituency of unemployment.<sup>30</sup> Jameson’s representation of capital as a virus resembles that of the narrator of Roberto Saviano’s *Gomorra* (2006) who speculates that:

Perhaps the only way to represent the workings of the economy is to understand what it leaves behind, to follow the trails of parts that fall away, like flaking of dead skin, as it marches onward. The most concrete emblem of every economic cycle is the dump. Accumulating everything that ever was, dumps are the true aftermath of consumption, something more than the mark every product leaves on the surface of the earth.<sup>31</sup>

The social being of capital as excess and waste informs and constrains DeLillo’s novels too; but their epic representations of capital also occupies the conceptual space outlined in Jameson’s re-reading of the workers who have been expropriated from the circuits of surplus value creation. DeLillo’s aesthetic politics is connected to a possible re-inscription and re-dialecticisation of the abandoned multitudes.

### *Delirious USA: An Explanation*

According to Lukács, one of the ways that the novel is able to indicate the opacity and complexity of social relations is through the inclusion of heroes who are ‘seekers’. ‘The simple

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<sup>29</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 149.

<sup>30</sup> Cunningham, ‘Capitalist Epics’, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra*, trans. by Virginia Jewiss (Oxford: Pan Books, 2008), pp. 282-283.

fact of seeking’, Lukács suggests, ‘implies that neither the goals nor the way leading to them can be directly given’.<sup>32</sup> Meaning has to be discovered, through a search, a form-determining principle consolidated in the bildungsroman which is able to dialectically synthesise episodic fragments into narratives of continuous personal development. Searchers populate DeLillo’s fiction too: as journalists, intellectuals, investigators, they strive to comprehend their situation within the social totality; epistemological projects, however, whose lines of flight often end in de-subjectification. The manifest destiny of DeLillo’s characters—embodied by the figure of Lee Harvey Oswald—resonate with Gilles Deleuze’s assertion that ‘American literature operates according to geographical lines: the flight West, the discovery that the true East is in the West, the sense of the frontier as something to cross, to push back, to go beyond’.<sup>33</sup> But, as Deleuze concedes, ‘a flight is a sort of delirium. To be delirious is exactly to go off the rails’.<sup>34</sup> Going off the rails is certainly one way of describing Lee Oswald’s search for ‘History’ in *Libra*, a bildungsroman that takes him from a Bronx haunted by the figure of Trotsky in exile to an unmarked grave in Texas, a catastrophic line of flight which also breaks ‘the back of the American century’.<sup>35</sup> DeLillo, in a strictly speculative sense, engages in a delirious rewriting of Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* in a historical context where ideologies of progress—personal and national—have derailed.

DeLillo’s off-kilter searchers can also be linked to an observation Perry Anderson makes regarding the ‘alternative value-worlds’ available to modernism that have receded from view in postmodern artworks. ‘Hostile to the commercial logic of the market and the bourgeois cult of the family’, modernism could ‘appeal’ to either an aristocratic disdain for the universal equivalence of money or ‘the emergent labour movement’ which metabolised another type of

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<sup>32</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze, ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’, in *Dialogues*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 36-76 (p. 37).

<sup>34</sup> Deleuze, ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’, p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> Don DeLillo, *Libra* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 181.

abolition of ‘the reign of the fetish and the commodity’. In this latter zone, the figure of ‘manual labour’ sustains the experimental aesthetics of artists like Brecht, a workerist stylistics that equally drives John Dos Passos’s novelisation of living labour in *USA* (1930-36).<sup>36</sup> As Anderson notes, a new figure of the ‘collective labourer’ has yet to emerge from the global economy; an imaginative blockage perhaps linked to a switch from modernist ‘images of machinery’ to the postmodern ‘machinery of images’—a televisual spectacle that absorbs Oswald’s despairing flight.<sup>37</sup> The ‘visible reservoirs of energy’ and dead labour concentrated in the factory have, in Jameson’s gloss, been replaced by mediatised communication technologies whose ‘ceaseless transmission of electronic signals’ renders their ‘relationship to human energy [...] problematic’.<sup>38</sup> The irrepressible desiring subjects represented by Dos Passos, and whose roving flights are politically organised in his novels by the IWW, disappear in DeLillo’s fiction. Living labour is instead demobilised—politically and geographically—and the multitudinous poor in DeLillo’s work ‘have been left without a world’.<sup>39</sup> DeLillo’s ‘USA’ is one composed of surplus populations, of the unemployed, of internal exiles and minorities who have become stuck—a USA where the people are no longer presupposed.

‘Delirious USA’, therefore, hopes to combine DeLillo’s derailment of the Lukácsian theory of the novel with a post-Dos Passos conceptualisation of the United States as a republic whose constituent peoples and projects are missing. More broadly, the thesis explores how DeLillo takes hold of a Marxist philosophy of history and reconceptualises it through Jameson’s new reading of *Capital* and the tendential movement towards global unemployment. DeLillo here, to borrow from Jameson, is set to a minor key, a composer of capitalist epics

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<sup>36</sup> Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London and New York: Verso 2006), p. 62; p. 103.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> The poor ‘have been left without a world’ in César Aira’s *Shantytown*, trans. by Chris Andrews (New York: New Directions Books, 2013), p. 67. For a cinematic example of a roving proletariat see *American Honey*. Dir. Andrea Arnold. A24. 2016. For a counter example of a proletariat who have become stuck see *The Florida Project*. Dir. Sean Baker. A24. 2017.

constantly on the verge of global ruination.<sup>40</sup> The argument's relationship with the existing and expanding multiverse of DeLillo scholarship is conceived less in terms of wholesale rejection and repudiation, and more as a series of 'glitches' in which a DeLillo other than the canonical novelist can be detected. As such, rather than attempt a futile totalisation of DeLillo studies in its present configuration, each chapter will instead offer its own sectoral scanning of the relevant scholarship. An important dimension of this study of DeLillo's fiction is the ways in which it challenges, supplements, and rewrites Marxist theories of the novel—and this is where its attention predominantly resides.

Where my work differs most sharply from extant monographs and commentaries is in its ambition to range across the full period of DeLillo's literary production, beginning with the early short stories from the 1960s and concluding with 2016's *Zero K*. Such an expansion is somewhat counter-intuitive given that the appearance of *Americana* in 1971 provides an ideal Year One for a conjunctural study of the novelist in an age of late capitalism. The value, however, of including the early short stories is not only that they disclose DeLillo's persistent thematic interest in surplus populations and the aestheticisation of revolution, but they also illustrate how DeLillo's prose style expands and disperses. As I argue in Chapter One, the early stories contemporaneity is reactivated by the return in DeLillo's late novels to an aesthetics of standstill, whose historicisation of the still life recalls the suspended temporality of the earlier work. In this sense, the emergence, expansion, and contraction of DeLillo's literary form generates two narrative arcs: the first, registers and encodes the self-moving substance of value and periodicity of capitalist crisis; the second, is immanent to form itself and belongs to a *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist is DeLillo's syntax.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Jameson, 'The Names', p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> This formulation comes from Fredric Jameson's description of Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis* which is 'an immense *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist is Syntax itself as it develops throughout the Western European languages', *The Cultural Turn*, p. 147. (italics in original).



Extension exacts its own costs, and this teleological narration of DeLillo's work as it disjunctively synthesises perceptual experience and collective destiny is furrowed with holes. Despite originating with a discussion of the early short stories, the thesis is not invested in a re-appraisal and re-centring of DeLillo's oeuvre around the currently marginalised short fiction or dramatic texts. But neither is it an exhaustive re-reading—a consequence of the constraints of a thesis rather than any judgement on the novels themselves. Omission of works like *Americana* (1971), *Endzone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), and *Ratner's Star* (1976)—which accelerate out of the 1960s short fiction—is related to the sense that DeLillo's conspiratorial thrillers offer a self-coherent and self-organising account of the spatio-temporal unfolding of US finance capital as it first envelopes the nation-state and then the world. Emblematic novels of mid-period DeLillo, *White Noise* (1984) and *Mao II* (1991), are likewise overlooked out of a need to allow requisite space for DeLillo's historical fiction, which self-reflexively narrates the distributed prehistories of the present of his post-autonomous thrillers. Whilst *The Body Artist* (2001) anticipates and crystallises Chapter Four's attention to DeLillo's standstill aesthetics, Lauren Hartke's isolation from collective history, subtracts the novel from the chapter's discussion of DeLillo's intimation of a monstrous historical future whose exteriority nonetheless enfolds the horizon of his late novels.

### *Delirious USA: An Outline*

Chapter One begins with an account of Don DeLillo's critically marginalised early short stories (1960-1972) and reconstructs their relation to the novels through the concepts of refusal and exodus. The early stories, the chapter will argue, have acquired a new historical legibility and contemporaneity in the wake of DeLillo's late turn towards a fiction of suspension and the still life—temporal forms that are crucial to the short story. Drawing on Peter Osborne's distinction

between an aesthetics of standstill and dialectics at a standstill, the chapter considers the extent to which the stasis of DeLillo's early stories generates new forms of historical action, or whether their scenic release of description from its subordination to plot produces an eternal present that engulfs the later novels too. This dispersion of affect from historical narration will be read through Gilles Deleuze's theoretical reflections on Italian neorealism and French New Wave, cinematic styles which DeLillo cites as influencing and shaping his prose. DeLillo translates and provides an afterlife to these European cinematic forms in the Italian American milieu of the Bronx and consumer society more generally. After an initial theoretical overview of the short story, the chapter will divide into two parts: the first will pursue DeLillo's earliest published work, 'The River Jordan', 'Take the "A" Train', and 'Spaghetti and Meatballs' through the optic of neorealism, concentrating on their refusals of work. The second will analyse 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.', 'Baghdad Towers West', and 'The Uniforms' in terms of DeLillo's adaption of New Wave cinema; a reworking, however, that questions the interplay between the politicisation of aesthetics and the aestheticisation of revolution.

The eccentrically plotted conspiratorial thrillers *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names*, guide the discussion of Chapter Two, which reflects on Fredric Jameson's concept of 'cognitive mapping' as a revived realism. In contrast to much of DeLillo scholarship, which regards these thrillers as symptoms of the complete commodification of US society, the chapter will argue instead that if *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* are not novels of uneven development, then they are at least narratives where developmentalism has gone awry. The chapter contends that they are novels that discover the internal peripheries and transnational edges of a capitalist world-system undergoing a phase of financialisation. To do so, the chapter first provides an account of Jameson's theories of 'national allegory' and 'cognitive mapping', before commenting on how DeLillo's interest in the margin pushes difference against development—a gesture that vacillates uncertainly between a post-Hegelian politics of the multitude and the

‘cunning of capital’.<sup>42</sup> From here, the chapter will read each text individually, as a moment in DeLillo’s registration of the spatio-temporal unfolding of US finance capital. *Players* dialectic of financialisation and de-industrialisation will be discussed through its representation of four institutions of political subjectivation: the stock market, the trade union, anarchism, and homelessness. The potential derailment of historicism is carried over into *Running Dog*, whose porno-accumulation erotises fascism and manufactures it as collective desire, a tendency towards an absolute capital that is checked by the novel’s secular romance of stagnation. A dialectic between the flow of capital and the stasis of labour-power reaches its climax in *The Names*, a transnational novel which detects a becoming-multitude of collective labour.

Chapter Three turns to DeLillo’s monumental historical novels of derailment: *Libra* and *Underworld*. The chapter opens with an examination of Georg Lukács influential account of the historical novel; an account that it re-reads through contemporary theorising on war, but also on war’s representation, in particular, the Stalinist nightmare that eventually consumes Lukács’s own text. Next the chapter engages with recent post-Lukácsian theories of historical fiction, concentrating on the historical novel’s misplacement in the dictatorship novel and its displacement as a capitalist epic. *Libra*, in turn, is interpreted as a state novel in which the history of the nation is dislocated by the actuality of the Cuban revolution. Cuba is the novel’s constitutive outside, a missing third world which cuts across DeLillo’s binarization of the USA and USSR. The commentary will first address DeLillo’s presentation of the US state-form as internally divided and at war with itself, before moving on to Lee Oswald’s revolutionary line of flight which catastrophically veers into a line of death. In *Libra* the collective of labour appears as always already dead and memorialised by the novel’s state archivist. De-collectivisation, the chapter argues, is one of the key themes of *Underworld*, whose people’s

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<sup>42</sup> I take the ‘cunning of capital’ from John Kraniauskas, ‘Difference Against Development: Spiritual Accumulation and the Politics of Freedom’, *boundary 2*, 32.2 (2005), 53-50 (p. 65).

history of a baseball game deteriorates into the non-people who inhabit the remnants of the Bronx. A Cold War novel of historical plateaus, *Underworld* gives narrative expression to capital's ruination of the soil and the worker—terminuses anticipated by Marx. The key question here is whether DeLillo salvages a post-Lukácsian invention of an underground people who flee the closure of the horizon of historical communism, or if the novel's tone of lucid resignation signals the end of history's utopian telos.

Resignation is brought forward into Chapter Four's discussion of DeLillo's twenty-first century novels *Cosmopolis*, *Falling Man*, *Point Omega*, and *Zero K*. In these late texts the dialectical account of history as the medium of collective human agency appears to be dislocated by post-Lukácsian non-anthropogenic subjects, namely, finance capital and the climate. Humanity in late DeLillo is exhausted, a crisis of reproduction that is encoded formally through a disjunctive synthesis of what Lukács calls the novel of narrowing down and the novel of polemical impossibility. The dissolution of historical communism and the universalisation of capital is historicised in DeLillo's late works as a transition from hybrid to pure capitalism—an absolute capital whose contemporary affects DeLillo's fiction sets out to represent. Populated by suspended performance artists, slowed down conceptual art installations, and cryonic preservation, DeLillo's twenty-first century novels reactivate the early stories interest in suspension as an aesthetic experience but also as a temporalisation of the present. The contraction of narrative institutes a final modification of the antinomies of DeLillo's realist poetics and raises the question of contemporary abstraction. Reflecting on the financialised detournement of the *Communist Manifesto* in *Cosmopolis*, post-9/11 homeland realism in *Falling Man*, the eclipse of human history by planetary extinction in *Point Omega*, and the flight from a present engulfed by the climate in *Zero K*, the chapter will assess whether DeLillo's most recent novels are able to invent historical futures that push through the will of capital or if they are not glittering tokens of capital's unassailable horizon.

## DeLillo's Operaismo: Refusal and the Contemporaneity of the Early Short Stories

In *The Postconceptual Condition* (2018), Peter Osborne stakes out a temporal distinction between ‘dialectics at a standstill’, as formulated by Walter Benjamin, and the displacement of Benjamin’s motif into ‘an aesthetics of standstill’. The shift in conceptual register from dialectics to aesthetics, Osborne writes, signals a retreat from reflections on ‘the intelligibility and historical character of art’ and a movement towards the ‘*feelings* [...] associated with the experience of standstill or stasis’.<sup>1</sup> Withdrawn into the de-chronologised realm of affect and sensation, aesthetic criticism is not only ‘marooned by history’ but risks reproducing the very temporal structure of capitalist modernity itself: the restless ‘*stasis of the new*’.<sup>2</sup> Dialectical standstill, on the other hand, laminates together what Benjamin calls the ‘what-has-been’ with a contemporary now in which the relationship between past and present is newly ‘recognisable’.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will argue that such a moment of historical recognisability now structures the experience of reading Don DeLillo’s early short stories (1960-1972), whose contemporaneity has been reawakened by the static historical rhythms that inflect DeLillo’s twenty-first century fiction. There is a correspondence, in other words, between the suspended temporality of the short story and the late novels temporalisation of history as at a standstill—a relationship that is literalised in the cryonically preserved bodies of *Zero K* (2016). The short story, however, is also a literary form where sensory perception is felt to emancipate itself from narrative action and historical intelligibility. One of the central questions of this archaeological reconstruction of the early stories, therefore, will be whether their forms of stasis generate the possibility of historical futures or whether the stories fold themselves into a de-collectivised

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), p. 201. (italics in original).

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 202; p. 200. (italics in original).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

eternal present—a tension between collective destiny and impersonal affect that recurs throughout DeLillo’s work.

### *Institutional Neglect*

Scattered across a series of university affiliated literary magazines, DeLillo’s early short stories coalesce into something of a ‘long sixties’ that remains largely under-, if not un-, theorised within the universe of DeLillo scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Although, to refer to the early stories, if only provisionally, as a ‘long sixties’, is to suggest a thematic and formal coherence that their heterogeneous styles, tones, and content, actively militates against. Two distinct phases can be detected: ‘The River Jordan’ (1960), ‘Take the “A” Train’ (1962), and ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ (1965), form a ‘neorealist’ cycle, focusing on the everyday gone banally awry and the experience of debt, dispossession and alienation in working class milieus. Concern with economic immiseration fades out in ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ (1966), ‘Baghdad Towers West’ (1968), and ‘The Uniforms’ (1970), whose experimental ‘new wave’ techniques question whether the politicisation of aesthetics in the sixties has not rebounded into a disastrous aestheticisation of revolution. Common to both the ‘neorealist’ and ‘new wave’ cycles is the presence of a dis-embedded subject whose challenge to normative social relations concludes, more often than not, in personal ruination. These beleaguered figures of dissensus embark on a series of refusals which the chapter will set in dialogue with Mario Tronti’s ‘Strategy of Refusal’ and its reconceptualisation by post-autonomist thinkers in terms of exodus and multitude—concepts that are crucial for DeLillo’s novels.<sup>5</sup> The task the chapter

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<sup>4</sup> The exceptions include Fred L. Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets: The Evolution of Italian American Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 153-192; Mark Osteen, *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo’s Dialogue with Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 8-30.

<sup>5</sup> For a history of Italian Workerism, or *Operaiismo*, the political tradition from which Tronti emerges and shapes, see Steven Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

sets itself is to demonstrate how DeLillo's early 'neorealist' and 'new wave' incursions into narrative fiction prepare the ground for his latter engagements with the representational dilemmas of capital.<sup>6</sup>

Despite being a prominent, long-standing practitioner of the genre, DeLillo's short stories have garnered surprisingly little critical commentary. Henry Veggian takes up this enigmatic absence in his monograph *Understanding Don DeLillo* (2015) and attributes their omission to an academic profession disciplined into regarding the novel as the highest mode of literary production. DeLillo's short stories, Veggian writes, 'pose particular challenges to the readers of his novels': 'whereas the novel invites commodification—as book, as film, as literary institution and the privileged object of literary canons—the story is an ephemeral commodity'. 'Commodification' and the 'commodity' belong here to different temporal regimes: the former serialises the arbitrary into a teleologically unfolding linear continuum; whilst the latter relates to the instant, the 'fateful mood of the epic fragment', as Veggian puts it, and refuses such totalisation.<sup>7</sup> The novel is thus doubly hegemonic: it both captures attention through its cultural prestige, and reproduces consent through the processual conversion of contingent experience into ideological secured blocs of meaning—an order whose stability is disrupted by the insurgent temporalities of the short story. Veggian reserves his greatest ire, however, for a tendency among DeLillo scholars to regard the short fiction merely as prototypes which are then perfected in the novels, an interpretative procedure that suppresses the autonomy of the short fiction. In a phrase that vividly illuminates the paucity of close textual analysis, the short stories are said to become 'the biographies of the novels in question'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Where this chapter departs from the work of Gardaphé and Osteen is in its insistence on reading the early stories as a totality. A totality that is nonetheless incomplete: there are two additional stories which I have not been able to discuss here, 'In the Men's Room of the Sixteenth Century', *Esquire* (Dec 1971), 174-177, 243, 246; and 'Total Loss Weekend', *Sports Illustrated* (Nov 1972), 98-101. Their focus on the policing of underground sexual practices and sports gambling exceed the frame of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Veggian, *Understanding Don DeLillo* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015) [accessed on Kindle] location 2684.

<sup>8</sup> Veggian, *Understanding Don DeLillo*, location 2907.

Instead of attending to DeLillo's short fiction as a particular mode of literary thinking, scholars have consistently subsumed them within the gravitational pull of the novel and, in so doing, contributed to the marginalisation of the form within university English departments—both in terms of teaching, as well as research.

What is missing from Veggian's account, however, is a consideration of the hierarchies and exclusions internal to the genre of short fiction—not least the tension between collected and uncollected material. Such a consideration becomes all the more pressing given the appearance in 2011 of DeLillo's first collection of short stories: *The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories*.<sup>9</sup> A multi-decade survey, *The Angel Esmeralda* presumably gestures towards and institutionalises an emerging canon of DeLillo's short prose. With the earliest story dating from 1979, it is hard not to feel that an unfavourable aesthetic, as well as commercial, judgement has been passed on the 'neo-realist' and 'new wave' cycles that constitute DeLillo's 'long sixties'—whose status as 'early' takes on an unfortunate new resonance. Institutional neglect is compounded further by the more general questions posed by periodisation as such, what Fredric Jameson helpfully calls the 'dialectic of the break and the period'.<sup>10</sup> To include the early short stories in a study of DeLillo's fiction necessitates an extension of the DeLillo period beyond its more familiar conjunctural framing within the secular deceleration of the US economy, cultural ascendancy of postmodernism, and closure of the revolutionary horizon.<sup>11</sup> The burden placed on refusal is twofold: it needs to be capable of inscribing the early stories into DeLillo's oeuvre without either subsuming them into the novels—as prototypes—or detaching them into absolute otherness; whilst also working to estrange the arc of DeLillo's career.

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<sup>9</sup> Don DeLillo, *The Angel Esmeralda: Nine Stories* (London: Picador, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> For a classic survey of this conjuncture see Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*.



In a sweeping overview of the aesthetic and philosophical development of the short story, Viorica Patea remarks that the genre has historically lent itself ‘to marginal people, women, or outsiders, all of them plagued by a sense of exile and existential isolation’.<sup>12</sup> Whilst this contention that short fiction is the primary literary domain available for disavowed subjectivities no longer seems tenable, Patea’s assessment can perhaps be strategically redeployed in regards DeLillo’s early work. Fred L. Gardaphé, for example, frames the vignettes of Italian American life depicted in ‘Take the “A” Train’ and ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ as social parables about the psychic and material truncation of ethnic characters who fail to assimilate into the US national community. Anxiety over internment in the ‘ghetto’ of ethnicity compels DeLillo, in Gardaphé’s view, to speak ‘through the persona of the other’—the white protagonists that people his novels—in order to ‘enter the mainstream without destruction’.<sup>13</sup> What emerges is an understanding of DeLillo’s work in which his novels, presented as metonyms for the nation-state, are concerned less with the acquisition of rights, and more with flights out of citizenship altogether. DeLillo, in this respect reverses the ‘original mission’ of the novel which, according to Nancy Armstrong ‘was to open a space within the field of social positions for previously unacknowledged forms of individualism’.<sup>14</sup> But, like the ‘problematic individual’ Lukács discusses in *The Theory of the Novel*, these ‘destituent’ missions are instantiated through the search—a form-determining impulse that signifies that such de-subjectification is dynamic and cannot be given in advance.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Viorica Patea, ‘The Short Story: An Overview of its History’, in *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First Century Perspective*, ed. by Viorica Patea (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 1-24 (p. 8).

<sup>13</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 175; p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, ‘The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism’, p. 387.

<sup>15</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 78. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discuss the sabotaging of ‘neoliberal processes of subjection’ in terms of a ‘destituent project’ in *Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 223.

By extension, the protagonist of the short story is a character who not only does not have the capacity to become a rights-bearing, property-owning citizen, but can barely count as a person at all. What distinguishes the novel's misfits from short fiction's outsiders, then, is the novel's ability to synthesise—that is, narrate—a series of encounters into a totality—a synthesis facilitated by a form of self-consciousness that is structured through a stable relationship to past-present-future. Patea's initial identification of the short story with marginalised subjectivities broaches the question of how social subjection and subordination can be simultaneously presented and abolished through literary form. The punctuality of short fiction first crystallises exclusion from personhood—reliant on progressive narrative development—and second, reframes this fragmentation of personality as the very shockwaves of a radically different future. It is short fiction, rather than the novel, which belongs to Benjamin's 'tradition of the oppressed'; a tradition whose shattered and dismembered cultural forms testify to the violence that underpins historical continuity.<sup>16</sup> The socially oppressed protagonist eventually disperses, in Patea's account, into fleeting 'states of consciousness and impressionistic perceptions of reality'; what Fredric Jameson calls 'affect'.<sup>17</sup> Affect, for Jameson, overwhelms 'personal identity' with 'the impersonal consciousness of an eternal and existential present' governed by 'pure' scenic representation; that is, of bodily sensations autonomous from any allegorical meaning.<sup>18</sup> Veggian's binary between the novel as a force of commodification and the short story as a transient commodity, can thus be supplemented by this related opposition between the irreversible time of destiny codified by the acquisition of citizenship and the perpetual present of the short story, whose investment in affect dissolves the hierarchical exclusions that undergird citizenship in capitalist societies.

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 248.

<sup>17</sup> Patea, 'The Short Story', p. 19; Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 25.

A contradiction emerges, however, between short fiction's capacity to redistribute the sensible towards 'radically unrecognised people'—the 'part of no part'—and the form's 'politics of time': its eternal present.<sup>19</sup> As Jameson comments in his significantly earlier analysis of structuralism, the snapshot of the short story confers an 'atemporal and object-like unity' that represses the duration of social processes, and represents instead a petrified reality.<sup>20</sup> The redistribution of the sensible so that the 'part of no part' become visible comes at the expense of being able to emplot those social relations and mechanisms that determine exclusion in the first place. What Patea considers to be an earned 'scepticism' towards the pretensions of 'knowledge' leads to a prioritisation of the sensory and the affective, which precludes the possibility of thinking the collective and historical dimension to artworks.<sup>21</sup> The danger, in other words, is that what appears as an initial interruption of the homogeneous empty time of historicism reverses into a permanent suspension of history in which the movement of difference has stalled.

For Michael Trussler this atemporal formalisation is integral to the short story's 'mode of historicity', a temporal structure he presents through the Bakhtinian concept of the 'threshold'.<sup>22</sup> The 'threshold', Bakhtin writes, is a chronotope 'connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life'. Trussler is particularly interested in Bakhtin's notion that within the threshold 'time is essentially instantaneous, it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time'.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the novel sets about integrating events into a series whose continuous unfolding secures the

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<sup>19</sup> Étienne Balibar, 'Concept', *Political Concepts*, 4 <<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/concept-etienne-balibar>> [accessed 22 May 2018] (para. 23 of 25); for the 'politics of time' see Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Patea, 'The Short Story', p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Trussler, 'Suspended Narratives: The Short Story and Temporality', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 33.4 (1996), 557-577 (p. 565; p. 558).

<sup>23</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 248.

psychological development of a character—becoming a metonym for developmentalism more broadly—the short story refuses such mediation and accentuates instead the incommensurability between contingent experience and historical meaning. By ‘suspending continuity’ the short story first confronts the reader with their dependence on sequential narratives in order to ‘mask the incongruities of existential experience’, and second, forces them to reckon with the experiential density of the present liberated from the horizons of past or future.<sup>24</sup> What Trussler calls the ‘autonomy of the moment’, then, links back to the idea that the short story is a mode of de-subjectification—it liquidates biographical time—whilst also tacitly endorsing Jameson’s position regarding the emancipation of affect from destiny.<sup>25</sup> There is a weak messianic suspension inscribed within the fibres of the short story.

### *American Translations*

John Kraniauskas suggests that ‘if all writing constitutes a worlding of worlds of sorts, then translation arguably involves a re-worlding’ which provides the ‘text with new spatiotemporal coordinates’. DeLillo’s early short stories might be thought of as providing such an ‘afterlife’ to the cinematic texts of Italian neorealism and the French New Wave.<sup>26</sup> Reflecting on his formation as a writer, DeLillo remarks that ‘in the sixties, when great European and Japanese movies began to appear in New York, they were a revelation and may have had some kind of effect on my work, although I can’t describe exactly how or what’.<sup>27</sup> Taking ineffability as licence for theoretical speculation, it is possible to read DeLillo’s early work as being involved

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<sup>24</sup> Trussler, ‘Suspended Narratives’, p. 558.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>26</sup> John Kraniauskas, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Technologies of Critique*, by Willy Thayer, trans. by John Kraniauskas (Forthcoming 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Don DeLillo, ‘What I’ve Learned’, *Esquire* (17 June 2016)

<<https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/interviews/a10153/don-delillo-what-ive-learned/>> [accessed 20 September 2018] (para 6 of 15).

in a process of translation and transculturation, but also transcoding, in which the formal situations of neorealism and New Wave cinema are reimagined within American milieus—initially the Bronx, before advancing into the hallucinatory spaces of consumer society more generally, towards: ‘a new kind of mystery’, as the bemused narrator of ‘Baghdad Towers West’ notes, ‘in which the angel of death pushes a vacuum cleaner and all the werewolves were schnauzers’.<sup>28</sup>

In Deleuze’s writing on cinema, Italian neorealism and French New Wave both respond to what he calls a ‘crisis’ in the ‘action image’.<sup>29</sup> A crisis that Deleuze anchors to the emergence in the post-World War II period of landscapes whose scale of ruination overwhelms the unity of plot, setting, and action, presupposed by the genres of classic Hollywood realism. But, this crisis is also related to the ‘unsteadiness of the “American Dream”’; an unsteadiness that loses its balance completely in ‘Take the “A” Train’, where a former World War II servicemen is driven underground in a despairing bid to evade mafia loan sharks and encounters a purgatorial environ haunted by the failure of his war time marriage and cultural disinheritance.<sup>30</sup> Somewhat telegraphically, Deleuze outlines that the five key formal characteristics of neorealism are: ‘*the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of the cliché, the condemnation of the plot*’.<sup>31</sup> Dispersal, here, relates to an awareness that agents are increasingly confronted with situations that can no longer be modified or resolved through action: a dispersal that manifests itself bodily in the fracturing of actors’ sense-perceptions from their actions; a division whose tendency towards the registration of sensation is embodied by the figure of the wanderer, the stroller, and the flâneur who aimlessly floats through landscapes; landscapes that have themselves become fully mediated by communications

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<sup>28</sup> Don DeLillo, ‘Baghdad Towers West’, *Epoch*, 17 (1968), 195-217 (pp. 198-199).

<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), p. 206.

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 206.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210. (italics in original).

technology to the point that they no longer appear as historically distinct scenes. It is this dispersion of narrative action into the representation of affect that DeLillo recodes in his early short fiction.

Mario Tronti's thought too emerges from a 'dispersive situation', one in which workers' struggle disperses beyond the political mediation of the communist party, and takes place directly, in the socialised sites of production and reproduction. For Tronti, 'the working class *does what it is*'; however, 'it is, at one and the same time, the *articulation* of capital, and its *dissolution*'.<sup>32</sup> As Kraniauskas helpfully glosses, this is an ontologising political project in which 'labour *power* is both heteronomous and autonomous, object and subject: it is made (as labour) and it makes (as power)'.<sup>33</sup> What Marx once called the 'subjectivity' of labour is revived by Tronti, becoming a force of refusal: 'what are workers doing when they struggle against their employers? Aren't they, above all else, saying "No" to the transformation of labour power into labour'.<sup>34</sup> Whilst the refusal of capitalist command asserts the historical priority of the workers' movement, living labour's 'antagonistic will-to-struggle' is also appropriated by capital and redeployed 'as a motor of its own development'.<sup>35</sup> Insubordination in the space of value creation, in other words, drive technological advances and managerial reorganisations as capital seeks 'to escape from its *de facto* subordination to the class of worker-producers'. The history of modernisation, therefore, is nothing but '*the history of successive attempts of the capitalist class to emancipate itself from the working class*'.<sup>36</sup> Despite the implications of this labour power driven philosophy of history—its tendency towards unemployment—Tronti himself doubts the viability of refusal beyond the historically

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<sup>32</sup> Mario Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', trans. by Red Notes, in *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp. 28-34 (p. 30). (italics in original).

<sup>33</sup> John Kraniauskas, 'Empire, or Multitude', *Radical Philosophy*, 103 (September/October 2000), 29-39 (p. 30). (italics in original).

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 272; Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31. (italics in original).

determinate Fordist factory and secure wage form.<sup>37</sup> DeLillo's early short stories, however, pick up this autonomous power of labour power and recontextualise it beyond the factory, imagining the refusal of the social command of capital. Situated in a decomposing, lumpenproletarian milieu, DeLillo captures the dispersal of class into surplus populations; what Deleuze refers to as 'a new race of characters'.<sup>38</sup>

### **I. Bless the Multitude (1960-1965)**

'The River Jordan', 'Take the "A" Train', and 'Spaghetti and Meatballs', present a series of personal worlds gripped by economic crisis and whose dissolution unfold inexorably. In many respects, they could be considered working class fictions acutely aware of financial insecurity and insolvency; however, the 'proletarian Being', to borrow from Peter Hitchcock, at the centre of each tale, is one that has become barred from such class identity and community.<sup>39</sup> The condition explored in DeLillo's stories, might instead be approached through Michael Denning's notion of 'wageless life'—a term intended to foreground the experience of 'dispossession, expropriation, and radical dependence on the market' as ontologically constitutive of capitalist sociality.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, 'The River Jordan', 'Take the "A" Train', and 'Spaghetti and Meatballs' appear to cast doubt on the very presupposition of a unified working class subject, depicting instead a dispersing multiplicity that might re-inscribe Marx's original conception of the proletariat back into its representational form.

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<sup>37</sup> Tronti is adamant that the era of workerism is over, see 'Workerism and Politics', *Historical Materialism*, 18 (2010), 186-189. For the narrative voice of living labour see Nanni Balestrini, *We Want Everything*, trans. by Matt Holden (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p. xi.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Hitchcock, 'They Must Be Represented? Problems in Theories of Working-Class Representation', *PMLA*, 115.1 (Jan 2000), 20-32 (p. 21).

<sup>40</sup> Michael Denning, 'Wageless Life', *New Left Review*, II/66 (Nov/Dec 2010), 79-97 (p. 81).

Framed by New York, ‘Take the “A” Train’ and ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ are tied to an Italian American milieu whose peripheral centre is the Bronx; whereas, ‘The River Jordan’, DeLillo’s earliest published story, takes place in a Manhattan traversed by evangelical religious sects. ‘The River Jordan’ tracks the proselytising activities of Emil Burke, an itinerant street preacher guided by a ‘concept’ without an ‘image’: ‘a vague abstraction of duty, instruction, salvation’.<sup>41</sup> Stretched across a single day, DeLillo gives expressive shape to Burke’s conceptual abstractions through a narrative of the common-becoming-exceptional which concludes with the break-up of Burke’s church and his anticipated martyrdom: ‘he tried to visualise a crown of thorns upon his head’—a visualisation the text itself withholds (RJ 120). Metaphysics is replaced in ‘Take the “A” Train’ by an indebted subject; although debt here does not relate to structural processes of financialisation but to more informal credit flows, to bookies and loan sharks. Angelo Cavallo’s line of flight from his creditors takes him underground, into the purgatorial space of the New York subway, where he is left to reflect on his expulsion from personhood—he becomes ‘animal’—and to marvel at the strange ‘civilisation’ beneath the street.<sup>42</sup> ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ expands this inquiry into dispossession, and is organised around an eviction. In contrast to Emil and Angelo, who stroll through the city, the characters of ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ are immobile, and the narrative recounts a sidewalk symposium on the good life between Santullo—whose apartment is being repossessed—and D’Annunzio—an older, Fascist sympathising companion.<sup>43</sup> Again deploying a one day temporal frame, DeLillo inverts the ‘working day’ with a dialogue which

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<sup>41</sup> Donald R. DeLillo, ‘The River Jordan’, *Epoch*, 10.2 (Spring 1960), 105-120 (p. 105). All further references will be cited parenthetically in text as RJ.

<sup>42</sup> Donald DeLillo, ‘Take the “A” Train’, *Epoch*, 12.1 (Spring 1962), 9-25 (p. 19; p. 14). All further references will be cited parenthetically in text as AT.

<sup>43</sup> Donald DeLillo, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’, *Epoch*, 14 (1965), 244-250. All further references will be cited parenthetically in text as SM. Initially a cultural figure, Gabrielle D’Annunzio (1863-1938) later became a prominent political figure on the Italian Right—a forerunner and rival of Mussolini.



takes as its subject a happy ‘wageless life’ divorced from productivity. These are tales of a blessed multitude.

Taking the publication of *The Angel Esmeralda* as an occasion to reflect on the status of DeLillo’s early Italian American vignettes, Christian Lorentzen identifies two contradictory impulses at work in the stories. On the one hand, their preoccupation with apocalyptic fanaticism, the cinematographic, and consumer society can quite clearly be categorised as ‘apprentice work’ prefiguring the coming novelist.<sup>44</sup> In ‘The River Jordan’, for example, the sacrificial ‘universe’ of Christianity has been commodified into a mass culture ‘where salvation awaits in the form of a parking space and an air-conditioned moviehouse’ (RJ 117; 112). On the other hand, the unexpected appearance of Italian American characters in ‘garlic-and oil’ tenement block settings, evidences an abandoned literary project where ‘DeLillo could have been an Italian Philip Roth, with the Bronx his Newark’ (AT 9).<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the combination of standard-language narration and vernacular speech—‘Hey, Caval [...] Ima joost on my way to calla the cops’—perhaps outlines a type of nation-building, a knitting together of the dialect of everyday life and the hegemonic cultural forms of the United States (AT 9).<sup>46</sup> Or, to use an image drawn from natural history, ‘The River Jordan’, ‘Take the “A” Train’, and ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’, are the fossils of a blocked evolutionary path.<sup>47</sup>

As Fred L. Gardaphé might reply, however, this supposed exogenous location of Italian American material only reproduces a blind spot within DeLillo criticism, which is unable ‘to construct a culture-specific code for reading the Italian signs that appear rarely, yet

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<sup>44</sup> Christian Lorentzen, ‘Her Face was Avant-Garde’, *London Review of Books*, 34.3 (9 February 2012), 26-27 (p. 26).

<sup>45</sup> Lorentzen, ‘Her Face was Avant-Garde’, p. 27. Although, with *Underworld’s* intimate rendering of the 1950s Bronx this experience is perhaps less unfamiliar. Maria Lauret explores this relation in ‘Don DeLillo’s Italian American: The Early Short Stories and *Underworld*’ (Forthcoming).

<sup>46</sup> For more on the split between standard-language narration and dialect see Alexander Beecroft, ‘The Narrator and the Nation-Builder: Dialect, Dialogue, and Narrative Voice in Minority and Working-Class Fiction’, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 42.4 (December 2015), 410-423.

<sup>47</sup> Literature evolves and diverges in Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 67-92.

consistently, in nearly all DeLillo's published narratives'.<sup>48</sup> The importance of 'Take the "A" Train' and 'Spaghetti and Meatballs' in particular, obtains to their dual signification as fables of ethnic life on the one hand, and allegories for the hazards facing the ethnic writer on the other. Gardaphé notes that DeLillo's characters are both spatially and temporally imprisoned: the Bronx functions as a ghetto, a biopolitical form of social incarceration that prevents its inhabitants from accessing the material wealth of the New World; an exclusion that is further exacerbated by the transplantation of Old World mentalities into America: a dead weight which restricts the characters viewpoints and limits their propensity to develop.<sup>49</sup> These parables of the deleterious consequences of remaining on the margins of society can, in turn, be rewritten, Gardaphé argues, as allegories of the destiny of the ethnic writer who fails to dissimulate their outsider identity. DeLillo's deracinated narrators, beginning with *Americana*'s David Bell, thus belong to an elaborate 'masquerade' whereby DeLillo slips the non-identity of the minority voice into the mainstream through tropes of withdrawal and negation.<sup>50</sup>

For Gardaphé, DeLillo's early short stories trace the dialectical interplay between American modernity and Italian tradition; a contradiction that congeals and leaves his characters 'frozen in the past'.<sup>51</sup> Considered as a process of transcoding Italian neorealism into the spatio-temporal coordinates of the United States, DeLillo's early work might instead be thought of as giving shape to the 'new race of characters' that Deleuze identifies as 'seers' rather than agents.<sup>52</sup> Neorealism, in contrast to 'the determined spaces of old realism', is situated amidst the post-war demolition and reconstruction of cities, unfolding in sites of 'urban cancer, undifferentiated fabrics, pieces of waste ground'—'any-spaces-whatever' which

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<sup>48</sup> Gardaphé, *Italian Signs, American Streets*, p. 174.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-182.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192. For a methodological expansion of Gardaphé's work that could also illuminate DeLillo's early stories see Josephine Gattuso Hendin, 'Social Constructions and Aesthetic Achievement: Italian American Writing as Ethnic Art', *MELUS*, 28.2 (Autumn 2003), 13-39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. xi.

overwhelm ordinary bourgeois daily life.<sup>53</sup> According to Deleuze, this movement from ‘determined’ to dispersed space registers a crisis of the ‘action image’: the presupposition and lamination of certain types of action onto specific settings—the codifications of genre—are ‘affect[ed], loosen[ed], unbalance[d], or uncouple[d]’ by neorealism, which produces a new type of image.<sup>54</sup> Constituted by ‘purely optical situations’, neorealism disconnects action from setting, whose relationship withdraws into a ‘dreamlike connection’ in which bodily encounters are mediated through ‘liberated sense organs’.<sup>55</sup> Here, ‘protagonists invest the settings and objects with their gaze’; an investment in scenic details—an “‘inventory” of a setting’—which emancipates the affective and the perceptual from their subordination to plot.<sup>56</sup> There is a sense, then, that this representation of the autonomous materiality of affect belongs to an impressionistic re-description of a social world in which previous forms of realism have been antiquated. Far from resembling a discontinued genetic line, as Lorentzen appears to imply, the early short stories are thus crucial moments in the unlimbering of DeLillo’s representational apparatus as it negotiates the milieus of capital.

That said, Deleuze insists that neorealism should not be defined sociologically, as an investigation of the disavowed contents of bourgeois society, but aesthetically, through the production of the ‘seer’ and the dispersed image.<sup>57</sup> The character of neorealism becomes ‘a kind of viewer’:

He shifts, runs and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of response or action. He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action.<sup>58</sup>

The characters of ‘The River Jordan’, ‘Take the “A” Train’, and ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ are also pursued by visions which transform them from agents into recording devices agitated by

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<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 212.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the sensory stimuli of New York. This movement beyond reaction into registration is also crucial to neorealism's politics of form, at least as it is conceptualised by Deleuze. 'Marxist critics', Deleuze glosses, abjure neo-realist films as 'too passive and negative [...] bourgeois, neurotic or marginal, and for having replaced modifying action with a "confused" vision'. The problem with such Marxist criticism is that it presupposes an already constituted political subject—the working class—capable of programmatic intervention, and, in doing so, "tolerates" or "puts up with" practically anything'; committed artworks, in other words, participate in a type of reconciliation.<sup>59</sup> Politics, however, has undergone a mutation in the post-war period and its radical aesthetic impulse now resides in the refusal of action: the powerless 'seers' 'makes us grasp, something intolerable and unbearable'.<sup>60</sup> A powerless vision which might produce new forms of collective action.

'Eccentric' is also how Étienne Balibar describes the 'location' of the proletariat in Marx's *Capital*—an eccentricity that applies both to the 'universal term "proletariat"' as a singular subject tasked with a 'historical mission' and 'the more "empirical" plural term "proletarians"'.<sup>61</sup> Near exclusively situated in the chapters on 'the general law of capitalist accumulation' and 'the secret of primitive accumulation', the 'proletarian condition', as characterised by Marx, is one of 'insecurity'. This insecurity stems first from the expropriation and separation of independent producers from the means of subsistence, namely, the land, and, second, 'as a permanent consequence of large-scale capitalist industry'.<sup>62</sup> Michael Denning similarly seeks to 'decentre' the political and representational priority of the industrial working class in Marxism, arguing 'that "proletarian" is not a synonym for "wage labourer" but for dispossession, expropriation, and radical dependence on the market'.<sup>63</sup> To reconceptualise the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. by James Swenson (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 146; pp. 125-126.

<sup>62</sup> Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, p. 126.

<sup>63</sup> Denning, 'Wageless Life', p. 80; p. 81.

proletariat through ‘wageless life’—a calamitous event in an economy of wage-labour—enables Denning to bring into visibility those communities expelled from work—as mediated through the wage-form—who pass unrecognised in political economy and its critique alike.<sup>64</sup> This understanding of the proletariat as a working class in transition equally informs Fredric Jameson’s ‘scandalous assertion’ in *Reading Capital* that Marx’s great text ‘is not a book about politics, and not even a book about labour: it is a book about unemployment’.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is the identity of production and unemployment which, in Jameson’s provocative reading, renews the ‘actuality today of *Capital* on a world scale’; an actuality that is one of the major subjects of DeLillo’s narrative project.<sup>66</sup>

According to Marx, the ‘accumulation of capital’ necessarily entails the ‘multiplication of the proletariat’.<sup>67</sup> It does so because increases in the social productivity of labour, so integral to continued accumulation, are achieved through the diminishing ratio of variable capital—living labour—to constant capital—machinery. In other words, capitalists require fewer workers to set greater amounts of capital in motion—living labour is thus subjected to processes of real subsumption. As Marx notes:

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal. The relative mass of the industrial reserve army thus increases with the potential energy of wealth. But the greater this reserve army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amount of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour.<sup>68</sup>

Marx calls this polarisation of society into zones of highly concentrated wealth, on the one hand, and zones of expanding destitution, on the other, ‘*the absolute general law of capitalist*

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>65</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. For an account of the tendential reproduction of the working class as a class excluded from work see Aaron Benanav, ‘Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital’, *Endnotes*, 2 (April 2010) <<https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2/en/endnotes-misery-and-debt>> [accessed 23 May 2010]. The proletariat are a ‘side-effect’ of accumulation in Endnotes, ‘Crisis in the Class Relation’, *Endnotes*, 2 (April 2010) <<https://endnotes.org.uk/en/endnotes-crisis-in-the-class-relation>> [accessed 10 January 2016].

<sup>67</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 764.

<sup>68</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 798.

*accumulation*'.<sup>69</sup> Jameson, in turn, moves unemployment to the foreground of his own reading of *Capital*, where it is now presented as one of the crucial structural categories of Marx's analysis. Unemployment, for Jameson and Marx, relates to the industrial reserve army whose presence is constitutive of accumulation. This reserve army disciplines workers during economic slowdowns, whilst it can be rapidly enlisted during upswings and surges in economic activity. But, as Jameson stresses, the production of socially necessary 'non-work' also 'includes people who will never work and who are indeed incapable of working'—the decomposition of the proletariat into surplus populations.<sup>70</sup> The political thrust of *Representing Capital*, then, is to gather the 'multiple situations of misery and enforced idleness' into a new constituency organised though 'a kind of global unemployment'.<sup>71</sup> Jameson's turn towards the surplus population belongs to a new reading of political economy that has yet to be matched by a similar reconfiguration of his literary criticism. Surplus populations and the unemployed have, however, been a persistent feature of DeLillo's writing, which provides the representational space to not only further explore Jameson's 'capital', but to also read this political economy through and against Jameson's literary theory itself. One of the questions DeLillo's fiction asks is whether this heterogeneous unemployed multitude can in fact be re-dialecticised as a form of collective agency.<sup>72</sup>

### *The River Jordan*

In 'The River Jordan', Emil Burke, a seventy-year-old church leader, is pursued by a 'thought': one that is 'no longer an image [...] but rather a concept, a vague abstraction' (RJ 105). The

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 798. (italics in original).

<sup>70</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>72</sup> For an account of the representation of unemployment which advocates aesthetic abstraction see Walter Benn Michaels, 'The Beauty of a Social Problem', *The Brooklyn Rail* (3 October 2011) <<https://brooklynrail.org/2011/10/art/the-beauty-of-a-social-problem>> [accessed 23 May 2018].

pursuit of this concept without image guides Burke's outsider ministry as he threads his way through the fabric of Manhattan daily life. Concept and conceptualisation, Balibar observes, are 'names for an *intellectual* activity, in the sense of an activity that produces *intelligibility*, or makes "things" *intelligible*, to create an "intelligible order"'.<sup>73</sup> On one level, 'The River Jordan's' intellectual activities are directed towards making intelligible what Walter Benjamin once called 'the religious structure of capitalism'.<sup>74</sup> As a metaphor, the 'River Jordan' itself both fissures and is fissured by the rituals of capital, combining and short-circuiting the relationship between the spiritual redemption promised by Burke and the consolations of mass entertainment—'a parking space, a movie with much shooting of guns and much grinding of thighs, and a bag of popcorn, buttered' (RJ 118). Yet on another level, this partition between concept and image, or concept and sensibility, gestures towards an aesthetic question regarding sensation. Founder and leader of the 'Psychic Church of the Crucified Christ', Burke's primary concern is whether 'the people'—in the text a 'faceless swarm'—'respond' to his preaching—that is to say, whether they are affected (RJ 111). The narrative, then, might be said to hinge on Burke's struggle to become a 'medium' that can 'transmit' 'particles of infinity' in an image society organised around the immediate mediation of spectacle (RJ 111).<sup>75</sup>

'The River Jordan' is a short story whose 'suspended temporality' is stretched across a single long August day in Manhattan—a city that is 'a montage of sound' (RJ 106). Duration is achieved through a rough division of the text's happenings into 'morning', 'afternoon', and 'evening'; scenes that are coordinated by Burke's transcendental imperatives of 'duty, instruction, salvation', respectively (RJ 105). Duty, for Burke, entails stealing onto the subway

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<sup>73</sup> Balibar, 'Concept', para 4. (italics in original).

<sup>74</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings and Marcus Bullock (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 288-291 (p. 288).

<sup>75</sup> 'Religion', Alberto Toscano notes, means 'literally the binding of sense of the world to the reason and/or will of the creator', 'From the State to the World? Badiou and Anti-Capitalism', *Communication & Cognition*, 37.3 & 4 (2004), 199-224 (p. 204).

and scrawling minatory messages to ‘REPENT’ above rows of ‘gurgling urinals’ (RJ 106). The ‘people’ are first confronted as ‘rush-hour’ crowds, labour ‘disgorged’ ‘from one sphere of agony to another’—a ‘people’ trapped in the inferno of work (RJ 106). Instruction consists of a midday tour of Burke’s church, located in ‘an old fruit store on Ninth avenue’ (RJ 106). The congregation it transpires is an assembly of misfits—naive, geriatric, comatose, or splenetic—who have been attracted to Burke’s charismatic personality as opposed to ‘organised churches, which function with all the feeling of the Internal Revenue Service’ (RJ 108). Salvation, finally, involves preaching outside the Metropole, a club from which ‘jazz flowed like waterfall onto the street’ (RJ 113). Burke’s bid to capture the ‘people’s’ attention, who now appear as the pleasure seekers and leisure strollers of Times Square ends ‘very badly. They didn’t respond at all’ (RJ 116). Cutting across this chronological sequence is a series of dream-like hallucinations—appropriated from Christ’s passion—that form a messianic supplement: without ‘martyrdom’, Burke warns, ‘there can be no progress’ (RJ 110). The story terminates in a venial bar with the Church of the Crucified Christ ‘unsponsored, and therefore extinct’, and with Burke attempting ‘to visualize a crown of thorns upon his head’—an image that might materialise the concept (RJ 117; 120).

Despite its theologically inspired riffing on the ‘ultimate’ as an immanence that ‘transcends matter’, ‘The River Jordan’ is not theological as such (RJ 111). That is to say, ‘The River Jordan’ is neither concerned with the miraculous ‘universe’ promised by evangelism nor with the historical re-inscription of evangelism within capitalist social forms and institutions.<sup>76</sup> It is, rather, tuned to an aesthetic struggle to weave perceptions, affections, and concepts into an intelligible and sensible community—a community that Burke imagines to be ‘the multitude’ (RJ 117). At the same time, it could be argued that it is precisely Burke’s sense of

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<sup>76</sup> For an American history see William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978).



‘mission’ which undermines his status as a neorealist ‘seer’ or recorder rather than agent (RJ 105). Burke’s signifying practices, in this sense, might be considered a form of ‘secondary production’, a term deployed by Michel de Certeau to suggest how a tactical misapplication of commodities can hack, disrupt, or recode urban spaces otherwise striated by capital and the state.<sup>77</sup> And yet DeLillo’s syntax, which relies heavily on the use of colons and semi-colons, often renders Burke’s actions indiscernible from the sensations excited by the scenes described. One of the constant procedures of neorealism, Deleuze writes, is the ‘inventory of a setting’, a recording of the details, objects, and textures of a situation that have ‘a dreamlike connection’ with ‘liberated sense organs’ where ‘action floats free in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion’.<sup>78</sup> As a formal compositional principle, DeLillo’s use of colons impress this ‘inventory of a setting’; and Burke’s questing through the subway hellscape, the abandoned fruit store, the satanic street corner, and pornographic bar registers the nodal points of a New York in the process of mutation. DeLillo’s interest resides less with an agent and more with the sensory affects released by the mutant zones of uneven or wild development.

The tension between the desire to bind a sensible community—Burke as agent—and the emancipation of affect from action—Burke as powerless seer—is staged most agonisingly during the sermon outside the Metropole. On the one hand, Burke’s metaphysical preaching is repeatedly interrupted by an alternative vernacular of the commons, that of advertising: as one heckler puts it to him, ‘Hey man [...] How ’bout Purity, Body, and Flavour? Mel Allen say it on the TV all the time’ (RJ 116). On the other, it is this very ‘false’ response which demotes Burke to just another spectacle for the ‘garland of garish faces’ to idly consume (RJ 114; 115). Such a relegation is worked out formally through the inventory of a setting:

Jazz blared in epileptic fits; smoke seeped from manhole covers. And a few feet away, beneath a subway grating, charged the distant enveloping suddenness of a train. It roared beneath the sidewalk, its sound so sustained, and so contained within his ears, that he could not separate it

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<sup>77</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Randall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. xiii.

<sup>78</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 4.

from silence; it sound so sustained, in its pounding rhythm, that this rhythm was transmuted to the quick-quickening pulse of his heart. If only he could be sure. Were they listening? Or simply watching? Simply watching an old man, a relic talking to himself. And, in his mind, sound did not exist; sound was lack of sound, sound was silence. Then he started to speak, and silence was severed from the roar of the train. (RJ 114-115)

This is a world possessed by a distorted and alarming materiality. Fragmented clauses cut irrationally and by soaking up the sounds, sights, and tremors that intrude from without, displace the centrality of Burke within the scenic frame whose presence is now indiscernible—the ‘rhythm’ of a subway train transmutes into ‘the quick-quickening pulse of his heart’. The accumulation of purely optical or sonic details establishes an indifference or abstract equality between each autonomous micro-event of perceptual excitation. Embedded within this process, then, Burke’s speech is presented as significant as the ‘suddenness’ of the subway—such is DeLillo’s democratisation of literary sensation.

This indifference between Burke and the affective description of setting is further accentuated by DeLillo’s seeding of free indirect discourse—or ‘free indirect subjectivity’—within the third-person narration.<sup>79</sup> Such a transition is signalled in the passage as it shifts from a clearly ascribed and impersonally observed ‘he’ to the intensely intimate ‘were they listening? Or simply watching’ that belongs to Burke’s own floating consciousness. In an essay on free indirect discourse, Timothy Bewes identifies two dominant seams of thought. The first regards this narratological category as the ‘mixture’ or ‘composite’ of subjective and objective perspectives—a hybridising discourse that Franco Moretti summarises as ‘emotions, plus distance’.<sup>80</sup> Here it is the combination of subjective proximity and objective distantiation that contributes to the actualisation of Burke’s alienation—his becoming-spectacle. Unlike Moretti’s discussion of free indirect discourse as a form of ‘socialisation’ and the production of a social contract between individual and society, DeLillo’s free indirect discourse entrenches

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<sup>79</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 148.

<sup>80</sup> Timothy Bewes, ‘Free Indirect’, *Political Concepts* <<https://www.politicalconcepts.org/free-indirect-timothy-bewes/>> [accessed 22 May 2018] (para 1 of 34); Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 82.

exclusion from the community of sensibility: Burke entertains the possibility that he is merely viewed as ‘a relic talking to himself’.<sup>81</sup> A second line of thought, one that Bewes himself has some sympathy for, ‘celebrates’ free indirect style as ‘the abandoning of perspective, that is, *the emancipation of the character from the author’s (or narrator’s, or theorist’s) field of vision*’. For Bewes, the abandonment of perspective is connected to Jacques Rancière’s theorisation of the literary regime as a refusal of the ‘rules of appropriateness between a particular subject and a particular form’, establishing instead ‘a general availability of all subjects for any artistic form whatsoever’.<sup>82</sup> DeLillo’s language arguably turns on an acute sensitivity to the distinction between ‘listening’—indicative of an intellectual responsiveness and reciprocity—and ‘watching’—a passive consumption that mutes voice and amplifies physical gesture, leaving Burke on the level of appearance or image-spectacle. Yet if this is an emancipation from the consensual perspective of the narrator, it is one that is double coded and resembles the precarious emancipation of the wage worker who, freed from the land, is condemned to solicit the capricious attention of the market.

Developing the work of Rancière, a politics of literature, for Bewes, would not legislate ‘what counts as a viable point of view and what does not’, but would rather involve the abolition of perspective altogether. ‘The River Jordan’ itself remains more closely connected to a representational politics tied to “‘the distribution of the sensible”, of “what is seen and what can be said about it”, and of who ‘is judged to have “the ability to see and the talent to speak”’.<sup>83</sup> The dissolution of Burke’s church and the consequent disintegration of his world are, in this sense, associated less with the withdrawal of financial backing, than with the recognition that Burke is barred from speech. In response to Burke’s injunction to ‘strike the blow! Do what you were born to do! Kill’, a bartender replies:

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<sup>81</sup> Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, p. 82.

<sup>82</sup> Bewes, ‘Free Indirect’, para. 3. (italics in original).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 3.

Aw, old bums like you are all the same. You make a lot of noise but you don't say nothin. Why should I get myself in trouble with the cops just for an old bum like you? Just beat it, willya bum. Take off, get lost. Nobody's payin' any attention to you, nobody's takin' you seriously'.  
(RJ 120)

The boundary between speech and noise is integral to Rancière's conception of 'political activity' which is nothing other than the 'conflict aimed at deciding what is speech or mere growl'.<sup>84</sup> Dismissed as 'a lot of noise', Burke's discursive activity is presented as insensible ambiance that, owing to his exclusion from the social contract—he is 'a bum'—remains unintelligible. If there is a dialectic here it is oriented towards a dynamic that simultaneously re-inscribes the social hierarchies that police the border between sense and non-sense—Burke is 'a relic talking to himself'—whilst anticipating a flight from such hierarchies in the joy of anonymous life—evoked in the text's scenic or inventory impulse. 'The River Jordan', therefore, refuses the emancipatory promises of de-subjectification and the release from wage-labour, whilst equally refusing that this condition as a rightless proletarian—a non-person—is without hope.

### *Take the "A" Train*

During a commentary on Charles Baudelaire's poetics, Walter Benjamin observes that 'the crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for people who have been abandoned. The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd'.<sup>85</sup> A modified version of this dialectic of asylum and narcotic is set in motion in DeLillo's second published story, 'Take the "A" Train'. The narrative opens mid-flight with Angelo Cavallo, a thirty-eight-year-old maintenance worker, fleeing debt collectors and seeking refuge 'within the anonymous press of bodies' that populate the New York subway (AT 14). Hoping to end a 'bad streak',

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<sup>84</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, trans. by Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, trans. by Harry Zorn (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 85.

Cavallo—ironically nicknamed ‘Crystal Balls’—borrows enough ‘capital’ from a series of loan sharks that would enable him to ‘figure the horses [...] figure everything’ (AT 22). DeLillo’s version of ‘indebted man’, then, belongs to a discourse on addiction and personal crisis; a crisis, however, whose originary causes Cavallo doubts can ever be grasped: ‘you can never figure out where anything begins’ (AT 14).<sup>86</sup> Yet this ‘ride to nowhere’, what Deleuze calls an ‘urban voyage’, is nonetheless linked by Cavallo to his alienation from two significant apparatuses of social reproduction: marriage and the family—whose conflictual non-identity he struggles to synthesise (AT 11).<sup>87</sup> Cavallo is subsequently visited by the apparitions of his ex-wife Helen and his estranged father, who consider Cavallo to be ‘a man who was not a man’ (AT 21). Manhood, for these biopolitical revenants, is only acquired through economic self-sufficiency—an autonomy that Cavallo’s feminised work in a ‘big store full of crazy womans looking for bloomers’ will not secure (AT 15). Underground, Cavallo hopes to find sleep amidst ‘the nightmare cry of wheels screaming round the bends of dreams, and the terrible felling now of the mind opening on the prolongation of oblivion’ (AT 11).

‘Take the “A” Train’ is expressly concerned with the experience of proletarianisation—a becoming-proletarian that Cavallo regards as ‘having nothing and having nothing to lose’ (AT 19). Proletarianisation, for Marx, occurs through processes of ‘primitive accumulation’, whereby independent workers are expropriated from their means of subsistence by extra-economic forms of violence.<sup>88</sup> Extra-economic violence menaces ‘Take the “A” Train’ too, but this is also an extra-legal violence associated with the black economy: ‘movie gangsters who know how to hurt you just enough to keep you interested’ (AT 10). Here, becoming-proletarian is presented by DeLillo as a transition out of the reproduction the capital-labour relation; that

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<sup>86</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of Indebted Man*, trans. by Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012).

<sup>87</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 212.

<sup>88</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, pp. 873-876.

is, of capital's unbinding from labour-power. Such a crisis in 'waged life' is dramatised in Cavallo's perception of having crossed a threshold:

What day is it? Friday: pay day. But not for me, not for Angelo. It made no difference; one week's salary— especially his salary, maintenance man's salary, maintenance man who works in a Bronx department store— wouldn't even begin to get him out of this hole. (AT 11)

Cavallo's existential dilemma originates out of an asymmetry between predatory credit and the potential earnings accrued from waged work—income that the black 'hole' of debt is indifferent towards. Working down from the highest form of abstraction—the salary—to the most concrete particularity—a Bronx department store—the rhythm of DeLillo's sharply punctuated, additive clauses effects a sort of 'accumulation through dispossession'.<sup>89</sup> Not only does this progressive declension of the value of labour-power consolidate the magnitude of Cavallo's deficit, it also operates as an expulsion from his formal social position. Desertion from commodified labour-power, in 'Take the "A" train', navigates a destituent line of flight into 'a darkness black as the universe' (AT 25).

Destitution, or the misery of 'wageless life', is represented politically as the loss of citizenship and exclusion from a normative community of wage-earning subjects. Drifting in and out of 'slumbering thought' and 'dream' voices, Cavallo questions: 'what do I do now; where do I go; who will help me? He knew the answers. Nothing, nowhere, nobody' (AT 10). If the underground subway network offers asylum—a sanctuary of sleep—it does so without the possibility of social mediation—either institutional or informal. Cavallo, a 'proletarian' flâneur, so to speak, is 'abandoned in the crowd'. Abandonment is scored into the despairing triple negation 'nothing, nowhere, nobody' which subtracts Cavallo existentially, ontologically, and subjectively from the social order. The force of this resignation, however, comes less from the access to Cavallo's consciousness and more from the sense that it is an internalised impersonal 'third voice'—the voice of a social contract that has been broken.

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<sup>89</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 141.

DeLillo in this regard takes on quite explicitly the ‘part of no part’—a category of excrescence that Cavallo nonetheless repeatedly disparages as ‘bums’. Whilst the ‘beginning of becoming a bum’ vexes Cavallo throughout the two nights he spends underground, this withdrawal of citizenship is encountered neither as a structural process inherent to the regime of surplus value, nor to the necessity of extending solidarity to those collectives that do not count, but as a ‘personal midnight’ (AT 14; 21). Moreover, Cavallo’s residual investment in bourgeois propriety prevents him from exploring, let alone identifying with, other forms of communal life: he walks ‘past the illegible faces of the abandoned, the gone, the cool, the hip. He didn’t know what they were talking about. He knew if he stayed and spoke to them they would laugh. They would know. Another square. He did not fit, even in the mud, even among the worm-life beneath the earth’ (AT 24). The socially legible—the ‘square’—is explicitly contrasted with the illegibility of the abandoned, whose speech and activities are tellingly reported indirectly, intimating a proximity that nonetheless remains othered. Rather than instantiating an event through which the illegible might acquire voice, a redistribution of the sensible, the scene only serves to sever Cavallo from all forms of life, even that of the non-human ‘worm-life’ of the below the below.

The subway is thus a literal and allegorical ‘hole’ that ingests Cavallo. But, as Deleuze waxes, sometimes ‘it is necessary to make holes, to introduce voids and white spaces’.<sup>90</sup> As a spatial form, the subway in DeLillo’s text entrenches a degree of autonomy from the surface world and produces a type of horizontalism. Commenting on the ‘dispersive’ image and reality of Robert Altman’s ‘post-Hollywood’ films, Deleuze notes that ‘the city at the same time ceases to be the city above, the upright city, with skyscrapers and low-angle shots, in order to become the recumbent city, the city as horizontal or at human height, where each gets on with

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<sup>90</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 21.

his own business, on his own account'.<sup>91</sup> 'Take the "A" Train' draws on this idea of the 'horizontal' city and sinks it underground, into a setting that records, and is recorded at, 'sub'-human height. Sub-human should not be confused, however, with a suppressed or disfigured value-producing base that supports or is the condition of vertical class hierarchies—a topography DeLillo mobilises in *Underworld's* fabulated Sergei Eisenstein movie *Unterwelt*.<sup>92</sup> What Cavallo discovers on his voyage is that 'a man could live his entire life here, here in this compact civilization beneath the earth' (AT 14). The sunken horizon might be considered by someone like Rancière as an instance of the literary regime whereby characters and sensations are released from the hierarchies that would otherwise inscribe them in a stable social order—an order in which the underground is encoded as the site of exploitation and toil. On the one hand, this 'civilisation' belongs to the mutation of space in which the clearly definable zones of realism have become indiscernible. On the other, this formal limit mediates the powerlessness of the unemployed and surplus population, whose experience of exploitation now comes from without and scrambles any meaningful split between the abode of production and the consumption.

It is this discovery of a 'civilisation' beneath the street that transforms the subway into a narcotic for the proletarian flaneur. Intoxicated, Cavallo becomes a recording apparatus:

He rode all day. He rode locals, expresses, shuttles; he went to places he had never heard of: Hoyt Street, Zerega Avenue, Astor Place. At each stop he read the street name and after awhile started reading them backwards. LanaC teertS. dnarG esruocnoC. He rode with beach-bound kids carrying blankets and portable radios, with mortar-faced laborers who got off early and, from 14th Street up, with the bargain-hunters from Klein's [...] He stayed underground and rode, changing trains, even systems— IRT, BMT, IND— but never going up to street level staying down in his warm moist cleft within the anonymous press of bodies. At 42nd Street he got off and walked through a tunnel into the lower level of Grand Central Station [...] He went past a bakery, a model home built to actual dimensions, through another tunnel and past a cocktail lounge, a clothing store and a barber shop. (AT 13-14)

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<sup>91</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207.

<sup>92</sup> The significance of this 'false' film will be discussed in chapter three.



Enwombed in a ‘warm moist cleft’, Cavallo stumbles across the inorganic ‘fuzzy empire of blur’ that Rem Koolhaas calls ‘junkspace’.<sup>93</sup> The debris and detritus ‘that remains after modernisation has run its course’, junkspace is a ‘Bermuda triangle of concepts’ that ‘replaces hierarchy with accumulation, composition with addition’.<sup>94</sup> Junkspace proliferates in Koolhaas’s reading, a proliferation captured in Cavallo’s exhilarated note-taking: each clause becomes evocative of another corner turned, another surprise encountered, commercial store fronts are greeted with a rush of anticipation, and there is wonderment in the sociological registration of people. At the same as this precious content fascinates, the full-scale ‘model’ world also confirms Koolhaas’s description of the endlessly additive logic of junkspace as ‘a low-grade purgatory’.<sup>95</sup>

The multiple passageways which open up for Cavallo and facilitate his botanising of the human and inhuman fauna that bloom in the artificial conditions underground, lends the narration a rhizomatic quality. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a ‘map and not a tracing’: whereas the tracing copies the ‘real’, ‘the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual’.<sup>96</sup> Emancipated from the fixed coordinates of daily labour—a form of compliance that traces a copy of the world—Cavallo roves through the subway, not only happening upon white spaces in his cartography of the city, but also rewriting the familiar in a stylistic derangement of space. There is an experiential plenitude to riding the trains ‘all day’, a testing out of different routes, velocities, and vectors of travel that intimates a type of mapping that has yet to have developed the

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<sup>93</sup> Rem Koolhaas, ‘Junkspace’, in *Project on the City 2: Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, ed. by Chuihua Judy Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas, and Sze Tsung Leong (Köln: Taschen, 2002), pp. 408-421 (p. 409; 408).

<sup>94</sup> Koolhaas, ‘Junkspace’, p. 408; p. 409.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>96</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 13-14.

necessary organs of cognition. One example Deleuze and Guattari provide of a rhizome is the ‘burrow’ which, like the map, has ‘multiple entranceways, as opposed to the tracing, which always come back “to the same”’.<sup>97</sup> For Cavallo, who thinks of himself as an ‘animal’, the subway functions as a burrow whose rhizomatic passageways offer so many lines of flight away from debt. Escape, however, proves impossible. Starved and dehydrated, Cavallo’s consciousness becomes a montage of impersonal voices and signs that have assimilated into him during his voyages. Despite his efforts to fall into a cosmological vortex created by carriage fans which spin into ‘stars within systems, systems within galaxies’, he inadvertently re-enters the secular world above ground: ‘He got up and looked out the window. There was Yankee Stadium, the upper deck, a million white shirts, speck upon speck’ (AT 25). One of the first items Cavallo registers underground is a discarded newspaper headline regarding the Yankee’s, a referent that resurfaces at the end of the story and perhaps overcodes the experimental mapping with a tracing that returns Cavallo home: a ‘dead-end, and you wake up and you’re not you anymore, not anywhere anymore, somewhere in the middle of nowhere, darkness, nothing but the mind thinking’ (AT 24).<sup>98</sup>

### *Spaghetti and Meatballs*

‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ extends and revises the neorealist themes and formal procedures developed in ‘The River Jordan’ and ‘Take the “A” Train’. The story opens and closes with an image of a man sitting on ‘a broken-legged brown armchair on the sidewalk of a quiet Bronx street’, whose ‘only plan is to smoke’ his ‘guinea stinker’ (SM 244; 245). Set in the aftermath of a home repossession, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ is concerned less with the particular

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<sup>97</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 14.

<sup>98</sup> DeLillo returns to this zero degree of consciousness in the Artis Martineau section of *Zero K*.

circumstances of foreclosure, than it is with the ontological insecurity of proletarian being—understood as being without a property. Surrounded by all his worldly possessions, Santullo, a fifty-four-year-old Italian American, considers himself to be ‘a man with nothing’ (SM 246). As with the preceding stories, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ depicts a limit situation in which the common becomes excruciatingly exceptional—Santullo is no longer a constituent part of the ‘Everybody’ who ‘was working or in school or shopping’ (SM 244). Yet it is precisely this exceptional status that in turn provides the story with its central problem: the relationship between the ‘good life’—‘what God intended when He made the world’—and an inversion of the working day into absolute non-work (SM 249). To misappropriate Bakhtin, DeLillo engages with this problem through a ‘dialogic’ form of narration. Composed largely through conversations between Santullo and an older, Mussolini sympathising friend called D’Annunzio, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ convenes a philosophical symposium on taste that, like its ancient predecessors, is removed from the site of labour.<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the ambulant passion of Burke and the frantic burrowing of Cavallo, Santullo and D’Annunzio are stationary characters who reflect on a contented idleness: a ‘happy’ wageless life.

The utopia imagined by DeLillo is powered by what might be thought of as a solar economy. As such, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ is a heliotropic text that twists itself towards the sun’s movements, opening with ‘a block of light’ and tailing off with the sun starting ‘to slip down the other side of the sky’ (SM 245; 250). DeLillo’s characters, in this regard, function like sundials that motionlessly record a measurement of time beyond the empty homogeneous clock time of the social factory. The idea of a ‘solar economy’ can also be picked up from the work of Georges Bataille, who in *The Accursed Share* outlines a theory of sovereignty as

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<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting that although the speech is rendered in English, the narrator informs us that ‘most of the time Santullo spoke a relentless, growling English but his conversations with the old man were mainly in Italian’, ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’, p. 244.

obtaining to ‘life beyond utility’.<sup>100</sup> Bataille regards the ‘sovereign moment’ as a form of miraculous consumption that is emancipated from usefulness, necessity, and the future’; that is, a moment suspended from the horizon of anticipation.<sup>101</sup> Whilst their discussion ranges across a series of topics that strive to make the world an object of knowledge, Santullo and D’Annunzio insistently return to the theme of pleasure, a somatic state they associate with purposelessness and the dissolution of named emotions. What the narrator calls ‘a slow, happy time’ refers to the delicate process of assembling and consuming lunch: ‘while placing the salami between slabs of long mountainous bread they took brief time-outs to sample the olives and pickles and nip at the cheese. They made moist babylike sounds and licked their fingers’ (SM 249). Language is stripped down to a minimum— ‘the bread was fresh and good and the beer was cold’—in order to savour the taste of each noun and to foreground the object’s incommensurability. Santullo’s closed question ‘is this happiness or is this happiness’ attests to a miraculous version of life unburdened from exchange (SM 249).

As Rancière notes, Hegel glimpsed the ‘embodiment of the ideal’ in the idle happiness of ‘little Sicilian beggars’, ‘because they do nothing’; an aesthetic judgement endorsed by DeLillo’s indigent philosophers: ‘it’s hard to see how anyone could ask for any more’ (SM 249).<sup>102</sup> Sat beneath beach umbrellas, Santullo and D’Annunzio are emancipated from the hierarchical divisions of labour and take sensual delight in idle happiness: ‘the darkness ran red and the warmth felt good on his face’ (SM 247). Freedom, in Rancière’s work, is realised through such an ‘inertia’ which suspends the constant means-end emplotment, an abeyance of narration that DeLillo presents through an indiscernibility between passivity and activity which erases the grounds of both.<sup>103</sup> Erasure of grounding is also important to Bataille’s conception

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<sup>100</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Volume 3: Sovereignty, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 198.

<sup>101</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Volume 3, p. 227.

<sup>102</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. by Zakir Paul (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. xiv.

<sup>103</sup> Rancière, *Aisthesis*, p. xv.

of sovereignty: ‘the miraculous moment when anticipation dissolves into nothing, detaching us from the ground on which we were grovelling, in the concatenation of useful activity’.<sup>104</sup> ‘What is sovereign’, Bataille adds, ‘is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time’.<sup>105</sup> It is precisely this ‘pure’ present, a ‘reduction to the body’ as Jameson might say, that is in tension with the temporality of narrative as a social form. Unlike the suspended time of painting, the interruption of the ontology of a world structured through exchange value—being-for-something-else—in ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ is only temporary. Despite D’Annunzio’s imploring to ‘think of the present. Of now’, Santullo’s mood darkens:

“Life is a son of a bitch,” Santullo said.  
“Eat the lunch. Enjoy.”  
“Where the hell will I go? I have nothing.”  
“Is too complicated. Don’t think about it. Eat, eat.”  
“Eat, drink and be merry. It doesn’t work, general. It’s all politics. Life is politics. It’s politics and no money.” (SM 249)

The future, which had otherwise been suspended by the story’s formal constitution as a still life, envelopes the scene thanks to Santullo’s biopolitical realisation that life is ‘politics and no money’. Bataille links such existential ‘anguish’ to the near perpetual ‘state of anticipation that must be called the anticipation of oneself’, an anticipation, that envisages the future as the result of subjective agency.<sup>106</sup> For Bataille the desire to attach a future to the present, delivered through narrative, bears the mark of the indentured and servile. DeLillo, however, seems rather more circumspect about the promises of sovereignty, and the abandonment dramatised in ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’ dampens down the utopian promises of sensual immediacy.

D’Annunzio’s rueful observation that ‘it was a good lunch until toward the end’ gives expression to the antinomy being traced between a pure present of affect and the temporality of narration, constituted by the memory of the past and anticipation of the future (SM 249). Yet, on further consideration, such a dyspeptic conclusion might also relate, albeit indirectly,

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<sup>104</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Volume 3, p. 203.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

to another form of acidity, to what Marx called the ‘reflux’ of money. Indirectly because for Marx the ‘phenomenon of reflux’ obtains to the completion of the general formula of capital accumulation, M-C-M, whereby the money originally advanced returns ‘to its initial point of departure’.<sup>107</sup> Money is significantly absent in DeLillo’s text; however, the inclusion of two striking inventories that bookend the narrative, provide a type of displaced account of ‘reflux’ as a modification within accumulation. Marx presciently notes that the formula M-C-M’ which captures the value in motion of industrial capital is abbreviated by finance capital, whose ‘concise style’ is presented in the ‘abridged form’ M-M’.<sup>108</sup> It is possible to see something of this obliteration of the material referent in DeLillo’s use of the list form which turns on the difference between ‘the commodity’ as a palpable thing, and ‘commodities’ as a speculative form of value detached from any underlying asset. The first of these inventories is located in the opening paragraph:

The rest of his furniture surrounded him on the sidewalk. There were more chairs; some big and small tables; a big chest with a portable radio on it; the frame and spring of a double bed; a china closet; a well-pillowed sofa; a large sepia photograph of the young Santullo, dapper and lean as a wolf; a roll-top desk; a closed beach umbrellas; several brown boxes. (SM 244)

A meticulous documentation of Santullo’s domestic possessions, the list inscribes an ‘inventory of a setting’ that sets a tone of bewilderment within the ordinary experience of life which now finds its ‘transcendental homelessness’ realised on the street.<sup>109</sup> Reported in an unadorned and calculative prose, these personal effects are, with the exception of the photograph, wiped clean of the worn intimacies of private life and presented in terms of their bulk materiality. Enumerating the relative size of each object enables the list to foreground the disparity in scale between the tangible items of domestic life and the less sensuously perceptible flows of finance—whose insolvency has precipitated the scene of dispossession.

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<sup>107</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 250. My reading of ‘reflux’ is drawn from John Kraniauskas, ‘The Reflux of Money: Outlaw Accumulation and Territorialisation in *Breaking Bad*’, in *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image*, ed. by Peter Osborne, Éric Alliez, and Eric-John Russell (Kingston upon Thames: CREMP Books, 2019), 219-245.

<sup>108</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 257.

<sup>109</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 41.

DeLillo, in this regard, is not quite on the terrain of the ‘cruel radiance of what is’ that Rancière takes to be crucial for a politically radical aesthetic presentation of those peoples who do not count. These household objects lack the ‘dreamer’s gaze’ that for Rancière seeks to simultaneously consecrate the insignificant detail and reveal it as scarred by necessity.<sup>110</sup> Instead, they appear like the husks of newly forlorn use-values.

Located in the penultimate paragraph, the second inventory stands in stark contrast to the heaped and palpable world of estranged domesticity:

The music stopped and an announcer came on to give the latest stock market report. Utilities were holding their own. Grain futures were mixed. Electronics were gaining. Industrials were so-so, Rails were down. (SM 250)

Here the content of the inventory has been transferred from static concrete commodities of the household into the abstract and more volatile realm of the commodity futures market. Not only is there a notable substitution of verbs for adjectives, but the announcement itself is reported indirectly, with the radio announcer’s voice re-articulated through that of the narrator, further accentuating a distance from the world of physical properties. Proximity and tactility give way to vectors of deterritorialisation, creating the impression that the decisive events that shape collective life occur on the trading floor and are at a remove from constituent struggles. Marx’s sense of the abridged and concise style of financial accumulation is encoded through the shift from the semi-colon, which operates as a linkage between objects, to telegraphic sentences which signify an autonomy from exchange that might be taken as the erasure of the material commodity. ‘Spaghetti and Meatballs’, in this sense, transforms a social relation that is lived through the personal to one that is experienced as an impersonal or a-personal force from without. And it is this transition from industrial to financial accumulation that is pursued across DeLillo’s novel, both in terms of affect and collective destiny.

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<sup>110</sup> Rancière, *Aisthesis*, p. 250.

## II. Pepsi Generation Blues: Cultural Revolution and Exodus

In the philosophical history of cinema plotted by Deleuze, French New Wave retraces the path of Italian neorealism and frees the ‘voyage-form’ from the ‘spatio-temporal coordinates’ of ‘social realism’. French New Wave is a cinema of description not action, an intellectual project self-reflexively framed ‘as the expression of a new society, of a new pure present’.<sup>111</sup> Such a progression is detectable in DeLillo too as his work continues its dispersion beyond the Italian American milieu of the Bronx into terrain that has been more fully subsumed by consumer society and its logics of the image. Deleuze himself conceptualises these image based social forms as belonging to a ‘civilization of the cliché’, a civilization from which the New Wave image ‘constantly attempts to break through’ and strains ‘to get out of the cliché’.<sup>112</sup> In DeLillo’s short stories this is re-presented through stereotyped language and its *detournement*; a practice of rewriting, however, that includes French New Wave itself within the ‘civilization of clichés’: the narrator of ‘Baghdad Towers West’ writes knowingly of the ‘Pepsi Generation’.<sup>113</sup> As DeLillo explains in a programmatic essay on the ultra-violent ‘The Uniforms’: the story was ‘an attempt to hammer and nail my own frame around somebody else’s movie’; a strategy intended to simultaneously make literature ‘less rigid in the sources it uses’, whilst also posing ‘a legitimate challenge to writers of radical intent’.<sup>114</sup> ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’, ‘Baghdad Towers West’, and ‘The Uniforms’ belong to a democratisation of the literary; an enfranchisement, however, which questions the radical political aesthetic of filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard. Having refunctioned the cinematographic for literature, DeLillo

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<sup>111</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 213.

<sup>112</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 21.

<sup>113</sup> DeLillo, ‘Baghdad Towers West’, p. 204.

<sup>114</sup> Don DeLillo, ‘Notes’, in *Cutting Edges*, ed. by Jack Hick (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1977), pp. 532-533 (p. 533).



explores the relationship between the image of revolution and the revolutionary image—an investigation which takes as its material substrate the cultural revolution of the sixties.

And yet, as Jameson laments, the concept of cultural revolution has been ‘obscured’ by its Maoist inscription in the empirical history of the Chinese Communist Party. The definite article, in other words, has eclipsed what should otherwise be an ‘essential’ component ‘of any theory of revolution or of systemic social change’. A further ambiguity resides in the idea of culture itself, which Jameson notes is often defined in ‘the narrow and specialised sense of literature, film and the like’.<sup>115</sup> By virtue of its appropriation and sampling of the Godardian film-text, DeLillo’s intertextual method might be felt to measure the energies and currents of a cultural revolution confined to the realm of artistic production—the production of artworks that turn against the commodification of a popular culture on which they nonetheless depend. But, in a more expansive definition, cultural revolution takes as its outer limit ‘the remodelling of the culture of everyday life in the more general sense’; a transformation that includes the production of new subjectivities.<sup>116</sup> Jameson’s own oft given example of such a process is realism itself, which decodes and disenchant the values, characters, and imaginaries of feudalism and acclimatizes supposedly autonomous wage-earners to the social universe of industrial capitalism. Realism, in this sense, can be understood as an important ‘component’ of a ‘vaster historical process that can be identified as none other than the *capitalist* (or the *bourgeois*) cultural revolution’, as Jameson writes.<sup>117</sup> Drawn from the student, feminist, and third world movements, DeLillo’s short fiction similarly appraises the dynamics of the sixties cultural ferment, although, if the texts depict a revolution, it is as much a revolution against *Capital* as it is capitalism.

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<sup>115</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Cultural Revolution’, in *Valences of the Dialectic* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 267-278 (p. 267).

<sup>116</sup> Jameson, ‘Cultural Revolution’, p. 267.

<sup>117</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘The Existence of Italy’, in *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 155-229 (p. 164). (italics in original).

Though, in another sense, DeLillo's movement beyond the unemployed worker into the territory of social reproduction can be additionally inscribed within the related passage from industrial to immaterial production narrated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000). Asserting that 'the history of capitalist forms is always necessarily a *reactive* history', Hardt and Negri read the social and political turbulence of the 1960s within the dominant capitalist countries—of which the United States is hegemonic—as originating in 'a general refusal of work and specifically as a refusal of factory work'.<sup>118</sup> Hardt and Negri push this assault on 'the disciplinary regime of the social factory' into a second creative moment whereby the autonomous power of labour power engages in 'a transvaluation of all values'.<sup>119</sup> The new values produced by living labour, which also produces new forms of subjectivity, favour 'mobility, flexibility, knowledge, communication, cooperation, the affective'.<sup>120</sup> Unlike Tronti, whose 'strategy of refusal' is fixed in the factory and its machinic subsumption, Hardt and Negri reckon with the expansion and real subsumption of the social by capital, advocating a fluid politics of worker nomadism and exodus. As they summarise, '*the proletariat actually invents the social and productive forms that capital will be forced to adopt in the future*'.<sup>121</sup> It is this powerful sense of capital's porosity and adaptability that guides Sven Lütticken's distinction between a communist cultural revolution of everyday life and a 'structural revolution' which involves the 'reordering' and 'remodelling' of desire into new circuits of production and consumption.<sup>122</sup> Again, DeLillo's stories might be said to reconnoitre and report on such a vacillation between exodus, on the one hand, and the structural re-containment of flight, on the other.

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 268; p. 261. (italics in original).

<sup>119</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 275; p. 274.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>122</sup> Sven Lütticken, 'On Cultural Revolution', *New Left Review*, II/87 (May/June 2014), 115-131 (p. 118).

Mark Osteen emphasises precisely such a complicity between the formal aesthetics of avant-garde cinema and the techniques of subjectivation in consumer society—a de-differentiation of the economic and the cultural in which the moment of politics is foreclosed.<sup>123</sup> The new wave short stories provide a preliminary x-ray of DeLillo’s ‘analysis of American magic and dread’, Osteen’s preferred post-secular terms for the toxic postmodern popular culture that DeLillo’s later novels are presented as ‘antidotes’.<sup>124</sup> The early stories cinematographic ‘debt’ can be discerned through their ‘situations, characters, and scenes’, which, Osteen maintains, borrow heavily from the contemporaneous work of Godard. Alongside this recycling of the ‘Godardian’ film image, DeLillo’s early work ‘forecasts the coming attractions and dangers of postmodern culture [...] the effacement of historical consciousness; dehumanisation by institutions and technology; the power of images to model subjectivities and blur the differences between reality and representations; the totalising effects of consumer capitalism; the yearning for magical antidotes to overwhelming dread’.<sup>125</sup> Yet when Osteen writes of the ‘collusion’ between anti-Hollywood cinema and consumer products, the charge is not that radical filmmakers like Godard are conscious agents of commodification, but that the line between commitment and celebrity has become indiscernible.<sup>126</sup> An example of this critique can be found in ‘The Uniforms’ which for Osteen effectively rewrites *Weekend* (1967), but, ‘whereas for Godard the bourgeoisie are terrorists, for DeLillo the terrorists are bourgeois consumers’.<sup>127</sup> DeLillo’s adaptation and transculturation of European cinema into an American milieu characterised by consumerism thus allegorises the absorption of radical

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<sup>123</sup> Osteen’s chapter ‘Children of Godard and Coca-Cola: Cinema and Consumerism in the Early Fiction’, is the first sustained engagement with these texts. For an earlier and symptomatic set of reflections see the ‘coda’ to Douglas Keesey, *Don DeLillo* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993).

<sup>124</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

aesthetic techniques by the commodity and effaces the possibility of an outside from which critique would be possible.

Important as Godard's cinematic practice is in shaping DeLillo's new wave fiction, Osteen tends to bind the literary too tightly to the filmic ur-text. For example, Osteen's readings proceed by pairing a DeLillo story with its Godardian master text: 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues' rehashes *Breathless* (1960), 'Baghdad Towers West' rehearses a scene from *Masculin/Feminin* (1966), and 'The Uniforms' cannibalises *Weekend*. Whilst such an arrangement undoubtedly showcases DeLillo's deconstruction of Godard's political aesthetic, it does so at the expense of conceptualising DeLillo's experimentation with the generic conventions of short fiction—a hot-wiring of form that thinks with, as much as it turns against, the spirit of Godard.<sup>128</sup> Reflecting on the cultural transformation of the closed feudal order into the infinite plasticity of capital accumulation, Jameson writes that:

Realism and its specific narrative forms construct their new world by *programming* their readers; by training them in new habits and practices, which amount to whole new subject-positions in a new kind of space: producing new kinds of action, but by way of new categories of the event and of experience, of temporality and causality, which also preside over what will now come to be thought of as reality.<sup>129</sup>

'Programming' is also a way of describing a social form of narration that 'flows', that of the televisual.<sup>130</sup> The 'new, pure present' of New Wave cinema is combined in DeLillo's work with the televisual which, as Jonathon Crary notes, presents a 'world beheld in common, in which anything could be coupled with anything whatever'.<sup>131</sup> Coupling 'anything whatever' is crucial to DeLillo's compositional method in these texts, which proceed to replace the single suspended scene of short fiction with a mode of breathless '*sheer narration*'.<sup>132</sup> Reality in these

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<sup>128</sup> A related issue is that DeLillo arguably synthesises multiple movies into each story, making the search for any one determining film futile.

<sup>129</sup> Jameson, 'The Existence of Italy', p. 166. (italics in original).

<sup>130</sup> Television flows in Raymond Williams *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, ed. by Ederyn Williams (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>131</sup> Jonathon Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and The Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 80.

<sup>132</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. by Albert Sbragia (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 146. (italics in original).

stories is undergoing a process of de-worlding and re-worlding, an orientation in which new forms of affectless action are recorded. DeLillo's New Wave fiction, in this regard, re-imagines Walter Benjamin's crisis of storytelling in an age in which information in its print-media form is supplemented by image-centred technologies of communication.

*Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.*

During the course of its 'evolution' the short story, Benjamin writes, has 'removed itself from the oral tradition'. Formerly constituted through the 'slow' sensuous accretion of 'layers', the modern short story is now instantiated by a logic of 'abbreviation'.<sup>133</sup> This modern logic of abbreviation is accelerated to a near terminal point in DeLillo's elliptical existential romance 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.'. Narrative voice, moreover, has been replaced by a mobile 'camera-consciousness' which records a young student couple as they negotiate and flee the biopolitical institutions of family, education, and work that would otherwise corral their destinies.<sup>134</sup> The refusal of the existing regime of subjectivity is presented in a grammatically terse, visual form of narration which cuts, often wildly, between moments of insubordination—ranging from family disagreements to acts of larceny such as shop-lifting and car-jacking—and moments of counter-cultural abandon. 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.' resembles a plot-less ballad whose unnamed protagonists invoke a generation that recognises 'things are different now'.<sup>135</sup> Even the story's one ostensible plot—the need to acquire money for an abortion—is handled with a disinterested remoteness which too eventually dissolves when the couple decide to keep the child. In contrast to DeLillo's neorealist fiction which oversaw the expulsion of the individual

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<sup>133</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 92.

<sup>134</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> Don DeLillo, 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.', *Kenyon Review*, 28.3 (June 1966), 391-394 (p. 393). All further references will be cited parenthetically as CS in text.

from the commons, ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues’ concludes intimately—‘they see what their life together is going to be like’—holding out the possibility of reordering social reproduction around love (CS 394).

The implementation of a new social dispensation or cultural arrangement is further registered by DeLillo’s peculiar reworking of the structure and syntax of short fiction. ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues’ is a conjunctural and conjunctive text in which the tale—an extraordinary three-page long paragraph—is introduced by a review or piece of cultural criticism which both envisions the tale as a cinematographic object and frames its reception. The paratext is fragmentary and concentrates on the affects released by the story: it is ‘tender and lyrical’, a ‘social document of aimless teenagers seeking their identity’, ‘evocative and bittersweet’, a ‘visual treat’ (CS 391). As Osteen highlights, the main narrative reads ‘as if the story were the plot outline of an upcoming movie’ or ‘a film scenario or “treatment”’—a written score.<sup>136</sup> DeLillo’s assemblage, then, is conjunctural insofar as it stitches together a discourse on the institutionalisation of rebellion—foregrounded by the glowing paratext—and the commercial manufacturing of refusal as entertainment—whose popular consumption is signified by forthcoming availability: ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’. Much like the unnamed couple, who are blank representative types—any-couple-whatever—the story, without a title, is emptied of content and functions like any-story-whatever. The relationship between the market demand for fictions of revolt and the abstract particularity of the images of dissent, in turn, operates self-reflexively as an allegory for the appropriation and commodification of refusal.

If ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues’ is, as the paratext asserts, a ‘social document’, it is one whose stylised social content documents the ‘civilization of the cliché’. Language in ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ is saturated and ‘composed of stereotypes’ which are, for Adorno,

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<sup>136</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 9.

constitutive of televisual ‘image-writing’.<sup>137</sup> Sexual difference, for example, is represented through the association of femininity with the body—the girl ‘whirls’, ‘pirouettes’, and ‘has lovely eyes’—whereas masculinity is anchored to the unhappy consciousness of the intellectual—the boy is ‘bitter about the world’ and rages that ‘nothing means anything’ (CS 391; 393). The conquest of the social by the image even extends to those zones where supposedly alternative forms of life and value are being created. For the couple, the counter-cultural ‘everybody’ they encounter at a Greenwich Village house party is ‘a phony except for one guy who’s a West Indian or an American Negro or a French Canadian’ (CS 392). Whilst the white revellers are ‘doing the freddy and talking about Andy Warhol or the Animals’, ‘this guy is telling them about real suffering, real pain. Telling it like it is’ (CS 392). Attached to the scarified victim of racial or colonial violence, the real is contrasted to the immateriality of cultural production; and yet, ‘wounded in Vietnam or Mississippi’, the real is also fetishised, becoming a ‘thing’ that puts the couple’s ‘troubles in a truer perspective’ (CS 392). The cliché is operative here in both the denigration of culture as artificial—it is ‘phony’—and in the abstraction of the traces of physical violence from the historical context of collective struggle.

The recuperation and re-presentation of refusal as a consumer product is inscribed into the very form of ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’, which resembles a linear continuum constituted of increasingly discontinuous sentence-images. The narrative opens with uncharacteristic certainty:

It is Fifth Avenue in late afternoon in autumn and the shadows darken the street. The boy wears a heavy sweater and desert boots. He has long hair. The girl is pretty. She is wearing a heavy sweater. It is Fifth Avenue or Grosvenor Square. She has lovely eyes. They look in the shop windows. Mannequins in fur and diamonds. Ladies’ shoes atop red velvet. An eight million dollar necklace. She whirls and pirouettes, dreaming of inaugural balls or being presented to the Queen. A few middle-aged people stare at her and shake their heads. What is the world coming to. (CS 391)

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<sup>137</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Prologue to Television’, in *Critical Methods: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 49-58 (p. 55).

Rancière uses the concept of a ‘sentence-image’ to describe the basic visual unit of montage; and it is possible to detect within this opening sequence a similar artistic method at work.<sup>138</sup> The focus cuts back and forth from shots of place—Fifth Avenue—to the colour of time—shadows of late afternoon—to close-ups of individual appearance—‘the girl is pretty’, ‘the boy wears a heavy sweater’. Seamlessly gliding across the smooth surface of the world, DeLillo’s text equally embodies Pasolini’s poetic notion of the camera’s ‘free indirect subjectivity’.<sup>139</sup> The poetic here, as well as the montage-effect, relates to the juxtaposition between the concrete world of the commodity—‘mannequins in fur and diamonds’—and the phantasmagoric dream-world accessible through contact with the shop windows—the romance of the worker. The scene also conveys a type of clocking as the camera scans the situation and sets up the relationship between fashion, the dreaming couple, and the disproving ‘middle-aged people’, which combines the dual qualities of the image: spectacle and surveillance. And yet this objectivity is undermined, inconspicuously at first, by the use of the conjunction ‘or’ which unsettles the relationship to the world. What is initially clocked as ‘Fifth Avenue’ becomes, in the process of exposition, ‘Fifth Avenue or Grosvenor Square’, an expansion and splitting of the referent that raises questions as to whether it is a form of equivalence or indeterminacy that is being advanced.

The ‘sentence-images’ which are constitutive of DeLillo’s compositional practice in ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ clearly differ from the concept of montage articulated by Rancière. ‘Dialectical montage’, as Rancière calls it, ‘creates clashes’ and ‘reveals’ the presence of ‘one world behind another’—the violent expropriation and appropriation of labour power that structures the abstract freedom of bourgeois society, for example.<sup>140</sup> In contrast to an aesthetics of collision and disjunction, Rancière distinguishes an alternative ‘symbolic montage’ which

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<sup>138</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 46.

<sup>139</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 148.

<sup>140</sup> Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, p. 56.



gathers heterogeneous elements and manufactures something in ‘common’, that is, it produces ‘co-belonging’ and community.<sup>141</sup> DeLillo’s text has neither the revelatory discontinuities of montage in its dialectical form, nor the institution of a common world that is the vocation of symbolic montage. DeLillo’s ‘sentence-images’ might be better thought of as a flowing ‘patchwork accumulation of moments’ that do not develop an account of political economy but signify instead a flattening or depthlessness of the social—of action without affect.<sup>142</sup> The encounter with the veteran injured in ‘Vietnam or Mississippi’ exemplifies some of the political tensions at stake here. On the one hand, this conjunction and bridging of the anti-colonial war in South East Asia with the anti-racist struggle in the American South does indeed establish a ‘common enemy: *the international disciplinary order*’, as Hardt and Negri would say.<sup>143</sup> On the other, this conjunction presupposes an abstract equivalence between the two sites of conflict, a homogenising commensurability that inserts the logic of exchangeability into DeLillo’s syntax. ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’, then, is not only structured through the cliché but it deploys nouns as if they were ready-made commodities, component parts that can be drawn on and pressed into service wherever necessary.

Conjunctions, though, are crucial to Deleuze’s conception of ‘camera-consciousness’, which is defined ‘by the mental connections it is able to enter into. And it becomes questioning, responding, objecting, provoking, theorematising, hypothesising, experimenting, in accordance with the open list of logical conjunctions’.<sup>144</sup> DeLillo’s ‘camera-consciousness’ inquires into the plasticity and fungibility of plot-content:

Then the boy and girl go to a store in San Francisco or Toronto or Liverpool. They steal some groceries. They leave the store laughing with the groceries under their heavy sweaters. Then the boy stops at a flower stand and steals a flower for the girl. Then they go home and she cries. Then they go to a party [...] They go to the Louvre and the girl sticks out her tongue at the Mona Lisa. Some middle-aged people shake their heads. The next day the girl gets up early and goes to school and the boy sits around smoking and looking in the mirror. (CS 392)

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>142</sup> A ‘patchwork accumulation of moments’ is taken from John Kraniuskas, ‘2666: A Monument to the Unknown Worker’, *Radical Philosophy*, 200 (Nov/Dec 2016), 37-46 (p. 37).

<sup>143</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 261. (italics in original).

<sup>144</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 23.

If the use of ‘or’ pluralises and destabilises the possible referent, the ‘sentence-images’ themselves are isolated into their own monadic form, encoded with a contingent message that is dispensed with before moving on to record the next occurrence, the next piece of raw material to trigger the narrative apparatus. For Deleuze the ‘irrational cut’ is not ‘one image after another’, but ‘one image *plus* another’, ‘a whole new system of rhythm, and a serial or atonal cinema’, which expresses ‘a new conception of montage’.<sup>145</sup> This additive logic of the ‘plus’, accompanied with a new system of rhythm, might also be thought to inform the strange neo-chronicle form of narration that is effected by the repeated use of ‘then’. Hayden White defines the chronicle as a pre-modern form of historiography that is constituted by a series of ‘singular existential statements’ that register events in a chronological sequence: ‘in the chronicle, the event is simple “there” as an element of the story; it does not “function” as a story element’.<sup>146</sup> As a religious mode of historiography, events in a chronicle require no narration—interpretation—because they are already inherently meaningful; that is, they are already inscribed within a divine teleology in which everything happens to God’s plan. Benjamin arguably discerns a secularised version of the chronicle in the new form of communication that saturates print-media: ‘information’. Information is corrosive to the art of storytelling because, like the chronicle, it has to appear ‘understandable in itself’, a process which means that events are always-already ‘shot through with explanation’.<sup>147</sup> ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ is composed through a neo-chronicle mode of narration which foregrounds the increasing impossibility of narrative in a society subordinated to the regime of the image.

‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ updates and accelerates Benjamin’s thesis on the crisis of storytelling in a modern, capitalist society. In DeLillo’s re-imagining, print-capitalism and its

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., pp. 213-214. (italics in original).

<sup>146</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), p. 7.

<sup>147</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, pp. 88-89.

dominant vehicle of communication, the newspaper, have been replaced by an emergent form of image-capitalism—the ‘society of the spectacle’—whose principle mode of social inscription is television. DeLillo thus takes French New Wave cinema, in particular its Utopian longing, as a meta-referent that he in turn reorganises and subordinates to the logic of television—enacting a type of capitalist cultural revolution. Television is key to Jonathon Crary’s post-situationist account of ‘24/7 capitalism’, where it is said to instantiate a world ‘beheld in common, in which anything could be coupled with anything whatever’.<sup>148</sup> Indifferently coupling and assembling of ‘anything whatever’ also describes DeLillo’s compositional practice in ‘Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.’ whose use of conjunctions insistently frames and de-frames the ‘beheld’ world which is subject to infinite re-coding. In an earlier presentation of the relationship between television and the waning of historicity, Stephen Heath observes that the televisual exhausts time into a ‘now-thisness’ that produces ‘flow, not history’.<sup>149</sup> The ‘interminable pluralisation’ and ‘flow’ of television’s ‘endless present’, in Heath’s view, effaces the grounds where a stable identity or subject position could be achieved.<sup>150</sup> DeLillo’s neo-chronicle narration flows too, and its irrational ‘patchwork accumulation of moments’ encodes a now from which a historicist conception of history has been expunged. The difference that DeLillo’s young couple detect, does not belong to the breakthrough of a new socialist culture, but to a re-programming of subjectivity in accordance to capital’s structural revolution.

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<sup>148</sup> Crary, *24/7*, p. 80.

<sup>149</sup> Stephen Heath, ‘Representing Television’, in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 267-302 (p. 279).

<sup>150</sup> Heath, ‘Representing Television’, p. 283.

*Baghdad Towers West*

Television in ‘Baghdad Towers West’ has already been exhausted as a cultural medium. Despite owning an abundance of devices, one character complains that ‘there’s nothing good on. There hasn’t been anything good since William F. Buckley Jr ran for mayor’.<sup>151</sup> Buckley Jr, a ‘populist’, although not ‘popular’ candidate, stands as place holder for a right wing aestheticisation of politics which will come to haunt America. If ‘Baghdad Towers West’, vectors away from the pivotal function accorded television by Crary who considers it a ‘machinery of regulation’ integral to the diffusion of 24/7 capitalism, DeLillo nonetheless identifies and explores a mode of refusal that Crary seeks to politicise.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to the ceaseless stimulation and incitement of artificial needs—which are perpetually non-fulfilled—‘sleep’, Crary writes, ‘poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonised and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability’.<sup>153</sup> Sleep is utopian insofar as it constitutes an absolute natural limit to the otherwise infinite accumulation of capital; a threshold whose crossing would be ruinous for living labour and the non-human environment alike. The unnamed first-person narrator of ‘Baghdad Towers West’, a ‘nobody’ defined only by their ‘possessions’—which include a ‘Mercedes 220 SE sedan and a ‘key to the Playboy Club’—and ‘title’—vice president—is also a self-described ‘virtuoso of sleep’ (BTW 205; 201). Crary’s presentation of sleep as an ‘uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism’ is given narrative shape by the narrator’s theft of time owned by capital.<sup>154</sup> Vice-president for research at a company called ‘Lithic Industries’, the narrator links

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<sup>151</sup> DeLillo, ‘Baghdad Towers West’, p. 209. All further references will be cited parenthetically in text as BTW.

<sup>152</sup> Crary, *24/7*, p. 81.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. For a critical assessment of Crary’s thesis see William Davies, ‘Economics of Insomnia’, *New Left Review*, II/85 (Jan/Feb 2014), 141-146.

his rediscovery of identity to sleeping through a corporate retreat—itsself a management practice designed to coerce affiliation:

About three years ago, during the annual company gathering of its far-flung executive officers, traditionally held at our chairman's lodge in the lake region of Minnesota, the Gopher State, somebody got up and started talking about aluminium stockpiles. I fell asleep halfway through his speech. I had disappeared almost completely and it was wonderful. Within the darkness I found something new, which was myself, or at least the beginnings of myself, the roots and mangled dirt of my becoming and being. I slept most of the week. They talked of international tax structures, computerization, ingot tonnage—and I slept. (BTW 205)

It is the narrator's pursuit of the 'wild psychotic coves' of sleep that sets in motion the events to which the act of narration is offered as a retrospective 'commentary' (BTW 205; 196). To put it in an existential register, 'Baghdad Towers West' is about dwelling in the world and the dream-texts characters invent in order to mitigate the 'transcendental homelessness' that Lukács considered to be the defining experience of modernity. Finding a world that is inhabitable is explored by DeLillo through the rather more prosaic quest for a new apartment—a struggle that the narrator regards as 'tragic' in a 'drawing room' sense (BTW 197). 'Baghdad Towers West', then, is a story named after an apartment complex: 'a 40-story orgone box of glass and steel' that promises a 'new kind of mystery, electronic and ultra-modern, in which the angel of death pushes a vacuum cleaner and all the werewolves are schnauzers' (BTW 198-199). An almost fairy-tale space where 'sleep and magic' remain possible, Baghdad Towers West also encodes via its architectural details another dynamic of modernity, its temporal form of novelty (BTW 198). Baghdad Towers West is presented in opposition to the narrator's former residence in Gramercy Park, an exclusive area of Manhattan whose denizens, the narrator reports, view it as 'one of the last preserves of civilization in New York' (BTW 202). It is such a notion of 'preserve', scored with a sense of an enclave, that the narrator explicitly rejects in his desire 'to be swept along in the neon tide' represented by the 'inhumanity and plastic terrors' of Baghdad Towers West (BTW 202). And it is this personal transition from the 'historical' unevenness of Gramercy Park to the flowing 'neon tide' of Baghdad Towers West which narrativises the passage into a period of real subsumption where all outsides have been

absorbed; an absorption demonstrated through the narrator's use of pastiche to mimic how Gramercy is now a nostalgia form—'let them erect plaques and declare the area a national landmark' (BTW 202).

Yet 'Baghdad Towers West' is also a story about an unlikely friendship formed between the narrator and three young women whose apartment he moves into and whose dreams he mocks, consumes, and is later nightmarishly consumed by. This friendship is also plotted around a transition of sorts: Caroline—a 'junk sculptress'—Robin—a high fashion model—and Melinda—a Broadway hopeful—are preparing to leave New York and need someone to take over their lease which still has a year to run (BTW 195-196). A significant part of the narrative is devoted to the narrator's disparaging observations regarding Caroline, Robin, and Melinda's passion for avant-garde aesthetic forms, haute couture, and theatre dynasties. Osteen bases his claim that DeLillo's text is 'a virtual reply of a scene in *Masculin Feminin*', Godard's 1965 essayistic homage to 'the children of Marx and Coca-Cola', around this mode of detached inquiry.<sup>155</sup> To be sure, there is something journalistic about the narrator's report: 'the three of them performed a kind of fugue which expressed their hopes and fears, their dreams and ambitions. They spoke to me as I were interviewing them for a profile in *Look* magazine, a story on the Restless Generation. They spoke in italics' (BTW 200). This loose sociological relationship of (masculine) narrating subject and (feminine) narrated object is disturbed, however, by the admission that the narrator's commentary—like the dreams he pursues—is affected by the memories of the women whose apartment he has come to 'possess' (BTW 208). Indeed, the very language and structure of the narration is said to be determined by whichever of the three beds the narrator is currently occupying, a recognition of the porous boundaries between personhoods.

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<sup>155</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 11. Although, in Godard's movie *Paul*, who functions as a sociological camera-eye, belongs to the same generation as the women he interviews, whereas in DeLillo's text, there is a bemused generational rift.

That each bed has ‘its own special incantation’ suggests that there is something fetishistic about the narrator’s attachment to Caroline, Robin, and Melinda (BTW 196). Fetishism might itself be felt to pervade the narrative more broadly—something underscored by the implicit orientalism of the title ‘Baghdad Towers West’. The narrator repeatedly enlists tropes drawn from romance and the exotic, referring to himself as ‘the button-down Sheik of Araby’, and likens the atmosphere of a nightclub called ‘Moloch’ to ‘the demonology of the Congo’ (BTW 211; 203). Such self-conscious incorporation of an already reified language points less to the reinforcement of the division between imperial centre and colonial or semi-colonial periphery—which can be re-presented as spectacle evacuated of historical content—and more to the intense fragmentation and privatisation of language in which all style has disintegrated into what Jameson calls ‘pastiche’—a ‘blank parody’ where the absence of linguistic standard or material referent becomes the content of cultural production.<sup>156</sup> Yet the ‘meridians of sleep’ which the narrator resorts to in order to ‘exorcise’ his ‘middle-class demons’ simulates another form of fetishism, that of the vampiric dependence and appropriation of living labour by capital (BTW 206). The narrator’s werewolf hunger for the women’s dreams, which ‘possess a beauty almost psychedelic’, turns against him when he begins to receive postcards relating the dismal situation of Caroline, Robin, and Melinda (BTW 208).<sup>157</sup> Fired for ‘massive indifference’, the narrator is terrorised by insomnia, ‘a spasmodic metaphysical current that rises from the belly until I have to open my eyes for fear of dying’ (BTW 216-17). In ‘Baghdad Towers West’ the collective of dreamers, whose hopes are woven into artistic creation, fashion, acting, and idleness itself, awaken to an everyday that has become a nightmare.

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<sup>156</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *The Cultural Turn* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-20 (p. 5).

<sup>157</sup> Caroline has a bad trip on peyote and believes she is turning into a cactus; Robin unhappily marries a cousin; and Melinda returns to Tallahassee where she works as a customer sales assistant.

In *Modern Epic* (1996), Franco Moretti introduces the concept of ‘world building’ to describe an arrangement of narrative space that simultaneously aspires to epic totality and is immediately shot through with the perception of its own contingency. A ‘world building’ is a ‘self-sufficient universe’ where ‘the grand world of modern capitalism can be ‘confronted within a confined space’.<sup>158</sup> ‘Baghdad Towers West’ thinks that ‘galactic beauty’ can be telescoped into the broken down and obsolescent parts of industrial society—and even envisages an extra-terrestrial encounter with ‘Martian archaeologists’ (BTW 195; 197). As ‘a self-contained commonwealth owing allegiance only to bad taste and the dim persuasions of sameness’, Baghdad Towers West can perhaps also be considered as DeLillo’s contribution to the category of ‘postmodern’ world building (BTW 208).<sup>159</sup> According to Moretti the world building of the nineteenth century is the department store where the wealth of society is displayed ‘as an immense collection of commodities’.<sup>160</sup> For DeLillo, what is presented for consumption is less a tangible, portable commodity, than living space itself—a world building that demands a particular form of dwelling in the world. Space in ‘Baghdad Towers West’ has already been annexed into the circuits of televisual mediation: the building’s atrium is a familiar ‘scene; we have all witnessed it on TV’ (BTW 199). The building’s corridors are both cleansed of human trace—there is ‘no smell of cooking, no loud arguments, no obscenities scratched on the wall’—and invested with oneiric fantasy—they are ‘like the corridors in our dreams’ (BTW 199). In addition, ‘artificial’ versions of trees, pools, and fish replicate and stand in for a nature that no longer exists (BTW 200). The world housed within ‘Baghdad Towers West’ is one that has been miraculated.

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<sup>158</sup> Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 127.

<sup>159</sup> See Jameson’s discussion of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, pp. 11-16.

<sup>160</sup> The phrase belongs to Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 125.



The excessive stimuli of the nineteenth century department store helped generate a new form of subject: the delirious and voracious consumer. In ‘Baghdad Towers West’ the subjectivity produced through interaction with the new spatial coordinates is more subdued and self-restrained. Much to the narrator’s amusement he befriends ‘a child of Baghdad Towers West’ who rides the building’s elevators as a form of recreation—an activity he is keen to expand across Manhattan’s postmodern architecture (BTW 209). ‘Ulysses’, as the narrator renames the voyager, justifies his hobby by arguing that ‘when you get down to it, there really isn’t much to do except ride the elevator. I mean what is there to do’ (BTW 209). The elevator becomes emblematic of the monadic subject and belongs to DeLillo’s re-appropriation and degradation of epic style into pastiche. Ulysses explains that his life is guided by a simple principle: ‘if I try to achieve a goal that’s simply beyond my abilities, I’m bound to be disappointed’ (BTW 208-09). It is this wariness of disappointment that sets Ulysses apart from Caroline, Robin, Melinda, and the narrator himself, who form a dreaming collective consumed by fancy. The world of epic, as outlined by Lukács, belongs to a pre-modern social formation where there is an accord between ‘being and destiny, adventure and accomplishment’; a harmony that is severed and rendered dissonant by modernity. In the lived reconciliation of ‘cognition and action’, DeLillo’s Ulysses offers a response to the postmodern condition.<sup>161</sup>

### *The Uniforms*

Louis Althusser’s anti-economist push to open up the political and ideological spheres as semi-autonomous fronts, whilst nevertheless ‘holding’ these levels together ‘in the ultimate unity of some “structural totality”’ ends, for Fredric Jameson, in the “meltdown” of the Althusserian

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<sup>161</sup> Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, p. 30.

apparatus'.<sup>162</sup> As a consequence, political, cultural, economic, and theoretical struggles are interpreted as radically heterogeneous and splinter into the 'world of micro-groups and micropolitics'.<sup>163</sup> Meltdown in the revolution would be one way of characterising DeLillo's depraved short story 'The Uniforms'. In this late sixties text, revolutionary violence has derailed into a barbaric aesthetic ideology that has 'thrown off the shackles of black-and-white revisionism' and shoots in the 'colour of childhood fantasy'.<sup>164</sup> Bradley, Jean-Claude, Hassan, Duong, and Harlow, belong to a multi-national band of leftist guerrilla fighters for whom the 'colour of childhood fantasy' consists of murder, mutilation, and rape. 'The Uniforms' is composed of a series of aleatory encounters that end in disaster for those who maintain the social order, an identification largely made on the basis of dress. On the one hand, the uniforms in question are the 'boring' and 'unimaginative' outfits of the armed wing of the state whose monopoly on violence is mercilessly undermined by DeLillo's nomadic war machine (TU 5). On the other, the uniforms reference the group's film theory that the 'devouring eye of history and the camera' values and rewards 'revolutionary uniforms' which are 'tight and spare' (TU 7). It is this vacillation between the image of revolution—mediated by extreme violence—and the revolution of the image—mediated by perceptual technologies—that forms one of the central contradictions of 'The Uniforms'.

DeLillo presents 'The Uniforms' to the reader as a 'legitimate challenge' to artists and artworks of 'radical intent'.<sup>165</sup> 'The Uniforms' is a metapolitical text whose raw material is drawn from the relation between aesthetic revolution and social revolution—a relation that DeLillo seeks to historicise and critique. Given the additional acknowledgment that 'The Uniforms' is also an experimental reworking and redrawing of the boundary between literature

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<sup>162</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Periodising the Sixties', in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 483-515 (p. 497; p. 498).

<sup>163</sup> Jameson, 'Periodising the Sixties', p. 498.

<sup>164</sup> Don DeLillo, 'The Uniforms', *Carolina Quarterly*, 22 (1970), 4-11 (p. 7). All further references will be cited parenthetically in text as TU.

<sup>165</sup> DeLillo, 'Notes', p. 533.

and cinema, it is not unduly reductive to refract DeLillo's conception of what constitutes 'radical intent' through the work of Godard—whose career might be viewed as an ongoing search for a revolutionary aesthetic. For Osteen, 'The Uniforms' is a 'gloss' on *Weekend*, Godard's getaway movie in which bourgeois society has entered a stage of terminal decomposition. What emerges from the ruins of bourgeois civilisation is a barbaric neo-primitive clan society whose peoples—depicted in the film through the 'Seine-et-Oise Liberation Front'—declare that 'we can only overcome the horror of the bourgeoisie by even more horror'.<sup>166</sup> The metaphorical cannibalism of the bourgeoisie, a vampiric class that sucks living labour dry, is negated in Godard's movie through a literal cannibalism—the survivors of modernity are consumed by cannibal revolutionaries. Osteen suggests that DeLillo's representation of an ultra-violent, fashion and film obsessed armed band 'reverses' the direction of Godard's thesis: 'whereas for Godard the bourgeoisie are terrorists, for DeLillo the terrorists are bourgeois consumers'.<sup>167</sup> DeLillo's re-narration, then, is thought to borrow Godard's modernist strategy of disjunctive association and twist it against itself so that the subjects of 'radical intent' are revealed to contain the consumer-within. Such a framing, however, seems to misread the bleak satire of *Weekend* for a positive endorsement of what Benjamin Noys calls 'terminal accelerationism'.<sup>168</sup> Instead, 'The Uniforms' might be better positioned as a story that turns on the question of mediation itself; a question that not only foregrounds its own status as an object of transcoding, but also the dilemma of how to move from aesthetics to politics.

DeLillo's challenge to, and refusal of, a certain type of radical textual politics operates through a disarming rift between seditious content and a formalisation that neutralizes such subversion. 'The Uniforms' opening paragraph is instructive in this regard:

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<sup>166</sup> *Weekend*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Athos Films. 1967.

<sup>167</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 15.

<sup>168</sup> Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero, 2014), p. 79.

The girl with the Apache headband joined them at the crossroads. Jean-Claude considered her rape-material but Bradley, who was new at this, tossed her a sten gun and named her Harlow. Bradley, an American, was the giver of names. Jean-Claude, who had been at the barricades outside the second Renault factory, was the theoretician and heartless bastard. Hassan was back at the ex-farm editing clips on the police barracks. Duong lectured at the university on Tuesdays. (TU 4)

The narrative begins with a bloodless encounter that replicates a formula whereby a stranger is invited to join a wandering posse—an invitation that is not without disagreement. Unlike *Weekend*, this armed posse is never named, but each member, including those absent, is individuated and identified with a specific skill—the mark of unalienated labour. Harlow’s talent, as the reader finds out, is disfigurement: ‘Harlow borrowed his bowie knife, made a slit in the dead men’s bellies and then cut off their sex organs and stuffed each into the appropriate slit’ (TU 5). Harlow, who learned this ‘trick’ in ‘Algiers during the time of the filming of Pontecorvo’s great fictional documentary’, becomes the narrative’s representative of roving international struggle (TU 5). Her tales of ‘bizarre sexual experiences’ with guerrilla fighters in Bolivia and Indochina, and sexual torture by French and Italian police both intrigue Bradley—who is amorously attached to her—and contrast with his own memories of an idealised prairie childhood: he ‘saw himself running in slow-motion from the barn to silo’ (TU 6). What is strikingly apparent is a split between a content that has gone haywire and a form of narration that is studiously detached and desensitised to the graphic material that constitutes its reportage. It presents a world in which civil war and states of emergency have been normalised.

This sense of being indifferent to the events depicted extends to ‘The Uniforms’ relation to world history; a relation that might be said to be askance. On one level, ‘The Uniforms’ internalises and posits itself as a post-68 text through a set of sweeping references to major social convulsions such as the factory occupations in France, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, and the Prague Spring. And yet on another, these bonds to historical referents are weakened, if not cancelled, through the inclusion of details that are simultaneously specific and elusive—the ‘second Renault factory’, the ‘third monsoon offensive’ (TU 4; 11). The framing and de-

framing of political history is supplemented by a similar process whereby cinematic history, in both its Hollywood—John Ford and John Huston—and European—Luis Bunuel and Gillo Pontecorvo—forms is spliced and rewritten by the text: Bunuel is said to have ‘declared that the days of the slow dissolve were numbered’ whilst fighting alongside Spanish partisans (TU 9). Revolutionary political history and cinematic history are interwoven in Jeremy Varon’s account of post-68 paramilitary groups who aimed to ‘bring’ imperial war ‘back home’ through terrorism. Varon notes that advocates for violent insurrection like Weatherman portrayed themselves as the ‘Americong’ in a bid appropriate the ‘mystique of the outlaw’ for the communist struggle against capitalist society.<sup>169</sup> DeLillo’s war machine similarly recycles frontier imagery: Bradley utters ‘Comanche birdcalls’ before blowing up a tank and Hassan and Jean-Claude appear on the horizon ‘like a pair of Kiowa scouts watching the cavalry pass below them into a trap’ (TU 6; 9). Conceived as such, the nomadic hoard re-inscribe themselves as part of an indigenous struggle against the expansion of the American state and capital, which are represented as alien and colonial forces.

History in ‘The Uniforms’ appears to be indiscernible from the cinematographic image— it is not so much what hurts but what can be shot. Although DeLillo’s text veers towards extreme pornographic violence—in one of the multiple scenes of sexual violence a woman is doused in lighter fluid and set on fire, in another a gang rape is filmed—‘The Uniforms’ also anticipates, in terms of its structure, the ‘violence pornography’ of Hollywood action movies.<sup>170</sup> As Jameson points out there is a tension in these films ‘between the construction of a plot (overall intrigue, narrative suspense) and the demand for a succession of explosive and self-sufficient moments of violence’. This ‘succession’ of autonomous moments ‘gradually crowds out the development of narrative time and reduces plot to the merest of

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<sup>169</sup> Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>170</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘The End of Temporality’, in *The Ideologies of Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 636-658 (p. 652).

pretext or thread on which to string a series of explosions'.<sup>171</sup> Plot has all but been expunged from 'The Uniforms', whose narrator instead orchestrates a rosary of atrocities—massacres, executions, and sexual assaults—and aesthetic debates which are strung together on the barest of narrative cartilage. The nomadic hoard is confronted with and overcome a series of events that have no meaningful connection with a before or an after and, in this sense, the text does not develop so much as over accumulate. Jameson uses the erasure of plot by self-sufficient episode to illuminate what he calls the 'end of temporality': 'a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place'.<sup>172</sup> It is this perception of a 'pure present' that begins to inform DeLillo's challenge to radical artworks.

The 'pure present' of 'The Uniforms' is achieved, then, through an accelerated turnover of narrative incidents in which the developmental times of past and future have been displaced by infinite addition. It is clear, however, that despite a similar conception of a temporal form cleansed of memory and anticipation, this sped-up 'pure present' is distinct from Michael Trussler's 'suspended temporality'. 'The Uniforms' does not make time elastic, but compresses and serialises it into a sequence of present actions that rush past in a style of narration that is barely invested in the affective dimension of a scene: 'he got the first fat woman just below the left breast with the bowie knife' (TU 9). What is in meltdown here is the genre of the short story. Indeed, the existential dilemma of short fiction—the loss of the future that pervades DeLillo's neorealist period—is cancelled and discarded in 'The Uniforms' by what Deleuze calls 'white events', 'events which never truly concern the person who provokes or is subject to them'.<sup>173</sup> The wild multiplication of action contributes both to the decomposition of the short

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<sup>171</sup> Jameson, 'The End of Temporality', p. 653.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 647.

<sup>173</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 207.

story and to DeLillo's challenge to radical artists, which can now be viewed as a criticism of an undialectical and transhistorical conception of shock-value. But, if shock has been transformed from a radical perceptual estrangement and segmented into commodified entertainment, 'The Uniforms' also imagines a strange pure present that passes out of narrative and historical time altogether: 'many would die that night, but they would not. They would live until the end and even beyond' (TU 11). A messianic collective destiny, perhaps, that seeks to invent new forms of narrativity.

One of the distinctions between modernist and postmodernist artworks, Jameson suggests, corresponds to the transition of subversion from an emergent aesthetic form that scandalises society to a dominant cultural style in which the social order is reproduced through capital's permanent revolution. 'The most offensive forms' of contemporary art, Jameson writes, 'are all taken in its stride by society, and they are commercially successful, unlike the productions of the older high modernism'.<sup>174</sup> Benjamin Noys speculates that it might have been the very 'commercial and critical success' of *Weekend* from the consumerist and bourgeois society that he sought to abolish, which sparked Godard's own flight into a more 'explicitly and didactic cinema' with the Dziga-Vertov collective.<sup>175</sup> DeLillo's critique in 'The Uniforms' is less of the profitability of violence as entertainment spectacle—something that will become a feature of his novels—and more of the recuperation and blunting of shock as an aesthetic device. With its emphasis on violent defamiliarisation, shock is in fact corralled by advertising and television, and incorporated into its logics of perpetual stimulation. Like 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.', global reference points flow through 'The Uniforms' whilst never quite sticking or taking on the consistency of a palpable milieu. Such narrative sliding through a sequence of 'any-place-whatevers' belongs to a 'the "worlding" image of television', as Richard Dienst

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<sup>174</sup> Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 19.

<sup>175</sup> Noys, *Malign Velocities*, p. 81.

puts it; or, as Crary suggests, ‘the falseness of the world’ incarnate.<sup>176</sup> History has stalled in ‘The Uniforms’, but stasis here is a perpetual present that nonetheless flows beyond the narrative and historiographic frame of short fiction. Mapping the development of the progressive englobement, both in terms of the individual bildungsroman and economic modernisation becomes the subject of DeLillo’s novel; to whose cognitive mapping and inhabitation of genre the thesis turns to next.

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<sup>176</sup> Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 5; Crary, 24/7, p. 82.



## American Rhizomes; or, Conspiracy, Cognitive Mapping, and Development

Since the publication of Henry Fielding’s foundling epic *Tom Jones* (1749), the novel’s ‘true subject matter’ has been, according to Adorno, ‘the conflict between living human beings and rigidified conditions’. Alienation is a condition of possibility for the novel—the misfit’s unhappy difference from the many—and an aesthetic device through which the novel deciphers ‘the riddle of external life’—instantiated formally through the search for social recognition or achieved socialisation.<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson returns to this antagonism between individual and social institutions in order to foreground how ‘both alternatives of realism and modernism seem intolerable to us [...] in the decaying future of consumer society’.<sup>2</sup> If the kinds of social experience that once informed realism have become ‘extinct’, Jameson is equally keen to stress that the modernist faith in perceptual estrangement—Adorno’s ‘anti-realistic moment’—has also been stripped of its subversive energies. In a society where the very ‘techniques of “estrangement” have become the dominant style’, it is the ‘habit of fragmentation’ that ‘itself needs to be “estranged” and corrected by a more totalising way of viewing phenomena’. In such a dialectical reversal the ‘connective values of realism’ return, but with a difference. No longer anchored to the existential category of identity—incarnated by the outcast—realism is instead coded through the epistemological concept of reification. Reification, Jameson glosses, ‘is a process that affects our cognitive relationship with the social totality. It is a disease of that mapping function whereby the individual subject projects and models his or her insertion into the collectivity’. The search for knowledge which drives a revived realism is reflexively

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘The Position of the Narrator in the Contemporary Novel’, in *Notes to Literature*, Volume One, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 30-36 (p. 32).

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Reflections in Conclusion’, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, by Adorno et al (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 196-213 (p. 211).

inscribed in figures of ‘intellectual difference’—the detective, the journalist, the researcher—whose task is the ‘forcible reopening of access to a sense of society as a totality’.<sup>3</sup> Published in 1977, Jameson will later re-address this diseased imagination in terms of ‘cognitive mapping’, which is the theme of this chapter.

Don DeLillo’s erratic conspiracy novels *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978), and *The Names* (1981) aspire towards the representation of a totality, but one which is spinning wildly off-kilter. Presented chronologically, DeLillo’s novels register the spatio-temporal unfolding of US finance capital: clocking its emergence on Wall Street in *Players*; its spiralling patchwork envelopment of the nation in *Running Dog*; and finally, its capture of so-called developing nations in *The Names*. In so doing, DeLillo engages in an eccentric ‘cognitive mapping’ of the United States in the process of becoming-empire. The novels narrate the tendential englobement of US capital, presented as the deterritorialisation of money, the commodification of visual attention, and the imposition of structural adjustment programs, whilst also plotting possible resistance to the extension of the USA as world hegemon. *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* are thus cultural forms that respond to, and imaginatively frame, what Giovanni Arrighi calls the ‘signal crisis’ of US hegemony as financial speculation supersedes industrial production as the dominant form of accumulation.<sup>4</sup> On account of its spatial form, Jameson identifies the political genre of conspiracy as one of the privileged narrative apparatuses through which the fragmentation and isolation of experience in the capitalist heartlands can be totalised. *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names*, are similarly guided by a ‘geographical motif’ but, unlike Jameson’s spatialisation of history, the ‘worlds’ they discover appear constitutively incomplete, haunted by a spectral excess.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to

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<sup>3</sup> Jameson, ‘Reflections in Conclusion’, pp. 211-212. The idea of ‘intellectual difference’ is taken from Étienne Balibar’s discussion of labour in *The Philosophy of Marx*, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2014), pp. 49-54.

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of our Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and

DeLillo's work is the registration of margins—both in the overdeveloped US and its underdeveloped peripheries—where history can be glimpsed as dynamically unfolding. This chapter will read *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* through the 'idea of development'; a Hegelian concept that has been 'scarified' by history.<sup>6</sup> The guiding question will be whether DeLillo's retrofitting of conspiracy as a new realism can indeed crack open the 'ontologies of the present' with a reconfigured post-Hegelian politics of the multitude or if DeLillo's dramatisation of historical derailment does not, in fact, novelise the 'cunning of capital'.<sup>7</sup>

### *Genre*

In a set of reflections on DeLillo's career at the moment of its canonisation, John Duvall relates how it is a 'gift for historicising the present' which marks DeLillo out 'as one of the cartographers of contemporary cognition' called for by Jameson. DeLillo's experimentation across popular literary genres, Duvall continues, 'show nothing less than how America became postmodern'.<sup>8</sup> Positioned as such, DeLillo shares affinities with the tradition of realism associated with Balzac in which everyday life is experienced as a particularity—the 'radiance of dailiness'—and subject to ongoing historical change and becoming: a 'realism of tendencies'.<sup>9</sup> Historicisation, as Duvall makes clear, additionally involves scanning for alternative future-presents: a possibility of difference that DeLillo's fiction strives to realise

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Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Kraniauskas, 'Difference Against Development: Spiritual Accumulation and the Politics of Freedom', p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), p. 215. For more on the 'cunning of capital' see John Kraniauskas, 'The Cunning of Capital Explained?', *Radical Philosophy*, 184 (March/April 2014), 42-46.

<sup>8</sup> John N. Duvall, 'The Power of History and the Persistence of Mystery', in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1-10 (p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> A 'realism of tendencies' is how Jameson re-presents Lukács's work in *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 216. The 'radiance of dailiness' comes from DeLillo's reflections on uneven development: 'imagine someone from the third world who has never set foot in a place like that suddenly transported to an A&P in Chagrin Falls, Ohio', Anthony DeCurtis, "'An Outsider in this Society": An Interview with Don DeLillo', in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 43-66 (p. 63).

through its efforts to escape ‘Madison Avenue’s dream of America’.<sup>10</sup> Deleuze too links cartography with flight: ‘to flee is to trace a line, lines, a whole cartography. One only discovers worlds through a long, broken flight’.<sup>11</sup> ‘American literature’, Deleuze sweepingly asserts, ‘operates according to geographical lines’, lines of flight that precipitate ‘a sort of delirium. To be delirious is exactly to go off the rails’.<sup>12</sup> What goes off the rails in *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names*, is the relationship between the dialectical form of history and its inscription within the realist novel; a mediation which is presented as newly problematic. If derailment for a theorist like Deleuze affords the possibility of an exodus from the plane constituted by capital and the state, for others, the de-dialecticising of history is thought to represent something like the ‘cunning of capital’ in which everything that is not capital has been fully captured or ceases to exist.

The turn to genre can be framed as both symptomatic of the real subsumption of culture by the economy and as an attempt to induce a homeopathic resistance to the commodity-form. Fredric Jameson’s influential periodisation of postmodernism as the cultural logic of multinational capitalism is crucial here, in particular, the reading of commodification in terms of the integration of the aesthetic into the economic. Jameson: ‘the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothes to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation’.<sup>13</sup> The aesthetic becomes economic in the form of mass produced entertainment, whilst economic value becomes acculturated in the form of advertising: a dialectical interplay that renders the modernist distinction between autonomous artworks and commercial culture inoperable. James Axton, the narrator of *The Names* alludes

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<sup>10</sup> Duvall, ‘The Power of History’, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze, ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37; p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), pp. 4-5.

to this prodigious expansion of the economic into areas formerly exempt from market relations when he depressingly notes that ‘Americans used to come to places like this [Greece] to write and paint and study, to find deeper textures. Now we do business’.<sup>14</sup> Genre, in other words, indexes the commodification of artworks and the annexation of zones of autonomy.

If genre historicises the incorporation of the aesthetic into commodity production at one level, its highly codified forms and social contracts also point to related epistemological and perceptual transformations. Adventure novels have long been associated with the discovery of new worlds, so it is perhaps unsurprising that DeLillo’s hybridised conspiracies have been interpreted within the context of a break and restructuring of the representational technologies of empire. In a discussion of *Running Dog* and intertextuality, John Frow comments that the novel is “‘about’ representation”; that is, it takes the mediation of reality as its subject.<sup>15</sup> Bill Mullen extends this idea of the auto-referentiality of genre, arguing that DeLillo’s ‘generic intertextuality’ dramatises the erasure of the formerly stable object or material referent which is now recomposed as volatile simulacrum.<sup>16</sup> John Johnston likewise argues that DeLillo’s deployment of popular sub-genres signifies a ‘post-cinematic perception’ which ‘can be described as a state in which the world seems to have lost all substance and anchoring or reference points, except in relation to other images’.<sup>17</sup> For Frow, Mullen, and Johnston, the pre-formed or readymade machinery of genre fiction crystallises a new sensory regime and operates as a meta-fictional device that exposes the subject’s access to the social world as always already coded through ideology. DeLillo’s genre fiction is a type of abstraction which takes the medium of popular culture as its content and questions its attendant modes of subjectivation.

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<sup>14</sup> Don DeLillo, *The Names* (London: Picador, 1987), p. 7. All further references will be cited parenthetically as TN.

<sup>15</sup> John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 145.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Mullen, ‘No There There: Cultural Criticism as Lost Object in Don DeLillo’s *Players* and *Running Dog*’, in *Powerless Fictions?*, ed. by Ricardo Miguel Alfonso (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 113-140 (p. 114).

<sup>17</sup> John Johnston, ‘Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo’, *Critique*, 30.4 (Summer 1989), 261-275 (p. 268).

The cultural politics of this second order figuration in which the image of the thing has displaced the thing itself, resides in a strategy of defamiliarisation. Tim Engles notes that DeLillo draws on ‘vehicles for popular entertainment’, like the political thriller, in order ‘to rearrange and subvert the genre’s conventions at every turn’.<sup>18</sup> DeLillo’s bourgeois characters flee their ‘scripted lives’ by dreaming themselves into wild conspiratorial plots whose scripts are in turn abandoned.<sup>19</sup> Deviation from everyday existence and the split from conventional narrative resolution, combine, in Engles view, to ‘evoke some tangible grasp on reality beneath the many beguiling representations’ and produce ‘genuine experience’.<sup>20</sup> Anne Longmuir also advocates the priority of mediation, but is altogether more sceptical of the possibility of unadulterated, pure experience. Longmuir instead focuses on how the conjunction of gender and genre is used to explore the ‘epistemological uncertainty and indeterminacy of post-Vietnam America’.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, the rigidly masculinist genres of the thriller and the western, as re-activated by Lyle Wynant of *Players* and *Running Dog’s* Glen Selvy, are presented as anachronistic and inadequate cultural forms. Moreover, their attempts to fix the fragmented psychic experience of consumer society end abysmally: Lyle dissolves in a Canadian motel, whilst Selvy is ceremonially decapitated. On the other, *Running Dog’s* Moll Robbins—an investigative journalist—and Nadine Rademacher—an erotic story teller—are able to self-consciously employ ‘cultural narratives’ that ‘allow them to remake themselves’.<sup>22</sup> By fabricating new, and more flexible subjectivities, Moll and Nadine are able to project a future beyond textual enclosure. Genre, in this case, is used to reawaken perception otherwise

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Engles, ‘DeLillo and the Political Thriller’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 66-76 (p. 66).

<sup>19</sup> Engles, ‘DeLillo and the Political Thriller’, p. 72. The chance to escape ‘scripted lives’ is not available to the novel’s ‘minor characters’: *Players*’ Frank McKechnie watches a television film which mirrors his recent misfortunes: ‘An old movie was on, inept and boring, fifties vintage. There was a man, the hero, whose middle class life was quietly coming apart’, *Players* (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Longmuir, ‘Genre and Gender in Don DeLillo’s *Players* and *Running Dog*’, *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, 37.1 (Winter 2007), 128-145 (p. 128).

<sup>22</sup> Longmuir, ‘Genre and Gender’, p. 144.

rendered inert by reification.

Recent Marxist scholarship has outlined two possible responses to the loss of aesthetic autonomy and resultant subordination of cultural work to the market. For Nicholas Brown the textual reworking of generic experience represents a type of afterlife for the ‘problem-solving’ telos that propelled modernist formal innovation. The drive to revise and improve generic forms establishes ‘a zone of autonomy within the heteronomous space of cultural products’: an ‘aestheticisation of genre’.<sup>23</sup> What Lukács would deplore as the indiscernibility between literature that ‘has’ a problematic and literature that ‘is’ problematic is reconceptualised by Brown as a species of post-autonomous artwork that turns capital’s feverish search for novelty against itself in the form of disappointed expectations.<sup>24</sup> David Cunningham, alternatively, highlights how ‘the strategic *use* of genre [...] draws upon the social and historical energy carried *by* mass popular forms, which are consequently the object of a critically reflective construction, deploying the structures of inherited genres as [...] formal raw material’.<sup>25</sup> The geological energy tapped in *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* is related to variations of the frontier—a chronotope crucial to the US national imaginary—and are inexorably drawn to what Margaret Cohen calls the ‘edge Zones’ of modernity.<sup>26</sup>

A remobilisation of genre in changed historical circumstances informs John McClure’s interpretation of DeLillo as a historiographer of ‘popular romance’. DeLillo, McClure observes, ‘crafts’ and sculpts his fiction out of ‘the espionage thriller, the imperial adventure novel, the western, science fiction, even the genre of occult adventure’.<sup>27</sup> Redeployed in a ‘late imperial’ key, romance presents an aesthetico-philosophical challenge to ‘the modernist notion

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<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Brown, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital’, in *Contemporary Marxist Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Andrew Pendakis, Jeff Diamanti, Nicholas Brown, Josh Robinson, Imre Szeman (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 449-468 (p. 464).

<sup>24</sup> See Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> David Cunningham, ‘Here Comes the New: *Deadwood* and the Historiography of Capitalism’, *Radical Philosophy*, 180 (July/August 2013), 8-24 (p. 20). (italics in original).

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 225.

<sup>27</sup> John McClure, ‘Postmodern Romance: Don DeLillo and the Age of Conspiracy’, in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 99-116 (p. 99).

that global secularisation and “rationalisation” have eliminated the magical enclaves ‘once available for imaginative exploitation’.<sup>28</sup> Upholding Jameson’s thesis that multinational capital has indeed colonised ‘Nature and the Unconscious’, McClure nonetheless maintains that DeLillo’s cultural mission is to explore how ‘Elsewhere’—a proto-utopian space—paradoxically reterritorialises itself ‘within the intricate fabric woven by a now global economic order, in the mysterious zones produced by the system itself’.<sup>29</sup> Navigating ‘jungle like techno-tangles; dangerous, unknown “tribes”; secret cults with their own codes and ceremonies’, DeLillo’s fiction happens on emergent forms of post-secular enchantment that are both immanent to the postmodern metropolis and which challenge its oppressive historical closure.<sup>30</sup> The appropriation of conspiracy fiction is ideological insofar as it imagines the individual’s insertion within networks of power; as McClure puts it, conspiracy ‘replaces religion as a means of mapping the world without disenchanting it, robbing it of its mystery’.<sup>31</sup> Conspiracy is additionally the political content of DeLillo’s poetics, and is used to sabotage the white, heroic political romance of the American state as the guarantor of world freedom. Romance not only cleaves open a space for alterity—through encounters with magical states—it also dismantles the ‘representation of actually existing democratic capitalism’ through a figuration of the black state of surveillance, deception, and assassination.<sup>32</sup>

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson acknowledges that romance ‘seems to offer the possibilities of sensing other historical rhythms and of demonic or utopian transformation of a real now unshakeably set in place’. In contrast to the ‘gradual reification of realism’, romance is ‘once again [...] felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and freedom from that reality principle to which a now oppressive realist representation is hostage’.<sup>33</sup> And yet when McClure

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<sup>28</sup> McClure, ‘Postmodern Romance’, pp. 99-100.

<sup>29</sup> John McClure, *Late Imperial Romance* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> McClure, ‘Postmodern Romance’, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 91.



writes of DeLillo's 'search for raw materials' it is hard not to wonder whether enfolded within the 'other historical rhythms' sensed by romance is not in fact the expansionary logic of capital itself.<sup>34</sup> Franco Moretti explicitly links the 'trope of expansion'—dramatised by the adventure novel's search—to 'capitalism on the offensive, planetary, crossing the oceans'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the navigation of the unknown which is crucial to the re-enchantment of the world after the 'realisation of reason' in McClure's work, is presented by Hegel as 'the higher romance of commerce', where the 'world' is 'again present to man as worthy of the interests of thinking mind [...] again capable of action'.<sup>36</sup> But if navigation is marked by colonial and entrepreneurial inflections, Hegel's identification of the reconciliation of cognition and action nevertheless points to a poetics of problem solving crucial to the Lukácsian theory of the novel. In the context of maritime literature, Margaret Cohen refers to this re-unification as the emplotment of 'practical reason', whose continued resonance she notes in 'detective and spy fiction' which 'take up the field of information as one of the Edge Zones of our time'.<sup>37</sup> Geographical reconnaissance and intellectual labour are central to Jameson's reading of conspiracy fiction as an allegory of cognitive mapping, to which the chapter now turns.

### *Conspiracy: National Allegory or Cognitive Mapping?*

Through the construction of a '*global* techno-space that is complexly traversed by multinational corporate interests, warring imperial and postcolonial "state actors", terrorists and displaced communities in motion', DeLillo gives shape to what McClure calls a 'geopolitics of the imagination'.<sup>38</sup> For Jameson, such narratives are the products of a

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<sup>34</sup> McClure, 'Postmodern Romance', p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Franco Moretti, 'History of the Novel, Theory of the Novel', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 43.1 (2010), 1-10 (p. 9).

<sup>36</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. by Elizabeth Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, p. 225.

<sup>38</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 6. (italics in original).

‘geopolitical unconscious’ whose centrepiece is ‘cognitive mapping’: an aesthetic and pedagogical practice that ‘presupposes a radical incompatibility between the possibilities of an older national language or culture [...] and the transnational, worldwide organisation of the economic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism’.<sup>39</sup> Cognitive mapping, as Phillip Wegner has recently shown, marks both a ‘period’ in Jameson’s thinking as it shifts ‘from the national to the global’ and periodises a spatial re-scaling of the world system—an economic horizon defined by the universal integration of nation-states into the world market; a structural inclusion that nonetheless marginalises any single nation-state as merely a particular assemblage or local configuration of capital accumulation.<sup>40</sup> The ‘universalisation’, if not exactly ‘unification’, of the economic horizon generates in turn a globalised present from which the memory or anticipation of historical difference has been purged.<sup>41</sup> Wegner clarifies that cognitive mapping is ‘a *process*, a way of making *connections*, *drawing* networks’: narrative activities that are ‘imperative for a new and heretofore unimaginable politics to emerge’.<sup>42</sup> The emergent worlds encoded in *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* are the ‘peripheral zones of underdevelopment’ that begin to appear ‘inside the centre’, the ‘internal Third Worlds, internal Souths’ which preoccupy Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>43</sup>

Cognitive mapping is embedded in Jameson’s argument that each of the ‘three historical stages of capital’—market, imperial, multinational—have generated a ‘unique’ type of space, whose escalating formal dilemmas can be tracked through the parallel sequence of realism, modernism, and postmodernism: the cultural logics of capitalism. In the first stage of ‘classical or market capitalism’, the ‘immediate and limited experience of individuals is still

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<sup>39</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Phillip E. Wegner, *Periodizing Jameson: Dialectics, the University, and the Desire for Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> For a distinction between capital’s ‘universalisation’ of history and socialism’s ‘unification’ of history see Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> Wegner, *Periodizing Jameson*, pp. 71-72; p. 73. (italics in original).

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 517.

able to encompass and coincide with the true economic and social forms that governs that experience'. This is a period where the dramatic incorporation of individual consciousness within the reality of collective will—inscribed by institutions like social class—can be narrated from, and sutured to, the nation-state and national history. 'Problems of figuration' emerge more fully in the monopoly or imperial stage of capitalism, and register 'a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of that experience'. The truth of 'the phenomenological experience of the individual', as Jameson summarises, 'no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place': that is to say, the truth of daily experience in the metropole lies elsewhere in the system of empire.<sup>44</sup> Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle call this the 'imperial end of immanence'; an experiential void which Jameson suggests is compensated for through modernism's stylistic and syntactical innovations.<sup>45</sup> Such a disjunction between individual existence and social abstraction only expands in the third, multinational stage of capital which:

Has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of individual human body to locate itself, to organise its immediate surroundings perceptually, and to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world [...] the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global, multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.<sup>46</sup>

It is this unthinkable incommensurability between lived experience and abstract structural totalities that cognitive mapping is tasked with making intelligible through a realism that 'is not exactly mimetic'.<sup>47</sup> To date, Jameson's most extensive elaboration of a non-traditional, non-identical mimesis can be found in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. The aesthetic dilemma, as the text repeats, is how 'to think a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of

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<sup>44</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 410-411.

<sup>45</sup> Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Winchester: Zero, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

perception with which human beings normally orient themselves'.<sup>48</sup> But given that the capitalist world system, to borrow from Moretti, is 'one, and unequal', the question of how to 'fantasise' an 'economic system on the scale of the globe' is resolutely situational.<sup>49</sup> Within the 'first world' context of the United States, Jameson offers conspiracy films as an example of how such an 'ambitious' imaginative program might be implemented: the 'conspiratorial text' constitutes 'an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us'.<sup>50</sup> As a narrative apparatus, conspiracy is able to fuse together 'a potentially infinite network'—the collective—with 'a plausible explanation of its invisibility'—the epistemological—whilst also short-circuiting literary fiction's relative inability to convey collectivity and a modernist taboo on politics.<sup>51</sup> Jameson emphatically stresses that 'nothing is gained by having been persuaded of the definitive verisimilitude of this or that conspiratorial hypothesis: but the intent to hypothesize, in the desire called cognitive mapping—therein lies the beginning of wisdom'.<sup>52</sup> Insofar as conspiracy is understood as an artificial and perpetually self-negating form, it can be begin to open up a conceptual space in which the individual's relation to the social can acquire historical meaning.

Conspiracy, however, is peculiarly overdetermined in US cultural and political history, to the extent that Jameson's attention to the formal poles of 'laterality' and the 'social detective' can seem at odds with theorists who regard conspiracy as the symbolic form of the American state.<sup>53</sup> As Peter Knight highlights, 'the history of the United States is a history of conspiracy'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (January/February 2000), 54-68 (p. 56). Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. It is such a focus on form that separates Jameson's earlier dismissal of conspiracy as 'the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system, whose failure is marked by slippage into sheer theme and content', 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp. 347-357 (p. 356).

<sup>53</sup> Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 33; p. 37.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Knight, 'A Nation of Conspiracy Theorists', in *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*, ed. by Peter Knight (New York: New York University Press, 2002), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).

Knicht proceeds to date a decisive—postmodern—break in the style of conspiracy fiction to the period post-1973, where an ‘erosion of America’s sense of manifest economic and political destiny’ catalyses a series of counter-cultural attacks on the federal state as an impediment to liberty: from the right as ‘big government’ and from the left as ‘invisible government’.<sup>55</sup> Timothy Melley situates this anxiety within a broader post-war culture of paranoia in which the autonomous subject of classical liberalism comes into conflict with diffused, impersonal, and unaccountable networks of corporate, political, and technological power: a conflict experienced as ‘agency panic’.<sup>56</sup> Critics like Patrick O’Donnell, on the other hand, view paranoia as a ‘way of seeing the multiple stratifications of reality’; a ““a delirium of interpretation”” that is ‘an indispensable precondition for the actions needed to transform the present’, as Phillip Wegner concludes.<sup>57</sup> Alternatively, for Samuel Chase Coale, the ‘master-plots’ invented by conspiracy conceal within them a malevolent Enlightenment spirit whose obsessive search for meaning violently converts contingency into determination and resurrects inherently racialised grand narratives—the other as enemy of the nation.<sup>58</sup> Symptom, resistance, and reaction, such are the valences of conspiracy fiction in America.

In this sense, conspiracy resembles another narrative category associated with Jameson, that of ‘national allegory’—to which cognitive mapping is presented as an unconscious ‘worlding’. National allegory constructs a story whereby the private fate of the individual citizen becomes enmeshed within, and dramatises, the destiny of the nation: it is ‘a formal attempt to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide,

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<sup>55</sup> Knight, ‘A Nation of Conspiracy Theorists’, p. 5; p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Patrick O’Donnell, ‘Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative’, *boundary 2*, 19.1 (Spring 1992), 181-204 (p. 182). Phillip E. Wegner, ‘The Beat Cops of History; or, The Paranoid Style in American Intellectual Politics’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 66.2 (Summer 2010), 149-167 (p. 155).

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Chase Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia: The Culture of Conspiracy in Contemporary American Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), p. 6.

essentially, transnational scale'.<sup>59</sup> If 'the conspiratorial project maps [the] structures' and 'relations of forces' that are constitutive of a social formation, as Ed White argues, it becomes apparent, at least within the US imaginary, that conspiracy has the capacity to operate as a popular national epic, a cartographic genre whose nervous subjects are forcibly sucked into History, now only conceivable as a black hole.<sup>60</sup> There is a tendency, however, for American literature to push this national allegory beyond the limits of the nation-state, to the extent that the planet is enveloped by a vast and inescapable global conspiracy. Emily Apter calls such 'paranoid globalism' a form of 'oneworldedness' which 'envisages the planet as an extension of paranoid subjectivity vulnerable to persecutory fantasy, catastrophism, and monomania'.<sup>61</sup> Narratives of 'oneworldedness'—of which Apter includes DeLillo—travel 'through the world absorbing difference', producing instead an absolutely smooth world where capital flows unchecked and 'everything is connected'.<sup>62</sup> National allegory here becomes another name for American cultural imperialism.

The relationship between national allegory and cognitive mapping vacillates unsteadily in Jameson's work between a logic of progression and a logic of conjunction. Taking their shared task to be the (re)historicisation of existential life, national allegory and cognitive mapping are representational acts whose symbolic compromises and solutions register, at the level of cultural form, two distinct phases in capital's tendential commodification of the globe. In this respect, they provide a meta-commentary on the transition from an encompassed world to one where the world has become an encompasser: that is to say, the shift from an order where the nation-state is felt to be a decisive vector of economic, political, and representational struggle, to one where the priority of the nation is undermined by globalised flows of capital.

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<sup>59</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, The Modernist as Fascist* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 94.

<sup>60</sup> Ed White, 'The Value of Conspiracy Theory', *American Literary History*, 14.1 (2002), 1-31 (p. 23).

<sup>61</sup> Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 83.

Read conjuncturally, however, national allegory and cognitive mapping refer less to different stages of development and more to disjunctive experiences of the same global present—differences that can be provisionally projected onto the contrasting, yet interconnected, zones of production and zones of consumption. In a transnational, post-Lukácsian twisting of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, Jameson maintains that ‘subalternity carries the possibility of knowledge with it, domination that of forgetfulness and repression’.<sup>63</sup> On one side of the global division of labour, history is still visible as an ongoing material process: neo-colonial or postcolonial subjects ‘know what reality and the resistance of matter are’ and, as such, the story of the individual ‘involves the whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself’. On the other, the first world consumer subject is locked into a ‘placeless individuality’ and to ‘the “projections” of private subjectivity’ sundered from the collective.<sup>64</sup> Here, the eternal present—the temporalisation of a now that has eliminated the residual and emergent times of the commune and communism—can only be interrupted by ‘fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm, from visions of “terrorism” on the level of the social to those of cancer on the personal’.<sup>65</sup> The importance of genres like conspiracy thus lies in their capacity to overcome the separation between private desire and social organisation and, by mapping the spatial limits of the present, render that present historically contingent.

The spatiotemporal unfolding of finance capital reflected on and mapped cognitively in *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* bisects stageist and conjuncturalist accounts alike, and instead runs through a set of milieus that DeLillo conceives of as the middle. They are novels of serration that cut across conceptions of history as a linear succession of stages—culminating in consumer society—and relationships of core and periphery formulated in world-systems

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<sup>63</sup> Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 199.

<sup>64</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism’, *Social Text*, 15 (Autumn 1986), 65-88 (pp. 85-86). For Adorno: ‘It is only on the margins that the things that go on in the pits of society, the underworld of its sphere of production, become visible’, ‘Reading Balzac’, in *Notes to Literature*, Volume One, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 121-136 (p. 123).

<sup>65</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 46.

scholarship. DeLillo's work, moreover, appears to represent a fundamental derailment of historicist theories of the novel as representing the 'dialectical form of history': that is to say, the relation between individual consciousness and the material conditions of embodiment is no longer presented in terms of progress.<sup>66</sup> Such a crisis of historicism—also a crisis of the dialectic 'as an instrument for grasping history'—animates 'much contemporary philosophy and theory', whose orientation, as John Kraniauskas highlights, is 'explicitly anti-Hegelian'.<sup>67</sup> History, in other words, is no longer interpreted as the medium through which reason developmentally unfolds as the history of freedom. Kraniauskas helpfully comments that the experiences of the twentieth century—the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of Fascism, the Holocaust, anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia, military dictatorship in the Americas—have 'combined to produce the effect of decentring and the independence of "difference" from dialectical capture'.<sup>68</sup>

DeLillo's novels push this notion of 'difference against development' through their interest in margins, as they materialise either within the United States or on the transnational edges of empire. The dynamic tracked across DeLillo's three novels can be more specifically related to a proposition forwarded by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* that one of the effects of globalised production is that 'the periphery and the centre exchange determinations': 'peripheral formations' become 'true centres of investment', while 'central formations' become 'peripheral'. In an observation that resonates with DeLillo's work, Deleuze and Guattari remark that the industrialisation of so-called peripheral regions with advanced technology coincides with the installation of 'peripheral zones of underdevelopment inside the centre, internal Third Worlds, internal Souths': a tendency framed in *Players* through

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<sup>66</sup> For a succinct recent account see Ian Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 50.3 (2017), 388-396 (p. 388).

<sup>67</sup> Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', p. 389; Kraniauskas, 'Difference against Development', p. 54.

<sup>68</sup> Kraniauskas, 'Difference against Development', p. 54.



the juxtaposition of Wall Street and a surplus population.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* are acutely sensitive to how the ‘roar of money’ is articulated politically in the form of ‘imperial state policy’ where ‘new—neo-colonial—totalisations of the world might be produced [...] an ongoing history of “freedom” as imposed reformation—*more development*’.<sup>70</sup> It is precisely this ‘inter- or transnational experience and administration of capitalism’ as the ideological capture and development of historical time that supplies *The Names* with its raw material: ‘it’s not a loan to some developer in Arizona [...] we’re important suddenly. Isn’t it something you feel? We’re right in the middle’.<sup>71</sup>

And yet the margin might also be crucial to the reawakening of the dialectical figuration of history after all. In an afterword to a collection of essays exploring ‘peripheral realisms’, Jameson clarifies that realism for Lukács was never about the adequacy of representation to an achieved ‘state of affairs’, but rather took as its project the registration of ‘history in movement and a future on the point of emergence’. To counteract the petrification of ‘historical currents’ in the society of the spectacle, Jameson recommends that we ‘maintain and strengthen the word margins’, which should be seen as ““weak links in the chain” where the Real may appear without warning’.<sup>72</sup> Moretti similarly argues that in the semi-periphery ‘historical conditions reappear as a sort of “crack” in the form: a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in a strange direction directed by an outside power; the world view tries to make sense of it, and is thrown off balance all the time’.<sup>73</sup> In *Players*, *Running Dog*, and *The Names* realism too is imbalanced, although this waywardness is relocated in the peripheries of the USA where the future stutters. Developing the ideas of refusal and exodus

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<sup>69</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 517.

<sup>70</sup> DeLillo, *Players*, p. 13; Kraniauskas, ‘Difference against Development’, p. 68. (italics in original)

<sup>71</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘Difference against Development’, p. 68; DeLillo, *The Names*, p. 116.

<sup>72</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73.3 (September 2012), 475-485 (pp. 479-480).

<sup>73</sup> Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, p. 65. ‘Off-balance’ is also how Perry Anderson characterises the situation of perception in the postmodern, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 56.

from Chapter One, the chapter will question whether DeLillo's conspiracy novels formulate a politics of the multitude which escapes from the horizon of capital or whether their breakdown of dialectics narrates the triumph of capital.

### **I. Surplus Capital and Surplus Populations in *Players***

*Players* begins with an example of 'optical cunning', a phrase used by DeLillo to describe the 'secret consciousness' concealed within the camera lens.<sup>74</sup> The cast of the novel's two unrelated plots are gathered together, albeit unknowingly, in the 'piano bar' of an aeroplane, and the scene slowly extends and rotates around their responses to an in-flight movie and its musical accompaniment (P 3). Part of the initial strangeness of this induction resides in the fact that the characters are introduced anonymously, as bundles of impersonal free-floating affects detached from their 'true' personalities which 'lie below [...] calling' (P 10). The ekphrastic description of the movie reworks an episode from DeLillo's paramilitary short story 'The Uniforms' where a guerrilla raid is launched on a group of golfers whose 'lush slaughter' fascinates the camera (P 9). The visual 'glamour of revolutionary violence' is undercut, however, by the 'autonomous' commentary of the piano player, who not only reduces 'photogenic terror' to an 'empty swirl' but also suggests an equivalency between the 'terrorists' and bourgeoisie: 'a spectacle of ridiculous people doing awful things to total fools' (P 6; 8; 9). For a novel in which the future is repeatedly felt to have 'collapsed' into the present, this opening prologue could be said to preview the aestheticisation of anti-capitalist violence, and its subsequent commodification as 'another media event' (P 17; 180). *Players* is thus a 'self-realising' text where the 'weightless' historical conflict envisioned by 'romance' is appropriated and negated by a commitment to the ontological solidity of the 'burdens of the

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<sup>74</sup> DeLillo, *Players*, p. 6. Hereafter, all further references will be cited parenthetically as P.

present day' (P 3; 19). Less commented on is the extent to which the camera's fascination relates not only to the 'capitalisation of visual attention', as Kraniauskas puts it, but to its 'repressive instrumentalisation' as state surveillance.<sup>75</sup> Considered as a mode of policing, DeLillo's association of 'optical cunning' with a 'sense of being unseen' resonates with D. A. Miller's explicitly Foucauldian framing of the disciplinary power of the Victorian novel in terms of 'panoptical narration'—an 'immunity from being seen'.<sup>76</sup> For Miller 'we are always situated inside the narrator's viewpoint', which needs to be thought of less as a person and more as a 'faceless and multilateral' institution: 'an implied master-voice whose accents have already unified the world in a single interpretative centre'.<sup>77</sup> To put it somewhat speculatively, the 'vigilant hidden thing' of DeLillo's 'optical cunning' could be identified with the impersonal third person narrator, which is now exposed as a more sophisticated form of policing (P 7).<sup>78</sup> This association of the (pan)-'optical cunning' of narration with a police function is also crucial to thinking about the dialectics of history and difference that have been discussed already under the idea of development.

*Players* is a novel, then, that takes the evolving relationship between labour and capital as its background but presents this material from the point of view of domination itself. As Lyle Wynant, one half of *Players* integral couple quips: 'the capitalist system and the power structure and the pattern of repression are themselves a struggle. It's not an easy matter, being the oppressor. A lot of hard work involved. Hard dogged unglamorous day-to-day toil' (P 34). Part One documents this prosaic 'struggle' as it is negotiated by Lyle, a Wall Street trader, and his wife Pammy, who works for a firm called 'Grief Management Council' in their

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<sup>75</sup> John Kraniauskas, 'Noir into History: James Ellroy's *Blood's a Rover*', *Radical Philosophy*, 163 (September/October 2010), 25-33 (p. 26).

<sup>76</sup> D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, p. 24-25.

<sup>78</sup> In *Players* voices and dialogue explode onto the narrative unattributed, a decentring effect that perhaps formalizes the transition from Foucault disciplinary regime to Deleuze's free-floating 'society of control'.

headquarters in the newly completed World Trade Center. Furnishing the text with one of its most significant geographical coordinates, the Trade Center towers also index the novel to a specific historical period and milieu—a ground zero of globalisation perceived by Pammy as wavering on the threshold of being: ‘the towers didn’t seem permanent. They remained concepts’ (P 19). Pammy is the novel’s inscription of the subordinated ‘writer’, and her job at Grief Management—named after ‘intense mental suffering’ and not a ‘founder’—is to ‘codify [...] emotions’ (P 18-19).<sup>79</sup> Such a codification and capture of emotion, coupled with financial speculation, registers the emergence of immaterial and affective labour which Hardt and Negri identify with the biopolitical production of life. For Pammy and Lyle these new forms of social reproduction are experienced through ‘boredom’ and alienation: the narrative cuts frenetically between their respective existentially dead routines but struggles to portray them as occupying the same frame.<sup>80</sup> Such separation becomes absolute in Part Two as they embark on divergent lines of flight: Lyle blunders into a terrorist plot to blow up the New York Stock Exchange, while Pammy begins an affair with her homosexual friend Jack Laws during a summer vacation in Maine.<sup>81</sup> Political resistance and libidinal release thus constitute two contrasting types of romance narrative that, as ‘lyrical interludes’, threaten to suspend the monotonous self-reproduction of an ever-same present (P 8).

Romance, in either its sexual or political manifestations, constructs one pole of *Players*’ rendering of a historical present, that of the ‘Event’. Indeed, the plot to bomb the NYSE, or, more accurately, ‘the idea of worldwide money’, is conceptualised as precisely such an instance of violent awakening: it would ‘announce terrible possibilities’ declares one of its architects (P

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<sup>79</sup> For Steven Shaviro ‘emotion is to affect, as in Marxist theory, labour-power is to labour’, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero, 2010), p. 152.

<sup>80</sup> For Lyle there is ‘something private about television’ which makes him ‘nervous’ to watch television with ‘someone else’, P 40.

<sup>81</sup> The connection between political romance and the romance of infidelity is death: presented by the anarchists as ‘the destiny of one’s class’; a conviction expressed rather more obliquely by the self-immolation of Pammy’s lover, *Players*, p. 146.

183). Yet what the plotters refer to as a ‘fantastic moment’ also affirms Jameson’s view that ‘terrorism is one of the privileged forms in which an ahistorical society imagines radical change’: that is, difference from a perpetual present can only be made available to thought as a total synchronic shock (P 183).<sup>82</sup> Placed in opposition to the cataclysmic interruption of social reproduction is the molecular unfolding of historical processes as they are experienced at the level of the everyday. These polarities can be schematically projected onto the ‘realist’ Part One and the ‘romance’ of Part Two which forces itself through ‘an indistinct warp, a collapse in the pattern’ of ordinary life (P 28). What I would like to explore further is how these two poles of historicity—the Event and the scenic—overlap and displace one another in the novel’s representation of finance capital which is said to exceed ‘the evidence of men’s senses’ (P 132). *Players* is continually haunted by the ‘idea of something still waiting to be expressed fully in concrete form’; a split between ‘concept’ and ‘thing’ that is crucial to the novel’s figuration of the ‘dis-aligning’ of financialised forms of accumulation from modes of exploitation like industrial wage labour (P 209).<sup>83</sup> Within the context of the USA, dis-alignment is thought in terms of financialisation and deindustrialisation, a relationship intimated by Lyle’s growing realisation that the financial district is a ‘locked sector’, a region ‘sealed off’ from the ‘rough country’s assent to unceremonious decay’ (P 132). *Players* is a future oriented adventure novel that explores an ‘edge zone’ of modernity: an ‘opening up’ of ‘currents’ that are simultaneously presented as the object of epistemological and perceptual investigation for Lyle and encountered as a representational barrier to Leftists who ‘run on different lines’ and ‘live by another map, entirely’ than the consensual liberal subject (P 82; 145-146). The task of this section will be to question to what extent the future-present that emerges in the margin depicted by *Players* is one that enacts a difference from capital, or whether such autonomy belongs to

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<sup>82</sup> Jameson, ‘Periodising the 60s’, p. 509.

<sup>83</sup> Italics in the original. Lyle replies to his colleague Frank McKechnie: ‘It’s good that it [the outside world] turns [...] or there wouldn’t be this stillness in here. We need that motion, see, exterior flux, to keep us safe and still’, pp. 157-158.

the ‘cunning of capital’.

A dis-alignment of historical modes of exploitation and contemporary forms of accumulation is gestured to in the opening paragraph of Part One, which begins with the mysterious namelessness expected from a thriller: ‘The man was often there, standing outside Federal Hall, corner of Wall and Nassau’ (P 13). This man holds aloft a ‘homemade sign’ whose exact ‘political nature’ the reader discovers later to be a tabulated record of the ‘RECENT HISTORY OF THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD’—a period that spans from the nineteenth century colonial ‘rise’ of capitalism to the destruction of Red Vienna and the catastrophe of Fascism (P 13; 151). An elliptical historiography of the colonial and industrial crimes of capital is counterpoised by the recovery and commemoration of radical instants of workerist and anarchist resistance, perhaps most notably, Mario Buda’s ‘wagon bombing’ of Wall Street.<sup>84</sup> The sign-holding man thus functions as a mnemonic device that preserves the memory of historical efforts to overcome the civilization of capital and strives to re-inscribe political struggle within the dissimulating ‘roar of money’ (P 13). As Peter Boxall poetically teases out, DeLillo’s sign-holder presents a ‘form of information’ that checks the ‘flow pulsing from Wall Street’ and operates ‘as a kind of dam that physically strains against the historical headwind’.<sup>85</sup>

Yet unlike the thriller, this unnamed man is incidental to the plot, and the economic crimes he bears witness to are not reconstructed in the narrative’s investigations. Rather, the sign-holder resembles a late modernist monument to the labour movement, the extinction of which is underscored by the ‘distracted’ gaze and ‘cursory glance’ of the financial workers who shape the novel’s conception of the economy as driven by the realities of speculation and not production (P 13). It is the marginality and passivity of the sign-holding man that

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<sup>84</sup> See Mike Davis, *Buda’s Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* (London and New York: Verso, 2007). These anarchist ‘scars’ reappear in a tour of Wall Street in *Zero K* (London: Picador, 2016), p. 179.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 73.

undergirds John McClure's contention that *Players* contributes 'to the very process of historical amnesia it records and regrets: it shows us, after all, virtually nothing about the "workers of the world" or their ongoing sufferings within the global imperial order of capitalism'.<sup>86</sup> In slightly different terms, it might be said that by charting the 'recent history of the workers of the world' as far as the 1930s, the sign-holder is merely foregrounding a caesura within Marxist theory itself, which struggles to address the political stability of representative democracy and dynamism of the world economy in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>87</sup> The sign-holder is a beleaguered remainder or empty husk of a vision of class politics that finds itself isolated in the alien surroundings of a society from which production has receded from view. In this sense, the indifference of the financial speculators towards the sign-holder's presence represents something like the 'cursory glance' of the economic towards the political: a de-dialecticisation of history, as organised labour—in either its social-democratic reformist or communist revolutionary modalities—is rendered structurally redundant, a redundancy replicated by the sign-holding man's precarious position within the novel.

If McClure is correct in assessing the portrayal of the sign-holding man as DeLillo's testament to the bleak fadeout of a 'whole language of resistance', the protester's vigil nonetheless reminds the reader that Marxism is, if nothing else, a 'problematic' that generates 'new problems'.<sup>88</sup> In a move primarily intended to frustrate the FBI, Lyle enters into a brief discussion with the sign-holder who, Lyle wryly notes, is a 'theoretical enemy of the state' (P 151). Originally camped outside the White House, the man tersely recounts his forcible removal at the bequest of the Nixon administration and concedes that he arrived on Wall Street after 'the banks sent word' (P 151). It is conceivable that this personal calling and gravitation away from the centre of US state power—Washington—to the economic hub of US capital—

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<sup>86</sup> John McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 127. McClure overlooks the 'solid work, clear and sometimes cheerful, old-world in a way' of the Wall Street traders themselves, *Players*, p. 157.

<sup>87</sup> See Perry Anderson's *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London and New York: Verso, 1987).

<sup>88</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 127; Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 372.

New York—is also inflected by a more expansive idea of ‘development’ or ‘*Bildung*’: the dis-alignment and autonomy of financial markets from national governments. As such, the protester’s relocation from the White House to Wall Street choreographs—or perhaps ‘signposts’—in an admittedly loose associative sense, a structural reorganisation of the economy identified by Arrighi as the ‘signal crisis’ of the US system of accumulation.<sup>89</sup> The protester, therefore, posits a political and representational limit that the novel’s subsequent engagement with financialised capital and its discontents seeks to move beyond.

According to Arrighi, the history of world capitalism can be sequenced onto four geographically expanding, although durationally contracting, systemic cycles of accumulation. Each cycle is centred on a singular hegemonic city- or nation-state whose rise, expansion, and eventual demise, Arrighi innovatively re-reads through Marx’s general formula for capital accumulation M-C-M’, which depicts ‘not just the logic of individual capitalist investments, but also a recurrent pattern of historical capitalism as a world system’.<sup>90</sup> The ‘central aspect’ of this process is the alternation between an epoch of material expansion—M-C— and an epoch of ‘financial rebirth’—C-M’. Arrighi is particularly interested in the transitional period where capital previously invested in the massive build-up of industry, mercantile trade, infrastructure, and commodity production, “sets itself free” from material commodities and returns to its most liquid, free-floating form, namely, money.<sup>91</sup> A ‘signal crisis’ captures the ‘turning point’ where the leading agency of accumulation, confronted with insuperable barriers to industrial or material expansion—falling rates of profitability—switches to financial forms of accumulation which promise a “wonderful moment” of renewed wealth and power for its promoters and organisers’.<sup>92</sup> Despite an initial windfall, Arrighi stresses that financial speculation can only temporarily alleviate rather than resolve systemic crises and, as such, can

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<sup>89</sup> Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, p. 220.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.



be considered a ‘sign of autumn’ as a hegemonic regime matures towards its terminal decline.<sup>93</sup> *Players* mediation of the signal crisis of the US cycle of accumulation—which Arrighi dates between 1970-1973—extends beyond the protester’s spatial leap from Washington to New York and encompasses Lyle’s reflections on the financial district’s historical temporality: ‘it’s unbelievably late. I’ve never seen it so late. It’s really late out there [...] like the end of organised time’ (P 71).

Arrighi’s spiralling narrative about the epochal periodicity of financial accumulation takes its cue from an observation Marx makes in *Capital: Volume Three* regarding an ‘abbreviated’ M-M’ formula of accumulation. In contrast to industrial capital, which typically realises itself through the extraction of surplus value from ‘productive’ labour, financial or speculative capital bypasses such encounters with the realm of material production and appears to yield returns through money’s self-interactions: ‘money breeding money’. The transformation of money into commodities, what Marx calls the ‘mediating process’, is thus ‘omitted’ and capital instead ‘obtains to its pure fetish form’: self-valorising value ‘devoid of content’.<sup>94</sup> Arrighi re-inscribes this ‘abridged’ formula into a historical dialectic whereby capital’s flight from physical commodity production—its liberation from content—is a strategic response to economic slowdown and the saturation of the world market.<sup>95</sup> The sign-holding man’s obsolescence, it follows, lies not only with the accelerated historical temporality of the stock market having overtaken the agonistic referents daubed across the sign, but with the very formal presentation of his sheer bulky, inordinate materiality; ‘overweight’ and ‘brightly sweating’, he is manifestly ill-adjusted to the new historical climate (P 152; 13).

The burnout of the post-war boom and consequent slide into recession supplies *Players*

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Every financial expansion is simultaneously the “autumn” of a capitalist development of world-historical significance that has reached its limits in one place and the “spring” of a development of even greater significance that is beginning in another place’, Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, p. 374.

<sup>94</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume III, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1981), pp. 516-517.

<sup>95</sup> Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, p. 6.

with its 'axial event'; an event that, from the perspective of the sign-holder, questions the situation of labour-power and its 'strategies of refusal' within the pure flow of financial speculation.<sup>96</sup> Crisis is experienced rather differently for those subjects who enter onto the factory floor of the monetary universe, and whom form the novel's privileged consciousness. The financial sector too is engulfed by uncertainty: not only is Lyle repeatedly asked whether the stockbrokers themselves have 'been declared officially antiquated', but he often imagines downtown Manhattan as a drowned historical horizon, whose 'taller structures were arrayed in fields of fossil resin [...] evoking as they did some of the ache of stunning ruins' (P 82; 191). Yet such a vision of the present as always-already prehistorical is balanced against Lyle's impressions of collective purpose from within the stock exchange itself, where 'it was possible to feel' that 'you were part of a breathtakingly intricate quest for order and elucidation, for identity among the constituents of a system' (P 28). One consequence of this schism between the panoramic and relational is that Wall Street is increasingly presented as an incubator for a future-present, one whose flickering ontological unfolding is linked to the reconfiguration of money, 'dizzying billions [...] beginning to elude visualisation' (P 109-110). As money transfers from 'a paper existence to electronic sequences, its meaning', Lyle reflects, becomes 'increasingly complex, harder to name. It was a condensation, the whole process, a paring away of money's accidental properties, of money's touch' (P 110). In one sense, such reflections can be used to explicate Arrighi's argument regarding the switch to finance in order to escape from the contingencies of industrial production, whose 'accidental properties' include labour unrest. Lyle continues, however, to think about how this 'form devoid of content', nevertheless retains

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<sup>96</sup> Jameson suggests that an 'axial event' is 'a mythic or absent starting point which provides the occasion for a Year One', *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 523. For accounts that read DeLillo's oeuvre as 'expressive of the process of financialisation of the US economy', see Alessandra De Marco, 'Morbid Tiers of Immortality: Don DeLillo's *Players* and the Financialisation of the USA', *Textual Practice*, 27.5 (2013), 875-898 (p. 876); and 'Don DeLillo's Fiction of Finance Capital', *Literature Compass*, 11.10 (2014) 657-666. Nick Heffernan reads *Players* and *Cosmopolis* 'as companion pieces or bookends to a three-decade literary project in which DeLillo has anatomised the development of U.S.-centred global capitalism [...] books which served as progress reports on the internalisation of American capital as a response to crisis', "'Money is Talking to Itself": Finance Capitalism in the Fiction of Don DeLillo from *Players* to *Cosmopolis*', *Critical Engagements*, 1.2 (2008), 52-78 (p. 59).

a ‘deathless presence’, an inhuman medium of existence (P 110).

The ‘deathless presence’ of financialised capital also haunts Fredric Jameson’s feverish description of speculation in terms of ‘spectres of value [...] vying against each other in a vast world-wide disembodied phantasmagoria’.<sup>97</sup> If finance capital is, as Marx insists, a ‘thing’, then its thingness is related to a ‘spectral ontology’.<sup>98</sup> In *Players*, history is conceptualised as the medium through which this spectral ontology inscribes itself: ‘the [financial] district grew repeatedly inward, more secret, an occult theology of money expanding ever deeper into its own veined marble [...] At the inmost crypt might be heard the amplitude pulse of history, a system and rite to outshadow the evidence of men’s senses’ (P 132). Couched in the language of esotericism, history is presented as a process with an inhuman subject. History’s ‘amplitude pulse’ also registers Arrighi’s spirals of development, as a hegemonic agent first reshapes their territorial and material centres before a second financial phase where capital takes flight and outstrips ‘the evidence of men’s senses’. In ‘Culture and Finance Capital’, Jameson enthusiastically absorbs Arrighi’s world history of capitalism in order to sharpen the period of capital flight, which Jameson achieves through the introduction of the Deleuzian concept of ‘deterritorialisation’. Whilst deterritorialisation denotes capital’s ‘shifts to other and often more profitable forms of production, often in new geographical regions’, it also crucially names ‘the grimmer conjuncture, in which the capital of an entire centre or region abandons production altogether in order to seek maximisation in those non-productive spaces’ of speculation.<sup>99</sup> Deterritorialisation as deployed by Jameson, captures both the stripping away of material content, which generates a second order abstraction, but also retains this content, although now in the form of abandoned or surplus populations.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 142.

<sup>98</sup> Here I misappropriate Chris Arthur’s ‘The Spectral Ontology of Value’, *Radical Philosophy*, 107 (May/June 2001), 32-42.

<sup>99</sup> Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 153.

<sup>100</sup> Jameson likens finance capital, which can circulate autonomous from any older industrial referent, to the autonomy of the cliché which is fully meaningful in itself—genre arguably becomes the orchestration of clichés,

The anarchist hypothesis which captures and reverses Lyle's romanticised lines of flight—'the secret dream of the white collar' is to turn state informer according to Lyle—targets precisely such deterritorialised finance (P 100). Marina Vilar, one of the groups angels of catastrophe, explains that their goal is to 'disrupt' an axiom: the 'idea of worldwide money' (P 107). Lyle's involvement with the anarchists begins in earnest after a sexual intrigue with colleague Rosemary Moore becomes political once he discovers Rosemary's intimate connection with two men whose failed attack on the stock exchange Lyle had been earlier investigating. The crime-detective reconstruction of the death of George Sedbauer—a trader turned co-conspirator—which is one of the subjects of Part One, swings into a bildungsroman of post-sixties radicalism, with Lyle agreeing to continue George's work—although this time fully aware of the target.<sup>101</sup> The anarchist cell has itself internalised the binary opposition between the state and the market, an opposition presented through two contrasting conceptions of 'spirit'. For J. Kinnear developments throughout the seventies have seen the State become a corrosive, 'totally entangling force' that is 'alien to the liberal spirit' and a derailment of the progressive manifest destiny of the USA: 'so much for the great instructing vision of the federal government' (P 104). Marina, on the other hand, focuses on the dematerialisation of economic 'spirits' whose source is the financial:

System that we believe is their secret power. It all goes floating across the floor. Currents of invisible life. This is the centre of their existence. The electronic system. The waves and charges. The green numbers on the board. This is what my brother calls their way of continuing through rotting flesh, their closest taste of immortality. Not the bulk of all that money. The system itself, the current [...] their invisible power. It's all in their system, bip-bip-bip-bip, the flow of electric current that unites moneys, plural, from all over the world. Their greatest strength, no doubt of that. (P 107)

The stock exchange now synchronises the global order.

Although *Players* sets in motion a conspiracy against capital, several scholars consider its manic representation of political dissent to neutralise revolutionary impulses. Vlatka Velcic

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*The Cultural Turn*, p. 161.

<sup>101</sup> Sedbauer, Lyle is told, believed he was 'involved in high-level—quote—industrial espionage—close quote', *Players*, p. 103.

trenchantly argues that *Players* rehearses a conventional Cold War demonology whereby the categories of ‘leftist’ and ‘terrorist’ prove reversible; a reversibility that quarantines anti-capitalism as the ‘political “Other”’ of American society. DeLillo’s narrative establishes a compromise through which ‘voices that speak against and outside the “military-industrial complex”’ are included, but only insofar as they conform to the ‘mould of “political Other”’: that is to say, the rule of capital can only be questioned by characters whose pathological and monstrous natures invalidate their theoretical stances.<sup>102</sup> The ‘Latin’ faction of Marina Vilar—imbued with a ‘savage light’—Rafael Vilar—emotionally defined by ‘violence, rage, threats of suicide’—and Luis Ramirez—possessed by a ‘secret energy’—are presented as the racialised negation of civilization (P 98; 182; 183). On the other hand, a ‘white’ faction of Kinnear—who evades ‘context’—and Rosemary Moore—a person without ‘individual history’—suffers from an obverse problem and, rather than essentialised allegiance to negation, is axiomatically devoid of meaningful commitment altogether (P 123; 75). Justifying his defection, Kinnear revealingly tells Lyle that the ‘terrorist network’ and ‘police apparatus’ often ‘overlap’, an indiscernibility that folds the difference of revolutionary ambition back into the identity of the State (P 116). Thinking beyond the maligned composition of the plotters, McClure highlights how Lyle’s casual betrayal of the cell’s location in Queens to the FBI transposes the enterprise into the ‘mere machinery of tawdry entertainment, a way of producing excitement rather than change’.<sup>103</sup> Lyle’s engagement with the radicals, thus, demonstrates the extent to which politics has become spectacle—‘another media event’ (P 180).

That said, it is precisely this idea of historical change and the struggle to conceptually shape its raw material, that is dramatised so strikingly through the discussions which guide Lyle’s political education. If change conceived as a punctual Event is indeed largely absent

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<sup>102</sup> Vlatka Velcic, ‘Reshaping Ideologies: Leftists as Terrorists/Terrorists as Leftists in DeLillo’s Novels’, *Studies in the Novel*, 36.3 (Fall 2004) 405-418 (p. 407).

<sup>103</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 127.

from the text—or, at least, outside the narrative that they disrupt—it is nonetheless registered at the molecular level as experiential novelty and perplexity. Something of this dynamic is at stake when Marina asks Lyle whether ‘all this decentralisation we see. Is it a response to terror? I amuse myself by thinking they have a master plan to eliminate prominent targets. To go underground. Or totally electric. Nothing but waves and currents talking to each other. Spirits. So they should be hit to whatever extent now’ (P 109). Political declension in the novel, then, is as much related to capital’s reactive autonomisation from strategic chokepoints as it is the commodification of revolutionary agency. To be sure, if there is a politics here, it is one closer to a ‘negative dialectics’ that strives to maintain fidelity to the non-identity between thing and concept. Reflecting on his role as the ‘social detective’, Lyle ‘hoped that Marina would provide factual data to round out his concept. Fitting human pieces into gaps on the board’ (P 145). In DeLillo’s poetics this desire to seamlessly plug the ‘gaps’ into a pre-constituted ‘board’ bears the insignia of the reification of imagination: a resistance to abstraction that Lyle is forced to recognise when confronted with Marina’s ‘alien reality’ (P 188). It is to the unsettling remainders of accumulation that I would now like to turn in order to conclude this sketch of the political positions available in *Players*.

The argument thus far has attempted to demonstrate how *Players* generates a series of contradictions between deterritorialised speculative capital, and the political opponents of the financialised world that is in the process of unfolding. Narrated ‘from the straight world’s point of view’, Lyle chances on both the isolated institutional bulwarks of the labour movement—unsteadily preserved by the sign-holder—and revolutionary spontaneity as articulated by the terrorists, to whom ‘the only worthwhile doctrine is calculated madness’ (P 101; 108). Whilst the sign-holder and the terrorist cell represent reflexive and principled oppositions to Wall Street, DeLillo also weaves into the narrative another form of negation in what would be the empty fourth slot of a semiotic square. *Players* is traversed by aleatory encounters with

Manhattan's homeless population who, like Lyle himself, inhabit and survive within the financial district—a coincidence that Deleuze and Guattari would take as the encoding of an 'internal periphery' within the very financial core itself. The most extended passage dedicated to this fourth dimension is introduced just before the shooting of Sedbauer—the catalyst of conspiracy:

In the financial district everything tended to edge beyond acceptability. The tight high buildings held things in, cross-reflecting heat, channelling oceanic gusts all winter long. It was a test environment for extreme states of mind as well. Every day the outcasts were in the streets, women with junk carts, a man dragging a mattress, ordinary drunks slipping in from the dock areas, from construction craters near the Hudson, people without shoes, amputees and freaks, men splitting off from sleeping in fish crates under the highway and limping down past the slips and lanes, the helicopter pad, onto Broad Street, living rags. Lyle thought of these people as infiltrators in the district. Elements filtering in. Nameless arrays of existence. The use of madness and squalor as texts in the denunciation of capitalism did not strike him as fitting here, despite appearances. It was something else these men and women had come to mean, shouting, trailing vomit on their feet. The sign-holder outside Federal Hall was not part of this. He was in context here, professing clearly his opposition. (P 27-28)

What emerges here is another collective which, like the traders and stockbrokers, is related to the experience of autonomy—although autonomy in this instance relates to the poisoned emancipation from labour. In contrast to the mathematical abstraction of finance from which the 'impression of reality' has been 'disconnected from the resonance of its own senses', bodily sensation returns in its onomatopoeic painfulness, 'dragging', 'slipping', 'limping' all evocative of a damaged sentience and restriction of mobility. Speculation, and its related practice of conspiracy, is 'earthed' in this distended vision of a proletariat.

Despite the biopolitical 'breach' suggested by the fusion of the Cold War ideologeme of communist infiltration with anxieties over population—'elements filtering in'—Lyle's experience of a dislocation from 'context' perhaps signals *Players'* dis-alignment from its own political history—its 'strategy of containment'.<sup>104</sup> As a 'lyrical interlude', scenic description here suspends the chronological impulse of the plot but only to inscribe the homeless—compositely referred to as 'outcasts'—into the eternal present of de-historicised poverty. There

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<sup>104</sup> For an elaboration on 'strategies of containment', see Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 37-38.

is a subtle shift between past tense narration—‘Lyle crossed diagonally toward the Exchange’—to the imperfect—‘every day the outcasts were in the streets’—which temporally condemns the homeless to an ongoing and infernal past-present from which escape is constitutively unimaginable. In a discussion of the passage, McClure laments that ‘by turning the victims of a specific economic order into figures of timeless suffering and endurance’, DeLillo ‘transports them, however wistfully, out of the universe of political struggle into that of religious romance’.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, the New York of the seventies, Toscano and Kinkle write, ‘stood, and still stands, as an iconic and highly influential example of the transformation to neoliberalism’.<sup>106</sup>

At least two aspects of neoliberal experimentation are salient here. In Miriam Greenberg’s account of the re-‘branding’ of New York, downtown Manhattan was purposefully transformed from an economically ‘mixed use district into a global financial centre’—whose monumental epicentre was the World Trade Center.<sup>107</sup> Secondly, this restructuring from industrial to immaterial labour was accompanied by the expropriation of working class communities from their neighbourhoods in order to create space for the new biopolitical workforce—of whom Pammy and Lyle are representatives. The ‘accumulation by dispossession’ associated with finance capital finds its material pre-condition in a prior moment of ‘primitive accumulation’.<sup>108</sup> This history of enclosure is wiped clean in the narrator’s neutral description of the district as a ‘test environment for extreme states of mind’. DeLillo’s kaleidoscopic scanning of the homeless equally replicates what Deutsche and Ryan call a ‘tourist’ aesthetic in which exotic ‘local colour’ is amplified but ‘untroubled by an social

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<sup>105</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 127.

<sup>106</sup> Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>107</sup> Miriam Greenberg, *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 125.

<sup>108</sup> According to Greenberg arson was the form favoured by landlords to facilitate ‘blight clearance’: between 1975 and 1977 there were 130,000 occurrences of home abandonments in Manhattan, pp. 143-144.



conscience whatsoever'.<sup>109</sup> The material conditions that constitute the forms of life embraced by Pammy and Lyle are, in other words, dependent on a massive displacement of Manhattan's working class, whose exodus reappears 'shouting, trailing vomit'. Yet the multitude or nomadic hoard as imagined by DeLillo does not seem to be deserting 'imperial control' so much as it is in flight from the horizon of history itself.<sup>110</sup>

Situated within the 'speculative reality' of Wall Street, the 'something else these men and women had come to mean' might equally be presented as an attempt to recuperate the 'labour theory of value', in what amounts to a novel form of speculative materialism. Richard Godden helpfully frames the conceptual dilemma of finance capital's profits without production as follows:

Given that the financial sector works in a medium—speculative capital—that systematically seeks to avoid uncomfortable collisions with the more material processes of the economy, how might such an immaterial mask be rendered expressive of the social relations that give rise to it? Or, put aphoristically, how does one figure the gap between M (money) and M1 (more money) in the absence of C (where C may be understood either as a commodity [produced, distributed, consumed] or as capital [accumulated before investment in manufacture]).<sup>111</sup>

Reworking this 'gap' in accumulation through the poetic form of the 'ellipses' enables Godden to dialectically resolve the opposition between the enchanted world of high finance—capital that has floated entirely free from 'the "concrete context" of its productive geography', as Jameson puts it—and those, in the global North, nostalgic for the epoch of industrial manufacturing.<sup>112</sup> 'Labour under capital', Godden notes, 'inheres as a structural "remainder" and reminder within the formation of capitalist value, existing therefore as a "dynamic contradiction" interior to the appearance of enchantment and not simply long gone from a notional "outside", occupied by a receding and redundant essence of labour'.<sup>113</sup>

The structural forgetting and disavowal of labour, reproduced in Jameson's comments

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<sup>109</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', *October*, 31 (Winter 1984), 91-111 (p. 109).

<sup>110</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 212

<sup>111</sup> Richard Godden, 'Labour, Literature, and Finance Capital', *PMLA*, 126.2 (2011), 412-421 (p. 413).

<sup>112</sup> Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 142.

<sup>113</sup> Godden, 'Labour, Literature, and Finance Capital', p. 420.

on a value that survives through ‘its own metabolism and circulate[s] without any reference to an older type of content’ and narratively rehearsed by DeLillo’s traders who believe that they have ‘effectively negated [...] the outside world’, thus founders when forced to confront the sheer decomposing bodily excess of the ‘living rags’ who inhabit the financial district (P 23).<sup>114</sup> As ‘nameless arrays of existence’, the outcasts are the spectral manifestation or ghostly incarnation of the ‘lives’ that are otherwise ‘nowhere evident’ in the stock market’s ‘artful reduction of the external world’ (P 70). Godden himself is keen to stress that the “‘two-fold nature” of financial value’ is simultaneously ‘abstract’—it circulates through complex instruments such as the derivative—and terribly ‘concrete’—the pivotal role of disciplining the workforce plays in neoliberal regimes—and instantiates an ‘innovative concreteness’.<sup>115</sup> There is a ‘structural tension’, then, ‘inherent in the value form’ which becomes visible, narratively at least, in moments of surplus: ‘it was something else these men and women had come to mean’. For Godden this elusive meaning can be found in the world-system, with the recognition that deregulated financial markets in the US core depend ‘on a tightly controlled, tightly tortured labour force’ in the periphery. As Godden sketches, ‘the circling indigent’ are ‘drawn aptly from the urban periphery to the civic hub [...] because, given the “two-fold nature” of financial value, labour, however peripheral to thought and geography, however seemingly disposable, retains its place at value’s core’.<sup>116</sup> Far from an abandonment of history, DeLillo’s hoard choreographs the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of production and, in doing so, allegorically re-inscribes the impurities and resistances of labour into the speculative medium of finance.

*Players*, though, is interested in ‘the *idea* of something, still waiting to be expressed fully in concrete form’. Rather than the revenants of American manufacturing, the struggle to

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<sup>114</sup> Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 161.

<sup>115</sup> Godden, ‘Labour, Literature, and Finance Capital’, p. 420; 413.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 420-421.

fit the ‘being’ of the outcasts into a ‘category’ or ‘context’, might instead be related to the anticipation of a future that, as the novel insists, is ‘being beamed in ahead of schedule’ (P 17). In this case, the ‘something else’ that the indigent represent is a complex instance of anagnorisis in which the ‘self-undermining universalisation of capitalism’ is ‘subjectivised’, as Gopal Balakrishnan glosses.<sup>117</sup> Anagnorisis, or ‘the recognition of the other as the same’, plays a crucial role in the concluding part of Jameson’s *Valences of the Dialectic* where, ‘from a modern dialectical and materialist perspective’, anagnorisis is recast as ‘the coming into view of those multitudinous others suppressed from the official story and field of view’.<sup>118</sup> Observing that the discourse of ‘recognition’ belongs to an ‘Enlightenment politics’ that can be ‘waged within the framework of bourgeois civil society’, Jameson proposes translating anagnorisis in terms of ‘discovery’, a process that more accurately captures the disclosure of the economic and material base of class societies: ‘the stripping away of layers of ideological concealment and occultation, to offer a terrifying glimpse of the historically Real’.<sup>119</sup> Jameson provocatively insists that Marx’s most significant discovery in *Capital* is the dialectic in which the producers of surplus value find themselves progressively barred from employment: not only is a ‘reserve army of labour’ an ‘indispensable function’ of capitalism, but the system tends towards mass permanent unemployment.<sup>120</sup> The three ‘actantial’ positions within capitalism, the worker, the unemployed, the unemployable—which includes the lumpenproletariat as well as the aged and infirm—can thus be accompanied by a fourth position, that of the ‘formerly employed’: ‘the working populations once active in vital industries which have now ceased to function, and around whose idle factories these veterans of dead labour live on’ in zones of structural exclusion or ‘black holes’.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Gopal Balakrishnan, ‘The Coming Contradiction’, *New Left Review*, II/66 (November/December 2010), 31-53 (p. 41).

<sup>118</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 565.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 568.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 569.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 580. For an alternative account of anagnorisis that would read Lyle’s evaporation as an instance of

The lumpen status of the outcasts initially puts them squarely within the bracket of the unemployable who, in Jameson's sketch, 'cannot in any way be conceived as subjects'. The report that the sign-holder 'was not part of this' scenic misery and 'professing clearly his opposition' confirms Jameson's distinction between the unemployed who qua workers 'can still be politically organised'—the 'contradictory'—and those others who have fallen 'outside the realm of political action altogether' and have lost the 'dignity' of labour—the 'contrary'.<sup>122</sup> But, in a novel where characters cannot 'accommodate any more time than what's right here', the outcasts also inscribe a future that 'is spectrally present in the present as *something else*' (P 42).<sup>123</sup> *Players*' heightened sensitivity to time relates to Joshua Clover's observation that it is not only the concrete body of the worker that is subtracted from the M-M' formula of accumulation, but time as well—or, as the necessary expectation of future production, it is included as a 'labour time to come'. As Clover points out, the abridged formula can more accurately be written as 'M-M' [C]' where the experiential '*feeling*' of financialised capital is 'haunted by the C to come'.<sup>124</sup> Pammy's confession that 'I don't think I can stand the idea of tomorrow' might also be the dictum of the hegemonic regime once it 'is no longer able to forward its accumulation via real expansion' and whose 'immortality', as Marina Vilar puts it, depends on speculation (P 42; 107).<sup>125</sup> The future on the verge of arrival, which Pammy 'can't stand the idea of' and for Lyle is 'not fitting', is nothing less than 'the closure of the world market', as Jameson puts it. Translated into the category of the formerly employed, the lateral scenes in which Lyle witnesses the outcasts, reproduces, on the level of form, a kind of dropping out of the narrative of history and captures the experience of 'those areas now

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'subjective destitution' see Ben Parker, 'History and Class Consciousness as a Theory of the Novel', *Mediations*, 29.2 (Spring 2016), 65-83.

<sup>122</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 571.

<sup>123</sup> Joshua Clover, 'Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital', *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, 41.1 (Spring 2011), 34-52 (p. 45). (italics in original)

<sup>124</sup> Clover, 'Autumn of the System', p. 45; p. 46. (italics in original).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

abandoned by capital in its *fuite en avant*: now fully commodified at the same time that they are blighted and devastated'.<sup>126</sup>

Considered from the abysmal future of abandoned labour, the 'something else' the 'living rags' mean but that which cannot be articulated, can now be posed in terms of what Balakrishnan argues is truly unrepresentable about contemporary capitalism: that 'a society organised around the process of value creating labour eventually staggers into a condition of permanent mass un- or under employment, spawning an ever deeper underworld of surplus humanity'. Capital's self-destructive contradiction, whereby the pressure for intensified rates of profit are achieved through the elimination of the sources of value creation—'employment under conditions of surplus value becoming its opposite, an unemployable surplus humanity'—whose 'political subjectivisation' Balakrishnan argues 'forms the Lukácsian crux of the contemporary historical situation' can, in *Players* only be presented in terms of a surplus whose process remains outside narrative.<sup>127</sup> Lyle's discomfort at the 'trailing vomit' is a type of revulsion or horror at the surplus population, the bowels of the labour movement as it empties itself towards extinction.

Set up in explicit 'opposition' to the sign-holding man, the homeless searchers who foreground the emergence of 'internal margins' within the 'core' of US capitalism, also represent the de-dialecticisation of the history of organised labour and its capacity to experience capital's 'self-destructive contradiction as a coherent historical process', to quote Balakrishnan.<sup>128</sup> The vision of collectivity here, is hollowed out and diffused, a scattering of lives whose autonomy from capital is by no means a measure of their revolutionary capability. Jameson concludes the section on anagnorisis by highlighting that is it an 'act of theoretical production in which new characters are produced for our collective political discovery and

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<sup>126</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 582. (italics in original).

<sup>127</sup> Balakrishnan, 'The Coming Contradiction', pp 46-48.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

recognition'.<sup>129</sup> Whilst the multitude discovered by Lyle in the financial district belongs to a pessimistic philosophy of history that can only envisage the structural exclusion of 'bare life', such a bleak prognosis is checked by another momentary deviation from the plot. 'Parked on a side street' in the Lower East Side, Lyle and Marina watch 'five bottles, thrown from a roof, hit the pavement at ten-second intervals'. In its current form this is only a 'public nuisance', but, as Marina comments, add 'a little gasoline, you have a political act' (P 143-144). Invisible to *Players*, this unseen multitude who exist beyond the (pan)'optical' narrator, blaze into an extraordinary visibility during the 1977 New York blackout, a carnival of proletarian appropriation which anticipates the joyous communist abolition of capital; and is the unthinkable utopian counterpoint to the novel's countdown to extinction.

## II. Porno-Accumulation: *Running Dog*

In their collaborative text *Wars and Capital*, Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato claim that the Marxist critique of political economy has insufficiently considered the extent to which 'the economy does not replace war but continues it by other means'. Their first thesis, that 'war, money, and the State are constitutive or constituent forces' of capitalism is certainly endorsed by Don DeLillo's *Running Dog*, a novel whose post-fascist aesthetic affirms that 'the logical extension of business is murder'.<sup>130</sup> This is a slogan adapted from Charlie Chaplin, an important cultural worker for DeLillo: both as an 'auteur' who worked within and against the 'Hollywoodization' of cinema, and as a 'Bolshevik', at least, from the perspective of the 'Americanism' Chaplin resisted, a communist figure with transnational 'resonance'.<sup>131</sup> In a rare

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<sup>129</sup> Jameson, *Valences*, p. 582.

<sup>130</sup> Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, trans. by Ames Hodges (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2016), p. 15; Don DeLillo, *Running Dog* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 83. All further references will be cited parenthetically as RD.

<sup>131</sup> John Kraniauskas, 'Laughing at "Americanism": Benjamin, Mariátegui, Chaplin', in *Capitalism and Its Discontents* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), pp. 17-27 (p. 17; p. 21; p. 27).

engagement with DeLillo's work, Jameson suggests that it too can be read in terms of an avant-garde reworking and cannibalisation of popular genres 'across the distance of pastiche': a post-autonomous compositional practice which in *Running Dog* encodes the eroticisation of fascism and its manufacture as collective desire.<sup>132</sup>

*Running Dog* begins, however, with the 'cataphoric' declaration that 'you won't find ordinary people here' (RD 3). The 'here', as the passage continues, is a bleak former industrial district on the edge of Lower Manhattan, 'where wind comes gusting off the river, stirring the powdery air of demolition sites'; and the people a composite of 'sexual deviants' and 'derelicts'—the forsaken veterans of dead labour: 'clustered, wrapped in whatever variety of coat or throwaway sweater or combination of these they've been able to acquire' (RD 3).<sup>133</sup> In Alliez and Lazzarato's terms, these are the casualties of capital's wars of annihilation against the people qua labour-power and sexuality. Narrated through a second-person perspective, *Running Dog's* opening page and a half is itself a formal deviation from the novel's otherwise enigmatic and distributive third-person narrator. The 'you' in question most immediately refers to Christopher Ludeke, a systems engineer and the novel's 'night-cruising' 'red queen' who is about to be murdered in a condemned warehouse (RD 4; 110). DeLillo's use of second-person is disorienting and blurs the distinction between Ludeke's interior consciousness, which is subject to interrogation, and the reader, who is sutured into the position of a voyeur—'a dark elation grows with every step you take'—a double-coding which introduces the thematic of spectacle and its codification as surveillance and pleasure (RD 4). This site of industrial abandon, a scene 'without a figure', as Fredric Jameson might say, thus becomes a crime scene, 'a discrepancy in the landscape' discovered by a police unit who are also cruising, an anomaly that self-reflexively slakes an addiction to noir: 'it's why you're here, obviously' (RD 4; 3).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Jameson, 'The Names', p. 119.

<sup>133</sup> For a discussion of cataphora see Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 165.

<sup>134</sup> Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 197.

Ludeke's murder, however, is misrecognised by the police, who assume the killing is sexually motivated and the crime is neither emplotted further nor reconstructed by *Running Dog's* social detectives: it remains instead a forgotten third, the memory of which deteriorates alongside one of the ruined collectives that populate the margins of the text. *Running Dog's* object of fascination and subjection is the potential existence of a canister of film, recorded in the Führer Bunker in April 1945, rumoured to be pornographic in nature and starring Hitler himself.

*Running Dog* is a novel about a mytho-poetic object—the twentieth 'century's ultimate piece of decadence'—and the struggle to possess and, crucially, reproduce that object commercially, as a commodity (RD 20). Mark Osteen catches this dynamic well when he writes that *Running Dog* is a 'postmodern grail quest-tale' which reflects on 'fascism's enduring appeal, of film's power to shape human history and subjectivity, and the convergence of fascism and film in pornographic representation'.<sup>135</sup> Such a description underscores the novel's structural affinities with 'romance' which, as Jameson notes, 'takes as its outer horizon the transformation of a whole world, ultimately sealed by those revelations of the enigmatic Grail is itself the emblem'.<sup>136</sup> But the 'other historical rhythms' sensed throughout *Running Dog's* errant lines of flight are inextricably bound up and mediated through capital—a social relation which too takes the transformation of the world as its outer horizon.<sup>137</sup> Earl Mudger, the founder of Radial Matrix—a successful logistics company which launders funds for the CIA—wants to diversify his portfolio and regards the Hitler sex tape as a 'product' that will enable him to enter a new market and capture the 'awe-inspiring' profit 'on hard-core movies' (RD 96). The film is synonymous with the creation of value, a status amplified by Mudger's rivals: Richie Armbrister, 'the boy wonder of smut, a twenty-two-year-old master of distribution and

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<sup>135</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 99.

<sup>136</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 129.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.



marketing’ who hopes to expand his enterprise vertically; and the Talerico brothers, a mafia family intent on maintaining their monopoly on the productive consumption of adult cinema (RD 54). *Running Dog*, then, can be considered a novel of ‘porno-accumulation’ that dramatises the processes by which capitalism appropriates and incorporates its outsides and, in doing so, provides an allegory of commodification.

Indeed, the internalisation of an ‘outside’ is implicit within the relationship between *Running Dog’s* three titled parts, ‘Cosmic Erotics’—named after an erotic antique gallery—‘Radial Matrix’—a front organisation for CIA backed paramilitary operations in Central America—and ‘Marathon Mines’—a secret training camp located on the US-Mexico border—and the untitled crime-detective opening which precedes the central narrative by six months. If *Running Dog’s* main sections focus on the social experience of commodity fetishism as enchantment, the struggle to possess the Hitler film is nonetheless predicated on a prior moment of slaughter. According to Marx ‘capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt’.<sup>138</sup> In contrast to the ‘idyllic’ prehistory presented in the ‘tender annals of political economy’, the actual emergence of conditions for capitalist exploitation are ‘written in the annals of mankind in letters of fire and blood’.<sup>139</sup> Marx calls the violent extra-economic separation of independent producers from the means of subsistence ‘so-called primitive accumulation’.<sup>140</sup> As the original owner of the Hitler film, Ludeke’s murder is both the novel’s prehistory and its originary act of violence: a form of textual primitive accumulation that is wiped clean from the narrative apparatus. Ludeke’s murder not only remains unresolved, it is, as one character intimates, unsolvable from the standpoint of the police—an observation that pushes the novel beyond the jurisdiction of the state—and noir.<sup>141</sup> The social rule of capital is established by historical processes of ‘conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder’ where ‘force’

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<sup>138</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 926.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 874-875.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 874.

<sup>141</sup> ‘The police know nothing. Sex crime that’s all they know’, *Running Dog*, p. 50.

plays ‘the greatest part’.<sup>142</sup> It is these relations of force and coercion that pressure Ludeke’s widow Klara in to acknowledging that she ‘will be cheated out of the movie’s true value’ (RD 107).

Yet the themes of expropriation and dispossession, which Osteen links to a ‘spiritual’ malaise, can be historicised further through the tape’s ontological status as a gift of history, an untapped lode of potential value that Jason Moore calls a ‘commodity frontier’.<sup>143</sup> Peter Boxall reads the film as a zone of maximal contact that ‘opens a line of communication, from a European colonial power on the brink of collapse, to an American power in the process of imperial expansion’.<sup>144</sup> ‘Burning a hole in time’, *Running Dog* connects Berlin 1945 to New York 1978, a disjunctive synthesis that records the transformation of film as a medium for Nazi propaganda and reflects on its pivotal role in the commodification of freedom in the ideological projection of the US; but also registers the ruination of the national-collective: the New York of *Running Dog* is subject to ‘demolition’ as well. (RD 3). On the other hand, the ‘value’ that Klara Ludeke believes she will be ‘cheated’ of can be coded through Moore’s dialectic of ‘exploitation’—abstract social labour—and ‘appropriation’—the incorporation of non-commodified natures into the circuits of capital.<sup>145</sup> In Moore’s world-ecology framework capitalism is presented as ‘a frontier process’ whereby limits to accumulation are overcome through the discovery and capture of previously noncommodified zones.<sup>146</sup> In DeLillo’s novel, the Hitler film is not only a commodity frontier that opens up a new stream of value, but also a frontier commodity whose illicit content points to a wider re-composition of the market. By virtue of the emphasis on the potential profit accrued from the reproduction and consumption of pornography, *Running Dog* gestures towards a situation of ‘generalised surplus-value’, a

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<sup>142</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 874

<sup>143</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 103. Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. 53.

<sup>144</sup> Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 59

<sup>145</sup> Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 16.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

concept advanced by Étienne Balibar in order to frame processes of valorisation that appear to be ‘liberated’ from the exploitation of labour-power within the sphere of production itself.<sup>147</sup> Much of the political despair associated with the novel can perhaps be attributed to this floating free of value creation from its determination by industrial labour—what might be considered DeLillo’s intimation of a coming ‘absolute capitalism’.<sup>148</sup>

The reel of film that spurs *Running Dog*’s porno-accumulation into action—beginning with the murder of Christopher Ludeke—it itself a revenant of sorts, encoded with the cultural memory of racialised mass murder. DeLillo here is concerned with fascism and its afterlife as a simulacrum, a spectacle detached from any concrete social content and whose consumption is being generalised. According to Lightborne, the owner of ‘Cosmic Erotics’ and the novel’s self-styled intellectual, Nazis are not only ‘automatically erotic’, but pornography itself shares a common etymological link with fascism: ‘fascinating, yes. An interesting word. From the Latin *fascinus*. An amulet shaped like a phallus. A word progression from the same root as the word *fascism*’ (RD 58; 169). Lightborne’s philological extemporisation is inaccurate; however, the synthesis of popular subjection with the technologies of image production and consumption, does unsettle the novel. Pornography, in *Running Dog*, stands in for the figuration of image culture in general; as Jameson extraordinarily claims: ‘the visual is *essentially* pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination’.<sup>149</sup> ‘Fascination’ becomes the object of what John Kraniauskas, in a slightly different context, calls a ‘capital-state alliance’ intent on ‘the capturing, ideological coding, and capitalisation of visual attention’, on the one hand, ‘and investigative surveillance, or spying (that is, its repressive

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<sup>147</sup> Étienne Balibar, ‘Towards a New Critique of Political Economy: From Generalised Surplus-Value to Total Subsumption’, in *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image*, ed. by Peter Osborne, Éric Alliez, and Eric-John Russell (Kingston upon Thames: CREMP Books, 2019), pp. 36-57 (p. 38)

<sup>148</sup> Étienne Balibar, ‘Critique in the 21st Century: Political Economy Still, and Religion Again’, trans. by Emiliano Battista, *Radical Philosophy*, 200 (Nov/Dec 2016) 11-21 (p. 19).

<sup>149</sup> Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 1. (italics in original).

instrumentalisation), on the other'.<sup>150</sup> Technologies of surveillance become diffuse in Lightborne's paranoid speculations: 'go into a bank, you're filmed [...] go into a department store, you're filmed [...] radar, computer traffic scans. They're looking into the uterus, taking pictures. Everywhere. What circles the earth constantly? Spy satellites, weather balloons, U-2 aircraft. What are they doing? Taking pictures. Putting the whole world on film' (RD 167-168). The detachment of fascism from a specific political movement in *Running Dog* and its transmission into apparatuses of image production—as dream factories and surveillance nightmares alike—reconfigures social experience into what Osteen characterises as a 'late capitalist panopticon', but which could also be seen as romance without transcendence.<sup>151</sup>

### *Absolute Capital*

History in *Running Dog* 'weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living'.<sup>152</sup> The text takes on the intensities of a fever dream in which the memories of dictators, tyrants, and revolutionary militants float to the surface and the dialectic of progress has stalled or even shattered, swallowed up by an 'ever-expanding middle' of consensus and conformity (RD 22). Like Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *Running Dog* is set against a counter-revolutionary consolidation of the state and the spectre of social revolution has mutated into its 'ghost', a 'bad trip' from which the novel struggles to awaken.<sup>153</sup> That is to say, the 'hallucinations' Marx identifies in the wake of the Parisian proletariat's defeat in 1848 spiral off into a paranoid delirium in the aftermath of the 'strange revolution of '68'.<sup>154</sup> Paranoia

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<sup>150</sup> Kraniauskas, 'Noir into History', p. 26.

<sup>151</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 108.

<sup>152</sup> Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. by C.P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1969), p. 15.

<sup>153</sup> Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 17; Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p. 42.

<sup>154</sup> Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, p. 130; Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Subjectivation and War: Marx and Foucault', in *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image* (Kingston upon Thames: CREMP Books, 2019), pp. 184-199 (p. 197).

though is crucial for envisioning the USA as a nation-state: as Patrick O'Donnell points out, 'paranoia has become a social bond, a way for the American body politic to assert its fragile and fictive unity against the various forms of disintegration and indeterminacy it experiences in an era of late capitalism'.<sup>155</sup> Yet if paranoia can be considered one of the privileged vehicles through which the relationship between individual consciousness and the material conditions of embodiment can be staged and subjected to cultural reflection and critique, the political orientation of such rear-guard national allegories is far from clear.

Discussions of DeLillo's cultural critique of paranoia centre on the representation of '*Running Dog*' magazine, a 'one-time organ of discontent' now uneasily 'established in the mainstream', and its staff writer, Moll Robbins, the novel's 'social detective' (RD 22). Moll is introduced indirectly, as a person in need of an education: she is 'planning a series of articles on sex and big business', Lightborne recalls, and it is his responsibility to induct Moll into the underworld of erotica, and its notable players (RD 14). Moll's initial scoop involves reformist senator Lloyd Percival and a vast hoard of erotic art stashed away in a secret annex to his Georgetown mansion. Percival's trove of pornographic artefacts is also identified as blackmail material by the fixers at 'Radial Matrix', whose financial sponsorship of paramilitary activities in Central America is under investigation by a senate committee chaired by Percival. The milieus of domestic reform, anti-Communist militias, and pornography, are connected by Glen Selvy, a 'reader' planted in Percival's entourage by 'Radial Matrix' in order to advise on erotic acquisitions (RD 31). Selvy and Moll become lovers, although, the anticipated 'partnership' between the investigative journalist and covert operative fails to develop: they separate and become minor to the plot—a 'waning of protagonicity'—and the uncovering of networks of corruption is overtaken by force and the competition to possess the Hitler film—which propels

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<sup>155</sup> Patrick O'Donnell, 'Obvious Paranoia: The Politics of Don DeLillo's *Running Dog*', *The Centennial Review*, 34.1 (Winter 1990), 56-72. (p. 56).

the narrative to its eventual disintegration.<sup>156</sup>

*Running Dog* is, if nothing else, a ‘reservoir of thwarted dreams’.<sup>157</sup> Moll’s article on the ‘history of reform’ and the ‘low-lying surly passion’ that resists and reacts against progress—what Percival calls the ‘historical counterfunction’—is spiked by her editor Grace Delaney after ‘Radial Matrix’ threaten to leak financial irregularities to the IRS (RD 81). Delaney, a former supporter of the Black Panther Party, reminds Moll that ‘conspiracy’s our theme’, ‘connections, links, secret assassinations’ and, in doing so, embraces what Jameson dismayingly regards as ‘a degraded figure of the total logic of capital’, of a catastrophic ‘slippage into sheer theme and content’ (RD 64).<sup>158</sup> This slippage is not lost on Moll who self-consciously concedes that ‘*Running Dog*’ opportunistically capitalises on ‘people’s belief’ in ‘worldwide conspiracies’ and ‘fantastic assassination schemes’; a ‘will to romance’ that for McClure cynically flattens the distinction between the counterculture and the culture industry it tries to outflank (RD 123).<sup>159</sup> McClure’s contention that the search for the phantasmagoric divests ‘*Running Dog*’ magazine of ‘compelling political commitment’—the bottom line is profit—is echoed by Frow, who finds the novel’s immanent critique of representational politics disappointingly lacking in ‘class analysis’ and ‘discussion of political alternatives’.<sup>160</sup> The ‘ever-expanding middle’ which engulfs ‘*Running Dog*’ and strips it of its anti-imperial credentials, has also absorbed *Running Dog* itself, whose pastiche decoding of capitalist models of reality is ‘constrained’ by an inability to construct alternative (communist) models.<sup>161</sup>

*Running Dog*’s perceived indifference to the exploitation and domination of labour-power—its failed demystification of romance—can more generously be considered as a

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<sup>156</sup> ‘The function of the partnership’, Jameson writes, ‘is not to experience the love passion as such, but rather to traverse, survive and navigate, the adventures of the episodic narrative’, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 215; the ‘deterioration of protagonicity’ comes from *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 56.

<sup>157</sup> Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 56.

<sup>158</sup> Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, p. 356.

<sup>159</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 130.

<sup>160</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 130; Frow, *Marxism and Literary History*, p. 146.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Constrained’ is how Jay Bernstein describes Cervantes’ struggle to ‘supply any criteria by which the real may be established’, quoted in Kraniauskas, ‘2666’, p. 40.

rendering into the visible the ‘constraints’ imposed on representation by the social logics of the abridged M-M’ formula of financial accumulation. In response to Moll’s questions about Hitler’s incestuous paintings, Lightborne remarks that ‘before pop art, there was such a thing as bad taste. Now there’s kitsch, schlock, camp and porn’ (RD 165). Pop art here periodises an undoing and collapse of the rigid boundaries between high art and popular culture, but equally gestures towards the porosity of Andy Warhol’s film work, widely considered to have launched pornography into the ‘ever-expanding middle’.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, it is precisely this waning of ‘bad taste’ which presents formal and social problems to the dissident artist—dramatised in *Running Dog* through the eroticisation of Hitler. As Perry Anderson notes, much of the furious creative energy of modernism is generated out of a visceral hatred of the ‘bourgeois world’, both in terms of its cultural forms of self-presentation and its moral ‘sensibility’. With the demise of the bourgeoisie and ‘the general *encanaillement* of the possessing classes’, there is no longer an artistic standard or social convention that the ruling classes have not themselves already flagrantly transgressed.<sup>163</sup> Shock value, in other words, has been defanged: as Jameson writes, ‘there is very little in either the form or content of contemporary art that contemporary society finds intolerable and scandalous’.<sup>164</sup> There is a pervasive sense that forms of cultural resistance are ‘somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it’.<sup>165</sup>

To put it in somewhat different, even heretical, terms, the world depicted in *Running Dog* appears to be undergoing a transition from ‘historical’ to ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ capitalism. The inorganic ‘ever-expanding middle’ characterised by Boxall as a culture ‘in the process of incorporating its own margins’—the text’s black hole—can be re-read through Balibar’s more

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<sup>162</sup> In particular, the release of *Blue Movie*. Dir Andy Warhol. Viva and Louis Waldon. Constantin Film. 1969.

<sup>163</sup> Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 86. (italics in original).

<sup>164</sup> Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, p. 19.

<sup>165</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 49. Although, for Boxall *Running Dog*’s ‘historical counterfunction’ facilitates precisely such a ‘disidentification’ from the ‘ideological and material conditions’ of state power and capitalist hegemony, *Don DeLillo*, p. 74.

recent speculation that:

We're only now entering "pure" capitalism, which does not have to deal constantly with heterogeneous social forces that it must either incorporate or repress, or with which it must strike some form of compromise. "Pure" capitalism is free to deal only with the effects of its own logic of accumulation and with those things necessary for its own reproduction.<sup>166</sup>

A purification experienced by Moll personally as the difference between a past 'then' when '*Running Dog's*' ironic mimicry of the 'Hanoi line'—'capitalist lackeys and running dogs'—'had impact', and a 'crappy' post-Vietnam now, where 'we do things in the schlockiest way imaginable' (RD 123).

For Balibar one of the crises of absolute capital is that the '*possibility of politics* as a collective agency, and hence as a privileged form of the articulation between institutions and modes of subjectivation that allow human communities to represent themselves as agents in their own history' has stalled disastrously.<sup>167</sup> This dis-alignment of political institutions—trade unions, social-democratic parties, revolutionary vanguards—and the 'modes of subjectivation' that enable history to be experienced collectively, has been a consistent feature of Marxist-Hegelian literary criticism—at least, as formulated in the work of Lukács for whom society is the 'principle subject' of the novel.<sup>168</sup> The 'dialectic between man-as-individual and man-as-social-being' goes awry in *Running Dog*: reformist bulwarks against unleashed capital are not only debarred but decay in figures like Percival; whilst the currents of revolution have either self-annihilated, like Moll's ex-boyfriend Guy 'Dial a Bomb' Penner, or sacrificed their militancy in order to survive counter-revolutionary times—the dismal fate of '*Running Dog*' itself (RD 43).<sup>169</sup> 'Without this collective dimension, history', Jameson adds, is 'reduced to mere conspiracy'—historical agency, in other words, is de-dialecticised and de-

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<sup>166</sup> Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 60; Balibar, 'Critique in the 21st Century', p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> Balibar, 'Critique', p. 12. (italics in original).

<sup>168</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1989), p. 139.

<sup>169</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. by John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 75.



collectivised.<sup>170</sup> In *Running Dog* this collective ‘third’ is not so much missing as it is ruined and exiled to narrative dead ends, to micro-episodes that cannot be further narrativised: the demolition craters re-occupied by a surplus population with which the novel opens; or a housing project in Washington D.C where African-American teenagers warn Lomax—one of ‘Radial Matrix’s’ traffickers in rogue capital—that ‘you’re being where you don’t live man, and it getting dark’ (RD 113).

And yet the claim that the outside has been fully incorporated and pacified in *Running Dog* is slightly misleading. John Marx argues that one of Lukács’s most important distinctions is between ‘forms of assemblage that exacerbate heterogeneity’ and those that contain and enfold the ‘heterogeneous’ into the nation-state.<sup>171</sup> Heterogeneity is exacerbated in *Running Dog*, although its assembly of private militias, Vietnamese assassins, wayward hitmen, the mafia, and other eccentric factions of the criminal underworld, signals a neo-reactionary withdrawal from the national-collective. If anything, *Running Dog*’s ‘porno-accumulation’ depicts a point of stress where the ‘capital-state alliance’ fractures. Moll’s affirmation of Chaplin’s aphorism that ‘the logical extension of business is murder’ underscores the importance of force in capitalist societies, at the same time as it engraves Chaplin himself as a kind of vanishing (communist) mediator, whose transformation from anti-fascist in *The Great Dictator* to anti-capitalist in *Monsieur Verdoux*, the novel commemorates as a ‘politicised aesthetics’.<sup>172</sup> The escalating ‘reversibility of war and economy’ informs Alliez and Lazzarato’s claim that ‘wars’—class, military, civil, sexual, and race—are ontologically constitutive of capital itself.<sup>173</sup> The ‘war machines’ assembled in *Running Dog*, however, cut across and interrupt Alliez and Lazzarato’s distinction between the ‘within-against’

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<sup>170</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 267.

<sup>171</sup> John Marx, ‘The Historical Novel after Lukács’, in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, ed. by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 188-202 (p. 189).

<sup>172</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 235. For Benjamin ‘all efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war’, p. 234.

<sup>173</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, ‘Subjectivation and War’, p. 188.

relationship of governmentality and the ‘outside-against’ non-relationship of war.<sup>174</sup> *Running Dog*’s war machines are subjectivated by forms of porno-capital that turn against the state and perforate its juridical order. Earl Mudger, for example, is reported to have fallen ‘in love with profits. The profit motive became more interesting to him at this stage of his career’ (RD 82). Mudger’s break with the US surveillance apparatus—he is ‘completely autonomous’—is attributed to his having become enraptured by surplus-value, a situation in which, as Senator Percival laments, ‘nobody knows what to do about it [...] anything could happen’ (RD 82). ‘The present’, Alliez and Lazzarato assert, ‘is the emergence of an unknown, unexpected sensibility that bears within itself the potential for new forms of existence impossible to conceive before they actually come forth’.<sup>175</sup> What comes forth in *Running Dog* is a pluralisation of the wars of capital against the state-form and the collective projects of the proletariat.<sup>176</sup>

Whilst this diffusion of fascism across US social and cultural phenomena might strike some as problematic, DeLillo also renders visible the emergence of what Balibar calls ‘generalised surplus-value’. Crucial to Balibar’s account of absolute capitalism is an intensifying indiscernibility and tendential incorporation of the sphere of reproduction—the services and activities that reproduce labour-power—into the circuits of production: that is to say, that ‘the anthropological barrier between work and life’ is ‘erased’.<sup>177</sup> Zones of life that had previously been underdeveloped or exempt from the valorisation process, like health care, leisure, and education, are now ‘fields that capital invests in’ and subject to processes of commodification.<sup>178</sup> Generalised surplus-value, then, denotes a situation of ‘total subsumption’ where ‘capital is valorised on both the “objective” side of labour and production and on the

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., pp. 192-194.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>176</sup> The State continues to function as a recording and archiving apparatus as the countless reports into characters backgrounds demonstrates.

<sup>177</sup> Balibar, ‘A New Critique of Political Economy’, p. 56.

<sup>178</sup> Balibar, ‘Critique in the 21st Century’, p. 19.

“subjective” side of consumption and use’.<sup>179</sup> In *Running Dog* this process of total subsumption is mediated through entertainment-capital, in particular, in its pornographic form—an inherently impure form of capital from the perspective of the State. Something of this antagonism between the State and the agents of porno-accumulation is motioned through instances of self-accounting which testify to a need to remain invisible. Richie Armbrister, who the reader is informed ‘controlled as maze of one hundred and fifty corporations’, tells Lightborne that the law will ‘never find me. I have too much paper floating around. I’m very well hidden, believe me. Holding companies in four states. Dummy corporations. I don’t exist as a person. I’m not in writing anywhere’ (RD 54-55). What such ready-made details lack, however, is the dynamic of the search itself: what emerges is less a mapping of the political economy of porn, and more a stylistic connotation of criminality as an affect.

### *Circulation*

*Running Dog*, then, is the story of a product, perhaps ‘the product’—a Nazi orgy filmed in Hitler’s underground bunker—and the war machines that want to organise its distribution and profit from its consumption. If the anticipated popular audience for the Hitler film signals the eroticisation of fascism in American consumer society, it also gives expressive shape to a new ‘era’ of sexual gratification, an era of ‘motion, activity, change of position. You need this today for eroticism to be total’ (RD 15). As Lightborne explains, ‘the single biggest difference between old and new styles of erotic art is the motion picture. The movie. The image that moves’ (RD 18). Lightborne, however, is not only the theorist of total eroticism and its ‘movement’, but the diegetic instigator of the novel itself, the self-positioned ‘go-between in some monumental pornography caper’ who ‘sets things in motion’ and ‘put powerful forces to

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<sup>179</sup> Balibar, ‘A New Critique of Political Economy’, p. 53.

work' (RD 20-21; 268-269). Like the pornographic entertainment-capital whose 'movement, action, frames per second' Lightborne intellectually revels in, the market too 'moves' in *Running Dog* but with murderous intent (RD 15).<sup>180</sup> There is a looping double coding of pornography into capital and capital into pornography: 'I'm making moves', explains Mudger, 'that's how you keep yourself going. You renew yourself' (RD 155). Whilst social revolution may well have stalled in *Running Dog*, or worse, shattered into post-fascist war machines, the cunning of capital surges forward in perpetual motion: 'I definitely want to explore this thing. The more I talk to people, the more I hear about profit potentials with first-run' (RD 96).

Renewal through exploration is pivotal to Moore's world-ecological account of capitalism as a 'frontier-making' process that historically overcomes limits to continued accumulation through the discovery of new regions of cheap nature. In contrast to zones of commodification which depend on the exploitation of labour-power, zones of appropriation rely on the capture of uncommodified natures and unpaid work whose progressive internalisation into the valorisation process is the 'lifeblood of capitalism'. Capitalism, Moore concludes, is 'defined by a frontier movement', a strategy of incorporation that appears to be at stake in the struggle to appropriate the Hitler film: an 'outside' that the novel momentarily unfolds through the movie's abysmal premier in Lightborne's gallery.<sup>181</sup> Yet, if DeLillo presents the film as a 'cultural fix' that will overcome barriers that have thus far denied or checked characters unlimited accumulation, Mudger's confession that the commercial allure of hardcore movies, and the Hitler film in particular, lies in the fact 'that you don't even have to make them' equally illuminates Balibar's 'generalised surplus-value' (RD 155).<sup>182</sup> The Hitler film, as envisaged in *Running Dog*, is not only novel in terms of its esoteric content, but also its form: it is a product that has not been produced or, at least, it has not been produced by

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<sup>180</sup> 'What moves is only the market— but this at ever accelerating speed, churning habits, styles, communities, populations in its wake', Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, p. 114.

<sup>181</sup> Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 301

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198. Moore takes the term 'cultural fix' from Stephen Shapiro.

commodified labour-power. The film's 'fictitious value' is, in other words, seemingly autonomous from productive labour, and its 'extra surplus-value', as Balibar puts it, is realised through subjective 'productive consumption'.<sup>183</sup> The new 'era' of the 'moving image' that filmic pornography inaugurates, also displaces the gravitational centre of class struggle, which is not so much absent in DeLillo, as it is no longer exclusively imagined in the abode of machinofacture.

As it transpires, the value of the film is truly 'fictitious', or worse still for Lightborne, merely 'historical' (RD 268). Finally screened in 'Cosmic Erotics' gallery, the 'footage has the mysterious aura of an event that cuts across time': but, rather than 'something dark and potent', history appears as farce: Hitler, the dictator parodied earlier in the novel by Chaplin, mimics Chaplin's 'the tramp', a private performance to entertain the Goebbels', as the Red Army encircles Berlin (RD 265; 268). Much to the despair of Lightborne the potential value of the film is revealed to be archival rather than commercial: a 'lost historical category', as Boxall puts it, whose oblique preservation both appals and stuns its New York audience.<sup>184</sup> The progressive disambiguation of rumour and its disappointing metamorphosis from operatic libidinal derangement to 'humanised' museum installation, secularises the romantic content of the novel: a disenchantment that applies to *Running Dog's* formal resolutions—its multiple plot lines terminate with abrupt indifference (RD 268).

Confronted with the persistence of adventure as means of relating and narrativising social experience, Moretti concludes that the novel should no longer be considered as 'the "natural" form of bourgeois modernity'—that is, its decoded prose—'but rather as that through which the pre-modern imaginary continues to pervade the capitalist world'—an expressive equivalent to forms of hybrid subsumption.<sup>185</sup> Adventure both stages capitalism as a 'perpetual

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<sup>183</sup> Balibar, 'Towards a New Critique of Political Economy', pp. 52-53.

<sup>184</sup> Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 69.

<sup>185</sup> Moretti, 'History of the Novel, Theory of the Novel', p. 8.

motion machine’, overcoming natural barriers and obstacles to development and, though its valorisation of ‘physical strength’, blends ‘might and right’: a material force that *Running Dog’s* war machines amorally embody whilst lending credence to the notion that the bourgeoisie ‘needs a master to help it rule’.<sup>186</sup> The compromise between power and justice is compromised in DeLillo’s novel, which remains resolutely ‘suspicious of quests’: Moretti’s heroic ‘anti-type of the spirit of modern capitalism’ is inverted and dismissed by Moll as springing from ‘some vital deficiency on the part of the individual [...] a meagreness of spirit’ (RD 253).<sup>187</sup> Quests, Moll reflects, are ‘almost always disappointing’ because regardless of whether the search is for ‘an object of some kind, or inner occasion, or answer or state of being’, people ‘come up against themselves in the end’ (RD 253). In contrast to Moretti’s knight who ‘can’t accumulate glory, but must renew it all the time’, Moll notes that Lightborne ‘wanted a marketable product’ and ‘wasn’t in it for the existential lift’ (RD 253).<sup>188</sup> If a pre-modern imaginary is corralled by DeLillo, it is less connected to the impurity of hegemony, as Moretti would have it, than it contributes to the stuttering and derailment of a ‘radical’ historical movement that was ‘once a living thing’ (RD 244). The ‘invisible frontier into another way of life’ that Moll crosses when she enters into the conspiracy is crucially unable to renew glory or accumulation, a deceleration captured in the novel’s ‘waning of protagonicity’: Moll finds herself prematurely evicted from the drama whose ‘action was elsewhere, and included everyone but her’ (RD 98; 240). The ‘perpetual motion machine’ of adventure malfunctions in *Running Dog*. What Frow refers to as the novel’s ‘bad plotting’ is exemplified by the ‘partnership’ between Moll and Glenn Selvy, which rapidly deteriorates, and their narratives spiral wildly off into absolute autonomy. Selvy, moreover, recedes into an unnameable person, ‘that other son of a bitch’, whose fate is no longer tied to Moll’s (RD 190). An irresolution that

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 3; p. 9.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

might be considered DeLillo's refusal of consensus.

### *Stagnation*

Selvy too crosses frontiers: marked for elimination by Radial Matrix—his erstwhile employers—Selvy flees a surveillance thriller and enters a 'western'; pursued by elite contract killers to the desert hinterland along the Texas-Mexico border where he makes a last stand (RD 208). A binomial figure who is simultaneously a 'gunfighter' and an 'indian', Selvy ends up not so much in 'a West, but Wests', as Deleuze might say: a milieu populated by monuments to Texan folklore, Japanese tourists, and whose horizon is darkened by a helicopter bearing former ARVN soldiers coming to 'adjust' him (RD 120; 178).<sup>189</sup> Some critics have suggested that this 'oriental' West, or West intercalated with an East, radiates a nativist paranoia. McClure, for example, castigates DeLillo who 'seems less interested in depicting America appropriately haunted by the ghost of past imperial adventures than he is in rehearsing a familiar and once again popular narrative of invasion from the Far East'.<sup>190</sup>

There is, however, a workerist ending as well, one which concerns the destiny of living labour. Nadine Rademacher, an aspiring actress and nude storyteller, hooks up with Selvy and flees the Mafia controlled sex industry. Selvy and Nadine travel along a 'straight line' from Times Square, the centre of the novel's porno-accumulation, to Marathon, Texas, its periphery; a biographical journey that returns Nadine to her childhood home and Selvy to the secret military facility where he was taught 'how to die violently' (RD170; 206). On the one hand, this equates to a personally regressive eloping back to their respective disciplinary origins—the patriarchal household and US army—origins which no longer promise 'regeneration'.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 167.

<sup>190</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 132.

<sup>191</sup> For regeneration see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

On the other, this transect connects the precarious existence of living labour in the wild porno-frontier of New York to the exhausted extractive frontier in the old west—the military base reterritorialised a mining encampment. In doing so, *Running Dog* codes the historical flow and expulsion of labour-power out of one regime of exploitation and into another. In contrast to capital's 'perpetual motion machine', *Running Dog* presents a machine that, from the perspective of living labour, has broken down. 'This is the end of the line', Nadine comments, when they reach the depopulated mining community:

Some of the houses had been abandoned. Others were half ghosts, apparently still occupied, but with windows completely out, or with soft plastic sheeting replacing the glass, torn sheeting rippling in the wind, and with sand everywhere, and tire tracks in the harder dirt, distinct reliefs, like tribal markings left behind to clarify local weather and geology. (RD 204; 201)

'The essential aim of the novel', Lukács suggests, 'is the representation of the way society moves'.<sup>192</sup> For many of *Running Dog*'s proletarian minor characters society no longer moves, or, rather, they no longer move with society: they have become stuck, immobilised, abandoned by capital. DeLillo re-imagines the social logics that once transformed labour-power into a commodity as logics of exclusion and expulsion: living labour is internally exiled in *Running Dog*, encountered laterally, on the edges of the text, in New York's abandoned dockyards, the black ghettos of Washington, the antiquated frontier towns of the Southwest. Jed Esty remarks that the 'romance tradition' in the United States is built 'for both frontier expansion and self-universalisation'.<sup>193</sup> The frontiers universalised in *Running Dog* are those of secular stagnation: 'half ghosts', the defeated of the wars of race and capital are undergoing an absolute de-collectivisation. These barely visible spectres are DeLillo's contribution to Jameson's political reconstitution of the unemployed.

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<sup>192</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 144.

<sup>193</sup> Jed Esty, 'Realism Wars', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 49. 2 (August 2016), 316-342 (p. 327).



### III. 'The Off-Lineage of Some Abrupt Severance': *The Names*

Product of a Guggenheim travel fellowship spent in Greece, *The Names* reprises the spatio-temporal unfolding of financialised capital depicted in *Players* and *Running Dog*, but reimagines it across new, multinational milieus, surroundings, and contexts. In doing so, the novel stages the political and economic collision of America and the world—a globalising world whose 'living myth' is the USA (TN 135). Although, as DeLillo reflects, this is a passage of production that *The Names* records at the level of the sentence and its representation of bodily affect:

In *The Names*, I spent a lot of time searching for the kind of sun-cut precision I found in Greek light and in the Greek landscape. I wanted a prose which would have the clarity and the accuracy which the natural environment at its best in that part of the world seems to inspire in our own senses. I mean, there were periods in Greece when I tasted and saw and heard with much more sharpness and clarity than I've ever done before or since. And I wanted to discover a sentence, a way of writing sentences that would be the prose counterpart to that clarity—that sensuous clarity of the Aegean experience.<sup>194</sup>

*The Names* is a monument to that 'Aegean experience'; a novel whose 'sculpted' paragraphs resemble stonework friezes commemorating 'common objects, domestic life' where 'all is foreground, wordless and bright' (TN 9-10). Mimesis is crucial to the novel's efforts to fabricate an aesthetic language that is the 'counterpart' to immediate sensory perception; a language that breathes the 'mysterious absolute' of Greece (TN 134).<sup>195</sup> Fredric Jameson once described the genre of the American abroad as stylistically 'detoxified' and equipped with a 'convalescent sensorium'; an observation that *The Names* echoes when it regards that 'one of the mysteries of the Aegean is that things seem more significant than they do elsewhere, deeper, more complete in themselves' (TN 279).<sup>196</sup> The space of the Aegean, as explored by DeLillo, is a region of maximal contact where the realities of American expansion and Greek resistance

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<sup>194</sup> DeCurtis, "'An Outsider in the Society'", p. 60.

<sup>195</sup> This is related to a discussion of metempsychosis, whose etymological root, one character argues it to breathe: 'We are breathing it again. There's some quality in the experience that goes deeper than the sensory apparatus will allow. Spirit, soul'. DeLillo, *The Names*, p. 133.

<sup>196</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Americans Abroad: Exogamy and Letters in Late Capitalism', in *Critical Theory, Cultural Politics, and Latin American Narrative*, ed. by Steven M. Bell, Albert H. LeMay, Leonard Orr (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 35-60 (p. 42).

overlap—a convergence that is synthesised at the level of the sentence. In *The Names*, however, this re-attachment of language to the body—the abolition of alienation—threatens to veer off into a de-narrativised violence that longs ‘to stop making history’ altogether (TN 250).

If *The Names* is a painterly text whose four parts—‘The Island’, ‘The Mountain’, ‘The Desert’, and ‘The Prairie’—name the pre-capitalist enclaves that enrapture its benumbed characters—‘colours I have never seen, brilliances, worlds’—it also diagrams the more abstract flows, networks, and currents of ‘money and politics’: the becoming-Empire of the United States, whose hegemonic alliance with capital is rendered indiscernible in the novel, and whose agents and institutions are persistently misrecognised (TN 371; 116).<sup>197</sup> The novel’s spatial core which exceeds and tries to smooth these elemental parts is Athens and the ‘subculture’ of Anglo-American business people—drawn from the ‘securities’ and ‘security industry’—who use the city as a hub from which they can administer freedom across North Africa, the Middle East, and South East Asia (TN 7).<sup>198</sup> As James Axton, the novel’s first-person narrator and ‘problematic individual’ gloomily observes: ‘Americans used to come to places like this to write and paint and study, to find deeper textures. Now we do business’ (TN 7).<sup>199</sup> Business here is synonymous with the spread of the world market: an ‘onrushing nameless event’ that overwhelms the novel’s horizon, but which Axton’s own ‘writerly’ descriptions stall or partially deflect (TN 7). Such untimeliness is registered through the temporal dislocation between Axton as retrospective narrator and the narrative time of Axton as character, unknowingly confined to a past-present: ‘this summer, the summer in which we sat on his broad terrace, was the period after the shah left Iran, before the Grand Mosque and

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<sup>197</sup> For alternative takes on the production of diagrams in *The Names* see Emily Apter, ‘Paranoid Globalism’, in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), pp. 70-98; and Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 176-206.

<sup>198</sup> The relation between ‘securities industry and the security industry’ is a crucial strategic question in ‘our oil-based financial system’, according to Robert Meister, ‘Liquidity’, in *Derivatives and the Wealth of Societies*, ed. by Benjamin Lee and Randy Martin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 143-173 (p. 146).

<sup>199</sup> Axton is also problematic on account of his rape of Janet Ruffing, *The Names*, pp. 262-275.

Afghanistan' (TN 77). It is this deliberate anchoring to, and plotting against, particular historical referents—the black hole of revolution, Islamic or communist—that leads Anne Longmuir to remark that *The Names* is 'more "realistic" [...] to an extent unprecedented in his earlier work'.<sup>200</sup> The importance of epistemology is underpinned by Axton's insistence that the only way to orientate oneself in the world is 'to connect things' and 'learn their names'—an emphasis on investigation that is vital to Jameson's theorisation of realism as a genre which 'shows us things we have never seen before, whose existences we have never suspected' (TN 394).<sup>201</sup> A bricolage novel that solders together a heightened perceptual register with an epistemological drive to 'learn', *The Names* internalises the contradictions of realism and modernism as a moment in the dialectic of uneven development.

This vacillation between the 'epistemological dimension' of language and its capacity to renew perception has been at the fore of discussions regarding the novel's political stance.<sup>202</sup> Language, one character remarks, is 'an engraving instrument', an apparatus for social inscription that codes the narrative's archaeological past—in the form of ancient epigraphy—into its developmental present—evoked by the contemporary telex messages, whose focus on investment is thought by some characters to be 'the wrong use of the future' (TN 12; 14). *The Names* takes its title from a nomadic alphabet cult called *Ta Onomata*, or 'the Names', who isolate and murder surplus humans by matching their victim's initials to the location of the crime: a grim coincidence of 'language and geography' (TN 354).<sup>203</sup> The reconciliation of epistemology and ontology, experienced by cult members as a 'frenzy of knowing', is interpreted by Paula Bryant as a 'reactionary' fulmination against structuralist accounts of language: semiotic flux is stabilised and branded with a fixed meaning (TN 251).<sup>204</sup> James

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<sup>200</sup> Anne Longmuir, 'The Language of History: Don DeLillo's *The Names* and the Iranian Hostage Crisis', *Critique* 46.2 (Winter 2005), 105-122 (p. 105).

<sup>201</sup> Jameson, 'The Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate', p. 478.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>203</sup> An example being the killing of Hamir Mazmudar in *Hawa Mandir*.

<sup>204</sup> Paula Bryant, 'Discussing the Untellable: Don DeLillo's *The Names*', in *Critical Essays on Don DeLillo*, ed.

Berger similarly argues that the murders amount to a rebellion ‘against the arbitrariness of linguistic signification’; adding that the cult’s activity ‘takes place in the context of shifting and ambiguous economic, political, and military power relations’.<sup>205</sup> The cult becomes the dialectical other of another ruthless clandestine organisation, the CIA, who Axton, a risk analyst, has been unwittingly working for all along. As Berger succinctly puts it, Axton’s ‘efforts to determine an economic order in the region’s social chaos serves also to impose a new political order’—an order the cult taunts: ‘they mock our need to structure and classify’ (TN 369).<sup>206</sup> Epistemology in *The Names* is thus the obverse of domination, whose neo-colonial totalisations are said to be the subject of DeLillo’s critique.<sup>207</sup>

Whilst Andrew Hoberek is correct to note that ‘*The Names* offers a self-conscious meditation on Americans’ neoimperial efforts to make sense of a newly threatening world’, it is nonetheless important to add that the novel despairs of such suspicious readings in equal measure.<sup>208</sup> The tension between epistemology and aesthetics is manifest in the competing interpretations of the story of Henry Rawlinson, an officer in the East India Company, whose desire to ‘copy the inscriptions on the Behistun rock’ is ‘miraculously’ realised through the employment of a young Kurdish boy who is able to scale the sheer rock face and make ‘a paper cast of the text’ (TN 94). Kathryn, Axton’s estranged wife, reads the tale as a ‘political allegory’ about colonial power and its mobilisation of language to ‘subdue and codify’; a materialist reading strenuously resisted by Owen Brademas, the novel’s language mystic (TN 94-95). An epigrapher, Brademas has ‘abandoned’ an interest in ‘history and philology’ and the related

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Hugh Ruppersburg and Tim Engles (New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 2000), pp. 157-170 (p. 160).

<sup>205</sup> James Berger, ‘Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children: Oliver Sacks, Don DeLillo and Turns Against Language’, *PMLA* 120.2 (March 2005), 341-361 (p. 352).

<sup>206</sup> Berger, ‘Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children’, p. 353.

<sup>207</sup> Dennis Foster argues that ‘the violence resulting directly from the cult’s faith in the acronymic method is clearly insane, but it is only a step away from the violence flowing daily from the ABC’s of contemporary business and government’, ‘Alphabetic Pleasures: *The Names*’, in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 157-174 (p. 158).

<sup>208</sup> Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 113.

effort ‘to decipher, to uncover secrets’, becoming infatuated instead with the materiality of inscription in-itself: ‘the mysterious importance in letters as such, the blocks of characters [...] those beautiful shapes. So strange and reawakening. It goes deeper than conversations, riddles’ (TN 42).<sup>209</sup> The novel, in turn, envisages a flight out of subjection through a numinous experience of language: the ecstasy of glossolalia affirmed both in the narrative’s profane ending—‘the nightmare of real things, the fallen wonder of the world’ recorded in Tap’s novel—and in its secular conclusion, where Axton finally visits the Parthenon:

People come through the gateway, people in streams and clusters, in mass assemblies. No one seems to be alone. This is a place to enter in crowds, seek company and talk. Everyone is talking. I walk past the scaffolding and walk down the steps, hearing one language after another, rich, harsh, mysterious, strong. This is what we bring to the temple, not prayer or chant or slaughtered rams. Our offering is language. (TN 406; 397)

Yet this exaltation of language as a ‘mode of communion’, as Mark Osteen puts it, is contested by an ideology critique that regards the polyglot aesthetic as masking a less palatable political dimension: the spiritual accumulation of empire that contains and erases difference.<sup>210</sup> John McClure excoriates Axton’s ‘breakthrough’ at the Acropolis by drawing attention to how ‘difference is valorised’ but ‘only abstractly, as a play of different sounds, not different meanings and dialogue—which would contain the possibility of disagreement’.<sup>211</sup> Emily Apter’s observation that *The Names* ‘treats acronyms like wormholes that open one systemic universe to another’ similarly picks up on DeLillo’s indifference to the actuality of difference. By linking Axton’s investigation of the alphabet murders to the CIA’s struggle to orchestrate the civilisation of capital, DeLillo configures the cult as the ‘corollary’ of empire and

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<sup>209</sup> For Rancière, “‘prosaic objects’” become signs of history, which have to be deciphered’ and the poet needs to ‘decipher the messages engraved in the very flesh of ordinary things’, ‘The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes’, *New Left Review*, II/14 (March/April 2002), 133-151 (p. 145). It is precisely this prosaicness that Brademas finds disappointing: ‘What the stone say, after all, is often routine stuff. Inventories, land sale contracts, grain payments, records of commodities, so many cows, so many sheep. I’m not an expert on the origin of writing but it seems to be the case that the first writing was motivated by a desire to keep accounts. Palace accounts, temple accounts. Bookkeeping’, *The Names*, p. 42.

<sup>210</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 136.

<sup>211</sup> McClure, *Late Imperial Romance*, p. 139. An example would be the ‘polyglot surge’ of language Axton experiences in Jerusalem, ‘part of the tumult and pulse, the single living voice, as though fallen from the sky’, *The Names*, p. 173.

inadvertently exports the American national epic of paranoia onto a planetary scale, suppressing other forms of imagining the world-system.<sup>212</sup> Axton's ecstatic celebration of the subjectivising force of language disavows the existence of hierarchies between major and minor languages—and their attendant cultural struggles—a disavowal Jameson labels 'American blindness'.<sup>213</sup> The collective subject invoked by 'our offering' might well fail to consider the imbalances that affect and afflict vernacular languages, but it also conceals the 'fundamental dissymmetry' between the United States and the rest of the world.<sup>214</sup> Movement between identity and difference animates Hegel's lord and bondsman dialectic, a figure and concept crucial to literary theories of uneven and combined development, to which the chapter now turns.

### *Uneven Development, a Romance?*

Fredric Jameson draws on the master-slave relationship to illustrate the cultural logics at work either side of the neo-colonial divide in his essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism'—an article accused of an 'American blindness' of its own. Hegel's medieval dialectic is transported to a globalised present and rewritten geo-politically: the 'placeless individuality' of the First World consumer replaces the disembodied idealism of the lord; whilst the bondsman's knowledge of 'reality and the resistance of matter' is accorded to the proletarianised workers of the Third World. 'Bereft of any possibility of grasping the social totality', the isolated American individual is condemned to a culture of 'psychologism and "projections" of private subjectivity'. The escape into private existence, Jameson writes, is 'denied to third world culture', in which the story of the individual 'cannot but ultimately

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<sup>212</sup> Apter, *Against World Literature*, p. 87.

<sup>213</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', in *Valence of the Dialectic* (London and New York: 2009), pp. 435-455 (p. 439).

<sup>214</sup> Jameson, 'Globalization as a Philosophical Issue', p. 439.

involve the laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself'.<sup>215</sup> In contrast to the first world text which is structured around the incommensurability between the personal and political, the third world novel is always already an allegorical narrative about the destiny of the nation and its people.

The Warwick Research Collective integrate Jameson's structuralist binarisation of cultural production into an account of the world-system, and its representation in literature, that emphasises singularity, simultaneity, and coevalness: a world-system that, as they approvingly quote Moretti, is 'one, and unequal'.<sup>216</sup> The dialectic of core and periphery is critical for WReC's intervention in literary studies, a dialectic though that they twist and recode through Leon Trotsky's law of 'combined and uneven development'—the literary implications of which WReC feel have been underdeveloped. In Trotsky's formulation, the theory of combined and uneven development applies to situations where there is a volatile amalgamation of 'archaic' non-capitalist forms and social relations, and 'contemporary' or emergent regimes of extraction, production, and circulation. WReC frame this disjunctive coexistence of the 'archaic' and the 'contemporary' as key for conceptualising cultural forms that register and encode the phenomenologically lived experience of capitalism; a self-reflexive awareness of historical novelty—'the shock of the new'—that has substantially waned from the schizophrenic perpetual present in capital's overdeveloped core regions.<sup>217</sup> History as a dynamic, non-teleological unfolding is instead more immediately apparent in the periphery and semi-periphery, whose textual mediations 'on the world are necessarily performed in the harsh

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<sup>215</sup> Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', pp. 85-86.

<sup>216</sup> Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 10. From now on, Warwick Research Collective will be referred to by their preferred acronym, WReC.

<sup>217</sup> WReC first insist that the constitutively uneven and interdependent capitalist world-system forms the economic horizon of history. Second, that modernity names the social, political, and personal forms through which the phenomenological experience of capitalism is lived. Finally, that world-literature is literature that both 'indexes or is "about" modernity', and which makes that experience perceptible through artistic form, *Combined and Uneven Development*, pp. 14-15.

glare of past and present imperial and colonial dispensations'.<sup>218</sup> Ongoing processes of accumulation and their supervision by state and extra-state institutions are, in other words, experienced as terrifyingly alien and politically contingent in non-core zones: a social estrangement that WReC insist is inscribed in the novel-form through wild assemblages of style, narration, characters, objects, and media.

Not quite a semi-peripheral text in the way intended by WReC, *The Names* nevertheless incorporates and reflects on the disjunctive condition of the semi-periphery. This dual optic is nowhere more apparent than in the novel's split between the anecdotal 'one-sentence stories' used by Anglo-American business people to convey their experiences of the worlding of capital and the 'primal [...] connections to the physical world' seared into Axton's scenic descriptions of 'Kouros', a fictional Cycladic island not yet 'abandoned to tourism' (TN 111; 38; 17). Unlike WReC, whose political project lies in the recovery of 'discrepant encounters' where the appearance and imposition of capitalist social relations are refused and resisted, *The Names* engages in a neo-imperial cognitive mapping grasped by Axton as 'History' itself (TN 115).<sup>219</sup> Indeed, for the corporate subculture to which he belongs, the semi-periphery affords an ontological 'heightening': 'the world is here. Don't you feel that? In some of the places, things have enormous power. They have impact, they're mysterious. Events have weight. It's all gathering [...] It's not a loan to some developer in Arizona. It's much broader, it has a serious frame. Everything here is serious. And we're in the middle' (TN 116). Whilst such sentiments endorse WReC's thesis that the historical tendencies of capital accumulation are more visible in peripheral settings, they also demonstrate that the collective labour recorded in the novel is not that of a workerist subjectivation of labour-power but that of subjectivated capital: the 'handlers of huge sums of delicate money. Recyclers of petrodollars. Builders of refineries'

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<sup>218</sup> WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 52.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.



(TN 116).<sup>220</sup> In turn, the ‘politics of occupation’ voiced by minor characters like Kathryn and Andreas Eliades—a Greek ‘autonomist’—are symptomatically displaced to the narrative’s own peripheries (TN 67).

The novel-form is also believed to be marginal or ‘dead’ in *The Names*; a death inflicted by television—a populist ‘rage-making machine’—but also by entertainment and the industrialisation of culture more generally (TN 91; 213). Owen Brademas speculates that such a condition of cultural morbidity, or becoming-minor, might be ‘liberating’ and enable novelists ‘to work in the margins, outside a central perception’: a double-vision that encapsulates Axton’s experiential divorce between his public-professional work in Athens, on the one hand, which superintends the expansion of capital and, on the other, his private-poetic flight into the ‘sculpted hush’ of life on Kouros (TN 91; 9). The political valence of the novel might be thought to reside in this bifurcated sensory apparatus, which contrasts the homogeneous ‘dead time’ of commerce and commercial travel—an abstract time that leaves ‘no sense impressions’ and ‘never happened until it happens again’—with the impressionistic depictions of landscapes relatively undisturbed by the agitations of capital, worlds that are a ‘conjecture or mood of light’ (TN 8; 159). Nick Heffernan notes that characters like Axton and Brademas are drawn to underdeveloped regions because there ‘appears to be a closeness to the materiality of the earth itself, a kind of “territoriality” that stands in opposition to the deterritorializations of capitalist modernity’.<sup>221</sup> This search for concrete immediacy is similarly presented by Boxall as the conflict between ‘American speed’ and ‘Greek stillness’; an accelerating contradiction in which the ‘contemporary movement’ of the world market is

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<sup>220</sup> DeLillo here might be said to be engaging with ‘how Capital “itself” has been successfully subjectivated’. Alberto Toscano adds that it is possible to ‘think of the IMF or the WTO as faithful “subjects” of Capital, strenuously eliminating any obstacle in the path of the hegemony of surplus-value’, ‘From the State to the World? Badiou and Anti-Capitalism’, p. 205.

<sup>221</sup> Nick Heffernan, ‘National Allegory and the Romance of Uneven Development: *The Names*’, in *Capital, Class, and Technology in Contemporary American Culture* (London: Pluto, 2004), pp. 179-204 (p. 189).

deflected by ‘archaic stasis’.<sup>222</sup> The discovery of uncodified bodily intensities, in turn, evokes a romantic anti-capitalism which detects in these traces of use-value the material for a future beyond the commodity-form. In doing so, DeLillo envisages an afterlife for the sixties liberation movements whose dissolution, perceptually framed by Axton as the point when he ‘stopped smoking grass’, otherwise haunt the text (TN 128).<sup>223</sup>

What such juxtapositions of the USA and Greece as the universal and the particular risk obscuring, however, are the manifold differences within national localities—a special problem considering Greece’s exceptional recent history compared to other western European nation-states.<sup>224</sup> On one level, DeLillo evokes this internal heterogeneity through the contrast between the cosmopolitan ‘spoken word’ of Athens and the desolate ‘silence’ and ‘geologic time’ of hinterland regions like the Mani (TN 215; 217). But it also relates to the idea of stasis itself which, for a Benjaminian critic like Boxall, configures a dialectical arrest where ‘patterns’ emerge from the ‘flow’, as Brademas puts it—a historical suspension that belongs to the novel’s troubled messianism (TN 22). Stasis, as Giorgio Agamben has etymologically reconstructed, is the ancient Greek for civil war: the ‘bitter history’ and ‘black memory’ of which stalks the anonymous faces and voices that Axton imagines ‘we’ find in the hinterlands—‘there’s a bleakness in their gazing, an unrest. How many dead in your village?’ (TN 123).<sup>225</sup> The ‘pressure of remembrance’ that is ‘everywhere’ in rural Greece is thus erased, excluded, and expunged from readings that want to position the so-called stillness and natural history of the ‘semi-periphery’ as a romantic counter to the bewildering complexity of advanced capitalism (TN 123).

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<sup>222</sup> Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>223</sup> The other figure for this is Frank Volterra, an avant-garde film director who, like Axton and Brademas, is ‘captured’ by the cult.

<sup>224</sup> See Jameson’s ‘Angelopoulos and Collective Narrative’, in *The Ancients and the Postmoderns: On the Historicity of Forms* (London and New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 123-140.

<sup>225</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. by Nicholas Heron (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

If the separation of the USA into a structurally absent zone overdetermined by abstraction, and Greece into a site defined by the concrete betrays a form of idealism, it is nonetheless true that Axton is overawed by matter:

The walls were splatted with shit, the bowl was clogged, there was shit on the floor, on the toilet seat, on the fixtures and pipes. An inch of exhausted piss lay collected around the base of the toilet, a minor swamp in the general wreckage and mess. In the chill wind, the soft sweet rain, this doleful shed was another plane of experience. It had a history, a reek of squatting armies, centuries of war, plunder, siege, blood feuds. I stood five feet from the bowl to urinate, tip-toed. How strange that people used this place, still. It was an offering to Death, to stand there directing my stream toward the porcelain hole'. (TN 219)

The excrescence of human waste matter inverts and replaces Hegel's heroic 'slaughter bench' with the figure of the 'terminal shithouse' where history does not so much progress as it is 'splattered' and 'clogged', where it accumulates nauseously without synthesis. This encounter with the odour and residue of excrement projects Axton onto an otherworldly 'plane of experience'; however, it is apparent that this affective investment in ordure is less a de-narrativisation of the present than an intimation of 'lost history [...] at the end of the continent' (TN 221). As a continuous 'offering to death' war is presented in *The Names* as an anthropological savagery which dislocates developmentalism and its counter-romance alike. Although, as Axton recalls 'the first fragment of Greek I ever translated was a wall slogan in the middle of Athens. *Death to Fascists*', a fragment which inscribes the history of resistance into the post-dictatorship present whose barely perceptible vapour envelopes the novel (TN 96).

The system of political theory that Agamben seeks to repurpose is predicated on a distinction between the unpoliticised space of the '*oikos*'—family household—and the politically circumscribed space of the '*polis*'—the city. Stasis transgresses this governing threshold and creates a zone of indiscernibility so that 'the *oikos* is politicised' and, 'conversely, the *polis* is 'economised': that is to say, the domestic is 'politicised into

citizenship’ whilst ‘citizenship is depoliticised into family solidarity’.<sup>226</sup> Agamben’s representation of stasis as ‘the becoming-political of the unpolitical’ and the ‘becoming-unpolitical of the political’, in turn, offers a way of approaching *The Names* which would read the novel as producing a related indistinction between the ‘lived experience of private existence’ and the ‘abstractions of economic science and politic dynamics’ which Jameson suggests are incommensurable in the first-world artwork.<sup>227</sup> *The Names*, as Deleuze might put it, dissolves the border ‘major literature’ maintains between the political and the private and, in doing so, is in the process of becoming-minor, where ‘no boundary survives to provide a minimum difference or evolution: the private affair merges with the social—or political’. In DeLillo’s novel the biopolitical nature of minor literature—the politicisation of the ‘private affair’ entails ‘a verdict of life or death’ in Deleuze’s work—goes awry: both in terms of the Manson family, ‘America’s morbid attempt to make a stronger instinctive unit, literally a blood-related unit’, whose violence cannot escape from what Axton earlier describes as a ‘form of consumerism’, killings which have ‘no connection to the Earth’; and Axton’s own marriage, the dissolution of which merges with imperial crisis (TN 242; 136).<sup>228</sup>

As Heffernan suggests, the porosity of Axton’s ‘private-personal’ situation and his ‘public-geopolitical’ role in the administration of capital unsettles Jameson’s rigid theorisation of a radical divorce of the domain of personal consciousness from the world of political economy in first-world cultural forms.<sup>229</sup> Jameson’s culturalist binary makes no allowance for the fluidity, mobility, and ‘intensification of the production of uneven development *within* the metropolitan core’; a limitation Heffernan seeks to rectify by introducing the concept of ‘metropolitan national allegory’.<sup>230</sup> As a symbolic apparatus, metropolitan national allegory

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<sup>226</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, p. 12; p. 14. (italics in original).

<sup>227</sup> Agamben, *Stasis*, p. 16; Jameson, ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, p. 69.

<sup>228</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 218.

<sup>229</sup> Heffernan, ‘National Allegory and the Romance of Uneven Development’, p. 182.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180; p. 181. (italics in original).

responds to the economic ‘crisis of global Fordism’ and the political ‘destabilisation of American global hegemony’ by incorporating representational ‘forms and cognitive strategies’ attributed to third-world cultural production: in particular, the deployment of personal crisis as the medium through which to mediate national crisis—now conceived as an articulated global totality.<sup>231</sup> ‘The recomposition of global space’, Heffernan clarifies, ‘is analogised in the transformation of “the space of bourgeois private life”, including the inner space of bourgeois subjectivity’.<sup>232</sup> In this sense, Axton’s marital estrangement from Kathryn, is a capacious vehicle that both allows DeLillo to dramatise America’s post-Vietnam humiliation and reflect on the shock of the Iranian revolution—an event that finds its equivalent in Kathryn’s surprise decision to return to Canada with their son. Axton’s ‘personal unmappings’, Heffernan concludes, ‘stand for the larger crisis of American imperial power’; a narrative procedure that, somewhat against the spirit of Jameson, he calls ‘cognitive unmappings’: a term that indicates a politics of disaffiliation and disagreement.<sup>233</sup>

### *A Minor Key*

In an admiring review of *The Names*, Jameson himself resists such a ‘totalisation by fiat’. *The Names*, Jameson comments, registers a ‘spatial dilemma’ which confronts all ‘contemporary fiction in the “world system”’: namely, the ‘increasing incompatibility [...] between individual experience, existential experience, as we go looking for it in our individual biological bodies, and structural meaning, which can now ultimately derive from the world system of multinational capitalism’. Whilst Heffernan amalgamates bourgeois existence and the passage into post-Fordism, Jameson alternatively insists on an irreducibility between political economy and the material embodiment of private consciousness in DeLillo’s novel. *The Names* instead

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, pp. 181-182.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

approaches this ‘spatial dilemma’ by representing ‘life among the unlinked fragments of the same untotalisable world’.<sup>234</sup> Axton:

The sense of things was different in such a way that we could only register the edges of some elaborate secret. It seemed we’d lost our capacity to select, to ferret out particularity and trace it to some centre which our minds could relocate in knowable surroundings. There was no equivalent core. The forces were different, the orders of response eluded us. Tenses and inflections. Truth was different, the spoken universe, and men with guns everywhere. (TN 112)

This dissociation of nameless affects from their structural intelligibility is replicated more broadly, Jameson suggests, in the autonomisation of Axton’s scenic descriptions from the ‘drifting plot curiosity’. The intrigue of *The Names* ‘is of finding out whether’ the cult’s crimes ‘are central in the book and which organise it, or whether they are mere episodes in a novel whose principle centre of gravity is personal relations’.<sup>235</sup> An antinomy, in other words, between the eternal present of scenic description and the retrospective means-ends narrativisation of the episodic into a totality.

Although, in another sense, *The Names* might be said to preserve a means-ends relationship in the shape of development—and its related administration of future-presents. Within the novel, development is philosophically framed by Brademas as a succession of civilizations—‘I’ve come to think of Europe as a hardcover book, America as the paperback version’—but depicted historically by Axton as the project of ‘technicians’ whose ‘bank loans, arms credits, goods, technology [...] bring new kinds of death’ to ‘ancient societies’ (TN 27; 134). These positions can be mapped on to the two dominant understandings of development, identified by Kraniauskas as: first the ‘historicist philosophical tradition’, based on Hegel’s ‘present-centred’ unfolding of ‘spirit’ through a succession of state-forms, and ‘politically retemporalised’ by Marx as working towards a future communist present; and second, ‘an evolutionary or technocratic’ tradition, ‘conceived primarily in terms of economic growth,

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<sup>234</sup> Jameson, ‘*The Names*’, p. 116.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118. Axton also notes that ‘this talk we were having about familiar things was itself ordinary and familiar. It seemed to yield up the mystery that is part of such things, the nameless way in which we sometimes feel our connections to the physical world. *Being here*’, *The Names*, p. 38. (italics in original).

labour productivity, and capital accumulation’, whose intellectual touchstone is the work of Adam Smith.<sup>236</sup> Given DeLillo’s peripheralisation of romantic-nationalist movements, it is perhaps unsurprising that *The Names* gravitates towards the latter conceptualisation of development—although, it too is lamented by the British expatriate Charles Maitland: ‘overthrow, re-speak. What do they leave us with? Ethnic designations. Sets of initials. The work of bureaucrats, narrow minds [...] Every time another people’s republic emerges from the dust, I have the feeling that someone has tampered with my childhood’ (TN 286). The passage from one form of imperial grammar to another—‘you can’t prefer Leopoldville to Kinshasa’—also registers the capture and redeployment of development ‘as the biopolitical complement of modernisation theory’ which, in the ‘context of the Cold War and rising revolutionary forms of decolonisation’, informs both ‘the foreign policy of the USA’ and the ‘social and economic policy’ of transnational institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (TN 287).<sup>237</sup>

The biopolitical aspect of development is foregrounded by the novel’s ‘credit head’, David Keller, a transnational banker who revels in ‘being intimately involved’ with ‘deficit countries’ and takes pleasure ‘when they allow you to monitor their economic policies in return for a loan. When you reschedule a debt and it amounts to an aid program’ (TN 59; 278). Economic tutelage is presented here in a language that waivers between the romantic and the patrician; but it also illuminates the sense of corralling postcolonial nation-states which Kraniauskas suggests guides US policy, whereby ““development” was a means to bring “underdeveloped” or “backward” nations regions [...] up to date; that is, up to the present as actualised in the metropolitan nations’.<sup>238</sup> Development, from this perspective, names the education of those ‘huge tracts of economic and social and political wreckage’ that turn Keller

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<sup>236</sup> John Kraniauskas, ‘Review: Future Present’, *Radical Philosophy* 150 (July/August 2008), 52-55 (p. 52).

<sup>237</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘Future Present’, p. 52.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

‘a little pinker’; a *Bildung* that is, of course, inverted in Axton’s personal de-formation once it is revealed that his employer, the Northeast Group, is a subsidiary of the CIA—a ‘blind involvement’ that he cannot exonerate himself from (TN 278; 116; 380). The overlapping of objective and subjective development in Axton’s line of flight, crystallised in his acknowledgment that ‘I came here to be close to my family and I’m finding something more’, yokes together the economic and a delayed bildungsroman whose moment of political recognition, however, does not so much end with compromise but dissensus: a personal ‘derailment’ that uncouples the spatio-temporal unfolding of ‘future-presents’ from their figuration in the novel (TN 116).<sup>239</sup>

Alternatively, *The Names* could be described as a biopolitical novel whose constituent parts fail to ‘clinch’, inscribing instead a zone of indiscernibility that blocks dialectical totalisation. The novel’s pairing of the bourgeois household—a crucial site for social reproduction—and economic development backed by the USA—the administration of life—are swallowed, in other words, by a black hole: the Iranian revolution—whose struggles are presented by Michael Hardt as biopolitical ones (TN 278).<sup>240</sup> The non-figurative figuration of Iran informs Anne Longmuir’s reading of Axton’s temporally dislocated narrative as symptomatic of the historical unintelligibility of political Islam to the US binary of American freedom versus Soviet communism.<sup>241</sup> It is possible to expand this black hole, and suggest that the lines of flight presented by DeLillo as a vector through the ‘middle’ instantiate a dialectic that misfires, becomes unstuck, or spins wildly out of control.

One way of considering the breakdown or de-collectivisation of the dialectic would be to track how the ‘master-slave’ relationship is appropriated and reconfigured by DeLillo. On

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<sup>239</sup> I take the idea of a ‘*Bildung*’ that goes off the ‘rails’ from John Kraniauskas, ‘The Reflux of Money: Outlaw Accumulation and Territorialisation in *Breaking Bad*’, p. 226. The bildungsroman is a genre of compromise and consensus in Franco Moretti’s *The Way of the World*.

<sup>240</sup> Michael Hardt, ‘Falsify the Currency!’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112.2 (Spring 2012), 359-379 (pp. 372-374).

<sup>241</sup> ‘By putting itself outside Western law, Iran put itself outside Western language’, Longmuir, ‘The Language of History’, p. 118.



the surface Jameson's distinction between the placeless idealism of first-world consumer subjects and the embodied materialism of third-world workers is reproduced intact: the bodily and impassioned figure for national self-determination, Andreas Eliades, is contrasted to the deterritorialised American 'business people in transit, growing old in places and airports' (TN 7). The proximity of Eliades to the earth is made explicit in one of the novel's recognition scenes in which Eliades invites Axton to a restaurant that 'specialised in heart, brains, kidneys, and intestines' (TN 279). Axton understands this to be a 'lesson in seriousness, in authentic things, whatever is beyond a pale understanding, whatever persuades the complacent to see what is around them' and the conversation rehearses the themes of Greece's military and financial subjugation to the United States—'our future does not belong to us. It is owned by the Americans' (TN 279-280; 282). The evening concludes with Eliades upbraiding the blindness of American power: 'you don't see us. This is the final humiliation. The occupiers fail to see the people they control' (TN 283). Andreas here anticipates a reciprocal misrecognition on behalf of his 'Autonomous People's Initiative' during their failed assassination of David Keller. Whether Keller—the banker—was the intended target is a question over which Axton—the unwitting CIA agent—agonises and concludes his account without being able to properly resolve: 'I want to believe that they plotted well. I don't like thinking I was the intended victim. It puts all of us at the mercy of events' (TN 393). If the indeterminacy of the event signals an indiscernibility between the surveillance network and multinational financial institutions—the becoming-biopolitical of struggle—its indifference also suggests a disintegration of the dialectic.

National self-determination, as institutionalised in the 'Autonomous People's Initiative', directly opposes the becoming-universal rule of the United States; a global hegemony to which the nomadic name's cult—a 'people who come from nowhere'—could be said to exist at a tangent or in a contrariwise relationship (TN 227). Rather than confront the

state-form, the cult's programmatic murder of outcasts belongs to a practice of invisibility and subtraction: as the apostate Andahl informs Axton, 'we are inventing a way out' (TN 250). The cult too relies on the 'experience of recognition'; however, what is held in 'common' is an identity that the 'program reaches something in us', an 'opening into the self' that must necessarily end with the obliteration of the scapegoated other (TN 248-249). It is this filial bond that captures Brademas—despite his protestations—who follows the cult on their ruinous line of flight into the Thar Desert—the 'abode of death'—but it also corrals Axton and the avant-garde film-maker Frank Volterra, who become entranced by the sect's search for 'a place where it is possible for men to stop making history' (TN 353; 250). The cult's reterritorialisation of language and geography, then, establishes a type of exodus from ideologies of development: 'this is not history', one member tells Brademas, 'this is precisely the opposite of history. An alphabet of utter stillness. We track static letters when we read. This is a logical paradox' (TN 349). But, by subtracting themselves from the state-form and the historical continuum this is a paradoxical exodus too, one whose messianic standstill turns against collective agency itself.

There is, though, one final subject position to be explored which finishes DeLillo's presentation of a multinational American bourgeoisie, a local Greek nationalism, and a fugitive nomadism; and which also completes the novel's cognitive mapping of the world system. Whilst *The Names* can be conceptualised as a 'major' modernist statement on the metaphysical properties of 'Language', Jameson prefers to 'read it as a minor work [...] "keyed" to the themes of proper names and their relationship to people and places'.<sup>242</sup> The relationship between peoples and places is pivotal to Deleuze's exposition of minor literatures and cinemas which respond, however, to national situations where 'the people no longer exist, or not yet... *the people are missing*'. Minor literatures are confronted with a task which is 'not that of

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<sup>242</sup> Jameson, 'The Names', p. 119.

addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people'.<sup>243</sup> In DeLillo too there is a non-presupposition of the people, a people that are transnationalised in *The Names*' version of the becoming-multitude of living labour.

The novel's final part, 'The Prairie', is composed of Tap Axton's wildly associative novel—'there was a man in a daise like a drunkerds scuffling lurch, realing in a corner'—which is itself a stylistic recoding of a prior account of Brademas's Pentecostal upbringing in the Mid-West (TN 401). This account first emerges during Axton's final meeting with an ailing Brademas, who reflects on his recent encounter with the names cult in the Thar Desert. Framed between the interruptive present of Axton's commentary, Brademas's personal experience is nonetheless presented through a third-person perspective in which his voice becomes indistinguishable from Axton's, instantiating a type of distributive narration. There is a moment where this oddly distanced and dislocated third-person narrative cuts from the past-present of Brademas's recent recollection to a more distant memory, a cut that links 'the scattershot of blazing worlds' in the Indian night sky to the extinguished mechanised agricultural world of 1930s Kansas: 'the earth we dream and childishly colour' (TN 357; 363). As the cult goes out to claim another victim, Brademas's memory, re-narrated through Axton, envisages the exhausted and defeated rural American poor: 'the marginal farmers, the migrant workers, the odd-jobs men, the invalids, the half-breeds, the widowed, the silent, the blank' (TN 366). The 'off-lineage of some abrupt severance or dispossession', these are a people that exist but barely in *The Names*: they are the 'faces gazing out of stony landscapes', the 'uncounted' living in the 'shacks and tents' of the world's 'shadow' cities: a people in search of figuration and conceptualisation, struggling to contend with the multiplying black holes driven through the workers' movement (TN 366; 123; 331). These glimpses of a missing people on the margins of the text constitute the outer limit of DeLillo's imaginative horizon; a futureless present

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<sup>243</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 216-217. (italics in original).

whose prehistory he reconstructs in the context of the United States through the novels of historical catastrophe: *Libra* and *Underworld*, which are the subject of the following chapter.

### Dialectics Derailed: DeLillo and the Historical Novel

The people are ‘missing’ in *Underworld* (1997). Or, more precisely, they are ‘underground’, as John Marks puts it, ‘hunted and ray gunned’ in a fictionalised Sergei Eisenstein movie *Unterwelt*, or just ‘downwind’, victims of the nuclear arms race and the radiation that has seeped ‘into the marrowed folds of the bone’.<sup>1</sup> For Marks, DeLillo’s Cold War epic merits ‘inclusion in the Deleuzian canon’ and demonstrates the ‘virtues of “American” literature’—a ‘minor’ literature that is ‘ideally a federation of diverse minorities’; that is, a multitude.<sup>2</sup> *Underworld* begins with the story of a baseball game, the fabled Giants-Dodgers 1951 pennant match. DeLillo’s third-person collective narration reconstructs a rhizomatic ‘people’s history’ culminating with Bobby Thomson’s walk-off home run—known colloquially as ‘the shot heard around the world’—and its euphoric aftermath (U 60). This ‘midcentury moment’ falls ‘indelibly into the past’ and becomes the prehistory of the post-Communist world encountered by Nick Shay, the novel’s present-day narrator (U 60). In this neoliberal present, however, the ‘wall’ over which Thomson ‘tomahawks’ his home run folds into another ‘Wall’, a ruined ‘slice of the South Bronx’ where a ‘wild’ girl called Esmeralda is raped and murdered, and whose death is recorded on a monument for dead street children, a ‘graffiti wall, the angels arrayed row after row, blue for boys, pink for girls’ (U 42; 810; 816).<sup>3</sup> The popular ‘longing’ that DeLillo’s prologue declares ‘makes history’ is thus de-collectivised by the novel’s epilogue, which instead presents the Bronx as a graveyard for the American proletariat (U 11). *Libra* (1988), too, ends in the ‘brokenhearted earth’ of a cemetery, with a mother’s grief overlooking

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<sup>1</sup> Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (New York: Scribner, 1997), p. 430; p. 803. Hereafter, all further references will be cited parenthetically as U; John Marks, ‘*Underworld: The People are Missing*’, in *Deleuze and Literature*, ed. Ian Buchanan and John Marks (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 80-99 (p. 97).

<sup>2</sup> Marks, ‘*Underworld: The People are Missing*’, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> It is revealing that the prologue has been re-published as a standalone novella titled, *Pafko at the Wall* (2001).

the grave of ‘William Bobo’, the final alias of the novel’s workerist hero, Lee Harvey Oswald.<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari warn that ‘lines of flight’ always ‘risk abandoning their creative potentialities and turning into a line of death, being turned into a line of destruction pure and simple’.<sup>5</sup> In *Libra*, DeLillo re-imagines the capturing of Oswald’s revolutionary line of flight by a reactionary plot against Kennedy’s reformist presidency, and whose subsequent assassination opens up a ‘generalised black hole’ or historical catastrophe: ‘the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century’ (L 181).<sup>6</sup> *Underworld* and *Libra*, then, are historical novels that reflect on and consider the collective destiny of the American people and the derailment of historical progress. The invention of a people is, according to Georg Lukács, ‘the great task of the historical novel’, whose influential account of the genre the chapter now turns.<sup>7</sup>

### *Exaggerated Hopes*

In Lukács’s *The Historical Novel* (1937) history becomes ‘the property of the broadest masses’.<sup>8</sup> It does so as a consequence of the French Revolution and the mobilisation of popular armies in the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars ‘which for the first time made history a *mass experience*’.<sup>9</sup> Éric Alliez and Maurizio Lazzarato return to the French Revolution in *Wars and Capital* and highlight two key sequences: the first tracks a rupture between the state and the war machine which, leaning on Clausewitz, becomes a people’s army; the second can be ‘characterised by the success of the bourgeoisie in reorganising both the state and the war machine around the interests of capital and then by the failure of the revolutionary movements

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<sup>4</sup> DeLillo, *Libra*, p. 454. Hereafter, all further references will be cited parenthetically as L.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 558.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 560

<sup>7</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 317.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. (*italics in original*).

that attempted to appropriate the war machine and the state throughout the nineteenth century'.<sup>10</sup> The democratisation of the army is integral for Lukács who, like Clausewitz, notes the decisive impact of the potentially limitless expansion of warfare: both as it removes spatial barriers between civil society and the army within nations, and as it broadens horizons from without, sending plebeian troops to fight across Europe. What proves crucial is the recognition that the conditions of social life can be transformed through collective agency. War, in other words, destroys idealist conceptions of progress as an 'unhistorical struggle between humanistic reason and feudal-absolutist unreason' and instead reconfigures historical development as the working out of the 'inner conflict of social forces in history'—whose engine, for Lukács, is class struggle.<sup>11</sup> Revolutionary momentum in Alliez and Lazzarato's text is enclosed and contained within the 'new form of the nation-state'; a socio-political constraint that Lukács's periodisation of the historical novel—'the classic historical novel' (1812-1848), 'the crisis of bourgeois realism' (1848-1918), 'the historical novel of democratic humanism' (1918-1936)—registers at the level of cultural form.<sup>12</sup>

Lukács codifies the genre around five compositional principles—a codification that is indebted to the fiction of Walter Scott which remains foundational to Lukács's thinking, but whose variations also reflexively encode new socio-political logics. Historical novels portray the 'great transformations of history as transformations of popular life' and depict change as it affects the everyday, and represent the effects of 'material and psychological changes upon people who react immediately and violently to them, without understanding their causes'.<sup>13</sup> Transformations of the material base of society are reconnoitred and made intelligible by a 'mediocre, prosaic hero' whose promotion to the centre of the narrative simultaneously

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<sup>10</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 49.

displaces ‘world-historical individuals’ to the margin.<sup>14</sup> As John Kraniauskas observes, the historical novel can be regarded as revolutionary ‘even in its compositional form’: by ‘pushing the heroic individual of romance-history into the background it represents the mediocre burgher’s entry into the historical foreground’—a bourgeois revolution of sorts.<sup>15</sup> Poised between the political world ‘above’ and the popular world ‘below’, the mediocre or average hero is able to visit opposing camps and, in so doing, mediates and collates perspectives: a process that artistically sharpens the social antagonisms that beset a nation. The mediocre hero operates here as an instrument or transversal vector of empathy. Such neutrality is key for Lukács’s fourth principle, the ‘necessary’ and ‘tragic downfall of gentile society’; that is, the elimination of residual or archaic forms of social life—a transitional moment of ‘primitive accumulation’.<sup>16</sup> The defeat of the Highland Clans in Scott or the Iroquois nation in James Fennimore Cooper can also be thought of as the decoding of romance by prose, but this time, at the level of the collective—a process that Lukács nonetheless affirms as progress. Progressive historicism, then, is inscribed formally through the use of ‘necessary anachronism’ which renders the represented past as the determinate and ‘*necessary prehistory* of the present’.<sup>17</sup> It is this historicity—an awareness that the present of narrative composition is organically related to the narrated past, it is its future—which distinguishes the historical novel from its eighteenth century predecessors, the social novels of Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson.

These five compositional principles are, in the period of the ‘classic form of the historical novel’, overdetermined by the bourgeois revolutions, after whose successful completion the ‘national idea’ becomes the ‘property’ of the masses—re-inscribed as a national

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘2666’, p. 38. In Alliez and Lazzarato this is where artillery and firepower ‘impose the primacy of infantry over cavalry by bringing an end to the reign of medieval chivalry’, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 61. (italics in original).



people.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the ‘awakening of national sensibility’ pivotal to the new experience of historicity is linked, Lukács suggests, ‘on the one hand with problems of social transformation’—the nation-state as collective project—and, ‘on the other, more and more people become aware of the connection between national history and world history’—crystallising inter-imperial rivalry.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, what Perry Anderson identifies as the historical novel’s ‘romantic nationalism’ can alternatively be interpreted through the theory of uneven and combined development—both as it relates the presence of ‘non-synchronous worlds’ within the emergent nation-state, and as it pertains to what Alliez and Lazzarato call the ‘*imperialist politics of national war*’.<sup>20</sup> Jed Esty astutely points out that the nation-state not only ‘stabilises the bourgeois revolution into a narratable form’—that is, it provides a type of closure to the ‘ever-unfolding dynamism’ of the ‘postepic’ world diagnosed in *The Theory of the Novel*—but it is also central to the ‘Lukácsian model of progress’ in which the nation-state administers and mediates ‘the relations between centre and periphery (capital and province) with reference to the same social project or political telos’.<sup>21</sup> Unevenness is also fundamental to the ‘experience of progress’ which, as Franco Moretti illustrates, transforms synchrony into diachrony: multiple social worlds and times are appropriated and rearranged in an ‘ascending teleology’—asserting the dominance of the advanced centre-capital over the backwards periphery-province.<sup>22</sup> Taking its external frame of reference as the nation-state, the historical novel subsequently gives imaginative form to the ideology of linear progress which privileges ‘the *non-contemporaneous* of the contemporaneous: the “Alongside” becomes a “Before-and-After” and geography is rewritten as history’.<sup>23</sup> It is this incorporation and subordination of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Perry Anderson, ‘From Progress to Catastrophe’, *London Review of Books*, 33.15 (28 July 2011), pp. 24-28 (p. 24); Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 98. (italics in original).

<sup>21</sup> Jed Esty, ‘Global Lukács’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.3 (2009), 366-372 (p. 367; p. 370).

<sup>22</sup> Moretti, *Modern Epic*, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 52. (italics in original). In contrast to historical drama, the novel, Lukács suggests, ‘portrays more what happens before and after’, *The Historical Novel*, p. 150.

alternative spatio-temporal forms to the nation-state that later becomes dislocated in DeLillo's *Libra* and *Underworld*.

Of course, it is precisely such a faltering of progress in the wake of the failed 1848 revolutions which subjects the historical novel to an involution of form—what Lukács refers to as ‘the crisis of bourgeois realism’. The decisive break with the ‘destiny of the people’—the subject of any ‘genuine historicism’, according to Lukács—occurs during the armed insurrection of the Parisian proletariat in June 1848; the violent suppression of which necessitated an accelerated re-alliance of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.<sup>24</sup> Progressive thought is not so much abandoned, however, but ‘smoothed’ into an evolutionary schema from which the ‘dialectic of contradictory development’—the necessary, but nonetheless tragic downfall of residual social forms—has been erased.<sup>25</sup> Esty captures this disavowal of social antagonism well when he writes that the ‘concept of combined and uneven development splits into a bourgeois hypostasy of endless Whiggish forward motion and irrationalist discourses of decline and degeneration’.<sup>26</sup> Such a de-dialecticisation of historical change into gradual reformism or civilizational collapse is inscribed aesthetically through an absolute ‘split between the exact and plastic descriptions’ of exotic historical ‘milieus’ and the interior consciousness of characters, whose subjectivities spiral off into madness and eccentricity.<sup>27</sup> In other words, there is a breakdown in the relationship between the monumentally described environments and the private lives of the protagonists who find themselves projected into such milieus, but whose incorporation into collective institutions and assemblages no longer re-shapes material conditions. Without this dynamic interaction and mediation of the object world and collective subjectivation—the encryption of the social metabolism into literature—the pre-histories represented become archaeologies of absolute difference, bearing no teleological

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<sup>24</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 201.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>26</sup> Esty, ‘Global Lukács’, pp. 366-367.

<sup>27</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 189.

relation to the present. Fragmented into sensually inorganic descriptions on the one hand, and lyrical subjectivism on the other, the historical novel runs aground on the desolate ‘desert sands of capitalist prose’ and can only instantiate the futureless-present of capital that it nonetheless presents as a compensatory ‘counter image’.<sup>28</sup>

*The Historical Novel* closes with a set of reflections on the anti-Fascist novel of ‘democratic humanism’ which marks a possible renewal of the genre. It becomes quickly apparent, however, that such renewals are only partially successful: they are rear-guard operations against an encroaching barbarism. Overturning the reactionary contempt for democracy with a commitment to emancipation, the novels of ‘democratic humanism’ are nonetheless unable to revivify the compositional principles and narrative apparatuses so badly decomposed during the previous period. In fact, it is precisely this contradiction between progressive intention and the formal means of representation, which Lukács finds so singularly frustrating. An exemplary instance would be the deployment of a biographical mode of narration which concentrates near exclusively on the interior life and political decisions of the sovereign or world-historical individual, typically a great man. Here the people are presented as an object, an intellectual problem to be resolved from without and thus denied agency. Configured as such, the historical novel ‘gives only an *abstract prehistory of ideas* and not the concrete prehistory of the destiny of the people themselves’; a detachment from immediate social experience symptomatic of the intellectuals’ distance from the workers’ revolutionary milieus.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, these abstractions tend to ransack history for costumes and settings that can be used to allegorically re-stage the dilemmas of the contemporary moment, twisting the past into a mere ‘*parable of the present*’.<sup>30</sup> The disintegration of dialectics precipitated by the nineteenth century crisis of realism is far from arrested then; but whereas novelists like Flaubert

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 337. (italics in original).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 338. (italics in original).

banished history into an absolute otherness, the novels of ‘democratic humanism’ re-claim the past through a suffocating sameness with the same predictable results: the depiction of a sterile future-less present.

‘Today’s historical novel’, Lukács concludes, ‘has arisen and is developing around the dawn of a new democracy’ whose referent is the Soviet Union and whose people belong to the movement of international socialism.<sup>31</sup> The experience of war thus remains crucial; although its potential for ruination haunts the later Lukács, who takes the occasion of *The Historical Novel’s* translation into English to censure the younger writer for their ‘exaggerated, indeed false, hopes in the independent liberation movement of the German people, in the Spanish Revolution’.<sup>32</sup> Published in 1937, the communist horizon to which Lukács’s theoretical energies gravitates, is itself overwhelmed by the ‘self-annihilation’ of the Bolshevik Revolution, by Stalinism and what Roberto Bolaño in his own extraordinary war novel calls ‘the nightmare that hides behind the eyelids of the dream’.<sup>33</sup>

### *Deteriorating Futures*

The sequence of emergence, arrest, and renewal traced in *The Historical Novel* is interrupted by a seemingly anomalous discussion of aesthetic totality in the novel and historical drama. According to Hegel, whose account Lukács reprises, historical drama stages the tragic collision between a sclerotic old world and the birth of a new politico-juridical order as a ‘totality of movements’. Movement here is restricted to the psychological machinations of world-historical individuals and their activities at court—forms of motion in which the popular or material base of society are notably absent. History, then, is enacted through the ‘direct

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 13. (italics in original).

<sup>33</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p. 729. For more on ruination and the self-annihilation of Bolshevism, see Kraniauskas, ‘2666’.

relations between people’, an existential register whose subject, however, is ‘man’ in the abstract—an abstraction which also preserves the hierarchical codifications of romance-history.<sup>34</sup> As a ‘bourgeois epic’, the historical novel, on the other hand, evokes an extensive ‘totality of objects’ whose ‘principle subject’ is ‘society’ and ‘man’s social life in its ceaseless interactions with surrounding nature, which forms the basis of social activity, and with the different social institutions or customs which mediate the relations between individuals in social life’.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the constrained personal immediacy of drama, the historical novel depicts the socialisation of productive forces and the transformation of labour-power into a commodity, but where the moment of subjective remainder is nevertheless crucial. As Lukács stresses, ‘the most important thing is to show how the *direction* of a social tendency becomes visible in the imperceptible capillary movements of individual life’.<sup>36</sup> The emphasis on process and developmental unfolding in part explains the invective directed towards naturalism, whose infinite ‘copying’ of empirical reality suspends a particular social condition into a perpetual present. Indeed, Lukács insists that ‘the essential aim of the novel is the representation of the way society moves’.<sup>37</sup> When Fredric Jameson transports the Lukácsian model of the historical novel to the United States, society no longer moves: it has been immobilised by the expanded reproduction of capital, what Peter Osborne pointedly calls the ‘stasis of the new’.<sup>38</sup>

In Jameson’s USA, the commodity-form has become a spectacle, a simulacrum of generalised exchange-value that no longer indexes an original referent and from whose memory use-value has been erased. The social hegemony of the image has a ‘momentous effect’ on ‘historical time’, historical consciousness, and the historical novel; as Jameson posits:

The past itself is thereby modified: what was once in the historical novel as Lukács defines it,

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<sup>34</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.133; p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144. (italics in original).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>38</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 200.

the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project [...] has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum. Guy Debord's powerful slogan is now even more apt for the "prehistory" of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a dusty set of spectacles.<sup>39</sup>

What Jameson calls the 'waning of historicity' corresponds, in part, to this experiential rift between received historiographic knowledge—encoded in reified cultural forms—and the 'existential fact of life' in the present of multinational capital.<sup>40</sup> The historical past, in other words, is no longer experienced as the necessary prehistory of a present; a rupture that shatters the telos of collective projects—the retrospective inscription of transitions and becoming—into the delirium of a fragmented perpetual present. With the disappearance of the referent, the unfolding of social development once embodied by typicality deteriorates into stereotype and the connotative style of pastiche, whose glossy inorganic images can only imagine the past through a set of period fashions, milieus, and tonalities. The essential relation between the past and the present, crucial to making a present non-identical with itself, thus scatters into a multiplicity of free-floating signifiers which can only re-enforce the present's non-historical presuppositions—its phantasmagorias.

The blockage of historical consciousness and the decay of representation into pastiche is further illustrated by Jameson through a famous, though somewhat counterintuitive reading of E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975). If Walter Scott is the epic poet of the decline of pre-capitalist forms of life, Doctorow is 'the epic poet of the disappearance of the American radical past'.<sup>41</sup> The experience of defeat is not only narrated at the level of content in *Ragtime*—the capture of the workers' movement by the culture industry—but is also instantiated formally:

This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about the past (which thereby at once becomes "pop history") [...] If there is any realism left here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Defeat is thus coded stylistically through what Jameson elsewhere calls an ‘unholy synthesis between a narrative particular and a conceptual (historiographic) universal’: that is, an ensemble of characters whose insertion into an arbitrary historical milieu they can only exemplify rather than perceptually reconfigure.<sup>43</sup> The de-collectivisation of the workers’ movement is made intelligible by virtue of this unmooring of the past into a set of cultural codes and styles which can neither be altered through collective agency nor produce the present as a historical future.

When Jameson returns to the historical novel in *The Antinomies of Realism* he suggests the future of the genre lies in its inclusion of ‘historical futures’.<sup>44</sup> ‘To read the present as history’, Jameson insists, ‘will mean adopting a Science Fictional perspective’ in which the present of narrative composition becomes the determinate prehistory of a specific imagined future: ‘our’ present is perceived as the archaeology of the future.<sup>45</sup> This claim is rather less surprising than it might at first seem, and returns to a correspondence between the historical novel and science fiction noted in *Postmodernism*. Here the ‘emergence of historicity’ connected with political modernity is recorded by the historical novel whose ‘contemplation of the past’ renews the experience of the ‘reading present’ as the ‘sequel’ or culmination’ of that depicted past.<sup>46</sup> The historical novel, in this sense, equipped the bourgeoisie with the figurative form ‘to project its own vision of its present and future and to articulate its social and collective project in a temporal narrative distinct in form’ from ‘earlier “subjects of history”’ like the feudal nobility.<sup>47</sup> Science fiction, in turn, responds to the ‘waning or blockage of that historicity’: ‘only by means of a violent formal and narrative dislocation could a narrative apparatus come into being capable of restoring life and feeling to this only intermittently

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<sup>43</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘A Monument to Radical Instants’, in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, by Peter Weiss (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. vii-xlix (p. xxiv).

<sup>44</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 313.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 298.

<sup>46</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 284; pp. 284-285.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

functioning organ that is our capacity to organise and live time historically'.<sup>48</sup> *The Antinomies of Realism* dates the 'modification' of historical consciousness formally processed by science fiction to the 1880s, to the 'emergence of imperialism on a world scale in the Berlin Conference 1885'.<sup>49</sup> As Esty highlights, it is precisely this confrontation with colonial wealth that forces the bourgeoisie to abandon its progressive historicism—modelled on the emergent nation-state—re-articulated by the novel's 'jettisoning' of universal development.<sup>50</sup>

But, *The Antinomies of Realism* also re-affirms two coordinates of the historical novel that are of some consequence for DeLillo's fiction. The first obtains to the collective:

The historical novel as a genre cannot exist without this dimension of collectivity, which marks the drama of the incorporation of individual characters into a greater totality and, can alone certify the presence of History as such. Without this collective dimension, history, one is tempted to say, is again reduced to mere conspiracy, the form it takes in novels which have aimed for historical content without historical consciousness and which remain therefore merely political in some specialised sense.<sup>51</sup>

Inscription into a collective is crucial, in other words, because it is only from the standpoint of collectivity that an economic system can be mapped cognitively, and the dynamics of history envisioned. Yet this subjectivation of the maintaining individual within a revolutionary collective also threatens to push a bourgeois revolution over into a socialist re-imagining of the conditions of labour and its reproduction; forms of group assemblage and teamwork that, in times of revolutionary downturn, perform a rear-guard operation that risks degrading into conspiratorial fantasy. The coexistence of multiple worlds equally informs Jameson's position that the historical novel registers a situation 'where two kinds of realities overlap', where 'dual possibilities are momentarily available'.<sup>52</sup> If uneven development is constitutive of the genre, the deterioration of the form in 'postmodernism' can be attributed to the extirpation of non-synchronicity—primitive communism in Lukács, historical communism for Jameson himself.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>49</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 298.

<sup>50</sup> Esty, 'Global Lukács', p. 369.

<sup>51</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 267.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 264.



Revolution, however, is an ambiguous concept. Whilst the historical novel is traditionally seen as a ‘narrative form generated by the passage from the old order to a bourgeois society’—a passage that is also its raw material—it is not entirely clear whether, as Jameson remarks, it ‘can represent wholly different kinds of historical convulsions’.<sup>53</sup> It is to these other kinds of revolution—and their containment—that this section will speculatively conclude.

### *Irrational Historicism*

Assessing the legacy of *The Theory of the Novel* and *The Historical Novel* on Anglo-American literary criticism, Ian Duncan suggests that their most significant contribution lies in ‘the identification of the novel with the philosophy of history’. That this ‘understanding of history as a humanly accountable process’ has come ‘undone’ in recent decades guides Perry Anderson’s survey of the historical novel: a literary form where history advances ‘*to the bad side*, the side of domination and ruin’.<sup>54</sup> The historical novel arcs from ‘progress to catastrophe’ in Anderson’s view; and its contemporary terminus is ‘at the antipodes of its classical forms. Not the emergence of the nation, but the ravages of empire; not progress as emancipation, but impending or consummated catastrophe’.<sup>55</sup> Like Jameson, the experience of defeat is pivotal: both in terms of the history that ‘went wrong’ in Latin America and which is miraculated in magical realism; but also in the United States, where the trauma of ‘race murder’ and ‘omnipresent surveillance’ informs a pervasive feeling that society itself has become a malevolent ‘conspiracy’, producing a ‘kind of black-magical realism’.<sup>56</sup> Contemporary historical fiction, Anderson concludes, bears the insignia of Walter Benjamin’s ‘angel of history’: their ‘exaggerated inventions of a fabulous and non-existent past (and future) [...]

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>54</sup> Duncan, ‘History and the Novel after Lukács’, p. 388. History progresses ‘to the bad side’ in Balibar’s *The Philosophy of Marx*, p. 99. (italics in the original).

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, ‘From Progress to Catastrophe’, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

rattle at the bars of our extinct sense of history’ and try to awaken a dreaming collective through ‘the electro-shock of repeated doses of the unreal and the unbelievable’.<sup>57</sup> Catastrophe, as a historical concept, not only encompasses wreckage in Benjamin’s thought, but it also carries the charge of having ‘missed the opportunity’—an unrealised future-present whose memory disrupts and reverses the telos of the historical novel.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst defeat in a period of unleashed accumulation might well be the dominant political content of American historical fiction—North and South of the border—Anderson’s account nonetheless fails to engage with what David Cunningham calls ‘the developing political problem of historiography’. This is a problem that concerns the possibilities of form, and questions the ‘ongoing adequacy—and, hence, historicity—of certain modern cultural forms to the *representation* of history’—a dilemma that I will return to shortly.<sup>59</sup> In Latin America, the historical novel gets ‘misplaced’: it is translated and transculturated, John Kraniauskas speculates, in a peripheral zone of the world-economy where the ‘prime movers of the “civilization” of capital in the area are [...] *militarised political societies*’.<sup>60</sup> An emergent bourgeois middle class, whose dynamic alliance with the popular classes—peasant and proletarian—drives Lukács classical account of the genre—the narrative typology of a bourgeois revolution overdetermined from below—is absent in a region whose economic contexts are shaped by ‘dependence and uneven development’, where the ‘poles of accumulation’ lie outside the nation-state. ‘The experience of capital’ has instead ‘been one in which historical processes of commodification, that is, the “economic” and its institutions (the market and civil society), were subordinated to the institutions of the state (and political

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 28. Anderson is quoting from an uncited text by Jameson.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 474.

<sup>59</sup> David Cunningham, ‘The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism’, *Raison Publique*, 4 May 2014 <<http://www.raison-publique.fr/article707.html>> [accessed 5 October 2017], par. 3. (italics in original)

<sup>60</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘2666’, p. 41. (italics in original).

society)'.<sup>61</sup> This political overdetermination of the economic, a 'passive revolution' from above, is captured and reflected on culturally through the displacement of the mediocre hero and the new focalisation around the world-historical individual, the dictator. 'A military *coup d'état*' at the level of literary form, as Kraniauskas aphoristically notes.<sup>62</sup>

Politically reconfigured around the dictator, the 'misplaced' historical novel '*narrativises and reflects upon the state-form as the subject and object of history*'—the popular experience of which is now subjection.<sup>63</sup> State-centred narrative forms employ a more distributed compositional method in the United States; what Kraniauskas in a discussion of James Ellroy's percussive 'Underworld USA' trilogy calls 'historical noir'.<sup>64</sup> 'Underworld USA' presents a political history of the sixties from the perspective of the state, a corrupt perspective that fractures the 'fetish of the unified state', whose warring factions, as in *Libra*, have a tendency to go rogue, to form war machines.<sup>65</sup> The state, in Ellroy's novels, is at war: internally, amongst its interlocking constituent parts, but also externally, against the population, at war with the people it biopolitically manages through fascination and surveillance. Executive power, therefore, remains in the background, leaving the foreground clear for the ordinary, maintaining individuals who are, however, politically over-coded and enlisted into the repressive state apparatus. The mediocre heroes who populate 'historical noir' are, in this sense, diametrically opposed to their forebears in Walter Scott: as subaltern state agents they 'maintain the existing order' against reformist and revolutionary currents—alternative future-presents that are contained and erased, often lethally.<sup>66</sup> For Hegel, 'it is the State which presents subject-matter that is not only *adapted* to the prose of History, but

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<sup>61</sup> John Kraniauskas, 'Introduction', *Capitalism and Its Discontents* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2017), pp. xvii-xxiv (p. xx).

<sup>62</sup> Kraniauskas, '2666', p. 41. (italics in original).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41. (italics in original).

<sup>64</sup> Kraniauskas, 'Noir into History', p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

involves the production of such history in the very process of its own being'. The state 'produces a record' of its 'transactions and occurrences', an archive whose ability to confer and perpetuate identity is dislocated in *Libra*, DeLillo's feverish take on 'historical noir'.<sup>67</sup>

History's deflected path—from the perspective of orthodox Marxism—feeds into and shapes Cunningham's critical response to Anderson's otherwise 'plausible narrative of the changing politics of the historical novel'—its 'historical trajectory from the narration of progress to the narration of defeat'.<sup>68</sup> At stake, is whether the genre's abysmal terminus is simply an 'aesthetic reflex of its contemporary eclipse', as Anderson pessimistically believes, or if it is not, 'paradoxically, the condition of some new kind of politically-enabling narration of history'.<sup>69</sup> The *Communist Manifesto* tasks the bourgeoisie with the construction of the nation as a political unit; an historical mission whose necessary prehistories are painstakingly recorded and affirmed by the classic form of the historical novel, which is, as Cunningham glosses: a "secularised epic of the emergence of the bourgeois nation, and through this of the bourgeoisie as a "subject of history"". <sup>70</sup> Lukács's account of collective agency, then, is sutured closed by a 'political notion of nationalism' which has, in Duncan's terms, 'withered away': the collective is no longer 'organised' or 'interpreted' through 'class' and, therefore, can be imagined no longer as the articulation of social class within 'national history, as distinct from its global redistribution by the forces of neoliberalism'.<sup>71</sup> Though, as Cunningham makes clear, the 'collective dimension' already finds 'itself dissolved' in Lukács's analysis of the post-1848 reconfigurations of the historical novel—the defence of progress rotates into a defence of the order of private property against the spectre of its future collectivisation. The loss of collectivity

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<sup>67</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by J.Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), p. 61. (italics in original). As Kraniauskas summarises, 'the state is both the condition and shaper of history's course for Hegel', 'Noir into History', p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> Cunningham, 'The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism', par. 2; par. 4

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 16. (italics in original).

<sup>70</sup> Cunningham, 'Here Comes the New', p. 24. (italics in original)

<sup>71</sup> Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', p. 393. The 'political notion of nationalism' comes from Susan Buck-Morss quoted in Cunningham, 'Here Comes the New', p. 14.

is a feature of Jameson's work, although here the actual defeats of the workers' movement are combined with a corresponding sense that 'the very *capacity* to perform any such historiographical task at all' has been damaged, perhaps permanently, as a consequence of defeat.<sup>72</sup> Cunningham's 'point of heresy' is to suggest that these representational difficulties, conventionally attributed to the elimination of the standpoint of a revolutionary collective, might also be a consequence of the progressive unfolding of the 'social being of modernity'; that is, capitalist social relations themselves.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, the waning of a 'collective sense of history' associated with the implosion of the institutions of reform and revolution—as modes of political subjectivation—can appear, 'from another point of view, a function of the ever-more totalising and abstract character of capital itself as *the* "universal" social form'.<sup>74</sup> Jameson gestures to as much in *Postmodernism*, writing that the 'emergence and eclipse' of the historical novel should be conceived 'less in the existential experience of history of people at this or that historical moment than rather in the very structure of their socioeconomic system, in its relative opacity or transparency, and the access its mechanisms provide to some greater cognitive as well as existential contact with the thing itself'.<sup>75</sup> Cunningham sets this structuralist reflection in motion, insisting that 'if there is anything like a "subject of history" in Marx's *Capital*' it is 'self-valorising capital' itself, whose forms of expanded self-reproduction displace the centrality of any specific class agent—bourgeois or proletariat. The aesthetic and epistemological struggles that beset the Lukácsian dialectic of 'man-as-individual and man-as-social-being' are less a consequence of the failures of any Leninist standpoint—the vanguard party—than they are related to the '*essentially* abstract' relations that structure capitalist

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<sup>72</sup> Cunningham, 'The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism', par. 7. (italics in original).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., par. 9. A 'point of heresy' comes from Balibar's *The Philosophy of Marx*, p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> Cunningham, 'The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism', par. 9. (italics in original).

<sup>75</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 284.

societies, and their ‘production of ever more extensive forms of interconnectedness’.<sup>76</sup> What such limits of representation make fitfully visible, is the inability of imaginative units like the nation-state or social class to repair the rift between the concrete immediacy of existence—experience at the level of the body or affect—and its meaningful inscription within historical time—a collective destiny that spirals wildly off-kilter, and is increasingly contested and appropriated by fascisms.

There is a connection here between the ‘waning of historicity’ diagnosed by Jameson and conceptually reconfigured by Cunningham, and Balibar’s discussion of the crisis of ‘collective activity’ as the dis-alignment between political institutions—trade unions, social-democratic parties, revolutionary vanguards—and ‘modes of subjectivation that allow human communities to represent themselves as agents in their own history’—a void disastrously re-occupied for Duncan by ‘religion, ethnicity, race’.<sup>77</sup> It is the novel’s ‘capacity to *render visible*’ the ‘irresolvable gap between the real abstractions intrinsic to modern capitalist social being’ and concrete immediacy that becomes central to its new political vocation: the making perceptible of the ‘invisible *limits* of representation’.<sup>78</sup> The historical novelists that most interest Cunningham return ‘to moments of *bifurcation*, historical turning points or passages of transition’, but unlike their canonical predecessors, these narratives ‘identify within our present’s prehistory the various occluded points at which past “hopes corroded to fragments”’.<sup>79</sup> In so doing, the telos of the historical novel is reversed, and rewritten from the perspective of the defeated, from what Benjamin calls the ‘tradition of the oppressed’. The retrospective inscription of the necessary prehistory of the present is derailed in such narratives, which instead seek to recover and salvage historical horizons where the future could have gone otherwise. This search for collective projects that failed to actualise themselves but whose

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<sup>76</sup> Cunningham, ‘The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism’, pars. 9-10. (italics in original).

<sup>77</sup> Balibar, ‘Critique in the 21st Century’ p. 12; Duncan, ‘History and the Novel after Lukács’, p. 394.

<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, ‘The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism’, par. 16. (italics in original).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 13. (italics in original).

utopian energies persist as ‘not-yet’ futures resonates with Andrew Cole’s pitch for an ‘untimely’ historicism that in ‘drawing attention to the conceptual and figurative relays between past and present’ acknowledges ‘where the past figuratively exceeds its own time and place, its own concept, to make a future for itself in our own time—a past demanding recognition now’.<sup>80</sup> Cunningham himself is less concerned with the rediscovery of the past as ‘unrealised possibility’, than in how these defeats and struggles against the new social logics of capital, capture processes of deterritorialisation in their moments of glistening emergence and render the present contingent once more.<sup>81</sup>

The conceptualisation of the historical novel of contemporary capitalism offered by Cunningham also appears to be underpinned by the non-presupposition of the people, who remain missing and require invention. At the same time, the very monstrous forces of social interconnectivity that the novel, in Cunningham’s view, strives to render perceptible—as disjunction—could be said to be engaged in a war of annihilation against the people qua labour-power, which is increasingly exiled from the circuits of expanded reproduction. The central section of Bolaño’s *2666*, ‘the part about the crimes’, records precisely such a murderous process of primitive accumulation which, as Kraniauskas reflects, ruins the collective dimension of the historical novel and ‘perhaps also [...] its regime of historicity—its progressive historicism—too’. Although the representation of history here is ‘de-collectivised’ and ‘even de-dialecticised’ it is not ‘de-historicised’, despite the femicidal black hole.<sup>82</sup> Kraniauskas instead relates the compositional present of Bolaño’s text to an experience of “‘constraint” with regard to an alternative “real”” which, in the form of Communism is ‘no longer’.<sup>83</sup> If the decoding of one model of reality into another is one of the tasks assigned to the classic form of the historical novel—the demystification of poetic savagery by the banal

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 161.

<sup>81</sup> Cunningham, ‘The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism’, par. 13.

<sup>82</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘2666’, p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

civilization of prose, for example—then what is lacking in the present delayed dissolution of capitalism, is exactly such an alternative model from which to re-imagine social reality—what Cunningham calls the ‘invisible *limits* of representation’. Constraint evidently feeds into *Underworld’s* epilogue where Nick Shay, in a deliberate inversion of the novel’s ‘popular’ opening, remarks that ‘most of our longings go unfulfilled. This is the word’s wistful implication—a desire for something lost or fled or otherwise out of reach’ (U 803). In Kraniauskas’s reading, Bolaño’s ‘peripheral’ figuration of the defeat of historical Communism ‘suggests that we need to think here of another kind of “history”, with another kind of non-historicist grammar or “regime”: a regime of “irrational” narratives’.<sup>84</sup> It is in the spirit of the production of irrational narratives and their untimely historicism that the chapter turns to *Libra* and *Underworld*.

### **I. The Historical Novel of Dislocation: Don DeLillo’s *Libra***

‘History’, Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘has never comprehended nomadism, the book has never comprehended the outside’.<sup>85</sup> Embedded in a discussion of ‘roots’ and ‘rhizomes’, this statement also touches on and engages with Hegel’s *The Philosophy of History*; in particular, the claim that ‘nomadic wanderings’ are ‘destitute of objective history’ because ‘they present no subjective history, no annals’.<sup>86</sup> Nomads, in Hegel’s view, are without history to the extent that they lack a material ‘record of transactions and occurrences’—an archive—that would enable narration to take place. But they also lack a state-form, which for Hegel is the subject of history: ‘it is the State which first presents subject-matter that is not only *adapted* to the prose of History, but involves the production of history

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<sup>84</sup> Kraniauskas, ‘2666’, p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p.61.



in the very progress of its own being’—hence Deleuze and Guattari’s belief that the ‘state’ is ‘the model for the book’.<sup>87</sup> Don DeLillo’s *Libra* refers to this conjunction of the state, the archive, and historiography, as the ‘career of paper’; a career, however, that for the novel’s archivist Nicholas Branch, is no longer adapted to prose and instead ‘is lost to syntax and other arrangements [...] it resembles a kind of mind-splatter, a poetry of lives muddied and dripping in language’ (L 15; 181). A retired CIA intelligence officer, Branch has been tasked with ‘writing the secret history of the assassination of President Kennedy’, a commission that after fifteen years of labour has become resolutely ‘stuck’ (L 15; 181). *Libra* is thus dedicated to ‘the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century’; a derailment of US political history that is reflected on as a crisis of historical narration, a manifest destiny gone horribly awry (L 181). By virtue of its dislocations, *Libra* is a state-book that reaches out and tries to comprehend its ‘constitutive outsides’—which will be the focus of discussion.

In an 1988 interview with *Rolling Stone*, DeLillo speculates that ‘what’s missing over these past twenty-five years is a sense of a manageable reality’, a ‘feeling’ that ‘can be traced to that one moment in Dallas’.<sup>88</sup> Kennedy’s assassination, as Lukács might put it, is the ‘concrete historical crisis of national history’ that grips *Libra*; however, unlike the classic form of the historical novel, this is a crisis that introduces ‘randomness and ambiguity and chaos’ into the popular experience of US history—eccentricities that are anathema to Lukács’s progressive historicism.<sup>89</sup> The ‘necessary pre-history of the present’ is instead portrayed as an ‘aberration in the heartland of the real’ (L 15). Branch believes that ‘one moment in Dallas’ and the circumstances which propelled Lee Oswald to the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, ‘will haunt him to the end’; consigned, as he is, to ‘the room of growing old, the room of history and dreams’ (L 445). In this sense, *Libra* too employs a ‘kind of self-

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<sup>87</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 61 (italics in original); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 27.

<sup>88</sup> DeCurtis, ‘An Outsider in this Society’, p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 70; DeCurtis, ‘An Outsider in this Society’, p. 48.

consciously *pedagogic* mode of historiographic narration' that, as Cunningham notes, foregrounds the struggle of cultural forms to adequately represent history—in *Libra* 'it is impossible to stop assembling data. The stuff keeps coming' (L 59).<sup>90</sup> Yet *Libra's* crisis of representation stems less from the social logics of modernity than it does Kennedy's death itself: a punctual interruption of the historical continuum revered by Branch as a 'holy' mystery (L 15). Without the presence of a 'third', 'collective dimension', history Jameson insists, 'is again reduced to mere conspiracy, the form it takes in novels which have aimed for historical content without historical consciousness and which remain therefore merely political in some more specialised sense'.<sup>91</sup> Undoubtedly a novel populated by conspirators, *Libra* also resonates with this idea of a 'third': a collective dimension that the chapter will suggest helps dislocate the scholarly focus on national tragedy, and reconceptualise the novel around the 'actuality' of the Cuban revolution—an event that cuts across the Cold War binaries of the USA and the USSR and is *Libra's* missing 'third' world.

*Libra* is a historical novel of 'contradictions and discrepancies' (L 300). At the molar level, the narrative is divided into two parts: the first, fronted with an epigraph from the historical Lee Oswald, tracks Oswald's flight out of the Bronx and eventual defection to the Soviet Union, before concluding with his return to the United States. Part Two, fronted with an epigraph taken from the 'other' patsy of Dallas, Jack Ruby, narrates the Marxist Oswald's progressive entanglement within an anti-Castro plot to assassinate JFK—a plot that metastases from theatrical simulacrum in Part One. These frames of desertion and homecoming are further divided into chapters that alternate between Lee Oswald's geographically inflected and wayward bildungsroman and those dedicated to the plot to stage an 'electrifying' miss on President Kennedy, a plot that turns 'towards death' and whose date marked entries become an

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<sup>90</sup> Cunningham, 'The Historical Novel of Contemporary Capitalism', par. 11. (italics in original).

<sup>91</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 267.

assassination countdown (L 27; 221). This off-kilter narrative structure, in turn, creates a looping effect of Oswald catching up with himself in history—his becoming-Lee Harvey Oswald—an effect exacerbated by the increasing cross-over of characters as Oswald’s desire to ‘merge’ with history is introjected into the conspiracy (L 101). It is important to add, that neither Oswald nor the three CIA agents who first conceive the strike on Kennedy, remain at the centre of narration: DeLillo’s compositional style is an assemblage of irrational cuts, reverse shots, and distributed free indirect discourse which constantly displaces and decentres characters and perspectives. In *Libra*’s epic re-telling, the story of the plot to kill Kennedy necessarily includes the families, friends, and acquaintances of the plotters; the strippers, sex workers and black radicals who transect their lives: the ‘mostly anonymous dead’, as Branch thinks of the people’s incorporation into the folds of 11/22 (L 580). What Glen Thomas calls DeLillo’s ‘threefold narrative structure’ of biography, conspiracy, and the archive can nonetheless be supplemented by a fourth narrative form: that of testimony, of Marguerite Oswald’s extraordinary first-person recitation of a life and her need for time to prove her son’s innocence, a desire for redemption that opens onto the reader’s imperfect future-present.<sup>92</sup>

### *The Room of Theories*

‘The history of nations’, Étienne Balibar summarises, ‘is always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject’.<sup>93</sup> For many of *Libra*’s readers, the history of the United States presented by DeLillo is one of discontinuity and rupture, of a new regime of historicity in which the will of the people is no longer incarnated in the nation-state. A regime, in other words, that no longer ‘expects the future to

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<sup>92</sup> Glen Thomas, ‘History, Biography, and Narrative in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 43.1 (Spring 1997), 107-124 (p. 107).

<sup>93</sup> Étienne Balibar, ‘The Nation Form: History and Ideology’, in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, trans. by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 86-106 (p. 86).

make as much sense as the past' (L 23).<sup>94</sup> David Cowart describes the assassination of Kennedy 'as the great turning point of America's twentieth century, the moment when the national myth and sense of purpose contracted a strange disease'—a disease whose 'etiology' is forensically probed in *Libra*.<sup>95</sup> Peter Knight similarly argues that Kennedy's assassination is the 'primal scene' of US postmodernism, a 'traumatic event' in which American history is 'reshaped' by conspiracy and paranoia, as well as the 'inaugural event in the society of the spectacle'—the moment when the full extent of the social power of the image is revealed for the first time.<sup>96</sup> More generally, *Libra's* reception in the late eighties and nineties is overdetermined by the translation and 'transculturation' of French poststructuralism into the Anglophone academy: *Libra* is a novel where the grand narratives of history as a humanly answerable process collapse—Lyotard—where the referent is erased by simulacrum and spectacle—Baudrillard—where subjectivity is displaced and dispersed across networks and discourse—Foucault—and where the historical 'Real' is traumatic—Lacan. *Libra* is positioned as a novel that exemplifies postmodernism—both as a historical period and as a cultural logic.

Nicholas Branch, the novel's 'general intellect', is central to these debates; an unknown scholar marooned in 'the room of documents, the room of theories and dreams' (L 14). Branch's self-reflexive struggle to write the definitive history of the Kennedy assassination stages the aporia between history as event—the realm of transcendental signified—and history as narrative—the practice of selecting and arranging events into a meaningful, coherent, and linear process. History in *Libra* becomes semiotic flux: to Branch's despair, 'the data keeps coming [...] new lives enter the record all the time. The past is changing as he writes' (L 301).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> 'I look at these old buildings in bustling town squares and I find them full of a hopefulness I think I cherish. Look at the thing. It's so imposing. Imagine a man at the turn of the century coming to a small Southwestern town and seeing a building like this. What stability and Civic pride. It's optimistic architecture', *Libra*, p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> David Cowart, *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From the Kennedy Assassination to The X-Files* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 115-116.

<sup>97</sup> As Jameson alternatively puts it: 'Nowadays, it is not so much an ideological belief in the past as multiple narratives— in all its versions as so many different ways "the story is told"— as it is the sheer accumulation of all those versions in what has complacently come to be called the Archive ("after Foucault"). It is sheer

Building on the work of Hayden White, for whom ‘there is no history without metahistory’, and expanding on Linda Hutcheon’s notion of ‘historiographic metafiction’, Thomas Carmichael argues that DeLillo exploits ‘the resources of intertextuality’ in order to destabilise and decentralise the state, and to represent history as a product ‘of endless trace and *différance*’.<sup>98</sup> Starting with a similar emphasis on historiographic metafiction, Leonard Wilcox notes that *Libra* grapples ‘with that which resists symbolisation, totalisation, and symbolic integration’; a moment of national trauma which demonstrates that ‘the historical enterprise is impossible, that it must always fail, that any attempt to close off the historical signified will miss its mark’ and only produce ‘further “mystery”’.<sup>99</sup> For Timothy Melley, Branch’s counter-history challenges the authority of the official state investigation of Kennedy’s Assassination—the Warren Report, ‘the Joycean Book of America’ according to Branch—and in doing so, dramatises a ‘crisis of knowledge’ that Melley links to a ‘crisis of historical agency’ (L 182).<sup>100</sup> Heinz Ickstadt likewise suggests that *Libra*’s politics of form can be located in its ‘ex-centric’ disruption of the dominant state narrative—the lone gunman theory—and its ‘subversive coalition with the submerged and suppressed’ whose stories ‘are not told in the dominant histories’—but whose racism and ethno-nationalist fanaticism pass unremarked by Ickstadt.<sup>101</sup>

If *Libra*’s self-conscious historiography breaks with naïve mimesis—which uncritically

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multiplicity itself which guarantees that none of these narratives can or should be taken at face value—a serious blow to the serious historian’, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 288. For readings of *Libra* as an archival novel see Marco Codebò, *Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010); Theo Finnigan, “‘There’s Something Else That’s Generating This Event’”: The Violence of the Archive in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Critique*, 55 (2014), 187-205; Shannon Herbert, ‘Playing the Historical Record: DeLillo’s *Libra* and the Kennedy Archive’, *Twentieth-Century Literature* 56.3 (Fall 2010), 287-317.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Carmichael, ‘Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Textuality in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*, *The Names*, and *Mao II*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 34.2 (Summer 1993), 204-218 (p. 204). Christopher Mott pushes this towards archaeology, ‘*Libra* and the Subject of History’, *Critique*, 35.3 (Spring 1994), 131-145. History has a ‘grammaticality’ for Joseph Kronik, ‘*Libra* and the Assassination of JFK: A Textbook Operation’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 50.1 (Spring 1994), 109-132.

<sup>99</sup> Leonard Wilcox, ‘Don DeLillo’s *Libra*: History as Text, History as Trauma’, *Rethinking History*, 9. 2/3 (2005), 337-353 (p. 345; 340).

<sup>100</sup> Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>101</sup> Heinz Ickstadt, ‘Loose Ends and Patterns of Coincidence in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, in *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*, ed. by Bernd Engler and Kurt Müller (Vienna: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994), pp. 299-312 (p. 300).

reproduces the ruling distribution of power—DeLillo nonetheless retains some impulses that belong to the classic historical novel; namely, the representation of the past as the necessary prehistory of the present. *Libra*, Jeremy Green posits, is ‘a speculative study of the origins of our own historical and cultural moment’, whose ‘emerging lineaments’ are shaped by technologies of ‘surveillance and spectacle’.<sup>102</sup> Spectacle is key to Frank Lentricchia, who argues that the mediation of social relations through the image dramatically reconfigures the dimension of collectivity in *Libra*. Lentricchia provocatively claims that ‘the genius of television emerges as nothing other than the desire for the universal third-person [...] the person we dream about from our armchairs in front of the television, originally dreamt by the first immigrants [to America], the pilgrims’.<sup>103</sup> Advertising economically exploits this ‘magical third-person’—the future self ‘we all want to be’—which is now the very ‘motor principle’ of consumer society.<sup>104</sup> Jameson’s ‘third’ is present in *Libra* but transformed through the ‘perpetual Atlantic crossing’ of televisual spectacle into a consumer collective whose desires are corralled by the commodity-form.<sup>105</sup> Something of this eclipse of the politics of labour is traceable in Oswald’s arc through Marxism—at one point he works in a Soviet factory assembling radios and televisions—to the magical third-person of consumerism: ‘he could see himself shot as the camera caught it [...] He watched in a drawing room, someone’s TV den’ (L 439). Oswald, Lentricchia concludes, does not merge with history in the form of class warfare but enters ‘the aura’ of the image.<sup>106</sup>

The total reification of society has important consequences for the ideologies of literary form. Lentricchia frames this as the moment where the social environments depicted by

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<sup>102</sup> Jeremy Green, ‘*Libra*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 94-107 (p. 94; 97).

<sup>103</sup> Frank Lentricchia, ‘*Libra* as Postmodern Critique’, in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 193-215 (p. 193).

<sup>104</sup> Lentricchia, ‘*Libra* as Postmodern Critique’, p. 208; 194.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193. An argument complicated by the ‘Black Atlantic’ crossings that Lentricchia fails to mention.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

American naturalism are recoded ‘by the charismatic environment of the image’—characters in *Libra* ‘glow’ (L 62).<sup>107</sup> *Libra* remains ‘a fiction of social destiny, but one which largely casts aside the usual arguments of determinism based on class, social setting, and race’, soliciting instead an ‘eerie’ faith in astrology: ‘the language of the night sky, of starry aspect and position, the truth at the edge of human affairs’ (L 175).<sup>108</sup> David Ferrie, *Libra*’s occult high priest explicitly upends Oswald’s episodic biography—the line of chance—and the CIA plot—the line of determination—with a ‘third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest levels of the self. It’s a line that cuts across causality, cuts across time. It has no history that we can recognise or understand. But it forces a connection. It puts a man on the path to his destiny’ (L 339). As Paul Civello astutely points out, *Libra* leans on and reworks naturalism’s sense of the ‘self caught in a universe of force’; a reworking, however, that ‘undoes’ the scientific models of causality favoured by writers like Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser—DeLillo’s naturalist predecessors.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the ‘self-referring loop’ created by the mass media world of *Libra* effaces the distance between the scientist-subject and the environment-object world under analysis, a collapse of the subject-object dualism that equally undermines the scientific foundations of linear causality crucial to naturalism.<sup>110</sup>

Materialist critics have challenged this occultism and occultation of social relations, in one of two ways. The first draws attention to *Libra*’s voice from below, to Marguerite Oswald’s testimony, and her insistence on the experience of hardship and wage-labour as explanatory categories: ‘I know what sickness looks like. I know low pay’ (L 450). For Magali Cornier Michael, Marguerite’s ‘incessant bid to connect her son’s problems to his economically

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 197. ‘Eerie’ is used repeatedly in *Libra* to describe the relationships between history and everyday life; for example, one conspirator finds: ‘a respite from the other life, the eeriness of living with people who do not keep secrets as a profession or duty, or a business fixed to one’s existence’, p. 16.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Civello, *American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth Century Transformations* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> Civello, *American Literary Naturalism*, p. 161.

deprived childhood’—‘I have struggled to raise my boys on mingy sums of money’—grounds the novel in material conditions once more, and restores a social logic of cause and effect (L 450).<sup>111</sup> Although governed by a mechanical materialism, Andrew Radford nonetheless maintains that Marguerite’s testimony re-introduces a realist code into the narrative, making it possible to rebuild agency and selfhood in a novel otherwise abandoned to obscurantism.<sup>112</sup> Skip Willman, in contrast, argues that *Libra* advances an immanent critique of chance, conspiracy, and astrology as philosophies of history; a position indebted to Slavoj Žižek and Adorno in equal measure. Both conspiracy and contingency constitute ideological distortions and disavowals of a more fundamental, yet unrepresentable negativity: the presence of class struggle. Conspiracy erases class struggle through externalisation, whereby the ‘fantasy figure of a hidden agent, the “Other of the Other”, secretly pulling the strings’, is imagined to have hijacked an equitable political and economic system.<sup>113</sup> Contingency, on the other hand, disconnects the individual’s action from structural determination; hence the Warren Report’s keenness to assign Oswald’s outsider status to individual pathology rather systemic alienation. Turning to Adorno, Willman argues that DeLillo’s mobilisation of astrology does not so much arbitrate between the ‘secret manipulation of history’ and randomness but is the determinate negation of untruth (L 377). The metaphor of astrology simultaneously preserves a conspiratorial sense of agency, but without the secret cabal, whilst keeping contingency’s sense of system but without re-investing it with reason.<sup>114</sup> *Libra* is thus composed of formal strategies

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<sup>111</sup> Magali Cornier Michael, ‘The Political Paradox within Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Critique*, 35.3 (Spring 1994), 146-156 (p. 146).

<sup>112</sup> Andrew Radford, ‘Confronting the Chaos Theory of History in DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *The Midwest Quarterly*, 47.3 (Spring 2006), 224-243. A possible mediation between the critique of naturalism and its materialist defenders might be found in Joseph Tabbi’s notion of a ‘postmodern’ or ‘conceptual’ naturalism in which technology has become organic, *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 174. An example of *Libra*’s constructivist documentary style would be Beryl Parmenter who sees ‘the world in news clippings and picture captions, the world becoming bizarre, the world it is best to see in one-column strips that you send to friends’, p. 259.

<sup>113</sup> Skip Willman, ‘Traversing the Fantasies of the JFK Assassination: Conspiracy and Contingency in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 39.3 (Autumn 1998), 405-433 (p. 410).

<sup>114</sup> Skip Willman, ‘Art After Dealey Plaza: DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (Fall 1999), 621-640 (p. 635). Willan has more recently returned to the Warren Commission in ‘Reframing “Official Memory”’: Don



of dissimulation that expose the irreducible kernel of bourgeois society: its dependence on mechanisms of exploitation and exclusion.

### *Cuban Breach*

Surveying twentieth-century American foreign policy, Perry Anderson identifies an ‘ontological difference’ between the prospective destinies of the USA and the USSR: ‘whereas the Soviet Union, representing (it claimed) the penultimate stage of history, was locked in a dialectical struggle for the final liberation of humankind, the United States *is* that very liberation’. The other of the United States, such that it exists, can only be a ‘perversion’, a state-form that is ‘intrinsically unjust and illegitimate, there only to be overcome and eradicated’.<sup>115</sup> Using a different conceptual register, Ernesto Laclau contends that such outsides are rather more indissoluble than Anderson allows: ‘every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its conditions of possibility at the same time’.<sup>116</sup> The conspirators in *Libra* rage against what Laclau calls a ‘constitutive outside’, an outside experienced in the text as ‘damaging’ to the American ‘psyche’ (L 258).<sup>117</sup> Lawrence Parmenter, a CIA veteran of the Bay of Pigs invasion, claims that ‘it’s the job of an intelligence service to resolve a nation’s obsessions. Cuba is a fixed idea. It is prickly in a way Russia is not. More unresolved. More damaging to the psyche. And this is our job, to remove the psychic threat, to learn so much about Castro, decipher his intentions, undermine his institutions to such a degree that he loses the power to shape the way we think, to shape the way we sleep at night’ (L 258). A breach in the United States’ strategy of containment, the reaction against the Cuban

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DeLillo’s *Libra* and the House Select Committee on Assassination’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 71.3 (Autumn 2015), 139-168.

<sup>115</sup> Perry Anderson, ‘Imperium’, *New Left Review*, II/83 (September/October 2013), 6-111 (p. 26). (italics in original).

<sup>116</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, trans. Jon Barnes et al (London and New York: Verso, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>117</sup> Laclau, *New Reflections*, p. 17.

revolution crystallises in *Libra* as a capital-surveillance alliance—Parmenter believes there to be ‘a natural kinship between business and intelligence work—that turns against and dislocates the state and progressive historicism alike (126).<sup>118</sup>

The crisis of national history represented in *Libra* is neither contained within the framework of the nation-state nor pushed completely beyond its horizon. A ‘moonlit fixation in the emerald sea’, Cuba forms a ‘constitutive outside’ around which the entire Kennedy administration—and its discontents—‘revolve’ (L 22; 54). As Michael J. Shapiro observes, DeLillo’s ‘polyvocal poetics of Cuba’ demonstrate the extent to which Castro’s momentous seizure of state-power ‘has penetrated into the complex economies of desire that structure [...] American political culture’.<sup>119</sup> When Cuba ‘emerges at the level of discourse’ it is dislocated and undergoes what Shapiro calls a series of ‘tropic displacements’.<sup>120</sup> Dislocation in Laclau is linked to ‘permanent revolution and uneven and combined developed’, theories deployed by Trotsky in an effort to conceptualise the possibilities of democratic revolutions driven from below in peripheral regions of the world-system.<sup>121</sup> To Parmenter’s anguish Cuba not only bypasses the civilizing institutions that could have ‘contained’ the ‘flaws and excesses of the Batista regime [...] without a revolution’, but its plebeian forces ‘march’ Cuba ‘into the communist camp’ (L 259).<sup>122</sup> If uninterrupted social revolutions dislocate the modernising telos of capital—‘it’s a question of something working beautifully, of private investment being given [a] chance’—they also, for Laclau, dis-articulate the ‘structural laws’ of orthodox Marxist

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<sup>118</sup> For an alternative take on dislocation, see Michael James Rizza, ‘The Dislocation of Agency in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*’, *Critique*, 49.2 (Winter 2008), 171-184.

<sup>119</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 80.

<sup>120</sup> Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity*, p. 80.

<sup>121</sup> For an overview of permanent revolution as the political moment within uneven and combined development see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Uneven and Combined Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 1981). Laclau suggests that Trotsky nonetheless remains within the logics of a stageism that the theory tries to escape, *New Reflections*, p. 49.

<sup>122</sup> For Neil Davidson, Cuba is an example of a ‘deflected permanent revolution’ which implements state capitalism, rather than socialism, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), p. 459-465.

historicism (L 259). In *Libra*, Lukács's dialectic of uneven development is too dislocated, and its progressive subordination of peripheral social formations to centralising regions of accumulation is revealed to presuppose the political organisation of wage-labourers into a workers' movement.

The actuality of the Cuban revolution, in other words, manifests itself formally in *Libra*'s de-linking of the social logics embodied by world-historical figures from the regimes of exploitation preserved and stabilised by its maintaining individuals. In the case of Cuba, Neil Davidson would suggest that the 'deflection' of revolutionary processes is tied to the replacement of a people's army—where history becomes the property of the masses—with a guerrilla struggle from which the popular dimension is excluded—a decomposition felt all the more keenly in DeLillo's transformation of Castro partisans into presidential hitmen. World-historical individuals themselves become 'constitutive outsides' in *Libra*: holders of magical properties they become objects of abjection, betrayal, and resentment for the novel's enforcers of history. As Guy Banister, a former F.B.I agent, riffs:

We're supposed to believe he's [Kennedy] the hero of the age. Did you ever see a man in such a hurry to be great? He thinks he can make us a different kind of society. He's trying to engineer a shift. We're not smart enough for him. We're not mature, energetic, Harvard, world traveller, rich, handsome, lucky, witty. Perfect white teeth. It fucking grates on me just to look at him (L 68).

The centralisation of executive power so that 'all the danger is in the White House, from nuclear weapons on down' repulses *Libra*'s distributed mediocre heroes who, drawn from the subaltern strata of the police order, seek to neutralise the civil rights movement and negate the 'communist cause' which they believe JFK 'is totally devoted to furthering' (L 68). Dislocation in the United States folds maintaining individuals into a populist 'we' that appropriates the concept of permanent revolution but deflects it through a permanent war on the population—inventing a paranoid 'society where it's always wartime' (L 64).

The 'real work of the nation' in *Libra* is carried out by 'vanguard' collectives like Banister's operation in 544 Camp Street New Orleans (L 66). In this sense, DeLillo dislocates

John Marx's opposition between historical assemblages 'that exacerbate heterogeneity' and those that blunt and contain heterogeneity within the bourgeois nation-state.<sup>123</sup> 'A non-class based politics of association' guides characters like Banister's secretary Delphine, who asks 'what could I accomplish in the City Council or some ladies' group? [...] This is a contribution I can make that I couldn't do in the normal ways, through committee work and so forth' (L 66).<sup>124</sup> It is clear, however, that these non-normative modes of subjectivation belong to a racialised collective project which strives to eliminate both 'black' and 'red' subjects from the future-present of the nation: as Delphine agonises, 'why do you think a Negro would want to be a communist? [...] Isn't it enough for them being coloured? Why would they want to a communistic tinge added on?' (L 66). This ethno-nationalist milieu acquires its own form of free indirect subjectivity and internalises a collective voice within the private consciousnesses of its various agents: 'we gave away Cuba, just ninety miles off our coast. We're getting ready to give away Southeast Asia. We'll give away White America next. We'll give it to the Negroes' (L 141). The 'third', then, certifies the presence of 'History' in *Libra*, but this is a counter-revolutionary history of white reaction to 'the civil-rights program of JFK' (L 141).

The clans and packs which provide a romantic outside to the civilization of industrial capital in Lukács's work re-appear in *Libra* as 'war machines' that have broken free from their institutionalisation in the military. War machines, for Deleuze and Guattari exist outside the state, an invention of nomads that are captured by the state, but whose capture, as Alliez and Lazzarato affirm, 'is never once and for all' and 'can always escape the state apparatus as a foreign body (*a military proletariat*).<sup>125</sup> In DeLillo's presentation the plot to kill Kennedy is invented by CIA agents who have gone rogue:

It was Everett who'd made the leap. Everett took the once bold idea of assassinating Castro and turned it over in his mind, finding it unworkable and crude. He struck a counter measure that made better sense on every level. It was original, spare and clean. The man we really want is

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<sup>123</sup> Marx, 'The Historical Novel After Lukács', p. 189.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>125</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 284. (italics in original).

JFK [...] The second leap was Mackey's. (L 219)

Deleuze and Guattari's contention that 'all decoded flows, of whatever kind, are prone to forming a war machine directed against the state' is given particularly sharp resonance here. If the 'fetish of the unified state is 'represented as a myth' through *Libra's* warring factions, Mackey's 'second leap' also undermines the fetish of the unified or integral conspiracy.<sup>126</sup> Everett and Parmenter, who alongside Mackey constitute the initial nucleus of the plot, remain, in Alliez and Lazzarato's terms, 'sedentarized' and are attached to the bourgeois household. The conspiracy opens in an 'American kitchen' with Everett 'lost to the morning noises collecting around him, a stir of the all familiar, the heartbeat mosaic of every happy home, toast spinning up, radio voices with their intimate busy timbre, an optimistic buzz living in the ear (L 16). Mackey, on the other hand, is 'loose in the world', a nomadic 'roving paramilitary' who occupies Everett's plan which has grown 'too twisty and deep' and consummates it, driving a black hole through the American century.

The destiny of the national-collective, in other words, is administered ruinously by 'men who believed history was in their care' (L 127). Society is no longer mediated through Lukács's civic 'dialectic between man-as-individual and man-as-social-being', but through an indiscernibility between the CIA and corporations, whose harmonisation produces 'a better-working version of the larger world' (L 127).<sup>127</sup> Or, as Branch reflects, Lee Oswald 'seems a technical diagram, part of some exercise in the secret manipulation of history'; a dissociation from democratically accountable institutions which belongs to DeLillo's wider questioning of the possibility of collective agency. Yet, if there is a redemptive moment in *Libra's* de-collectivisation of history, it might be found in the immaterial labour required to 'script a person or persons out of ordinary pocket litter' (L 28). That is to say, if there is a utopian impulse it perhaps resides in the non-alienated collective work of constructing the plot on JFK

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<sup>126</sup> Kraniauskas, 'Noir into History', p. 129.

<sup>127</sup> Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, p. 75.

itself: Everett ‘would script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper, the contents of a wallet. Parmenter would contrive to get document blanks from the Records Branch. Mackey would find a model for the character Everett was in the process of creating’ (L 50). The power of labour power:

Win Everett was in his basement at home, hunched over the worktable. His tools and materials were set before him, mainly household things, small and cheap— cutting instruments, acetate overlays, glues and pastes, a soft eraser, a travel iron. He felt marvellously alert, sure of himself, putting together a man with scissors and tape [...] He worked on a Diners Club card, removing the ink on the raised letters with a Q-tip doused in polyester resin. A radio on a shelf played soothing music. He pressed the card against the warm iron, heating it slowly to flatten the letters. Then he used a razor blade to level the remaining bumps and juts. He would eventually reheat the card and stamp a new name and number on its face with an addressograph [...] He unscrewed the top of the Elmer’s Glue-All. He used his X-Acto knife to cut a new signature strip from a sheet of opaque paper. He checked the length and width of the strip against the bare space on the back of the credit card. Then he dribbled an even stream of glue over the paper and pressed it lightly on the card. He listened to the radio while the glue dried. (L 145-147)

This is the novel’s workshop, the atelier where history is manufactured and manipulated. DeLillo’s syntax lingers here, savouring the objects, materials, and tools that will be used to fabricate an assemblage, to put ‘together a man’. The clauses themselves are ‘hunched’, poised and concentrating intensely; a world of intricate detail and delicate movement that contrasts with Everett’s career in the CIA, which was one of ‘constant hurry’; an imperfect past tense of labour in which conceptual work is reconciled with physical craft and technique (L 146). Everett wants to dissimulate a history that appears ‘real’; an artificial world in which meaning and sense perception are reconciled through an enterprise of labour.

### *Autonomy*

For Lee Oswald such a project is experienced rather more oppressively and transforms him into a ‘dupe of history’—a patsy (L 418). CIA interference reaches such a pitch that it produces an ‘eerie sense’ that the conspirators control the communication networks and run messages ‘through the night into his skin’ (L 370). Oswald, though, is a producer of ‘eeriest panic’ too: to Everett’s horror, a break-in of Oswald’s apartment yields ‘a glimpse of the fiction he’d been

devising, a fiction living prematurely in the world' (L 179). Everett concedes that 'it was no longer possible to hide from the fact that Lee Oswald existed independently of the plot' (L 178). Autonomy and the primacy of resistance are central to the strands of libertarian Marxism associated with post-autonomist thinkers, whose concepts of 'exodus' and 'nomadism' are given imaginative pre-figuration in DeLillo's re-working of Oswald; a worker-subject always-already in flight, whose 'body fluttered in the fastest stretches [...] on the edge of no-control' (L 3). *Libra's* dual narratives—the spatial bildungsroman that operates under the sign of contingency and the temporal conspiracy marshalled by destiny—can be reconceptualised, if not as a duel, then at least as an antagonism between living labour and the state apparatuses that capture and re-deploy its refusals. *Libra*, in other words, can be rewritten as a novel of 'constituted power', defined by Michael Hardt as 'the fixed order of the constitution and the stability of its social structures', and represented by DeLillo through the men who superintend 'the makings of deep chronos'; and 'constituent power', defined by Negri as 'a force that bursts apart, breaks, interrupts, unhinges any pre-existing equilibrium and any possible continuity' (L 78).<sup>128</sup> Oswald 'unhinges' history from below: he is a 'Chaplinesque figure skating along the edges of vast and dangerous events'—one event in particular, the Kennedy assassination, a ruinous black hole into which he falls (L 194).

'Desertion, exodus, and nomadism' are powerful forms of class struggle in Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, movements whose 'diagonal stance' withdraws from 'imperial sovereignty' and searches for a passageway towards communism.<sup>129</sup> Marguerite Oswald likewise believes that 'the point of our century is the movement of people'; however, the exodus *Libra* traces is the passage from political violence—the failed assassination of the fascist General Walker—

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Hardt, 'Foreword: Three Keys to Understanding Constituent Power', in *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, by Antonio Negri, trans. by Maurizio Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), vii-xiii (pp. vii-viii); Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies*, p. 11. Oswald has 'a turbulence running through him', *Libra*, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 212-213.

to what James Axton in *The Names* calls ‘consumerist violence’: the apolitical slaying of Kennedy (L 49). Branch reflects that:

After Oswald, men in America are no longer required to lead lives of quiet desperation. You apply for a credit card, buy a handgun, travel through cities, suburbs and shopping malls, anonymous, anonymous, looking for a chance to take a shot at the first puffy empty famous face, just to let people know that there is someone out there who reads the papers. (L 181)

A violent act emptied of political content and self-reflexively inscribed in media discourse undergirds Lentricchia’s position that the ideological coding, capturing, and commercialisation of visual attention by advertising has replaced older collective thirds with the privatised ‘magical third-person’ of consumer subjectivity. This ‘magical third-person’ can be incarcerated too: in his final jail cell, Oswald realises that ‘his life had a single clear subject now, called Lee Harvey Oswald’ (L 435). For Lentricchia, David Ferrie’s exposition on the ‘sensible’, ‘respected’, and ‘well balanced’ ‘positive Libran who has achieved self-mastery’ and ‘the negative Libran who is, let’s say, somewhat unsteady and impulsive’ offers an ontology of what it means to be an ‘American’ who, like the negative Libran, is ‘poised to make the dangerous leap’ (L 315).<sup>130</sup> A social ontology in which the politics of labour has lost all traction.

Hardt and Negri, like Lentricchia, consider Americans to be ‘a new people, *a people in exodus*’, but nonetheless insist that ‘labour is the power to act’; an acting in common whose ‘intelligence, passion, and affect’ exceeds ‘the existing order and the rules of its reproduction’—and configures a ‘constituent power’.<sup>131</sup> Labour searches for an outside in *Empire*, a passage through exploitation and domination that is coded into and ‘misplaced’ in *Libra*’s biographical form (L 33).<sup>132</sup> Oswald not only collects intelligence on both communist

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<sup>130</sup> Lentricchia, ‘*Libra*’ p. 210.

<sup>131</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 170; pp. 357-358. (italics in original).

<sup>132</sup> Robert Sproul, a childhood friend of Oswald, describes him as a ‘misplaced martyr’ in regards to breaking the colour line in New Orleans: ‘whether out of ignorance or principle, Lee refused to say [...] let you think he was just a fool, or exactly the reverse, as long as he knew the truth and you didn’t’—a truth that the later Oswald takes to the grave, *Libra*, p. 33. Ideas are ‘misplaced’ in Roberto Schwarz’s *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, trans. by John Gledson (London and New York: Verso, 1992).



and capitalist camps, but becomes a ‘world-historical’ individual: ‘He and Kennedy were partners. The figure of the gunman in the window was inextricable from the victim and his history’ (L 435). The dualism between liberty and command is framed by Peter Boxall as an antagonism between ‘history and becoming’; a ‘contradiction between the Oswald in the process of becoming and the Oswald that is invented by the authorial forces which surround him’: Oswald is a ‘quirk of history’ that fits ‘perfectly’ into a preformed ‘plan’ (L 330).<sup>133</sup> If state history for Deleuze is, as Jay Lampert glosses, an ‘ordered succession of regimes’, revolutionary history is instead a ‘form of becoming’; a disordered nomadic flight that materialises in *Libra* through Oswald’s ‘search for a geographical and intellectual space beyond the orbit of US control’.<sup>134</sup> A character who has a ‘mean streak of independence’, Oswald’s flight might be considered not just a refusal of US state power but of the disciplinary regime altogether (L 335). Oswald, in other words, resists absorption into fixed capital; a stance that is evident during his military deployment in Japan—the US Marine Corps manual is about ‘how to be a tool of the system. A workable part’—but also in his desire to flee employment in a radio assembly factory in Minsk—‘the plant is dull and regimented [...] everything is the same’ (L 106; 198).

‘Defection’, Paolo Virno argues, ‘modifies the conditions within which the struggle takes place, rather than presupposing those conditions to be an unalterable horizon; it modifies the context within which a problem has arisen.’<sup>135</sup> Oswald’s multiple defections in *Libra* are driven by the desire to become a revolutionary intellectual; a project that sets him in transversal opposition to the cold war disciplinary regimes that thwart its realisation; but is also a project

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<sup>133</sup> Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, pp. 131-132; p. 137.

<sup>134</sup> Jay Lampert, ‘Theory of Delay in Balibar, Freud and Deleuze: *Décalage, Nachträglichkeit, Retard*’, in *Deleuze and History*, ed. by Jeffrey A. Bell and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 72-91 (p. 72); Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 141.

<sup>135</sup> Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 70.

that constantly risks being instrumentalised as ‘intelligence’ (L 247).<sup>136</sup> What Virno refers to as the ‘unrestrained invention’ of defection ‘which alters the rules of the game and throws the adversary completely off balance’ returns in *Libra* as the principle of indeterminacy, of Oswald’s ‘dizzying history’ where ‘left is right and right is left’ (L 303).<sup>137</sup> For Hardt and Negri ‘the multitude, in its will to be-against and its desire for liberation, must push through Empire to come out the other side’.<sup>138</sup> ‘The name we give this point’, Oswald reflects, is ‘history’; which also ‘means to merge [...] to climb out of your own skin’, a convergence typically recoded in the historical novel through the presence of collectives (L 101). And Oswald assembles workers’ militias: first with Konno, a Japanese communist, and second with Bobby Dupard, a black militant who helps launch the raid on General Walker. Politics for Konno and Dupard is without mediation: Konno ‘believes in riots’, whilst Dupard supports immediate expropriation—‘I’m not looking to wear the white man out with my ability to suffer’—attitudes which shape Oswald’s eccentric understanding of the political (L 87; 272).

One of the most striking aspects about these dissident assemblages is that they fail to substantiate their constituent projects and instead disperse abruptly. Oswald is less a maintaining individual who stabilises future-presents than a vector of disruption, a de-maintaining hero who organises ghostly pre-histories of presents that never arrive.<sup>139</sup> Barred from entering Cuba, Oswald ‘feels he is living in the centre of an emptiness. He wants to sense a structure that includes him, a definition clear enough to specify where he belongs. But the system floats right through him, through everything, even the revolution (L 357). This dissociation from social structure and revolutionary event is captured by David Ferrie who convinces Oswald that he’s ‘had it backwards all this time. You wanted to enter history. Wrong

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<sup>136</sup> ‘A fact is innocent until someone wants it. Then it becomes intelligence’, *Libra*, p. 247.

<sup>137</sup> Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, p. 70.

<sup>138</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 361.

<sup>139</sup> Dupard, for example, is a fabulated supplement to the historical Oswald’s attempted assassination of General Walker.

approach Leon. What you really want is out. Get out. Jump out (L 384). Jerked ‘out of the spin of history’, Oswald’s Texan strike does in fact constitute a ‘democratic totality’, but one that de-maintains historicism and spirals off into irrational historicities (L 384).<sup>140</sup> The ‘multitude’ appears in *Libra*, then, but as ‘a storm force’ who first welcome Kennedy to Dallas and second as a despondent ‘people’ ‘lonely for news’ (L 393; 414). The desolate burial scenes which concludes with Oswald’s entombment in ‘a rolling field of the dead’ is perhaps DeLillo’s response to autonomism, desertion, and exodus (L 454).

If Cuba is *Libra*’s missing ‘third’ world of revolutionary collectivity, Oswald’s deflected and deformed lines of flight nonetheless discover the emergence of what Manuel Castells calls a ‘fourth world’. The ‘fourth world’ in Castells work names the ‘multiple black holes of social exclusion’ that appear across the planet, regions whose populations are immobilised and abandoned by development—capitalist and socialist alike.<sup>141</sup> These are the milieus, the ‘floating’ worlds where Oswald encounters and bonds with characters like Konno and Dupard, whose aborted constituent projects accentuate the impression of de-collectivisation and de-linking. Oswald, who befriends Dupard in military jail, is re-united with him by chance, in a Dallas laundromat:

They didn’t talk about Japan. They talked about West Dallas, where Bobby lived with his sister and her three small kids in a project of hundreds of buildings stretched in barracks formation between the Trinity River and Singleton Boulevard. They called it a housing park. Fenced in, isolated from the city, with ripped-out plumbing set on the mud lawns. Bobby worked at the speed wash from seven to midnight six days a week. Twice a week he took a course in mechanical drawing at Crozier Technical High School downtown. Sometimes he worked a noon-to-four shift as a mixer in a bakery, a fill-in for the sick and the missing. He went home in clothes dusted weight. (L 270)

The ‘barracks’ like housing project represents another type of encampment, that of the reserve army of labour whose experience of exploitation is increasingly linked to their structural exclusion from the flows of accumulation: a collective that is ‘fenced in’—the containment of

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<sup>140</sup> Negri, *Insurgencies*, p. 11.

<sup>141</sup> Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium*, Volume III: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 164.

black workers. Dupard's account of the production and reproduction of labour-power sharply contrasts with Oswald's reading material—HG Wells's *The Outline of History*—and imagines instead a popular exodus in which labour is sent 'spinning' by police water cannons which are 'like a wrath from out of hell' (L 271). A constituency whose political subjectivation is presented by DeLillo as a not-yet future.

### *The Anonymous Dead*

*Libra* is a rhizomatic text composed of dreams and night terrors, a novel where historical agency is overwhelmed by the arbitrary and the miraculous. Unlike other cultural texts which take Kennedy's assassination as an occasion to test hypotheses regarding democracy and collective will, DeLillo's is a novel of distributed difference; of chance which disperses the narration beyond the conspirators and into the lives of the people who produce their domestic conditions: to Win Everett's depressed wife, Mary Frances, for whom 'it was an effort just to exist', or their daughter, Suzanne, and her secret 'Indian' fetish dolls, the 'Little Figures' that talk to her and give her 'protection' (L 359; 366). The experience of history as nightmare extends beyond the conspiracy's reproductive workers and into the novel's representatives of living labour, who are similarly haunted by annihilation. Dupard tells Oswald that he 'landed' in the army 'like a dream [...] I figure I'm already dead. It's just a question they shovel the dirt in my face' (L 98). Perhaps the most terrifying vision of all, however, is only incidentally related to the plot—via the wage relation—and belongs to Brenda Jean Sensibaugh, a stripper professionally known as Baby LeGrand, who works at Jack Ruby's 'Carousel' Club:

It's the whole Carousel in a five-second glimpse, plus the tourists from Topeka. They are saying go go go. They are crying out for a garment. They want the piece of silk that passed between her legs. They are here to bathe in the flesh of the sleepwalking girl, the girl who wakes up naked in a throbbing crowd. This is how it always seems to Baby L. She is having a private fit in the middle of the night, like she is demonised, and wakes up naked in a different dream, where strange men are clutching at her body. (L 262)

Brenda receives a wire transfer from Jack Ruby the morning of Oswald's murder, a connection

to Dallas that ends with her suicide in an Oklahoma jail cell in June 1965. Dupard, in another of the novel's coincidences, is murdered two days later, during a holdup of the hardware store where he is an assistant manager and where Ruby bought the gun used to kill Oswald. Slaughtered on account of their proximity to the conspiracy, Brenda and Dupard are too included in Branch's book of the dead: an anonymous workers' collective whose eliminated historical futures *Libra* commemorates and mourns.

## II. 'It's the Old Bolshevik Dream being Dreamed Again': The Historical Novel after Communism

'Capitalist production', Marx writes, 'only develops the techniques and the degree of social combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker'.<sup>142</sup> Although the context for these remarks is the introduction of large-scale industry into the sphere of agriculture, Marx's discovery of the self-undermining tendencies of accumulation resonates with the ruined historical futures depicted in DeLillo's staggering novel *Underworld*. Whilst workers, for Marx, are physically wasted through the real subsumption of machinery, the industrialisation of agriculture disturbs the 'metabolic interaction between man and earth' depleting soil fertility.<sup>143</sup> In *Molecular Red*, McKenzie Wark uses this exhaustion of soil as an example of a 'metabolic rift' in which the 'waste products' from 'private metabolisms' fail to 'return so that the cycle can renew itself'—and instead cause further rifts to appear elsewhere in the socio-ecological metabolism.<sup>144</sup> *Underworld* too ends with a reflection on 'the intractability of waste' at the terminus of a historical cycle of accumulation.<sup>145</sup> Waste is regarded as 'the secret history, the underhistory'

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<sup>142</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 638.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 637.

<sup>144</sup> McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), p. xiv.

<sup>145</sup> DeLillo, *Underworld*, p. 805. Hence forward all further references will be cited parenthetically as U.

of the Cold War: a category that totalises the techniques and social combinations developed by the USA in its containment of the USSR: namely, nuclear armaments and mass consumerism (U 791). From the present of the early nineties, Nick Shay, the novel's first-person narrator, worries that the 'dark multiplying by-products' of the wars against communism will 'come back to consume us' (U 791). Consummated disaster here refers to a privatised nuclear waste disposal facility in the hinterlands of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and the Bronx, the 'American gulag' (U 807). Provocatively titled 'Das Kapital', the zones of death encountered in *Underworld's* epilogue gesture to the ruination of labour-power and the earth envisaged by Marx across the volumes of *Capital*—and whose historical arc fuels DeLillo's narration.<sup>146</sup>

Marx's speculation on capital's self-undermining exhaustion and expulsion of the 'very resources it requires to endure', informs Sarah Brouillette, Joshua Clover, and Annie McClanahan's account of an economic crisis conceived less as a cyclical 'blowout' and more as a secular 'impasse'; that is, a crisis 'from which there can be no eventual recovery'.<sup>147</sup> Confronted with an 'era of growthlessness and non-development', the 'metaphors of spectacular crisis no longer quite describe' a capitalism that has 'gone spongy' and which requires 'us [...] to think in terms of stall, immobility, stasis'.<sup>148</sup> *Underworld's* epic historical scope and geographical range lends itself to imagining the stagnation of capital as a 'permanent' and not 'punctual' crisis—a crisis tracked in the novel through the sprawling movements of waste and surplus populations.<sup>149</sup> In classical political economy, secular deceleration is conceptualised as 'the "stationary state" of civilization'; a static present that is nonetheless achieved in *Underworld* through the state's permanent warfare against the many:

Through the battered century of world wars and massive violence by other means, there had always been an undervoice that spoke through the canon fire and ack-ack and that sometimes grew strong enough to merge with battle sounds. It was the struggle between the state and secret

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<sup>146</sup> Marx returns to this exhaustion of labour-power and soil in the chapter of 'The Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent' in: *Capital*, Volume Three, pp. 949-950.

<sup>147</sup> Sarah Brouillette, Joshua Clover, and Annie McClanahan, 'Introduction: Late, Autumnal, Immiserating, Terminal', *Theory & Event*, 22.2 (April 2019), 325-336 (p. 325; p. 335).

<sup>148</sup> Brouillette, Clover, McClanahan, 'Late, Autumnal, Immiserating, Terminal', p. 330.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

groups of insurgents, state-born, wild-eyed— the anarchists, terrorists, assassins and revolutionaries who tried to bring about apocalyptic change [...] The passionate task of the state was to hold on, stiffening its grip and preserving its claim to the most destructive power available. With nuclear weapons this power became identified totally with the state. The mushroom cloud was the godhead of Annihilation and Ruin. The state controlled the means of apocalypse.<sup>150</sup> (U 563)

*Underworld's* bio-political economy of waste is articulated here by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who links the global containment of communism to the domestic regulation of sexuality: 'once you yield to random sexual urges, you want to see everything come loose. You mistake your own looseness for some political concept' (U 564). This split between the maintaining task of the state and the insurrectionary agencies of revolution is reworked in DeLillo's compositional practice through a dislocation of 'the monotone of the state'— 'History'—by what Patrick O'Donnell calls a 'patchwork of underhistories'—a loosened multiplicity of voices, characters, and veering destinies which themselves wage war on protagonicity.<sup>151</sup>

'The history of the Cold War', Alliez and Lazzarato observe, 'is an *American history* written from start to finish by the super power that emerged victorious from the two world wars'.<sup>152</sup> It is this always-already American history that feeds into, but also constrains, DeLillo's national-popular epic. Broken into six constituent parts—'Long Tall Sally' (Spring-Summer 1992), 'Elegy for Left Hand Alone' (Mid-1980s-Early 1990s), 'The Cloud of Unknowing' (Spring 1978), 'Cocksucker Blues' (Summer 1974), 'Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry' (Selected Fragments Public and Private in the 1950s-1960s), 'Arrangement in Grey and Black' (Fall 1951-Summer 1952)—*Underworld* is a historical novel of plateaus, milieus, and microworlds in which time runs backwards and history is presented

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<sup>150</sup> Gopal Balakrishnan, 'Speculations on the Stationary State', *New Left Review*, II/59 (September/October 2009), 5-26 (p. 6).

<sup>151</sup> Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary US Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 156. The 'monotone of the state' is broken up by the many in DeLillo's reading of E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, 'The Power of History', *New York Times*, 7 September 1997, Book Review section <<http://movies2.nytimes.com/library/books/090797article3.html>> [accessed 1 July 2019].

<sup>152</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 228. (italics in original).

in retrogression. ‘Minds and bodies’, Albert Bronzini reflects, are ‘way stations for the distribution of time’; a distributive unity that guides the novel’s scattered network of characters, whose ‘standoff between the time continuum and the human entity’ Bronzini yearns to ‘rewind’ (U 234-235). *Underworld*’s reverse chronology is bookended by a prologue, ‘The Triumph of Death’, which re-imagines the folkloric 1951 National League pennant game between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, and an epilogue, the aforementioned ‘Das Kapital’, set in the ‘wild privatised times’ that follow the involution of the Soviet Union—and whose Kazakh nuclear test site is the dialectical other of New York’s Polo Grounds (U 802). Spliced between *Underworld*’s heterogeneous periods are brief sections documenting the missing hours in the lineage of the Bobby Thomson home-run baseball. Named after Manx Martin, the father of the ball’s first owner, these sections are preceded by a typographically blacked out page and their micro-episodes stutter forwards against the nostalgic backwards drag of the white narratives. In doing so, they memorialise the African American history that is constitutively absent from DeLillo’s national-popular epic.<sup>153</sup>

Despite its monumental canvas, *Underworld* is primarily a novel of ‘local yearning’, of collective thirds that ‘are not a migration or revolution’ but ‘bring with them [...] their own small reveries and desperations, the unseen something that haunts the day’ (U 11). DeLillo eschews what Wark calls the ‘molar’—events ‘where big-bodied entities clash, antagonist against protagonist’—and favours instead the ‘molecular’, the ‘minor stories’ whose processes are ‘more subtle and imperceptible’.<sup>154</sup> *Underworld*, as O’Donnell emphasises, is ‘largely about’ the ‘transformation in relations between subjects and objects’; a transformation, though,

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<sup>153</sup> An example of *Underworld*’s overcoding is ‘Long Tall Sally’ herself: ‘But the point I’m making is that the Long Tall Sally in the song and the Long Tall Sally they painted on our nose are not one and the same female of the species [...] the Sally in Little Richard’s number ain’t gonna be seen in no car in no drive-in movie doing a little necking with a youth like yourself [...] because she black and she bad’, p. 609. Or the story of Donnie Moore, another pitcher who gave up a home run in a play-off game but, unlike Ralph Branca, ‘was not allowed to outlive his failure’, p. 98. Moore committed suicide shortly after his retirement.

<sup>154</sup> Wark, *Molecular Red*, p. xvi. DeLillo’s wild free form compositional style would also be ‘molecular’ in the sense sketched out by Fredric Jameson in *Fables of Aggression*, p. 8.



in which the banal and miraculous things of US capitalism—a lost baseball, Minute Maid orange juice, a B-52 bomber called ‘Long Tall Sally’—become mediocre heroes in themselves, the maintaining-commodities of American hegemony.<sup>155</sup> Such an elevation in the status of the object is clocked by Matthew Mullins who argues that ‘society’—understood as an aggregate of wage-earners—is replaced in *Underworld* by ‘community’: an ‘exposure of singularities’ sutured to the novel’s ‘exalted’ objects (U 318).<sup>156</sup> *Underworld*, in other words, is composed of ‘cockeyed’ personal ‘stories’; destinies which the baseball enthusiast Marvin Lundy imagines as being ‘absorbed by something larger, the long arching journey of the baseball itself’ (U 318). A passage which pushes the novel out from the horizon of historical communism and into an era conceptualised by DeLillo as the triumph of dead labour.

#### *Whoever Controls Your Eyeballs Runs the World*

Introducing a collection of essays on *Underworld*, Joseph Dewey highlights the difficulty of writing about a novel that mesmerises and ‘eludes each effort at definition’.<sup>157</sup> *Underworld*, Dewey suggests, ‘is most obviously a cultural biography’; one which begins with the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1951 and concludes in an eternal present of the 1990s with ‘an instantaneous capital that shoots across horizons at the speed of light’ (U 786).<sup>158</sup> As Phillip Wegner notes, ‘the narrative act of periodisation [...] is at the very heart of DeLillo’s monumental historical overview of US Cold War culture and its immediate aftermath’.<sup>159</sup> This retrospective production of identity and difference is addressed by Klara

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<sup>155</sup> Patrick O’Donnell, ‘*Underworld*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 108-121 (p. 109).

<sup>156</sup> Matthew Mullins, ‘Objects and Outliers: Narrative Community in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*’, *Critique*, 51.3 (2010), 276-292 (p. 277).

<sup>157</sup> Joseph Dewey, ‘A Gathering Under Words: An Introduction’, in *Underworlds: Perspectives on Don DeLillo’s ‘Underworld’*, ed. by Joseph Dewey, Steven G. Kellman, Irving Malin (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), pp. 9-18 (p. 10).

<sup>158</sup> Dewey, ‘A Gathering Under Words’, p. 10.

<sup>159</sup> Phillip E. Wegner, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: US Culture in the Long Nineties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 43.

Sax, one of the novel's outsider artists, who reflects that 'power is in shatters or tatters and now that those Soviet borders don't even exist in the same way, I think we understand, we look back, we see ourselves more clearly [...] it held us together, the Soviets and us. Maybe it held the world together' (U 76). For Hardt and Negri this sense of deterritorialisation registers the 'passages of sovereignty' from modern imperialism to Empire; whose correlate 'passages of production' from industrial to immaterial labour are captured by Klara's belief that 'money is undone [...] it has no measure anymore, it has no level of values' (U 76).<sup>160</sup> The classical form of the historical novel which takes as its referent the consolidation of the nation-state is thus derailed. In Wegner's reading, *Underworld* instead maps 'the decentring during the latter stages of the Cold War period of the older nation-states and the system of nation-states and the emergence of new *global* social and spatial formations'; that is, DeLillo focuses 'on the emergent decentred and chaotic landscape of the post-Cold War world'—an empire of wastelands, toxic dumps, and industrial wreckage.<sup>161</sup>

Part of *Underworld's* decentralisation of the state-form comes from its inclusion of multiple pre-histories of the present which nonetheless disperse from the play-off game between the Dodgers and the Giants—franchises which themselves flee west to Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively. DeLillo's double-coding of the 'Shot Heard Around the World' so that it disjunctively synthesises baseball and the atomic bomb retraces, in Wegner's view, the 'originary' moment of the Cold War; but, the novella length prologue also anticipates and crystallises many of the novel's significant motifs, not least waste itself: 'generational tides of beer and shit and cigarettes and peanut shells and disinfectants and pisses in the untold millions'

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<sup>160</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, pp. 67-204; pp. 219-350. Peter Knight reads this as a transition from 'secure' to 'insecure' paranoia, a cultural experience linked to the Post-Fordist transnationalisation of production: 'Everything is Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45. 3 (Fall 1999), 811-836.

<sup>161</sup> Wegner, p. 45. (italics in original). For a sympathetic engagement which nonetheless insists on DeLillo's utopian closure see Johanna Isaacson, 'Postmodern Wastelands: *Underworld* and the Productive Failures of Periodisation', *Criticism*, 54.1 (Winter 2012), 29-58; and for a critical alternative see Philipp Löffler, *Pluralist Desires: Contemporary Historical Fiction and the End of the Cold War* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), pp. 34-65.

(U 21).<sup>162</sup> As a fragment, the prologue is ‘self-enclosing’, a ‘self-limiting form, conscious of its incompleteness’—hence *Underworld’s* reconstructive structure—but it also ‘carries the *idea* of totality within itself’ in the form of its self-sufficiency.<sup>163</sup> Baseball, John Duvall argues, becomes an ‘aesthetic ideology’ in *Underworld* and its ‘auratic function masks crucial political realities’: baseball culturally eclipses the geopolitical stakes of the Soviet Union’s atomic breakthrough; it racially whitewashes and homogenises the American crowd; and finally, as an event mediated through communication technologies, it replaces history with simulacrum.<sup>164</sup> What the Giants radio announcer Russ Hodges wistfully thinks of as the ‘people’s history’ is re-interpreted by Duvall as an ideological totalisation of the United States cleansed of the constitutive antagonisms of race and class—and, given Hodges’s emphasis on ‘gassy old men’, gender too (U 60).<sup>165</sup> This opening collective whose destiny *Underworld* re-creates might also be refracted through Alliez and Lazzarato’s idea of ‘a people of capitalism’, a people who are socialised through the ‘force’ of mass consumption—and are in direct opposition to a ‘People’s democracy’.<sup>166</sup> The USA in *Underworld’s* prologue is ‘in a hurry to make the future’; a ‘burgeoning economy’, however, whose ‘venerated emblems’ are the industrially manufactured commodities which are ‘easier to identify than the names of battlefields or dead presidents’—the traditional preserves of historical fiction (U 39). A future, in other words, in which the popular historicism of the historical novel has been subsumed to the will of capital.

Molly Wallace refers to these icons as ‘history-commodities’; objects that not only erase the traces of production but which also conjure the phantasmagoria of the ‘classless

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<sup>162</sup> Wegner, p. 48.

<sup>163</sup> This is Peter Osborne’s philosophical reconstruction of the fragment in German Romanticism, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p.60. (italics in original).

<sup>164</sup> John N. Duvall, ‘Baseball as Aesthetic Ideology: Cold War History, Race, and DeLillo’s “Pafko at the Wall”’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41.2 (Summer 1995), 285-313 (p. 292). As a later character observes: ‘The Thomson homer continues to live because it happened decades ago when things were not replayed and worn out and run down and used up before midnight of the first day’, *Underworld*, p. 98.

<sup>165</sup> For Tim Parish, ‘the game stands as a cultural marker for an abiding American will to innocence’, *From the Civil War to the Apocalypse: Postmodern History and American Fiction* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), p. 215.

<sup>166</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 254.

society' of American consumerism—whose suppressed other, those that have been excluded from class altogether, re-appear throughout the novel like 'commuter[s] of the future' (U 323).<sup>167</sup> The consequences of commodity fetishism and reification are returned to in the epilogue, 'Das Kapital', which provides *Underworld* with its exhausted historical futures. The novel terminates with disjunctively combined zones of death: the biopolitical horror of 'the Museum of Misshapens' which exhibits the legacy of Stalinism and a 'slice of the South Bronx called the Wall', an 'inner ghetto' of demolished tenement buildings (U 799; 810). In Walter Benjamin's late work the 'angel of history' faces backwards and despairingly contemplates 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage', a 'pile of debris' growing 'skyward'.<sup>168</sup> *Underworld's* vision of history too ends with a face, perhaps that of an angel, of the raped and murdered street child Esmeralda, whose image appears behind an advertising billboard several weeks after her death and gathers 'awestruck' crowds (U 823). Whereas Duvall maintains that 'Das Kapital' 'urges a Marxian perspective on the relations of the aesthetic image to the economic forces of capitalism', Wegner suggests that Esmeralda's miraculous appearance 'offers us at least the hope that another history might be in the offing'.<sup>169</sup> Such a possibility is experienced by Sister Edgar as an ontological heightening and dissolution of the individual into the collective: 'she is nameless for a moment, lost to the details of personal history, a disembodied fact in liquid form, pouring into the crowd' (U 823).<sup>170</sup>

This nameless state that exists 'outside your experience' is conceptualised in *Underworld* under 'the status of shit'; a condition the novel aspires to and internalises through an interest in 'garbage' and 'waste material' (U 77). Cultural, economic, and military detritus

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<sup>167</sup> Molly Wallace, "'Venerated Emblems": DeLillo's *Underworld* and the History-Commodity', *Critique*, 42.4 (Summer 2001), 367-383.

<sup>168</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 249.

<sup>169</sup> John N. Duvall, 'Excavating the Underworld of Race and Waste in Cold War History: Baseball, Aesthetics, and Ideology', in *Critical Essays on Don DeLillo*, ed. by Hugh Ruppersburg and Tim Engels (New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 2000), pp. 258-281 (p. 273); Wegner, p. 59.

<sup>170</sup> For a periodisation that hinges on liquidity, see David Evans, 'Taking Out the Trash: Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Liquid Modernity, and the End of Garbage', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 35.2 (2006), 103-132.

are recycled in the novel's bricolage aesthetic; a compositional method, however, held together by Nick Shay's bildungsroman from juvenile delinquent to 'executive emeritus' of a waste management firm, and the globalization of waste—of which Nick's work is a metonym (U 804). *Underworld's* generative catechism, 'everything is connected', recuperates these discarded objects and releases their 'uncontainable' historical 'energies', as Mark Osteen puts it; that is to say, DeLillo constructs 'interlocking underworlds that resist oppressive institutions' and, in doing so, produces 'a counter history that undoes established narratives'.<sup>171</sup> James Annesley suggests that *Underworld* adopts a more dialectical approach to globalization. On the one hand, the novel's networks and connections orientate themselves towards total 'integration', whereby the world-system is homogenised, standardised, and rigidified—enclosed by what Nick Shay thinks of as 'a certain furtive sameness, a planning away of particulars' (U 786).<sup>172</sup> On the other, the narrative includes processes which short-circuit 'incorporation' and whose 'hot horizon', like the unholy container ship of shit, resists historical closure (U 824).<sup>173</sup> Although, for Tony Tanner, 'the novel deliquesces into something close to sentimental piety', substituting "'religious fanaticism" for the cold prose of the real'.<sup>174</sup> The convergence of market forces filters into the narrative itself: *Underworld's* 'many voices start to seem part of one, tonally invariant American voice'—replicating the very univocality of the state that DeLillo's patchwork narration hopes to counter.<sup>175</sup>

The atom bomb too is 'shit', Klara Sax theorises; 'it's garbage, it's waste material', but it is also 'something that eludes naming' and is 'too big or evil' (U 77). An awful surplus of

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<sup>171</sup> Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, p. 216.

<sup>172</sup> James Annesley, "'Thigh Bone Connected to the Hip Bone": Don DeLillo's *Underworld* and the Fictions of Globalization', *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, 47.1 (Winter 2002), 85-95 (p. 95).

<sup>173</sup> Annesley, 'Fictions of Globalization', p. 95. For Boxall 'the novel's experience of ecstasy' counters the 'apocalyptic homogenisation' of global capitalism, *Don DeLillo*, p. 186.

<sup>174</sup> Tony Tanner, *The American Mystery: American Literature from Emerson to DeLillo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 220.

<sup>175</sup> Tanner, *The American Mystery*, pp. 213-214. Emily Apter reads DeLillo's paranoid mediation of the flows of accumulation across the world-system in terms of 'oneworldness', 'On Oneworldness: Or, Paranoia as World System'. *American Literary History*, 18.2 (Summer 2006), 365-389.

being returns in *Underworld's* bleak conclusion with the brokered disposal of highly toxic American waste through underground nuclear explosions in post-communist Kazakhstan. For all its 'desperate' urgency, Nick worries that the crisis of waste 'is not otherwise touchable somehow', a palpable remoteness from daily life that echoes Gopal Balakrishnan's gloss on the unrepresentable 'rift between an unfolding contradiction in socio-historical conditions and the increasingly worldless milieu of contemporary *Dasein*' (U 805).<sup>176</sup> Waste therefore is 'a privileged site of resistance to the hegemony of capital', whose political aesthetics, Todd McGowan writes, requires us 'to look at waste in the proper way, seeing in it the limit of capitalism rather than another potential commodity'.<sup>177</sup> Nick's nightmarish vision of 'raw capital spewing' highlights the extent to which the capitalisation of garbage delays and displaces what Jason Moore refers to as the closure of the 'waste frontier' (U 802).<sup>178</sup> Leonard Wilcox draws attention to 'another residue or remainder', that of 'an underclass of homeless and marginalised' whose 'political subjectivation', Balakrishnan insists, 'forms the Lukácsian crux of the contemporary historical situation'.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, due to its self-undermining destruction of labour-power, capitalism 'staggers into a condition of permanent mass un- and under-employment, spawning an ever deeper underworld of surplus humanity'.<sup>180</sup> It is to this 'underworld' of immiserated workers, the 'wastelings of the lost world, the lost country that exists right here in America', that the chapter now turns in order to consider the extent to which DeLillo re-imagines a post-Lukácsian invention of a multitudinous people beyond nation and class (U 628).

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<sup>176</sup> Balakrishnan, 'The Coming Contradiction', p. 41.

<sup>177</sup> Todd McGowan, 'The Obsolescence of Mystery and the Accumulation of Waste in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*', *Critique*, 46.2 (Winter 2005), 123-145 (p. 140).

<sup>178</sup> Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 280.

<sup>179</sup> Leonard Wilcox, 'Don DeLillo's *Underworld*: American Nationhood and the Troubling Remainder', in *From Z to A: Žižek at the Antipodes*, ed. by Laurence Simmons, Heather Worth, and Maureen Molly (Wellington: Dunmore, 2005), pp. 199-214 (p. 208); Balakrishnan, 'The Coming Contradiction', p. 48.

<sup>180</sup> Balakrishnan, 'The Coming Contradiction', p. 46.

*The Triumph of Dead Labour*

Alliez and Lazzarato suggest that the Cold War was not only an inter-imperial military conflict but also, and perhaps more importantly, ‘a new biopolitical regime of *endocolonisation* for the entire population subject to the “American way of life”’.<sup>181</sup> *Underworld’s* representative of biopower is J. Edgar Hoover, who, prior to Truman Capote’s 1966 ‘Black & White’ Ball worries that ‘the time might be coming, once again, when ideas became insurgent and rebel bands were reborn (U 564). ‘Scruffy and free-fucking’, these insurgents participate in what Alliez and Lazzarato call ‘the “crack-up” of the 1960s’ in which the domestic ‘*containers*’ of American middle-class society—‘the nuclear family, marriage and sexuality, housewives’—are sent to the ‘bottom’ (U 564).<sup>182</sup> *Underworld’s* form too cracks up in Part Five—‘Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry’—cutting irrationally between world-historical figures like Hoover and the hipster comedian Lenny Bruce, and a multiplicity of private individuals often on the fringes of collective action. In Alliez and Lazzarato’s account, ‘the historical fate of “class struggle”’ is played out in the United States during this period; a history in which labour is defeated qua class by ‘a new political fundamentalism’ that attacked ‘*the very idea of communism* carried by the Russian Revolution’—as Hoover venomously notes, ‘it’s the old Bolshevik dream being dreamed again’ (U 564).<sup>183</sup> What Hoover regards as personal ‘looseness’ is discussed by Alliez and Lazzarato in terms of ‘struggles without a central contradiction or general mediation’; struggles which are indexed in *Underworld*, but whose future-presents the novel crucially cannot imagine:

She [Rosie Martin] watched the cop strike the man on the head and arms, three, four blows with his billy club and then a pause, and she pushed through a couple of sawhorses and ran directly toward them, feeling fast and light and unstoppable [...] She had no idea what she planned to do when she got there, about four seconds from now.<sup>184</sup> (U 526)

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<sup>181</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 228. (italics in original).

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265. (italics in original).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229. (italics in original).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Collectivity, such that it appears in the novel, is either dispersed and askance from the narrative's waning—cracked up—protagonicity or presented as collectivised death. For Nick Shay, 'even if we believe that history is a workwheel powered by human blood—read the speeches of Mussolini—at least we've known the thing together' (U 82). If there is a unifying vision in *Underworld* it is perhaps closer to the 'landscape of visionary havoc and ruin' that Hoover becomes obsessed with: Pieter Brueghel the Elder's 'The Triumph of Death', an apocalyptic resurrection with 'the old dead fucking the new' (U 41; 51). Part One opens with a somewhat different version of resurrection:

I was driving a Lexus through a rustling wind. This is a car assembled in a work area that's completely free of human presence. Not a spot of mortal sweat except, okay, for the guys who drive the product out of the plant— allow a little moisture where they grip the wheel. The system flows forever onward, automated to priestly nuance, every gliding movement back-referenced for prime performance. Hollow bodies coming in endless sequence. There's nobody on the line with caffeine nerves or a history of clinical depression. Just the eerie weave of chromium alloys in interlocking arcs, block iron and asphalt sheeting, soaring ornaments of coachwork fitted and merged. Robots tightening bolts, programmed drudges that do not dream of family dead. It's a culmination in a way, machine made and shaped outside the little splat of human speech'. (U 63)

DeLillo's syntax here replicates the form of the factory itself: the language pirouettes elegantly, it 'flows', glides, weaves, and soars with a balletic grace that is tightly regulated and coordinated by frequent punctuation, creating the effect of the automated assembly-line. Marx describes the valorisation process in terms of resurrection: 'living labour must seize on these things [raw material and machinery] awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values'.<sup>185</sup> Marx's factory is 'a lifeless mechanism' too; however, it monstrosly incorporates workers 'as its living appendages': 'the instruments of labour confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power'.<sup>186</sup> The 'culmination' of machinofacture envisaged by Nick coincides with the near total extinguishment of living labour and the expulsion of its physical and psychological impurities from capital's 'forever onward' flow

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<sup>185</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 289.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* p. 548.



into infinity. As Alberto Toscano might say, ‘dead labour takes centre stage’ here; or, to twist *Underworld’s* own register, this is DeLillo’s ‘Triumph of Dead Labour’.<sup>187</sup>

Marx’s *Capital* itself culminates with an ‘accumulation of wealth’ and an ‘accumulation of misery’—a dialectic powered by the prodigious growth in the social productivity of labour.<sup>188</sup> The accelerating conversion of variable capital—living labour—into constant capital—machinery—which drives improvements in productivity, also produces an increasingly large industrial reserve army of the unemployed whose idleness is nonetheless structurally necessary. What emerges is ‘a consolidated surplus population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to the amounts of torture it has to undergo in the form of labour’.<sup>189</sup> *Underworld’s* Lexus manufacturing plant—equally a metonym for the displacement of production to East Asia—imagines that this machinic real subsumption of labour-power has become absolute. Emptied of workers, the robotic drudgery of the factory is yet another monument to the defeat of labour—a collective third whose ‘human presence’ is obliquely detectable in the militarised immaterial labour of weapons researchers based in an underground facility known as the ‘pit’.<sup>190</sup> Along with the soil, the worker is a crucial source of surplus-value creation; and it is this progressive repulsion of labour-power from employment and its subsequent degradation in ‘the dead weight of pauperism’ which helps crystallise Marx’s intuition regarding capital’s self-destructive contradictions and its tendency towards immiseration.<sup>191</sup>

Much of Jameson’s theorising of late has focused on this ‘unity of capitalist production and unemployment’, a contradiction which he suggests renews ‘the actuality today of *Capital* on a world scale’.<sup>192</sup> By ‘recoding’ the ‘multiple situations of misery and enforced idleness’ in

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<sup>187</sup> Alberto Toscano, ‘The World is Already Without Us’, *Social Text* 127, 34.2 (June 2016), 109-124 (p. 115).

<sup>188</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 799.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 798.

<sup>190</sup> According to Alliez and Lazzarato, ‘the automatic factory, with the computer that “calculates” is the other of atomic warfare’, *Wars and Capital*, p. 230.

<sup>191</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, p. 798.

<sup>192</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 147; p. 71.

‘terms of a kind of global unemployment’ it might be possible, Jameson wagers, to invent ‘a new kind of transformatory politics on a global scale’.<sup>193</sup> Unemployment, then, also cuts through a representational impasse Jameson had previously identified as confronting the historical novel. Here, ‘demography and globalization’ render any narration of the collective as the ‘demiurge’ of history unsustainable; that is to say, it becomes impossible to envisage how any dialectical inscription of a maintaining individual within a collective could reveal the processes of global accumulation.<sup>194</sup> Jameson’s bid to expand the political constituency of the unemployed, so that it not only includes the conventional reserve army, but also those ‘lost populations’ stranded in camps and regions abandoned by capital, marks an important departure from the type of cognitive mapping undertaken by Marx himself.<sup>195</sup> As Jameson glosses, ‘Marx named and identified a working class already in the process of becoming visible’; a presupposition of the world of labour and its subjectivation qua class that has been decimated by decades of neoliberalism.<sup>196</sup> Reflecting on Jameson’s thesis, Balakrishnan notes that ‘unlike in the age of classical Marxism, the current dynamics of capitalism do not seem spontaneously to constitute such populations in the recognisable figure of a proletariat illuminated against the backdrop of an acknowledged “social question”’.<sup>197</sup> Instead, the ‘epochal decline of industrial employment’ releases ‘unincorporated multitudes’, like *Underworld’s* long-term resident of the Bronx, Albert Bronzini, ‘who watches the ruin build around the actual planet where he was born’ (U 211).<sup>198</sup> It is these multitudes who have ‘dropped out of history’ that Jameson hopes to re-politicise and re-collectivise as historical agents through the category of unemployment.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>194</sup> Jameson, ‘A Monument to Radical Instants’, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>195</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 150.

<sup>196</sup> Jameson, *The Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 568.

<sup>197</sup> Balakrishnan, ‘The Coming Contradiction’, p. 45.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 46; p. 45.

<sup>199</sup> Jameson, *Representing Capital*, p. 149.

Jameson's move from the presupposition of a workers' movement on the threshold of realising a communist future-present to the non-presupposition of an unemployed multitude, opens up a conceptual space that is occupied in *Underworld* by a fictional Sergei Eisenstein film called *Unterwelt*. Premiered in New York's Radio City Music Hall, *Unterwelt* is one of a series of screenings, installations, and cultural events attended by Klara Sax during her 'rooftop summer' of 1974; a montage of attractions which stage the tension between avant-garde practices and their absorption by the commercial art market (U 371). An index of the aesthetic and political self-annihilation of the Bolshevik revolution, *Unterwelt* is a genre piece, a plot-less science fiction movie where a 'mad scientist' conducts underground experiments on prisoners—test specimens who are severely mutilated by the scientist's 'atomic ray gun': one resembles 'a worm with human pathos about him' (U 429). At one point the captives escape and upon reaching a surface scarred by war are revealed to be mutants—a 'cyclops', a 'lizard man', a 'woman with a flap of skin for a nose and mouth' (U 443). Like Eisenstein's movie itself, they are 'an inconvenient secret of the society around them' (U 443).<sup>200</sup> The 'politics of montage' shatters and the camera's dialectical investigations become 'intimate', tilted less at 'class or social mission' and more at what Klara thinks are the inherent 'contradictions of being' (U 443-444).

Klara is particularly struck by *Unterwelt's* abandonment of the 'cross-class solidarity of the Soviet tradition' and the absence of 'crowd scenes or sense of social motive—the masses as hero' (U 430). *Unterwelt* instead exists in 'some ambiguous filmscape somewhere between the Soviet model and Hollywood's vaulted heaven of love, sex, crime, and individual heroism' (U 431). In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze argues that 'the people are already there' in classical cinema; a

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<sup>200</sup> A secret encountered again by Nick during a visit to a medical clinic for downwinders in Kazakhstan: 'the boy with skin where his eyes ought to be, a bolus of spongy flesh, oddly like a mushroom cap, springing from each brow', *Underworld*, p. 800. The premier is spliced with Ismael Munoz, a graffiti writer who reflects on New York's invisible populations and the state's erasure of the graffiti crews 'spray-crazy unpaid labour', *Underworld*, p. 438. For more on montage, modernism, and postmodernity see Philip Nel, *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), pp. 96-115.

revolutionary or democratic ‘unanimity’ that is infiltrated and corrupted by the Fascist subjection of the ‘masses’; the ‘tyrannical unity’ enforced by the Stalinist party; and ‘the break-up of the American people, who could no longer believe themselves to be either the melting-pot of peoples past or the seed of a people to come’.<sup>201</sup> If there is a ‘modern political cinema’ it is founded on the basis that ‘the people no longer exist, or not yet...*the people are missing*’.<sup>202</sup> Such a non-presupposition of collectivity, Deleuze suggests, structures the cinema of the third world and minorities in which ‘the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves [...] in new conditions of struggle’.<sup>203</sup> *Unterwelt*’s ‘ambiguous filmscape’ is perhaps located in this third world territory: as John Marks observes, DeLillo re-invents the heretical Eisenstein as ‘a “minor” film-maker’.<sup>204</sup> Becoming-minor is certainly evident in Klara’s reflection that *Unterwelt*’s agonistic form renders it ‘a film about Us and Them [...] They can say who they are, you have to lie. They control the language, you have to improvise and dissemble. They establish the limits of your existence’ (U 444). *Underworld* arguably adapts Deleuze’s non-presupposition of the people; and, across its dispersing rhizomatic prehistories, maps the becoming-minor of the ‘people of capitalism’ as they are both exiled from production and search for unincorporated outsides.

Expulsion and flight combine in Nick’s comment that the automated factory is ‘a natural match for the landscape’ through which he is driving, the Sonoran Desert, where ‘the species’ is ‘factually absent from the scene’ (U 63). Part One commences with Nick’s search for an encampment, a colony organised by Klara who, by the 1990s, is an internationally renowned artist ‘going mad with colour’ (U 70). Working out of a former US air force base, Klara is engaged in a monumental project: the transformation of hundreds of decommissioned B-52 bombers into a ‘landscape’ installation (U 70). ‘The desert’, Klara tells a French

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<sup>201</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 216.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216. (italics in original).

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>204</sup> Marks, ‘*Underworld: The People are Missing*’, p. 96.

documentary crew, 'is central to this piece. It's the surround. It's the framing device. It's the four-part horizon' (U 70). Refractory to the ideologies of 'industry and progress', the desert not only constrains the historicism of the historical novel but also forms a militarised white space: 'it enables us to show our mastery. The desert bears the visible signs of all the detonations we set off. All the craters and warning signs and no-go areas and burial markers, the sites where debris is buried' (U 71). As Toscano notes, there is a tendency to conjoin the 'end of nature'—'as autonomous from human agency'—with the 'end of history'—'as the inability to articulate that agency as a common project'—under the sign of the atomic bomb; a tendency whose melancholic fixation with 'species alienation' is unable to envisage 'any horizon of disalienation'.<sup>205</sup> It is towards such 'disalienation' that Klara directs her work; as she tells the documentary team, 'this is an art project, not a peace project' (U 70).

This project constitutes an exodus of sorts: Klara relies on a 'workforce' drawn from 'art students [...] history majors and teachers on leave and nomads and runaways, coming and going all the time, burnt-out hackers looking for the unwired world, they were people who heard the call, the whisper in the ear that sends you out the door and into some zone of exalted play' (U 65). Paolo Virno suggests the history of the American West offers an example of a labour class losing the 'appearance of the "people"' and acquiring the 'features of the "multitude"'. The 'many' desert the factories of the East Coast in search of freedom in the west and, in doing so, temporarily refuse 'the "popular" vocation to stateness'.<sup>206</sup> The multitude summoned by Klara's excavation also hope to discover a passage out of statehood:

We're painting, hand-painting in some cases, putting our puny hands to great weapons systems, to systems that come out of the factories and assembly lines as near alike as possible, millions of components stamped out, repeated endlessly, and we're trying to unrepeat, to find an element of felt life, and maybe there's a survival instinct here, a graffiti instinct—to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are. (U 77)

Formed on the ruins of military industrialisation, this is a labouring multitude who take hold

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<sup>205</sup> Toscano, 'The World is Already Without Us', pp. 109-110.

<sup>206</sup> Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, p. 45.

of what Toscano calls the ‘broken tools’ of US imperialism in the hope of resurrecting an alternative future-present.<sup>207</sup> In ‘trying to unrepeat’ historical production, Klara’s collective gesture to a non-presupposition of historical futures; an archaeological people who hope to turn their present into the prehistory of a future yet to be imagined.

Lukács despairs with the becoming-archaeological of the historical novel, arguing that its milieus are no longer presented as the necessary prehistory of the unfolding social logics of the present. Archaeology’s ‘ghostly illusion of life’ is retained by *Underworld*, although its futureless prehistories are treated enigmatically, as remainders, like an ‘ancient ruin’ visited by Nick and his family (U 342).<sup>208</sup> Located in the hinterlands between the USA and Mexico, the ruin belongs to a ‘whole settlement abandoned for no discernible reason, one of those mysteries of a whole people who disappear’ (U 343). Vanishing is implicitly contrasted with Nick’s appreciation of ‘the way history did not run loose’ in the West: ‘they caged it, funded and bronzed it, they enshrined it carefully in museums and plazas and memorial parks. The rest was all geography, all space and light and shadow and unspeakable hanging heat’ (U 86). *Underworld*’s regenerative historicism might be felt to reproduce the very processes of internal colonisation it seeks to counter; that is, it expels all those groups who opposed the US state project from the realm of history and re-narrates their expropriated destinies as romance.<sup>209</sup> To an extent, *Underworld* resembles a novel of constituted power: DeLillo rehearses the foundational violence of the United States, both through the internal subordination of black labour—the Manx Martin sections—but also by the erasure of the wars of extermination against Native Americans—who appear in pacified form, in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, as ‘streets named for Indian tribes’ (U 805).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Toscano, ‘The World is Already Without Us’, p. 120.

<sup>208</sup> Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 189.

<sup>209</sup> Alliez and Lazzarato, *Wars and Capital*, p. 228.

<sup>210</sup> Hardt and Negri argue that Native Americans ‘could not be absorbed within the constitutional machine’, whilst African Americans are inscribed in ‘the Constitution’, *Empire*, p. 170.

The absence of Native Americans in particular is all the more revealing given *Underworld's* preoccupation with the ecological ravages of the Cold War; that is, its toxicology of the atomic age. For characters like Nick and Klara, the west is associated with personal and national renewal; a refrain that, as David Noon highlights, entangles *Underworld* within cultural, representational, and discursive 'forms of blindness'. The attendant 'erasure of native communities from the politics and geography of the nuclear west', Noon adds, allows for the landscape to 'once more be imagined as empty, useless for anything beyond the bonanza of extraction and disposal'.<sup>211</sup> Jesse Detwiler makes this uncomfortably true for Nick and Simeon Biggs, 'needling' them about their dumping of 'garbage on sacred Indian land' (U 288).<sup>212</sup> But, as this example of collegiate antagonism demonstrates, even when Native American interests do break into the novel's discourse, they only do so indirectly, as rumour or hearsay. For Noon, this omission of indigenous Americans is made further problematic by the direct encounter with the environmental and biopolitical horrors of Stalinism—a catastrophic history which has no US equivalent in the text. As Mike Davis observes, the 'homelands' of indigenous cultures like the Kazakhs, Paiutes, and Shoshones, have alike been transformed into 'national sacrifice zones' through the testing of nuclear weapons—an 'eco-disaster' on a planetary scale.<sup>213</sup> *Underworld* proves incapable of fully imagining the American 'side of this terrible symmetry' and is unable to adequately reflect on 'the comparable role of the Pentagon' in sacrificing land and peoples deemed beyond the national-popular collective.<sup>214</sup> On the obverse side, Davis's registration of transnational solidarity networks like the 'Nevada-Semipalatinsk Movement', gestures to popular counter-histories that despite being contemporaneous with the composition

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<sup>211</sup> David Noon, 'The Triumph of Death: National Security and Imperial Erasures in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 37.1 (2007), 83-110 (p. 101). A slightly different ideology critique of the novel's aesthetics of recycling would focus on Nick's move to Phoenix, Arizona, a city that is not only an example of unsustainable development, but is a form of 'radioactive colonialism', Andrew Ross, *Bird on Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 141.

<sup>212</sup> Nick and Simeon reply that 'we're not sixties people. We're forties and fifties people', *Underworld*, p. 289.

<sup>213</sup> Mike Davis, 'Dead West: Ecocide in Marlboro Country', *New Left Review*, 1/200 (July/Aug 1993), 49-73 (p. 49).

<sup>214</sup> Davis, 'Dead West', p. 73.

of *Underworld* and occupying a similar territory, have been effaced by DeLillo's de-collectivisation of national history.<sup>215</sup>

De-collectivisation, though, is the explicit destiny of one of *Underworld's* most important historical milieus, the South Bronx, former home of many of the novel's characters—and DeLillo himself. The novel concentrates on 'a tuck of land adrift from the social order' known colloquially as 'the Wall'; a name derived in part from a 'general sense of exclusion', but also from a local landmark, an exposed tenement block façade where Ismael Munoz's graffiti crew spray paint a memorial angel for every child killed in the neighbourhood (U 239). 'The Wall' is a sacrifice zone through which death personified stalks: 'a muddled, shuffling danger that waited for the girl'—the angel Esmeralda (U 251). A 'society of indigents', the population of 'the Wall' exemplifies one half of Manuel Castells' exposition on 'dual America': a nation polarised between advanced cybernetic technologies and spiralling rates of homelessness (U 242).<sup>216</sup> If the convergence of global markets is one of *Underworld's* historical climaxes, 'the Wall' is the dialectical other of such 'instantaneous capital': it is an illiquid black hole of stagnation and immiseration (U 786). For Castells, the vectors of world accumulation bring forth 'fourth worlds' excluded and shutoff from development, zones of localised ruination that DeLillo's 'part of no part' survive in and hope to takeover.<sup>217</sup>

America's manifest destiny is dislocated and misplaced in 'the Wall'. Surveying the wreckage of the South Bronx, Sister Edgar remarks to a fellow outreach worker that 'you wonder if we make a difference. You can't understand how the last decade of the century looks worse than the first in some respects. Looks like another century in another country' (U 811). The experience of the present as deterioration begins to give imaginative shape to Jameson's conviction that 'the closure of the world market is therefore not to be understood as the filling

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 69

<sup>216</sup> Castells, *End of Millennium*, p. 130.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 162.



up of an empty container but rather as the progress of an epidemic'.<sup>218</sup> This epidemic is evoked further by a sequence of staccato paragraphs beginning with the refrain 'they saw' which document the nuns social labour and expose the desperate 'unknown lives in every wallboard room' (U 245).<sup>219</sup> It is also apparent that 'the Wall' represents a limit to *Underworld's* own national-collective project, whose powerful interpellation, 'he speaks in your voice, American', the narrative commences (U 11). The affirmation and faith in a democratically encompassing American 'voice' falters in Sister Edgar's encounters with the children of 'the Wall': 'they spoke an unfinished English, soft and muffled, insufficiently suffixed' (U 243). Not only does the enfolding of the third-person into the second-person stall in Sister Edgar's exchanges with the dispossessed, the separation and divorce of collective realities itself becomes an object of spectacle. 'A squander of burnt-out buildings and unclaimed souls', 'the Wall' attracts another type of immaterial production, the carnivalesque tour operator '*South Bronx Surreal*'—whose reality in turn is contested by the nuns: 'it's not surreal. It's real, It's real. Your bus is surreal. You're surreal (U 238; 247). With reference to Detroit, Toscano observes that 'many of the human-altered landscapes of the present appear to be beyond resurrection' and serve as allegories for the 'twin deaths of living and dead labour'.<sup>220</sup> In *Underworld*, 'the Wall' is presented as the graveyard of the proletariat.

Expanding the constituency of unemployment so that all forms of non-work are re-theorised as types of economic exploitation, marks Jameson's bio-political critique of 'bare life'. It also, to quote Balakrishnan once more, demonstrates that the political subjectivation of surplus humanity 'forms the Lukácsian crux of the contemporary historical situation'.<sup>221</sup> The multitude, as conceptualised by DeLillo in *Underworld*, emerges from precisely such a re-

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<sup>218</sup> Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 582.

<sup>219</sup> 'They saw a woman in a wheelchair who wore a Fuck New York T-Shirt. Gracie said she would trade the groceries they gave her for heroin, the dirtiest street scag available', p. 246.

<sup>220</sup> Toscano, 'The World is Already Without Us', p. 120.

<sup>221</sup> Balakrishnan, 'The Coming Contradiction', p.48.

figuration and re-inscription of living labour: the ‘little splat of human speech’ exiled from the factory returns as a surplus population ‘smeared in other people’s seeing’ (U 63; 817). This coming into visibility, however, is attached to tragic pathos, to the senseless murder of Esmeralda and the media attention it subsequently receives:

One of the girls is pedalling the bike, Willie for short, and she calls out to them, *hey, here, look*, and they gather at the TV set and stand astonished. There is a news report of the murder, their murder, and it is freaking network coverage, CNN—tragic life and death of a homeless child. The crew is stunned to see footage of the Wall, two and a half seconds of film that shows the building they’re in, the facade of spray-painted angels, the overgrown lots with their bat caverns and owl roosts. They gawk and buzz, charged with a kind of second sight, the things they know so well seen inside out, made new and nationwide. They stand there smeared in other people’s seeing. (U 816-817)

Balakrishnan adds that the failure of capitalism to reemploy workforces also undermines ‘the power of these populations to respond collectively to and thus experience this self-destructive contradiction as a historical process’.<sup>222</sup> Such a cognitive blockage persists in *Underworld*: the ‘estranging mise-en-scène’ in which Balakrishnan and Jameson hope the labouring-collective will comprehend themselves becoming an unemployed-other, appears to be reversed in this process of self-recognition. Ismael’s graffiti crew see themselves through the media apparatus, a ‘second sight’ in which they are ‘smeared’ in the national imaginary, an unavoidable catastrophe but one which is reported as a natural rather than social disaster.

Étienne Balibar refers to capital’s necessary expulsion of vast populations from economic activity and their desperate re-composition as an ‘underclass’ as ‘*cruelty without a face*’.<sup>223</sup> ‘Millions of disposable human beings’, Balibar writes, are simultaneously ‘excluded from labour [...] and kept within the boundaries of the *market*, since the market is an absolute; it has no *external limits*. The market is the world. When it excludes you, you cannot leave it, search for another America, settle there and start again’.<sup>224</sup> A pointed critique of exodus, *Underworld*’s surplus population in ‘the Wall’ are nonetheless agents of corrosion who might

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>223</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, trans. by Christine Jones, James Swenson, Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 142; p. 143. (italics in original).

<sup>224</sup> Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, p. 142. (italics in original).

burn a hole through the market regime. Ismael and his crew help facilitate the nun's welfare program—DeLillo's version of dual power—but they also earn money through the salvaging and selling of the broken machines and industrial ruins of the Bronx. Ismael informs Sister Edgar that he is 'planning to go on-line real soon, Sisters. Advertise my junk cars. Go, like, global. Scrap metal for these trodden countries looking to build a military' (U 812). *Underworld* envisages a possible re-orientation and re-direction of the flows of production between the internal peripheries of the USA and its external peripheries—a remapping which, for the historical novel, is impossible without the army. In doing so, DeLillo again gestures to the prehistories of non-presupposed future-presents, to a 'people's army' that might be in the process of resurrection.

*Coda: Weird Histories*

Nick Shay closes his narration circumspectly, longing 'for the days of disorder', for 'the breach of peace, the days of disarray', but also anxious about an 'actual pulsing thing [...] not otherwise touchable, somehow, for the menacing heft and breadth of the material' (U 810; 805). Unlike human history, which is responsive to collective will, this 'thing' eluding popular knowledge and representation is waste itself; a restless non-anthropomorphic subject that, in Jesse Detwiler's view, has 'its own momentum' and pushes back, 'inciting people to build a civilization in response, in self-defence' (U 287). 'Garbage comes first' in *Underworld*, and the novel provides a historiography of waste and its disposal: spiralling out from Antoine Cooper's dumpster car—the local—to the towering pyramid of trash at Fresh Kills and the 'futurist' pit on the outskirts of Los Angeles—the national—to its conclusion with the eradication of toxic waste through nuclear explosions in Kazakhstan—the planetary (U 288). In this sense, *Underworld* is about the civilization of capital and its increasingly 'desperate' struggle to contain the toxic by-products of accumulation; the negative externalities of which

threaten to engulf the novel's human populations and their commons. 'Capitalist technological advance', Jason Moore suggests, 'produces a *general law of overpollution*: the tendency to enclose and fill up waste frontiers faster than it can locate new ones'.<sup>225</sup> *Underworld* too can be read through the 'law of overpollution', of the increasing toxification of capital and the closure of the 'waste frontier'—or 'nature-as-sink'—what Nick regards as 'the intractability of waste'—the end of 'cheap garbage' in Moore's work (U 805).<sup>226</sup>

DeLillo, therefore, pushes the historical novel against the 'eco-historical limits' of the capitalist mode of production; a self-undermining drive for accumulation which lays waste to workers and the planet alike.<sup>227</sup> What in Moore's view is the combined and uneven development of negative value is perhaps registered and encoded most strikingly in Brian Glassic's experience of the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island, for whom the site 'was science fiction and prehistory':

He imagined he was watching the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza— only this was twenty-five times bigger, with tanker trucks spraying perfumed water on the approach roads. He found the sight inspiring. All this ingenuity and labour, this delicate effort to fit maximum waste into diminishing space. The towers of the World Trade Center were visible in the distance and he sensed a poetic balance between that idea and this one. Bridges, tunnels, scows, tugs, graving docks, container ships, all the great works of transport, trade and linkage were directed in the end to this culminating structure [...] He dealt in human behaviour, people's habits and impulses, their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their excesses and indulgences but their kindness too, their generosity, and the question was how to keep this mass metabolism from overwhelming us. (U 184)

The antagonism between human agency and the inorganic by-products of accumulation threatening to overwhelm collectivity—a rift in the 'mass metabolism'—becomes one of the central questions of DeLillo's late novels; novels in which the Lukácsian philosophy of history is dislocated by surplus waste as a non-anthropogenic subject of history.

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<sup>225</sup> Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 280. (italics in original).

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277; p. 29.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

### Enfolded in the Will of Capital: Twenty-First Century DeLillo

In Marx's *Grundrisse* the universalising tendency of capital produces 'the real conditions of its own suspension'.<sup>1</sup> It does so, because the drive to 'suspend *necessary labour time*' undermines the conditions for capital's continued reproduction and tendentially leads to a situation where 'the forces of material production [...] *suspends capital itself*'.<sup>2</sup> Capital, Marx posits, is 'a mere point of transition' towards a future society organised around the free association of producers.<sup>3</sup> Capital's universalisation solicits a somewhat different suspension in *Underworld*: as Nick Shay confesses, 'I begin to feel something drain out of me. Some old opposition, a capacity to resist' (U 801). *Underworld's* historiography of accumulation more closely resembles Étienne Balibar's contention that modernity is nothing less than 'a very long drawn out transition' from historical to absolute capitalism; that is, a self-referential capital 'free to deal only with the effects of its own logic of accumulation and with those things necessary for its own reproduction'.<sup>4</sup> Historical communism's dissolution and the entry into "pure" capitalism' continues to inform DeLillo's twenty-first century novels; texts which struggle to remain outside 'the market culture's innovative brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible ends, absorbing everything around it'.<sup>5</sup> Populated by suspended performance artists, static video installations, and cryonic preservation, DeLillo's twenty-first century novels are also drawn to ideas of suspension, both as an aesthetic experience but also as a historical temporalisation of the present. The question at the centre of this final chapter is whether these suspended states tender the resignation of one of the finest critics of US capital and state power

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 541-542.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543. (italics in original).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 540.

<sup>4</sup> Balibar, 'Critique in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p13; p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Balibar, 'Critique in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p. 12; Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 99.

or if they do not also exhibit ‘larvae of novelty’ that imagine history beyond the regime of absolute capital.<sup>6</sup>

*Lateness, Contemporaneity, Realism*

The novels that have appeared in the aftermath of *Underworld*, differ from both the epic works of historical salvage but also from the irrational totalisations of DeLillo’s earlier conspiracy fiction. If a contraction of scale is most immediately and materially apparent in their reduced length, DeLillo’s twenty-first century novels equally exhibit an emotional sobriety, oblique prose style, and static narrative rhythm, distinct from what had previously constituted the DeLillo novel. *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), and *Zero K* (2016), Peter Boxall suggests, abandon ‘narrative to a kind of directionless, a slowed, unbounded wandering’.<sup>7</sup> A waning of referentiality which is itself symptomatic of a ‘late’ style and ‘gives expression to a wider cultural historical condition’; a culture that has aged and ‘become historically disorientated, uncertain of its bearings or sense of direction’.<sup>8</sup> Late style, in Adorno’s original formulation, rejects biographical morbidity and instead aims to reconstruct ‘furrowed, even ravaged’ late artworks philosophically as ‘catastrophes’ which, in Alex Fletcher’s gloss, confront the reader with ‘bristling challenge, resolute negativity and unsynthesised fragmentariness’.<sup>9</sup> Composed of ‘unsynthesised’ fragments, DeLillo’s late novels dislocate the synthesis of the eternal present of affect with the abstract historical movements of collective destiny, a process which Jed Esty insists is integral for realism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alberto Toscano, ‘“European Nihilism” and Beyond: Commentary’, in *The Century*, Alain Badiou, trans. by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), pp. 179-201 (p. 180).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Boxall, ‘Late: Fictional Time in the Twenty-First Century’, *Contemporary Literature*, 53.4 (Winter 2012), 681-712 (p. 693).

<sup>8</sup> Boxall, ‘Late’, p. 690.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Late Style in Beethoven’, in *Essays on Music*, trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 564-568 (p. 564); Alex Fletcher, ‘Late Style and Contrapuntal Histories: The Violence of Representation in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Livre d’image*’, *Radical Philosophy*, 2.04 (Spring 2019) 59-72 (p. 59).

<sup>10</sup> Esty, ‘Realism Wars’, p. 335.

Affect, in late DeLillo, threatens to accomplish its negation of personal identity: these are novels where character is reduced to ‘the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in [...] the neurons and peptides’.<sup>11</sup> An absence of collective will constrains these narratives, but they also take as their task the re-inscription of the scenic within a temporalisation of history as at a standstill.

‘The term “late” designates’, Nathan Brown suggests, a ‘condition of being after-yet-within; it acknowledges the ambivalence of the *not-yet*, and it demarcates the extension of a horizon that we still have to pass beyond’.<sup>12</sup> Like Boxall, Brown wants to extend the period of ‘late modernism’ and also thinks of the as yet unsurpassed horizon of capital in terms of ‘late modernity’; however, whereas Boxall focuses on an ‘historically transitional mood’, Brown works within the framework of historical materialism, triangulating the social experiences of ‘late modernity’ and their cultural registration in ‘late modernism’ with the economic structures of ‘late capitalism’.<sup>13</sup> Retaining Marx’s injunction that the history of modernity is the history of capital’s moving contradictions, Brown insists that ““late modernity” is characterised by the unfolding consequences of real subsumption, grasped as the deepening of capitalist contradictions and their irreversible dynamics’.<sup>14</sup> With the ‘accomplishment of real subsumption’, ‘we do not’, contra Jameson, ‘exit modernity into a full modernised world in which uneven development is eliminated’, but instead ‘enter a late phase of modernity’ where ‘the social and political consequences of real subsumption play out’.<sup>15</sup> Secular decline, Brown concludes, is encoded culturally through an imaginary ‘haunted by the spectre of its own exteriority’; by the appearance of a world beyond the stalled temporality of the present—an

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<sup>11</sup> DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> Nathan Brown, ‘Postmodernity, Not Yet: Toward a New Periodisation’, *Radical Philosophy*, 2.01 (February 2018), 11-27 (p. 21). (italics in original).

<sup>13</sup> Brown, ‘Postmodernity, Not Yet’, p. 14; Boxall, ‘Late’, p. 697.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, ‘Postmodernity, Not Yet’, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Absent from Brown’s account, though, is a discussion of Marx’s appreciation of ‘countering factors’ to the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit, see *Capital*, Volume III, pp. 339-348.

outside that opens onto postmodernity proper.<sup>16</sup>

Late phase DeLillo responds to this condition of being ‘after-yet-within’ by returning to the conjunction of surplus capital and surplus population inscribed within financialising capital, but also expands outwards to reflect on anthropogenic climate change. The climate, Brown notes, revokes the notion of nature’s disappearance—crucial to theories of postmodernism—and is instead testament to ‘the *persistence* of its unpredictable relation to the history of accumulation and the class relation’.<sup>17</sup> In a trenchant critique of Fredric Jameson’s work, Andreas Malm writes that the ‘diagnosis of postmodernity’ as ‘devoid of time and nature’ is visited by its antithesis, the ‘warming condition’ where ‘time and nature’ catastrophically conquer ‘ever more space’.<sup>18</sup> The shrinkage of the past and future onto the permanent present of the body, what Jameson calls ‘the end of temporality’, is reversed in Malm’s account, where daily life ‘is sucked by planetary forces into the hole of time, the present dissolving into past and future alike’.<sup>19</sup> Malm’s climate storm appears to Jeffrey Lockhart, the dissociative first-person narrator of *Zero K* in the form of a video installation:

Nothing but sky at first, then an intimation of threat, treetops leaning, unnatural light. Soon, in seconds, a rotating column of wind, dirt and debris. It began to fill the frame, a staggered funnel, dark and bent, soundless, and then another, down left, in the far distance, rising from the horizon [...] here was our climate enfolding us.<sup>20</sup>

If intimations of ecological annihilation reverberate across DeLillo’s late work, they do so because ‘historical time’ is no longer seen as an ‘intelligible interface’ between what Ian Duncan, leaning on Paul Ricœur, calls ‘the time of the soul’ and ‘the time of the world’.<sup>21</sup> ‘Time’ is ‘enormously old’ in *Point Omega*’s Badlands and experienced ‘palpably’, as a ‘time

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 19. (italics in original).

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Malm, *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Malm, *The Progress of this Storm*, p. 11. For an overview of Jameson’s position see ‘The End of Temporality’, in *The Ideologies of Theory*, pp. 636-658. Existential time shrinks in *Cosmopolis*: ‘Beyond that, what? He did not know. He could not imagine. But then he never could. It made sense to him that his immediate and extended futures would be compressed into whatever events might constitute the next few hours, or minutes, or less. These were the only terms of life expectancy he’d ever recognised as real’, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> Don DeLillo, *Zero K* (London: Picador, 2016), pp. 35-36.

<sup>21</sup> Duncan, ‘History and the Novel after Lukács’, (p. 394).



that precedes us and survives us'.<sup>22</sup> In Duncan's late Lukácsian theorising on the novel-form as 'after-yet-within' the dialectic, 'the world, meaning the earth itself as at once material object and dynamic system, has loomed into view as the sublime horizon of historical totality—meaning it has come into view as a limit: the end of history, the end of man, the end of nature'.<sup>23</sup> The historical 'by-products of our accumulated actions'—what Malm calls '*the heat of this ongoing past*'—overwhelms and exceeds the 'capability of the political institutions supposed to represent our collective will' to enact an 'effective intervention'.<sup>24</sup> Anthropogenic climate change, Duncan adds, 'makes a mockery of "History" as the medium of human progress' and disbars the classical realist enfolding of private individual consciousness into the social life of a collectivity building towards communism.<sup>25</sup> This rift between the civilization of capital and the 'enormously old [...] deep time, epochal time' that bears in on *Point Omega's* fragile bourgeois household, signals a turn in DeLillo's work towards forms of historicity without history—cosmological time from which humanity has been erased.<sup>26</sup>

Time is equally 'a corporate asset' in *Cosmopolis*: it 'belongs to the free market system' and 'is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential'.<sup>27</sup> If climate change severely tests the dialectical form of history 'as an anthropomorphic project', as Duncan suggests, then the abbreviated M-M' formula of financial accumulation might also be felt to undercut the capacity of collective will to resist 'the inhuman imperatives of capital'.<sup>28</sup> As *Cosmopolis* remorselessly affirms: 'the force of cyber-capital will send people into the gutter to retch and die'.<sup>29</sup> Financialisation is thus another marker of lateness in DeLillo's twenty-first century novels, a sign of autumnal maturity

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<sup>22</sup> Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 91; p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', p. 394.

<sup>24</sup> Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', p. 394; Malm, *The Progress of this Storm*, p. 5. (italics in original).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>26</sup> DeLillo, *Point Omega*, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Duncan, p. 389; p. 394.

<sup>29</sup> DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 90.

presaging a coming winter—‘something will happen soon, maybe today [...] to correct the acceleration of time’.<sup>30</sup> Commenting on the ‘Autumnal literature’ of US hegemony, Joshua Clover suggestively reads the transition from M-C-M’ to M-M’ as ‘the subtraction of time’; a reading in which the identification of the missing commodity with labour-power—whose ‘value is measured in time’—is crucial.<sup>31</sup> For Clover the ‘decreasing ratio of workers to machines’ and the incorporation of future labour into the present as credit, is registered in literature through ‘*the conversion of the temporal to the spatial*’; a process that can be comprehended through ‘the postmodern novel’s narrative instability and its frequent substitution of sprawl for story’—that is, the novel’s refusal to represent the ‘development of a character through consequent time’.<sup>32</sup> Mathias Nilges similarly regards financial accumulation as ‘the contraction of time into instantaneity’; however, in contrast to Clover, Nilges insists on the ontological significance of the novel as a cultural form.<sup>33</sup> Addressing DeLillo’s late work specifically, Nilges notes that as the novels have ‘turned to the speed of capital’ they have become ‘markedly shorter in length’.<sup>34</sup> If DeLillo’s novel’s instantiate the temporal contraction of the present materially, they also self-reflexively render regimes of time as historically contingent—and, in this sense, affirm the novel-form’s status as a resistant ‘medium of mediation’.<sup>35</sup>

One of the most significant developments in Nilges’s survey of contemporary realism is the return of the *Zeitroman*. The *Zeitroman*, Nilges sketches, ‘examines the category of contemporaneity as bound up with specific forms of thinking about time—its very subject is time as an abstraction moving through history and experiencing crises and impasses’.<sup>36</sup> A crisis

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua Clover, ‘Autumn of the System: Poetry and Financial Capital’, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-43. (italics in original).

<sup>33</sup> Mathias Nilges, ‘Neoliberalism and the Time of the Novel’, *Textual Practice*, 29.2 (2015), 357-377 (p. 368).

<sup>34</sup> Mathias Nilges, ‘Finance Capital and the Time of the Novel or, Money Without Narrative Qualities’, *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 30.31 (Fall 2013/Spring 2014), 31-46 (p. 39).

<sup>35</sup> Nilges, ‘Neoliberalism and the Time of the Novel’, p. 367.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 374-375.

of historical temporalisation is certainly one of the central concerns of DeLillo's historically suspended late novels, which can be reconfigured around ideas of the contemporary and contemporaneity. As David Cunningham illustrates, the contemporary can be simultaneously understood as 'a category of "epochal" history (the contemporary era)' and as 'a form of historical temporalisation in its own right (the contemporary as a specific mode of conceptualisation or relation to time and history)'. In this latter usage, the 'contemporary continues to evoke something of the modern's self-defining emphasis on the newness of the present, but without the stronger *historical* dynamic'—that is, without the 'expected otherness of the future'.<sup>37</sup> The contemporary, as Peter Osborne summarises, is a 'moderated' modernity whose sociality remains inscribed within the 'relentless self-expansion of the value-form'.<sup>38</sup>

Cunningham draws attention to a surprising resonance here between contemporaneity as a 'futureless present' and Lukács's classic account of the opposition between realism and naturalism in 'Narrate or Describe'.<sup>39</sup> For Lukács, the critical distinction between narration and description as 'philosophies of composition' relates to their respective temporalisation of history and historical temporalisation: 'description contemporarises everything. Narration recounts the past'.<sup>40</sup> Narration assumes and extends the standpoint of epic poetry, knitting 'a single life or an assemblage of lives' into a retrospective and coherent account of the actions, events, and collective institutions that helped shape the unfolding of a dynamic historical totality.<sup>41</sup> Description, on the other hand, adopts the position of the disinterested observer and abandons itself to 'a whirlwind of details of apparently equal significance'; a perspective that

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<sup>37</sup> David Cunningham, 'Time, Modernism, and the Contemporaneity of Realism', in *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*, ed. by Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 49-62 (p. 49).

<sup>38</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, p. 16; Peter Osborne, 'Remember the Future?: The *Communist Manifesto* as Historical and Cultural Form', *The Socialist Register* (1998), pp. 190-204 (p. 193).

<sup>39</sup> For 'futureless present' see Crary, *24/7*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', *Writer and Critic*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1970), pp. 110-148 (p. 130).

<sup>41</sup> Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 128.

transforms the ‘novel into a kaleidoscopic chaos’.<sup>42</sup> Naturalism, in other words, releases ‘details’ from their hierarchical subordination to plot; a levelling porosity that paradoxically results in an increasingly rigid representation of the present as:

A series of static pictures, of still lives connected only through the relations of objects arranged one beside the other according to their own inner logic, never following on from the other, certainly never one out of the other. The so-called action is only a thread on which the still lives are disposed in a superficial, ineffective fortuitous sequence of isolated, static pictures [...] the writer must strive to counteract the intrinsic monotony through the novelty of the objects depicted and the originality of the description.<sup>43</sup>

The form-giving impulse of narrativity is displaced by a mimetic-impulse which registers objects, milieus, and sensations with ever greater complexity but is unable to conceptualise the relations between these scenic moments. Without motion, style becomes an apparatus in the reification of the present: a ‘capitalist prose’ that erases the traces of social production.<sup>44</sup>

DeLillo’s late work embraces the suspended temporality of the still life; a compositional practice that indexes, in turn, the eclipse of the communist horizon to which Lukács’s work heliotropically leans towards. Yet the ‘struggle between the narration of (hi)story and “contemporising” affect’, identified by Cunningham, is complicated further by Osborne’s argument that ‘the temporality of globalization’ is ‘a new kind of totalising but immanently fractured constellation of temporal relations’.<sup>45</sup> A nationally inscribed ‘I that is we and we that is I’—*Underworld*’s singular American voice—is fractured by a distributive unity of self-differentiating collectives.<sup>46</sup> *Cosmopolis*, as Cunningham notes, is torn by precisely such a split ‘between phenomenological time and historical time more generally, a day in the life and the epic movements of capital’. Here the disjunctive synthesis between affect and history relates to finance and what Cunningham calls the ‘new realisms of contemporary abstraction’, although this disjunctive conjunction runs throughout DeLillo’s twenty-first

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>45</sup> Cunningham, ‘Time, Modernism, and the Contemporaneity of Realism’, p. 54; Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 16.

century novels.<sup>47</sup> In the absence of a presupposed anthropomorphic subject of history, DeLillo begins to detect historical futures which drive black holes through historicism and ruin all possibility of humanly inhabitable future-presents.

### I. 'Dead Stars That Still Shine': Finance, Labour, and Subsumption in *Cosmopolis*

According to the late Argentine writer Ricardo Piglia, money 'is the best novelist in the world'. Money, Piglia sketches, 'is a machine for producing fictions': on the one hand, for characters who 'have money', the history of its acquisition and originary accumulation must be dissimulated; and, on the other, for those without, 'getting rich is the illusion' that marshals their actions and provides a medium through which to dream. But, for money to operate as a narrativising machine, it cannot be earned through wage labour—which 'only produces poverty'—but made through 'imaginary labour' like laundering, counterfeiting, blackmail, theft, invention, and falsification. As Piglia adds, 'to become rich is always an imaginary adventure, the epic of magical and outlawed appropriation'.<sup>48</sup> One of the dilemmas presented to Eric Packer, the twenty-eight year old billionaire currency trader at the centre of *Cosmopolis*, is that 'money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time'.<sup>49</sup> Money in *Cosmopolis* is 'talking to itself', a self-referential medium whose processes of abstraction lead to the virtualisation of wealth into 'lines of code' (C 77; 124). Although Jerry Varsava's portrait of Packer as a 'rogue capitalist' might well situate DeLillo's novel within the tradition of 'bandit literature' staked out by Piglia, there is an overwhelming consensus that the 'epistemological and narratological crisis' charted in *Cosmopolis* relates to a more structural

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<sup>47</sup> Cunningham, 'Time, Modernism, and the Contemporaneity of Realism', p. 60.

<sup>48</sup> Ricardo Piglia, 'Roberto Arlt and the Fiction of Money', trans. by John Kraniuskas, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 8.1 (1999) 13-16 (p. 13).

<sup>49</sup> DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, p. 77. Hence forward all further references will be cited parenthetically as C. Conversely, abstract art becomes derivative: 'He liked paintings that his guests did not know how to look at. The white paintings were unknowable to many, knife-applied slabs of mucooid colour. The new was all the more dangerous for not being new', *Cosmopolis*, p. 8.

purification of capitalism than its interpretation as a picaresque ‘misweave’ allows (C 200).<sup>50</sup> The surge of cyber-capital overloads money as a narrativising machine; a breakdown presented through Packer’s currency analysts who despair at the movements of the yen, but also ontologically: as an heiress inquires, ‘where does it go when you lose it?’ (C 178). *Cosmopolis* is a novel of outlaw dis-accumulation; a conjunctively disjunctive narrative whose ‘imaginary labour’ simultaneously hastens the acceleration of capital into ‘a time beyond geography’ and holds that future off with its insistence on ‘a counter-consciousness’—the ‘scalding fact’ of the body (C 36; 50).

### *A Frenetic Standstill*

Set on an undated day in April 2000, *Cosmopolis* is not so much a novel about New York, as it is a ballad of a street, Manhattan’s 47<sup>th</sup>. The narrative opens at its eastern most point, in a luxury residential tower overlooking the ‘smokestacks’ of Queens and closes among the ‘car barrens’ and ‘old junked-up garages’ on the ‘last block’ before the Hudson (C 6; 179). DeLillo draws on the chronotope of the road and the aleatory encounters it generates. As Bakhtin notes, on the road ‘the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people—representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages—intersect at one spatial and temporal point’.<sup>51</sup> That point of intersection in *Cosmopolis* is the white limousine of Eric Packer, the visionary head of ‘Packer Capital’ who is visited throughout by members of his investment team but also engulfed by the multitudinous events of the day.<sup>52</sup> A fusion of ‘space and flows’, the road, in Bakhtin’s view, concretises the prevailing ‘course of history’; a future-present

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<sup>50</sup> Jerry Varsava, ‘The “Saturated Self”: Don DeLillo on the Problem of Rogue Capitalism’, *Contemporary Literature*, 46.1 (Spring 2005), 78-107 (p. 80); Piglia, ‘Roberto Arlt and the Fiction of Money’, p. 14; Nilges, ‘Finance Capital and the Time of the Novel or, Money Without Narrative Qualities’, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 243.

<sup>52</sup> For readings of the limousine as the ‘subject’ of the novel see Ian Davidson, ‘Automobility, Materiality, and Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*, *Cultural Geographies*, 19.4 (2012), 469-482; and Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 147-166.

accelerated into being through Eric's wild speculation on the value of the yen, what he calls an 'assault on the borders of perception' (C 21).<sup>53</sup> As Eric implores: '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' (C 21). Yann Moulier Boutang too insists that 'the future is already here for those who know how to read it'.<sup>54</sup> In this future, surplus value is no longer primarily extracted from 'the expenditure of human labour power' but appropriated from '*invention-power*'; a 'cognitive capitalism' reliant on the general intellect of collectivised creative labour-power.<sup>55</sup> An intellectualisation of work at the dynamic core of *Cosmopolis*.

Although the futurity of cyber-capital 'becomes insistent' and is felt by Eric and his colleagues to 'thrust' into the present, *Cosmopolis* is also a novel where time lingers and passes in excruciatingly 'slow transit' (C 79-80; 205). Prompted by a desire for a haircut from his childhood barber in Hell's Kitchen, Eric's crosstown journey stalls and runs into traffic that resembles 'a long liquid shimmer of idling metal' (C 65). Gripped by 'mass paralysis', New York is at a 'frenetic standstill', to borrow from Hartmut Rosa (C 65).<sup>56</sup> For Rosa, late modernity is characterised by 'social acceleration' and 'societal rigidity': the constitutive technological acceleration that drives modernity has crossed a 'critical threshold' beyond which redistributive politics and movements have been exhausted.<sup>57</sup> Wiped of its utopian telos, historical development, Rosa posits, runs uncertainly into an 'open future'; or, as Eric less generously puts it, 'history' has become 'monotonous and slobbering', shaped by investment funds and seismic movements of currency rather than the resistant agencies of class struggle (C 75).<sup>58</sup> There is a sense, however, that by plotting the novel's episodes around 47th street's

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<sup>53</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 244.

<sup>54</sup> Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. by Ed Emery (London: Polity Press, 2011), p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, p. 32. (*italics in original*).

<sup>56</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. by Jonathon Trejo-Mathys (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, p. 15; p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

intersections with Manhattan's grand avenues, DeLillo orchestrates a series of clogs and stoppages which block the flow of circulation. In other words, the disjunctive synthesis of acceleration and stasis—a 'frenetic standstill'—also searches for possible 'chokepoints' where finance capital can be made dangerously illiquid.<sup>59</sup>

If *Cosmopolis* inherits the one-day narrative structure from modernist predecessors like James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, it also subsumes the twenty-four-hour narrative to the logic of the market. *Cosmopolis* is a novel of quarters and its four chapters convert Eric's existential day into a business cycle on the verge of going bust. Subsumption also manifests itself through the novel's division into a working day and a recreational evening—a partition signalled by Eric's declaration that 'now he could begin the business of living' (C 107). The novel's two halves separate into a political Part One—which includes the mediated appearance of the President of the USA, the murder of the managing director of the IMF, an alter-globalization riot, as well as the resignation of a Japanese finance minister for a 'misconstrued' pause—and a cultural Part Two—whose incidents number 'The Last Techno Rave', the funeral cortege of Sufi rapper Brutha Fez, the 'pastry assassin' and 'action painter of creme pies' Andre Petrescu, and a post-apocalyptic movie set (C 47; 142-143).<sup>60</sup> These political and cultural codes are, in turn, mediated through the economic, concentrated in Eric's limousine—a roving node of speculation which maps a 'diagram of control'.<sup>61</sup>

Eric's linear progress is interrupted and disarticulated by the 'The Confessions of Benno Levin'—the 'spiritual autobiography' of Richard Sheets, a former employee who murders Eric. (C 149). Levin's confessions are also marked temporally as 'morning' and

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the relationship between chokepoints, finance, and political agency see Meister, 'Liquidity', in *Derivatives and the Wealth of Societies*, pp. 143-173.

<sup>60</sup> 'Semio-capital' is pushed to an extreme by DeLillo: 'There's a rumour it seems involving the finance minister. He's supposed to resign any time now [...] Some kind of scandal about a misconstrued comment. He made a comment about the economy that may have been misconstrued. The whole country is analysing the grammar and syntax of this comment', *Cosmopolis*, p. 47. See Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. by Gregory Conti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Hardt, 'The Withering of Civil Society', *Social Text*, 45 (Winter 1995), 27-44 (p. 36).



‘night’; however, their chronology is reversed so that the midnight reflections over Packer’s corpse appear between chapters one and two, whereas the outline of the project to hunt Packer down is inserted between chapters three and four. Levin’s self-account pre-empts the future in a manner that replicates the structure of financial accumulation, although the desolate historical future envisaged belongs to the dispossessed: ‘it is the violent act that makes history and changes everything that came before’ (C 154).<sup>62</sup> A community college lecturer prior to joining Packer Capital, Levin explains to Eric that he ‘couldn’t keep up’ with the ‘microtimed’ currency trading system (C 191). As such, Levin appears to be a figure of the ‘desynchronised’, marooned ‘generic labour’ who has fallen into a ‘hole’ (C 60; 190).<sup>63</sup> Insisting that his ‘middle class values’ remain intact, Levin regards his occupation of a municipally condemned warehouse as part of ‘a practical life of starting over’ (C 58). In doing so, he embodies a developmentalism without development, a malevolent spirit now manically ‘susceptible to global strains of illness [...] contracted originally on the Internet’ (C 152).<sup>64</sup>

### *The Glow of Cyber-Capital*

According to Bakhtin, the ‘one crucial feature’ of the road novel is that it ‘passes through *familiar territory*, and not through some exotic *alien world*’; that is, ‘it is the *sociohistorical heterogeneity* of one’s own country that is revealed and depicted’.<sup>65</sup> What *Cosmopolis* reveals and depicts are the conjunctive disjunctions of globalisation as they appear along a single New York street, veering from a ‘space of flows’—global institutions—to a ‘space of place’—

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<sup>62</sup> For the ‘pre-emption of future production’ see Cedric Durand, *Fictitious Capital: How Finance is Appropriating Our Future*, trans. by David Broder (London and New York: Verso, 2017).

<sup>63</sup> The ‘desynchronised’, writes Rosa, ‘are excluded from the decisive structural and cultural developments’, *Social Acceleration*, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup> An assemblage of St. Augustine and Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Levin’s journal might also tunnel out of the novel form entirely: ‘So what is left that’s worth the telling’, *Cosmopolis*, p. 61.

<sup>65</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 245. (italics in original).

deindustrialised stagnation.<sup>66</sup> The existential register through which David Cowart reads Eric Packer's 'life-journey' is historicised further by critics who detect an economic shift from the 'time beyond geography' of a 'financial imaginary' to a residual 'nation based imaginary' rooted in the abandoned warehouses of Hell's Kitchen—the cannibalised prehistory of the present.<sup>67</sup> Eric's search for a 'haircut' invested with familiar 'associations' is politicised in turn as a desire for the sensuous which is argued to be suppressed by the disembodied subjectivation of immaterial labour (C 15).<sup>68</sup> The danger here is that in disavowing the 'radiant and seductive [...] glow of cyber-capital' such arguments remain trapped in a romance of use-value and overlook the extent to which *Cosmopolis* is interested in the affects and impersonal sensations of finance, on Eric's 'assault on the borders of perception' (C 78; 21).<sup>69</sup>

Culturally processing the collapse of the Dot Com bubble, *Cosmopolis*, in Joseph Vogl's reading, is less a critique of finance from the perspective of the nation-state, than a machine for testing economic rationality. The novel's synthesis of 'modes of perception'—affect's assault on named experience—and the 'hypertrophic amassing of events'—the realm of history—'raises fundamental questions about how different incidents are interconnected in the current global economy'.<sup>70</sup> The yen's inexplicable and precipitous climb in value, despite

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<sup>66</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Volume I: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 378. For a reading focusing on DeLillo's mapping see Marie-Christine Leps, 'How to Map the Non-Place of Empire: Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*', *Textual Practice*, 28.2 (2014), 305-327.

<sup>67</sup> David Cowart, 'Anxieties of Obsolescence', in *The Holodeck Garden*, ed. by Peter Freese and Charles B. Harris (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2004), pp. 179-191 (p. 184). For the transition from a national to a financial imaginary see Alison Shonkwiler, *The Financial Imaginary: Economic Mystification and the Limits of Realist Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. xi.

<sup>68</sup> For example: Nick Heffernan, "'Money is Talking to Itself': Finance Capitalism in the Fiction of Don DeLillo from *Players* to *Cosmopolis*", *Critical Engagements*, 1.2 (2008), 53-78; Dennis Hanneman, 'Global City turns Local Street Theatre: The Dynamics of Character and Setting in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*', in *Territorial Terror: Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing*, ed. by Gerhard Stilz (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2007), pp. 295-312; Sven Cvenk, *Towering Figure: Reading the 9/11 Archive* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Such an emphasis maintains 'an industrial imaginary in the age of biopolitical production', Hardt, 'Falsify the Currency!', p. 362. For a spatial reading that focuses on DeLillo's registration of the 'devastating socioecological footprint of global capitalism', see Nicole M. Merola, '*Cosmopolis*: Don DeLillo's Melancholy Political Ecology', *American Literature*, 84.2 (December 2012), 827-853 (p. 828).

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, trans. by Joachim Redner and Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 2.

countervailing pressures, is crucial because it conceptualises financial markets as zones of ‘elemental danger’ and, in so doing, reintroduces the ‘epic’ into a novelistic ‘world already prosaically ordered’.<sup>71</sup> For Vogl, the significance of the yen is twofold: on the one hand, it underscores that ‘speculative investment has destabilised the system’: ‘his [Eric’s] actions regarding the yen were causing storms of disorder. He was so leveraged, his firm’s portfolio large and sprawling, linked crucially to the affairs of so many key institutions, all reciprocally vulnerable, that the whole system was in danger’ (C 116). On the other hand, Eric’s confession that he ‘couldn’t figure out the yen’, discloses that ‘the world has become unreadable, its interconnections blurred’ (C 190).<sup>72</sup> Vogl concludes by insisting on a homology between ‘the coherence of the narrated world and the rationality of the economic system’; a connection that is dislocated in DeLillo’s irrational novel, which instead foregrounds a world haunted by the ‘spectral wilfulness’ of capital.<sup>73</sup>

Such a reading is disputed by Alison Shonkwiler, who argues that *Cosmopolis* ‘is not about the failures of market regulation [...] or the growth of rogue capitalism’. DeLillo studiously avoids the pedagogical and focuses instead on the reification of the cultural imagination—a reification which now includes the very unrepresentable complexity of the system itself. *Cosmopolis* is thus a self-reflexive investigation of ‘the withering of the frames of critique in the face of this new cognition of the market’.<sup>74</sup> This withering of critique when confronted with the ‘financial sublime’ appears in DeLillo’s presentation as the ontological waning of realism—a fictional President Midwood is substituted for the historical Bill Clinton. The ‘thinness of the novel’s history’, Shonkwiler writes, captures the new condition of global finance: ‘the sublime imagination of capital does not reach into the thickness of historical

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<sup>71</sup> Vogl, *The Specter of Capital*, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10; p. x.

<sup>74</sup> Alison Shonkwiler, ‘Don DeLillo’s Financial Sublime’, *Contemporary Literature*, 51.2 (Summer 2010), 246-282 (p. 254). An example of a pedagogical form would be *The Big Short*. dir. Adam McKay. Paramount Pictures. 2015.

material relations'.<sup>75</sup> *Cosmopolis* is best considered 'an experiment in form, an investigation into the adequacy of our representations of capitalism in its dimensions and effect', rather than a testing of the rationality of finance or nostalgic plea for the 'self-contained [...] world' of manufacturing (C 60).<sup>76</sup> For Shonkwiler, the task of the contemporary novelist of capitalism is to combine scenic descriptions with a narration of financialisation as another moment in the contradictory development of capital accumulation. It is to this question of historical temporalisation that the chapter now turns, with a particular interest in *Cosmopolis*'s aesthetic reworking and detournement of the 'desire called History': *The Communist Manifesto*.

### *A Spectre Is Haunting the World*

'Situated at the hinge' between the 'age of revolution' (1789-1848) and the 'age of capital' (1848-1870), the *Communist Manifesto*, Peter Osborne speculates, 'may stand as a metonym for the desire called "history"'.<sup>77</sup> The *Communist Manifesto* is used to register an epochal transition in *Cosmopolis*; although, in DeLillo's novel, the historical dialectic between revolution and capital has been overtaken by the 'interaction between technology and capital' (C 23). Marx and Engels' text appears during an alter-globalisation demonstration where protesters break into the NASDAQ centre and reprogram its stock tickers, declaring that 'A SPECTRE IS HAUNTING THE WORLD— THE SPECTER OF CAPITALISM' (C 96). This specter is personified in *Cosmopolis* by Eric Packer, who 'is always ahead, thinking past what is new' and 'wants to be one civilization ahead of this one' (C 152). The spectral future that haunts the novel is one in which, to quote Osborne, 'communism as the eschatological absolute has given way to the "bad infinity" of capitalism'.<sup>78</sup> Or, as Vija Kinski, Packer Capital's 'chief

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<sup>75</sup> Shonkwiler, 'Don DeLillo's Financial Sublime', pp. 254-255.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>77</sup> Osborne, 'Remember the Future?', p. 190.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

of theory’, puts it: the protesters want ‘to hold off the future [...] keep it from overwhelming the present’; a reflection that reprises and reverses the standpoints sketched out by Marx and Engels, with the working class now functioning as the agents of historical retardation (C 91). If *Cosmopolis* imagines a capitalism that has expanded ‘beyond the rules of historical materialism’, as Shonkwiler contends, DeLillo’s nomination of the demonstrators as a ‘multitude’ equally gestures to emerging subjectivities that might too reimagine the rules of historical materialism.<sup>79</sup>

That said, the novel itself seems to suggest that the creative potential of the multitude, what Hardt and Negri call its ‘Kairos’, has already been integrated into the world market.<sup>80</sup> Observing the confrontation between the protesters and riot police from within Eric’s limousine, Kinski tells Eric that the demonstrators ‘are not the grave diggers’ envisaged by Marx and Engels, but ‘a fantasy generated by the market. They don’t exist outside the market. There is nowhere they can go to be on the outside’ (C 90). Critical Theory is ‘misplaced’ in *Cosmopolis* and turns against those searching for an exit from the dominion of capital. As Suman Gupta notes, DeLillo not only draws attention to the ‘complicity between globalization theory and capitalist practices’, but also accentuates a rift between ‘thought and practice’ whereby the theorist Kinski is alienated and distanced from the spontaneity of collective praxis.<sup>81</sup> The ‘protesters, anarchists, whoever they were’ are contemplated by Kinski and Eric as ‘a form of street theatre, or adepts of sheer rampage’—a considerable deflation of Hardt and Negri’s project of constituent power (C 88). Moreover, the resistant ontology of living labour is embraced by Kinski and becomes an engine of growth: the protesters ‘exist, to invigorate

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<sup>79</sup> Shonkwiler, ‘Don DeLillo’s Financial Sublime’, p. 250. This notion of ‘multitude’ is partly corroborated by Cornelius Collins’s report from the DeLillo archives, which notes that the preface to Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*, as well as their 2001 *New York Times* opinion piece ‘Don’t Dismiss the Genoa Protesters’ are included among the research material for *Cosmopolis*, “‘Gathering Facts for the End of the World’: Don DeLillo’s Archive of Global Turbulence’, *Orbit: Writing around Pynchon*, 4.2 (2016), 1-31.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 165.

<sup>81</sup> Suman Gupta, *Globalization and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 15.

and perpetuate the system [...] they give it energy and definition' (C 90). The autonomist stress on refusal and exodus is reflected on and represented as a 'shadow transaction between the demonstrators and the state'; a transaction in which the 'enforced destruction' of Anarchism, Libertarian Marxism, and capitalism coalesce (C 90; 92).

By rendering the collective a static object of contemplation for *Cosmopolis's* maintaining individuals—or, individuals who maintain through volatility—DeLillo reproduces the passivity of naturalist forms of description censured by Lukács. 'Observation', Lukács insists, 'ignores the motive forces of social development' and imagines life 'as a constant even-tenored stream or as a monotonous plain sprawling without contours', 'interrupted by "sudden" catastrophes'.<sup>82</sup> Whilst the incorporation of the individual within a collective third might well be de-dialecticised in *Cosmopolis*, Kinski's comment that the protesters 'are traded on the markets of the world' nonetheless supplements a blind spot in the *Communist Manifesto* itself (C 90). In 'placing the proletariat outside of capital', Marx and Engels, Osborne writes, crucially neglect its internal 'existence as variable capital'—a liquidised subsumption of labour-power captured by Kinski.<sup>83</sup> If the detachment of the maintaining individual from the third, formalises, for Lukács, the suspension of bourgeois political economy—that is, its disavowal of historical change—in DeLillo a new historical temporalisation emerges from the experience of standstill. Kinski: 'money makes time. It used to be the other way around. Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism. People stopped thinking about eternity. They began to concentrate on hours, measurable hours, man-hours, using labour more efficiently' (C 79). As Dick Bryan, Michael Rafferty, and Chris Jeffries would put it, Marx's 'modes of valuation'—abstract social labour time and fixed state money—have become 'historical'. One of the tasks of contemporary Marxism is to take into account 'the highly liquid financial assets of uncertain

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<sup>82</sup> Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 122.

<sup>83</sup> Osborne, 'Remember the Future', p. 201.

value’ and to conceptualise the value of labour-power ‘beyond wage work at the factory’— forms of collectivity that struggle to attain imaginative coherency in *Cosmopolis*.<sup>84</sup>

In this ‘new and fluid reality’ of cyber-capital, ‘the amassments’ and ‘material crush’ of manufacturing are obsolescent and go ‘mostly unseen’ (C 83). When collective labour appears in *Cosmopolis* it does so as an abstraction, as financial ‘data’ which, in Eric’s view, is ‘soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process’ (C 24). History, it seems, has broken free from historicism and it is now ‘the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole’ (C 24). *Cosmopolis*’s vision of the digitisation of the commons reaches an apotheosis when Eric and Kinski exit the limousine to view the market listings running across a tower on Broadway:

This was very different from the relaxed news reports that wrapped around the old Times Tower a few blocks south of here. These were three tiers of data running concurrently and swiftly about a hundred feet above the street. Financial news, stock prices, currency markets. The action was unflagging. The hellbent sprint of numbers and symbols, the fractions, decimals, stylized dollar signs, the streaming release of words, of multinational news, all too fleet to be absorbed. (C 80)

DeLillo presents a ‘structure-in-motion’ here, one in which, contra Lukács, the ‘action’ of contemporising affect is ‘unflagging’; although, it is also ‘too fleet to be absorbed’ and narrated historically.<sup>85</sup> Speculation, Bernard Stiegler complains, ‘fossilises time: it freezes it into a wall of time where past and future cancel each other out’; a perpetual present in which, for Kinski and Packer, ‘information’ is ‘made sacred, ritually unreadable’ (C 80).<sup>86</sup> Cyber-capital’s ‘hellbent sprint’ retains Marx’s ‘relentless temporal logic of negation’; however, this is the surge of a futureless present whose citizens have become spectators in an unfolding historical disaster.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Dick Bryan, Michael Rafferty, and Chris Jeffries, ‘Risk and Value: Finance, Production, and Labour’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 114.2 (April 2015), 307-330 (p. 309).

<sup>85</sup> I take ‘structure-in-motion’ from Clover, ‘Autumn of the System’, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 107.

<sup>87</sup> Osborne, ‘Remember the Future?’, p. 192.

Like Kinski, Fredric Jameson suggests that ‘the impact of the new value abstractions on everyday life and lived experience’ are ‘best articulated in terms of temporality’. The ‘older cyclical rhythms’ of ‘boom and bust’ capitalism have been replaced by ‘newer processes of the consumption of investment’ on the stock market, of ‘the anxious daily consultation of the listings, deliberations with or without your broker, selling off, taking a gamble on something as yet untested’. A ‘microtemporality’ now ‘accompanies and as it were condenses the rhythms of quarterly “profit taking”’; a narrowing of temporality that affects ‘our own individual and collective futures’ more generally.<sup>88</sup> Eric is ‘thrilled to think in zeptoseconds and to watch the numbers in their unrelenting run. The stock ticker was good. He watched the major issues breeze by and felt purified in nameless ways to see prices spiral into a lubricious plunge’ (C 106). For Jameson this acceleration belongs to the ‘wholesale liquidation of futurity’, whose cultural symptom is the inability of collective projects to frame alternative historical futures ‘for themselves’.<sup>89</sup> A liquidation of the past and the future also partly explains the absorption of the alter-globalization riot, whose constituent project, Jameson notes in a related discussion of Hardt and Negri’s work, is ‘no longer a politics of duration but the politics of the instant, of the present’.<sup>90</sup> In other words, such projects cannot constitute themselves beyond the temporal form of finance itself: ‘we were under attack by anarchists’, Eric tells Elise Shifrin, ‘just two hours ago they were a major global protest. Now, what, forgotten’ (C 118).<sup>91</sup> *Cosmopolis*’s integration of the protest as a serialised episode, then, confirms the demobilisation of the Lukácsian workers’ army.

*Cosmopolis* responds negatively to Osborne’s query as to whether there really is ‘no

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<sup>88</sup> Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, pp. 643-644.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 644.

<sup>90</sup> Fredric Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Hardt and Negri could respond that this ephemerality is related to the fact ‘that there is no common language of struggles that could “translate” the particular language of each into a *cosmopolitan* language’, *Empire*, p. 57. (emphasis mine).



time but that of the expanded reproduction of capital, the relentless self-expansion of the value-form'.<sup>92</sup> 'Time is a thing that grows scarcer ever day' and is 'sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential' (C 69; 79). Although, as Clover suggests, financial speculation is less a renewal of 'systemic accumulation' than it is a displacement of the contradictions and crises of the value-form.<sup>93</sup> *Cosmopolis* too closes with a terminal crisis that cannot be overcome: not only does Eric crash the stock market but he is held captive by his killer Benno Levin. The experience of lateness as a condition of being 'after-yet-within' is given its most startling expressive form when Eric watches the future unfold in his watch and realises that he is the unidentified 'Male Z' being interred in a hospital morgue: 'O shit I'm dead' (C 206). Confronted with this vision of material finitude Eric wonders if 'all the worlds' have 'conflated, all possible states become present at once (C 205). This dechronologisation of the present is not equal 'to those great Utopias that have occasionally broken on the status quo like a sunburst', as Jameson writes, but it nonetheless dislocates the temporal framework of finance capital and cracks open a weak messianic possibility of historical futures other than that of market domination.<sup>94</sup>

### *A Communist Conclusion?*

'History is what hurts', Jameson writes, 'but this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force'.<sup>95</sup> History in *Cosmopolis* is similarly presented as a trace: 'the Sikh at the wheel was missing a finger. Eric regarded the stub, impressive, a serious thing, a body ruin that carried history and pain' (C 17). It is this 'burden' or 'purpose' that is missing from Levin's personal revenge, an act that has not been sharpened by 'some

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<sup>92</sup> Osborne, 'Remember the Future?', p. 193.

<sup>93</sup> Joshua Clover, 'Value/Theory/Crisis', *PMLA*, 127.1 (January 2012), 107-114 (p. 113).

<sup>94</sup> Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory*, p. 644.

<sup>95</sup> Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 88.

oppressive force' but resembles instead 'another fool shooting up a dinner because because' (C 196). If there is something undoubtedly fetishistic about this distinction between the damaged historical body of the migrant and the ahistorical carnage of the 'native' shooter, DeLillo nonetheless elucidates a problem for representational democracy in the contemporary realist novel. The shaping of history in *Cosmopolis* is divorced from democratically accountable institutions and is instead colonised by investment funds and other loyal subjects of capital: 'people eat and sleep in the shadow of what we [Packer Capital] do' (C 14). As Robert Meister points out, whilst it only requires a 'few of "us"'—hackers, for example—to crash the financial system, it is rather more challenging to build these rogue collectives into democratising movements.<sup>96</sup> Peripheralised, when the people finally appear on the stage of history in DeLillo's novel, they do so on a movie set, as a post-apocalyptic 'city of stunned flesh' and 'fallen bodies' (C 172; 174). 'The bodies were blunt facts', Eric thinks, 'their power was their own independent of whatever circumstance attended the event': a 'withdrawn' power of labour-power that might yet instantiate a collective destiny autonomous of capital (C 173).

Clover argues that the return of the riot in recent years is symptomatic of a shift in the gravity of class struggle, whose centre is no longer the fixed terrain of production—'the setting of prices for labour-power'—but rather the dispersed zones of reproduction—'the setting of prices for market goods'.<sup>97</sup> The 'barricades of burning tires' erected by DeLillo's multitude, in turn, relates to Clover's contention that the mission of the American riot is to bring the circulation of capital to a standstill (C 91).<sup>98</sup> Although the alter-globalization protesters fail to constitute themselves into the spatial politics of the commune—they remain a flash mob—they nevertheless implement a type of conceptual price re-setting in which the stock tickers of the NASDAQ Center announce that 'A RAT BECAME THE UNIT OF CURRENCY' (C 96).

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<sup>96</sup> Meister, 'Liquidity', p. 171.

<sup>97</sup> Joshua Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot.: The New Era of Uprisings* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), p. 15.

<sup>98</sup> Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot.*, pp. 175-192.

Reviewing Foucault's lectures on 'the "dog philosophy" of the cynics', Michael Hardt recounts a story in which the Oracle at Delphi gives instructions to 'Falsify the Currency!'.<sup>99</sup> 'To change the currency', Hardt glosses, 'becomes a project to create a new life and new world'; a falsification which now underpins the corralling and capturing of social values by financial instruments.<sup>100</sup> As Elise tells Eric: 'I think you acquire information and turn it into something stupendous and awful' (C 19). Yet the falsification of currency also names 'biopolitical struggles against neoliberal capitalist control' which, Hardt argues, strive 'to put a new face on social value'.<sup>101</sup> DeLillo's novel might not share this communising vocation; however, its falsification of currency offers to re-situate Ricardo Piglia's notion of the imaginary labour of bandit accumulation. Surveying a post-riot scene of 'smoke and gas', Eric 'thought he was an astronaut upon a planet of pure flatus' (C 96). As Jameson might say, *Cosmopolis* here breathes 'the air of other planets' and experiences 'radically different futures' existing within 'world of immanence': historical futures that are not earned but appropriated by communist outlaws.<sup>102</sup>

## II. Falling Man: 'Natura Morta'; or, History as a Still Life

'Something will happen soon, maybe today', Kinski speculates, 'to correct the acceleration of time' (C 79). Whilst this 'something' obtains to the imminent collapse, correction, and displacement of the dot-com bubble, it is hard not to associate Kinski's premonition with the September 11 terror attacks—whose ruination, rather than deceleration, of the future, preoccupies DeLillo in *Falling Man*.<sup>103</sup> Bruce Robbins's observation that 9/11 'created its own

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<sup>99</sup> Hardt, 'Falsify the Currency!', p. 359.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 360. The biopolitical dimension to finance becomes farce in an exchange between Eric and Michael Chin in which they reflect on the rat becoming a unit of currency: "That would impact the world economy" [...] "Yes. U.S. established rat standard".

"Yes. Every U.S. dollar redeemable for rat".

"Read rats".

"Yes. Stockpiling of rats called global health menace", *Cosmopolis*, p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>102</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 213.

<sup>103</sup> This distinction is DeLillo's: 'The protesters in Genoa, Prague, Seattle and other cities want to decelerate the

unique surround' in the American novel holds especially true for DeLillo: in *Falling Man* the world is shattered ontologically—'it was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night'—intensified perceptually—'the ordinariness, so normally unnoticeable, fell upon him oddly, with almost dreamlike effect'—and rendered politically open—'what comes after America?'.<sup>104</sup> Reflecting on the United States as a 'stricken community', *Falling Man* is composed of a 'scenic impulse' which registers experiential contingency in the aftermath of atrocity and a 'narrative impulse' that struggles to inscribe 9/11 within an intelligible historical process. The search for historical narration, however, polarizes the novel's characters into those that endorse a racialised civilizational thesis and those that remain faithful to the categories of historical materialism—characters who are regrettably 'back in another time zone' (FM 49). *Falling Man*, thus, internalises the antinomies of realism; a novel whose disjunctive synthesis of affect and history can be identified through the appearance of multiple still lives: the most prominent examples of which are the Giorgio Morandi paintings and the virtuoso performance artist, 'Falling Man', who dangles in a 'suspended state' (FM 221).<sup>105</sup> Discussing the aesthetics of standstill, Peter Osborne asks 'when is the stasis of reification just a commodified negation of process and relation'—Lukács—and 'when is it a critical interruption of the already reified process of a naturalising historicism'—Benjamin.<sup>106</sup> This question of erasure or interruption guides the following consideration of *Falling Man's*

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global momentum that seemed to be driving unthinkingly toward a landscape of consumer-robots and social instability, with the chance of self-determination diminishing for most people in most countries. Whatever acts of violence marked the protests, most of the men and women involved tend to be a moderating influence, trying to slow things down, even things out, hold off the white-hot future. The terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past', 'In the Ruins of the Future', *Guardian*, 22 December 2001, Culture section <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>> [accessed 4 August 2019].

<sup>104</sup> Bruce Robbins, 'The Worlding of the American Novel', in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. by Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1096-1108 (p. 1096); Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2008), p. 3; p. 51; p. 192. Hence forward all further references will be cited parenthetically as FM.

<sup>105</sup> 'All his falls were headfirst, none announced in advance. The performance pieces were not designed to be recorded by a photographer', *Falling Man*, p. 220. As 'an activity without an end product', virtuosity has to 'rely on witnesses', Virno writes, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, p. 52

<sup>106</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, pp. 202-203.

states of historical suspension—DeLillo’s homeland realism.<sup>107</sup>

### *Lover’s Discourse*

*Falling Man* negotiates the ‘disoriented’ post-9/11 condition through Lianne Glenn, a freelance editor, and her estranged husband, Keith Neudecker, a survivor of the World Trade Centre who reappears ‘out of an ash storm, all blood and slag, reeking of burnt matter’ (FM 87).<sup>108</sup> Although Lianne worries that in an age of terror ‘all life’ has ‘become public’, *Falling Man* eschews the national-collective and focuses instead on family: on Lianne and Keith’s delicate rapprochement; their precocious child Justin; Lianne’s art historian mother, Nina Bartos, and Nina’s German lover, Martin Ridnour, an art dealer and former revolutionary (FM 182). According to Nancy Armstrong, the ‘modern household’ has historically served as ‘an apparatus of and model for a modern liberal society’. The bourgeois family provides the novel with a ‘mediating structure’ whose ‘telos and resolution’ takes up ‘the impossible task of patching rifts between private consciousness and the material conditions of embodiment’.<sup>109</sup> In *Falling Man*, the family as a site of care-giving is welcomed by Lianne, who insists that ‘we need to stay together, keep the family going [...] with the idea that we’re permanent. Times like these, the family is necessary. Don’t you think? Be together, stay together? This is how we live through the things that scare us half to death’ (FM 214).<sup>110</sup> Such a desire to ‘sink into our little lives’ is checked, however, by the names of history which overdetermine the novel’s three parts—Bill Lawton, Ernst Hechinger, and David Janiak—who push forms of dissensus into the

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<sup>107</sup> For accounts of Homeland see Amy Kaplan, ‘Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space’, *Radical History Review*, 85 (Winter 2003), 82-93; and Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>108</sup> Robbins, ‘The Worliding of the American Novel’, p. 1096.

<sup>109</sup> Nancy Armstrong, ‘The Future *In* and *Of* the Novel’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 44.1 (2011), 8-10 (p. 8).

<sup>110</sup> For an ‘ethics of embodiment’ see Katrina Harack, ‘Embedded and Embodied Memories: Body, Space, and Time in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* and *Falling Man*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 54.2 (Summer 2013), 303-336.

narrative (FM 75).<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, each part is supplemented by a geographically marked episode in the bildungsroman of Hammad, a fictionalised 9/11 hijacker, whose alternative kinship structure lodges into the novel like ‘organic shrapnel’ (FM 16).<sup>112</sup> In this respect, *Falling Man* attempts to capture the ‘contemporising’ now of affect whilst also including, albeit partially, the prehistory of its futureless present.

Progressing elliptically across the days, months, and eventually years after September 11, DeLillo nonetheless curves the novel back round to its originary black hole, ‘the ash ruins of what was various and human’ (FM 246). *Falling Man* concludes in the moments prior to its stunned opening scene, with Keith Neudecker emerging from the North Tower into a world where ‘the only light was vestigial now, the light of what comes after, carried in the residue of smashed matter’ (FM 246). 9/11 is thus presented by DeLillo in terms of a perceptual and historical rupture; a ‘limit event’, as Kristiaan Versluys puts it, ‘that shatters the symbolic resources of the culture and defeats the normal processes of meaning making and semiosis’.<sup>113</sup> Whilst this traumatic breakdown of ‘the network of significations’ is typically healed by narrative, Versluys contends that DeLillo’s novel is ‘pure melancholia without the possibility of mourning’—hence its inability to conceive a future beyond the cycles of traumatic experience.<sup>114</sup> Aimee Pozorski agrees that DeLillo reflects on the ‘problem of reference’ without referentiality; however, argues instead that the stalling of representation meditates on the burden of witnessing itself.<sup>115</sup> Thinking about her encounter with the ‘Falling Man’, Lianne realises that ‘she was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers, to record and absorb’ (FM 223). The act of witnessing, John Duvall

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<sup>111</sup> Bill Lawton is an anglicised version of Bin Laden, Ernst Hechinger is the nom de guerre of Martin Ridnour, and David Janiak is the performance artist Falling Man.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Organic shrapnel’ is the name given to the ‘small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber’s body’ which get ‘wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who’s in striking range [...] like, pellets of flesh, human flesh that get driven into the skin’, *Falling Man*, p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> Versluys, *Out of the Blue*, p. 4; p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> Aimee Pozorski, *Falling After 9/11: Crisis in American Art and Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 1.

remarks, is integral to the novel's artworks, artists, and art critics, who illustrate 'the inadequacy and necessity of artistic mediation', and embark 'on the task of remembering and memorialising'.<sup>116</sup> *Falling Man*'s virtuoso aesthetics of standstill, then, simultaneously records the socio-historical experience of discontinuity and strives to invent a people aslant from the imperial sovereignty of the Bush Administration.

On the other hand, there is a countervailing argument which suggests that *Falling Man*'s turn towards affect, memory, and trauma, 'contribute[s] to, rather than challenge[s]' the United States 'hypernationalism'.<sup>117</sup> DeLillo's 'excessive reliance on the US national form', John Carlos Rowe notes, prevents him from depicting America's role in producing forces that now 'exceed' the empire's 'cultural, political, and military control'—the 'dialectics of disaster', to quote Fredric Jameson.<sup>118</sup> This othering of otherness—so that it is incomprehensible—is particularly evident in DeLillo's characterisation of Hammad, which not only occupies a mere eighteen pages, but is absent of direct speech, rendering Hammad an inert stereotype rather than a complex fold within a world-historical collectivity. 'Jihad', in *Falling Man* lacks historical determination and desires simply 'to make blood flow, their blood and that of others'; fanaticism-for-itself which, as Rowe observes, 'refuses to explore the possibility of any transvaluation of values from *outside*' what the plotters regard as 'the all-enfolding will of capital' (FM 173; 80).<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> John N. Duvall, 'Witnessing Trauma: *Falling Man* and Performance Art', in *Don DeLillo: Mao II, Underworld, Falling Man*, ed. by Stacy Olster (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 152-168 (p. 153). The novel traces 'the repression of memory and the memory of repression' in Linda Kaufman's reading, an interpretation that draws on Lianne's writing workshop with Alzheimer's patients and Martin Ridnour's involvement with Kommune 1, 'The Wake of Terror: Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future", "Baader-Meinhof", and *Falling Man*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.2 (Summer 2008), 353-377 (p. 354).

<sup>117</sup> John Carlos Rowe, 'Global Horizons in *Falling Man*', in *Don DeLillo: Mao II, Underworld, Falling Man*, ed. by Stacy Olster (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 121-134 (p. 134). Joseph Conte nonetheless maintains that DeLillo formulates a 'dialectical critique of the transnational forces of global capitalism and fundamentalist terrorism, 'Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and the Age of Terror', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 57.3 (Fall 2011), 557-583 (p. 559).

<sup>118</sup> Rowe, 'Global Horizons in *Falling Man*', p. 134; Fredric Jameson, 'The Dialectics of Disaster', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.2 (Spring 2002), 297-304.

<sup>119</sup> Rowe, 'Global Horizons in *Falling Man*', p. 128. (italics in original).

DeLillo's reluctance to investigate the historical milieus of the 9/11 plotters touches on one half of Richard Gray's critique of post-9/11 US fiction: its reified 'encounters with strangeness'.<sup>120</sup> The other dimension to Gray's argument concerns a tendency to 'assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures' and the consequent domestication of crisis so that 'cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists'.<sup>121</sup> One of the fundamental problems with the trauma thesis, as Rachel Greenwald Smith makes clear, is that it retroactively presupposes 'a previously integrated entity' whose unified constitution is shocked from without. As such, trauma replicates and secures 'a new national myth' in which differences within the United States are erased, and the agencies of terror are expelled from history: radical Islam is 'a viral infection. A virus reproduces itself outside history' (FM 113).<sup>122</sup>

Drawing on Alain Badiou's injunction that 'art must withdraw and not contribute to the invention of formal ways of rendering visible what Empire already recognises as existent', Greenwald Smith adds that without the 'not-yet', *Falling Man's* estranging stylistics—Lianne's impersonal 'thoughts from nowhere, elsewhere, someone else's'—merely operate as a literary analogue for disaster capitalism (FM 69).<sup>123</sup> The codification of affect into emotion—Lianne 'was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue'—reproduces, at the level of the artwork, the dialectic whereby 'world-changing catastrophes' coincide with 'the expansion of existing policies' (FM 236).<sup>124</sup> Without the discovery of new content, aesthetic defamiliarisation merely reframes the continued accumulation of capital and its supervision by imperial forms of

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<sup>120</sup> Richard Gray, 'Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis', *American Literary History*, 21.1 (2009), 128-151 (p. 135).

<sup>121</sup> Gray, 'Open Doors, Closed Minds', pp. 133-134.

<sup>122</sup> Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 64.

<sup>123</sup> Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature*, p. 67.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



sovereignty.

Posing the question of whether there has indeed ‘been a worlding’ of the US novel in the wake of September 11, Robbins concludes that ‘in the face of large-scale impersonal violence, many of them [US novels] retreat into domesticity—behind national borders, behind the door of the family home’.<sup>125</sup> The ‘rituals of retreat’ are certainly set in motion when Lianne reflects in Part Three that ‘she was continuing to withdraw, but calmly, in control’, adding that her and Keith ‘were falling out of the world’ (FM 212).<sup>126</sup> In an excoriating reading of DeLillo’s novel, Robbins picks up on this refrain of worldliness noting that ‘when the word “world” comes up in *Falling Man* it’s often to indicate that ambitions are being scaled-back, life-complicating destinies are being abandoned’.<sup>127</sup> That said, Lianne self-reflexively describes herself as ‘privileged, detached, self-involved, white’ and attributes her distance from anti-war demonstrators and here wariness of Islam alike to ‘a white person’s thoughts, the processing of white panic data’ (FM 184-185). Withdrawal from political subjectivation and the setting of national crisis in a domestic key might instead be considered as pivotal to the novel’s imagining of a people without a destiny. *Falling Man*’s distribution of characters, perspectives, and the sensible remains firmly within the ‘familiar zone’ of the bourgeois couple, and consciously presents the horizons beyond domestic intimacy as unnavigable.<sup>128</sup> DeLillo, therefore, establishes a totality without geopolitical totalisation and, as such, sculpts a novel that in Lukácsian terms ‘narrow[s] down and volatize[s] whatever has to be given form to the point where’ it can be encompassed—an encompassing, however, that de-worlds *Falling*

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<sup>125</sup> Robbins, ‘The Worlding of the American Novel’, p. 1097.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1098.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1098. For accounts which take the opposite approach and suggest that DeLillo’s first family refuse to reproduce consensus and ideological closure, see Magali Cornier Michael, ‘Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*: Countering Post-9/11 Narratives of Heroic Masculinity’, in *Portraying 9/11*, ed. by Veronique Bragard, Christophe Dony, and Warren Rosenberg (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), pp. 73-88; Mary J. Parish, ‘9/11 and the Limitations of the *Man’s Man* Construction of Masculinity in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*’, *Critique*, 53.3 (2012), 185-200.

<sup>128</sup> Robbins, ‘The Worlding of the American Novel’, p. 1098.

*Man*.<sup>129</sup>

Robbins's call for 'better maps, more complex and reliable global positioning systems' is echoed by Clemens Spahr, who is similarly concerned that 'questions of trauma and commemoration' have displaced the cartographic and 'political work that literature can do'.<sup>130</sup> Spahr draws attention to a conflict between the 'ethical vision of reconciliation and renewal' attached to an aesthetics of suspension and a concomitant refusal to inscribe 9/11 back into the dynamically unfolding 'socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions' of the USA.<sup>131</sup> Hamilton Carroll's discussion of *Falling Man*'s 'twinned temporalities' equally broaches the question of suspension; however, DeLillo's 'ekphrastic' mode of description here derails the 'forward narrative momentum' embodied by Hammad's chronology: 'we are finding the way already chosen for us' (FM 175).<sup>132</sup> The multiple instances of ekphrasis disrupt the unidirectional historicism of the hijackers, opening onto an open-ended 'referential present'; a present that in Spahr's despairing account is not only divorced from history, but represses the possibility of alternative futures.<sup>133</sup> Spahr writes that 'the moment of suspension is prolonged to such an extent that no vision of the future emerges'; a futureless present that results from DeLillo's bracketing off and rejection of the 'commitment to political and social change'.<sup>134</sup> Framed as such, Spahr and Carroll's arguments vividly illuminate one of the central concerns running through Jameson's *The Antinomies of Realism*: the tension between realism's conflicting temporalities—the destiny enforced through temporal continuity and the perpetual present of affect—and its 'ontological stake in the solidity of social reality'—its resistance to 'history and

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<sup>129</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 38.

<sup>130</sup> Robbins, 'The Worlding of the American Novel', p. 1097; Clemens Spahr, 'Prolonged Suspension: Don DeLillo, Ian McEwan, and the Literary Imagination after 9/11', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 45.2 (2012), 221-237 (p. 221).

<sup>131</sup> Spahr, 'Prolonged Suspension', p. 221-222.

<sup>132</sup> Hamilton Carroll, "'Like Nothing in this Life": September 11 and the Limits of Representation in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*', *Studies in American Fiction*, 40.1 (Spring 2013), 107-130 (p. 114; p. 116; p. 113).

<sup>133</sup> Carroll, 'September 11 and the Limits of Representation', p. 127.

<sup>134</sup> Spahr, 'Prolonged Suspension', p. 222; p. 235.

change'.<sup>135</sup> It is to the antinomies of narration and description that the chapter now turns.

### *Still Lives*

Spahr attributes *Falling Man's* failure to 'imagine a political role for itself' to DeLillo's reluctance 'to imagine a future that significantly revises the present'.<sup>136</sup> This state of depoliticised abeyance is exemplified during the first appearance of the performance artist 'Falling Man', where the narration toggles between the 'outraged' third-person popular response to the 'puppetry of human desperation' and the use of interior discourse to present Lianne's measured observation: 'it held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all' (FM 33). Suspended outside Grand Central Station, the world of 'Falling Man' is contrasted to the 'sight of police and state troopers in clusters' which evoke, for Lianne at least, 'other places [...] other worlds, dusty terminals, major intersections, [where] this is routine and always will be' (FM 32). Dissociated from the political context of the national security state, 'Falling Man's' suspension of the everyday 'ultimately' reaffirms 'the status quo' according to Spahr; an eternal present that resonates with Lukács critique of naturalism and its compositional principle of description.<sup>137</sup> As naturalism succeeds classical realism, characters are transformed from active participants in the collective steering of historical tendencies into passive spectators who serve as perceptual instruments registering the frozen being of social forms. This formal reworking is achieved through a shift in tense, whereby the epic relationality of past tense narration is abandoned for the 'contemporaneity of the observer'.<sup>138</sup> Description emancipates bodily sensations, affects, and scenic detail from

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<sup>135</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Spahr, 'Prolonged Suspension', p. 221.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>138</sup> Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 130.

their subordination to a hierarchically ordered plot, but such autonomisation of contingent experience ‘sinks’ into the abstract particularity and ‘arid, flat prose of everyday bourgeois life’.<sup>139</sup> ‘For all its close observations and descriptions, modern realism’, Lukács writes, ‘has lost its capacity to depict the dynamic of life’; an absence of motive forces crystallised in Nina Bartos’ conviction that there is ‘nothing next. There is no next. This was next’ (FM 10).<sup>140</sup>

To be sure, *Falling Man* could also be said to self-consciously dramatize the transition from a regime of historiographic narration to a regime of contemporising description—‘the spirit of what is ever impending’—through an extraordinary moment of narrative clinching (FM 212). The novel’s final section, ‘In the Hudson Corridor’, encodes a violent transfer of perspective as Hammad’s destituent project explodes into Keith’s daily life:

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the side of the aisle, and he [Hammad] watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc [...] across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. (FM 239)

Peter Osborne’s conceptualisation of the contemporary as ‘the disjunctive unity of times’ is given a striking punctual twist in this passage; however, DeLillo struggles to further substantiate the collective subject of modernity: ‘a we that is a conjunction of a plurality of temporally co-present “I’s”’.<sup>141</sup> But the contemporary, Osborne notes, also ‘fixes or enfolds’ the ‘transitoriness’ of modernity ‘within the duration of a conjunction’; a static ‘present moment’ which Lukács disparagingly discusses in terms of ‘still lives’.<sup>142</sup> The aesthetic category of the still life is crucial for DeLillo’s novel, not just in terms of its ekphrastic depiction of the Morandi paintings titled ‘*Natura Morta*’ and the suspend grace of *Falling Man*, but also for its existential experience of historical time: away from ‘all the streaming forms of office discourse [...] things seemed still, they seemed clearer to the eye, oddly, in ways he [Keith] didn’t understand’ (FM 65). Although DeLillo’s thinned out prose pushes abstraction to the point

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>141</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not at All*, p. 25

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

where particularity is almost dispensed with altogether—‘he noticed things, all the small lost strokes of a day or a minute’—the concentration on intensities and affects, nonetheless evoke a perpetual present dislocated from any historical telos (FM 65).

Through its serialised and episodic assemblage of still lives, description, in Lukács’s account, is the aesthetic ideology of an embattled bourgeoisie, whose detachment of thought from action disavows the impermanence of the historical present. Franco Moretti is similarly interested in these apparently banal descriptive episodes, narrative units he renames ‘fillers’ and places in opposition to ‘turning points’.<sup>143</sup> For Moretti, this binary relates less to an absolute split between the sensory depiction of the world and the narration of human action, than it obtains to the narrativity of everyday life itself: ‘the background conquering the foreground’.<sup>144</sup> The bottle which ‘skitter[s] across the floor’ and relays narration from Hammad to Keith is encountered earlier in the novel’s discursive arrangement, in the form of the Morandi still lives of ‘bottles, jugs, biscuit tins’:

There was something in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name, or in the irregular edges of vases and jars, some reconnoitre inward, human and obscure, away from the very light and colour of the paintings. *Natura Morta*. The Italian term for still life seemed stronger than it had to be [...] let the latent meanings turn and bend in the wind, free from authoritative comment. (FM 239; 12)

Lianne’s experience is presented here in terms of an affect that floats away from its particular medium of representation, ‘something’ that cannot be named, a surplus that destabilises the narrative frame. Such a pivot away from the ‘authoritative’ stamp of identity into an oblique ‘inward’ form of consciousness resembles less the petrification of historical movement identified by Lukács, than the ‘incessant in quiet action’ of Moretti’s fillers. The purpose of fillers, Moretti asserts, is to release a ‘calm passion’ into the temporal rhythms of the novel.<sup>145</sup> *Falling Man* is sedated by the calming passion of the filler, a compositional mode that

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<sup>143</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 70.

<sup>144</sup> Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, p. 78.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

witnesses the clamour of an everyday life that is ‘tenaciously *there*’.<sup>146</sup>

Fillers, Moretti argues, ‘*rationalise the novelistic universe*, turning it into a world of few surprises, fewer adventures, and no miracles at all’.<sup>147</sup> For a novel so profoundly marked by a sense of ‘before’ and ‘after’, the possibility of cataclysmic surprise still painfully exists; however, it is precisely this experience of heightened anxiety that the calming passion of DeLillo’s homeland realism aims to conquer and subdue. *Falling Man* is a novel that strives to make its characters ‘feel safe in the world’ (FM 216). Indeed, the ‘reliable calm’ which resolves Lianne’s plot is intimately related to bodily affect:

It wasn’t sweat she smelled or maybe just a faint trace but not the sour reek of the morning run. It was just her, the body through and through. It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn’t even something she smelled so much as she knew [...] it was a small moment, already passing, the kind of moment that is always only seconds from forgetting. (FM 236)

The repetition of the indefinite article ‘it’ delicately balances the fleeting and untalisable existence of the sensation, on the one hand, whilst forcefully insisting on its material density and anchored presence. *Falling Man* is an instance of what Fredric Jameson calls ‘ontological realism’, a novel that is ‘absolutely committed to the density and solidity of what is’ and which is ‘threatened [...] by any suggestion that these things are changeable and not ontologically immutable’.<sup>148</sup> The political argument that there is a different future ‘within the world of immanence’ must therefore be resisted and repudiated, something that is achieved through the representation of political characters as entertaining ‘only the flimsiest relationship with the solid ontology of what exists right now’.<sup>149</sup> If this weightlessness is true of Hammad, who believes that the entirety of American ‘life’—a ‘world of lawns to water’—is an ‘illusion’, it also helps explain the ambivalent depiction of Martin and his historical materialist

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 75. (italics in original).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 82. (italics in original).

<sup>148</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 5; p. 215. My understanding of Jameson’s work is significantly influenced by David Cunningham’s review essay, ‘The Contingency of Cheese: On Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism*’, *Radical Philosophy*, 187 (September/October 2014), 25-35.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

interpretation of 9/11 (FM 173). *Falling Man* includes a Marxist perspective—‘he spoke about lost lands, failed states, foreign intervention, money, empire, oil’— only to undermine it formally, through Martin’s waning physical presence: ‘he had the same thirteen-day beard, the drooping lids of chronic jet lag [...] someone displaced or deeply distracted, lost in time’ (FM 113; 191). The material attenuation and bodily abstraction of characters who seek to comprehend 9/11 historically, dispossesses them of the horizon of the future and secures a permanent state of emergency.

And yet if *Falling Man* does immunise itself from the possibility of a different future-present, the world, as experienced by Lianne and Keith, is nonetheless haunted by vapours and dissociative states. *Falling Man* is less a novel of ontological density, than it is of a world becoming immaterial, composed of atmospheric charges and perceptual intensities that overrun any putative social inscription: ‘words, their own, were not much more than sounds, airstreams of shapeless breath, bodies speaking’ (FM 212).<sup>150</sup> For Jameson, these ‘waves of generalised sensation’, and the impersonal consciousness that registers them, belong to the realm of ‘affect’ and reduce temporality to the ‘perpetual present’ of the body.<sup>151</sup> Affect suspends the chronological temporal system of ‘past-present-future’; however, in a reversal of Lukács’s argument, Jameson insists that it is narration that now bears the scars of irreversible homogeneous empty time, whilst scenic description harbours an insurgent temporality that threatens to shatter the continuum. Description becomes a form of messianic action, a position sympathetic to Moretti’s sketch of ‘fillers’ as the narratives of everyday life, but which reverses Moretti’s political conclusion: rather than habituate the bourgeois subject to a moderated modernity, affect explosively holds out the promise of emancipation from the regime of significance and signification. Such an autonomisation of style, though, poses a dilemma for

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<sup>150</sup> It is a novel of ‘ontological insecurity’ for Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 123.

<sup>151</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 28.

Jameson's earlier assertion regarding realism's 'ontological stake' in the permanence of bourgeois society, a permanence and narrative coherence that affect 'secretly abhors'.<sup>152</sup> *Falling Man's* 'days of indirection' do not offer a solution to this contradiction, and their own affects gesture towards a perceptual organ folding in on itself, clasp on to the ruins of referentiality, hence DeLillo's insistent use of abstraction instead of physical referents (FM 212). There are rare instances, however, when the suspension of daily life glimpses an autoreferentiality that belongs to a utopian not-yet. During Lianne's second encounter with 'Falling Man', she becomes distracted by a homeless man:

Almost at once she came upon the derelict, the old threadbare man, and he stood looking past her at the figure upended in midair. He seemed to be in a pose of his own, attached to this spot for a half a lifetime, one papery hand clutching his bicycle wheel. His face showed an intense narrowing of thought and possibility. He was seeing something elaborately different from what he encountered step by step in the ordinary run of hours. He had to learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit. (FM 168)

### *Nevadan Reserves*

Building on Jameson's identification of realism's attempt to synthesise 'dense sociological detail' and 'collective destiny', Jed Esty glosses that 'critical realism does not fix or freeze the current state of affairs but shows society in motion'; that is, it represents historical change unfolding immanently—'a strange kind of wave running through matter', to use Jameson's vivid description.<sup>153</sup> Importantly, such projects avoid 'presenting global capitalism' as a static and completed 'transcendental signified', but instead seek to 'capture the world system operationally as a series of interlocking processes, causes and effects, screens and mediations'. Allegorical figurations of society through representative individuals and families—the commensuration of self and society—give way to the painstaking 'metonymic' tracing of social

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> Esty, 'Realism Wars', p. 335; p. 337; Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 216.



interconnectivity chronicling instead ‘the literal integration of subjects into state and civil apparatuses’.<sup>154</sup> *Falling Man*’s final part, titled ‘David Janiak’, opens ‘in the midst of dissent’, with Lianne and Justin enfolded in a half million strong anti-war demonstration—the date of which, the 29th August 2004, is not indexed to the monumental protest itself but to Charlie Parker’s birthday (FM 182).<sup>155</sup> The nation appears here as ‘a bright swarm of people’, although what the scene proceeds to depict is Lianne’s individuation from the collective, ‘she felt remote from the occasion even as it pressed upon her’ (FM 181). Whilst Lianne wants Justin ‘to see and feel the argument against war and misrule’, she remains dissociated from the mass gathering, a fold that resists integration: the ‘crowd did not return to her a sense of belonging’ (FM 182). Detached and distanced from the movement, Lianne is ‘cut free’ from a collective agency whose ability to affect and alter state policy she dismisses: the march is ‘all choreography, to be shredded in seconds’ (FM 182). *Falling Man*’s other ‘literal integration’ involves Keith and the ‘crucial anonymity’ he finds in the casinos of Las Vegas, ‘the mingling of countless lives that had no stories attached’ (FM 204). It is to these ‘Nevadan reserves’ that the section will now turn in order to conclude.

‘Space’, Antonio Negri notes, ‘is the constitutive horizon of American freedom’; a horizon whose cultural association with the ‘west’ has insistently captured and overcoded characters lines of flight across DeLillo’s oeuvre.<sup>156</sup> Las Vegas, for Keith, is a desert oasis, a ‘place’ that ‘he could easily believe [...] he’d always known’—a telos that echoes Martin’s conviction that people ‘become who they are supposed to be’ as well as Hammad’s eschatological belief that ‘the end of our life is predetermined’ (FM 197; 194; 175). For Mary

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<sup>154</sup> Esty, ‘Realism Wars’, p. 337.

<sup>155</sup> ‘A man came up to her, slouching out of the crowd, black man, hand on heart, and said, “This here’s Charlie Parker’s birthday” [...] in his reproachful tone she the implication that all these people, these half million in their running shoes and sun hats and symbol-bearing paraphernalia, were shit-faced fools to be gathered in this heat and humidity for whatever it was that had brought them here when they might more suitably be filling these streets, in exactly these numbers, to show respect to Charlie Parker on his birthday’, *Falling Man*, p. 182.

<sup>156</sup> Negri, *Insurgencies*, p. 144.

J. Parish, Keith's flight from the World Trade Center and encampment at the poker tables and sports bars of Las Vegas—what Lianne profanely dubs a 'seance in hell'—constitutes a withdrawal from 'capitalist enterprise' (FM 216).<sup>157</sup> Unlike Negri, who would suggest that such an exodus is driven by living labour's search for a world beyond its commodification as labour-power, Parish argues that Keith's withdrawal into 'the milieu of poker' demonstrates the 'inability of stereotypical masculinity to "create the counter-narrative" to terrorism'.<sup>158</sup> This subtractive enterprise can nonetheless be supplemented by a reflection on the operational networks, processes, and flows of capital that Keith's 'literal integration' makes visible.

Las Vegas, in Hal Rothman's ecstatic cultural history, 'is the first city of the twenty-first century, the place where desire meets capital, where instinct replaces restraint'; it is 'the place where the twenty-first century begins, a centre of the postindustrial world'.<sup>159</sup> The 'only centre' America 'occupies', Martin Ridnour despondently insists, is 'the centre of its own shit'; but his sense that 'there's an empty space where America used to be' might perhaps be related to the displacement tracked by Rothman, whereby 'the colony of everywhere' becomes 'the coloniser of its former masters' (FM 191; 193).<sup>160</sup> The authors of *Strip Cultures: Finding America in Las Vegas* are equally interested in its status as a 'dream capital'; however, as Jane Kuenz notes, 'Las Vegas is ground zero for the "security aesthetics" of contemporary' USA.<sup>161</sup> Las Vegas is 'not a metaphor but a model' for the 'militarisation of perception', combining 'total surveillance' with the 'advertisement' industry.<sup>162</sup> Terry Chang, a high stakes poker

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<sup>157</sup> Parish, p. 186.

<sup>158</sup> Parish, p. 186. For a traumatic reading of Keith's flight see James Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality in the Work of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 55-84; for machinic-enslavement see Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); and for the connection between Las Vegas and Wall Street see Elizabeth S. Anker, 'Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel', *American Literary History*, 23.3 (Summer 2011), 463-482.

<sup>159</sup> Hal Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. xi; p. xxvi.

<sup>160</sup> Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, p. xxvi.

<sup>161</sup> Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, xxvii; Jane Kuenz, 'S.I.N City', in *Strip Cultures: Finding America in Las Vegas*, ed. by Stacy M. Jameson, Karen Klugman, Jane Kuenz, and Susan Willis (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 70-109 (p. 71).

<sup>162</sup> Kuenz, 'S.I.N City', p.71; p. 74.

player, informs Keith that ‘I’m in their computer. Everything’s in their computer. Everything’s entered. If you lift an item from the minibar and don’t return it inside sixty seconds it’s charged directly and instantaneously to your account’ (FM 199). If this exchange catches some of the dynamic interaction between entertainment capital and the state, DeLillo gestures towards an impasse in the metonymic inscriptions of individuals in social processes. In a rare venture outside the strip, Keith looks down onto the city:

It took him a moment to understand what he was looking at, many miles ahead, the city floating on the night, a feverish sprawl of light so quick and inexplicable it seemed a kind of delirium. He wondered why he’d never thought of himself in the middle of such a thing, living there more or less. He lived in rooms, that’s why. He lived and worked in this room and that. He moved only marginally, room to room. He took a taxi to and from the downtown street where his hotel was located, a place without floor mosaics and heated towel racks, and he hadn’t known until now, looking at the vast band of trembling desert neon, how strange a life he was living. But only from here, out away from it. In the thing itself, down close, in the tight eyes around the table, there was nothing that was not normal. (FM 226-227)

‘Literal integration’, for *Falling Man*, proves to be an obstacle to any project of cognitive mapping, and serialised movement from room space to room space cannot be pushed into a greater understanding of system’s operations. DeLillo draws on this estranging prospect, but only to register the limits of representation—as framed from the unit of the individual character.

Las Vegas’s historical arc from internal colony on the ‘margins of American society’ to the symbolic embodiment of the ‘new America’ traced by Rothman, can perhaps be read alongside Osborne’s notion of the ‘colonial modern’.<sup>163</sup> The colonial, Osborne notes, ‘is constituted *internal to* the conceptual dialectics of the modern as a historical concept’; that is to say, the modern ‘can never be actual’ without the ‘political-territorial differences of the colonial relations’.<sup>164</sup> Internal to the conceptual space of the ‘colonial modern’ is the double coded idea of the ‘reserve’: ‘on the one hand, it is that which is held back, delimited, segregated, enclosed; but on the other, it is also that which contains the future itself’, an ‘as-yet-unrealised potential, something “beyond” the actual’.<sup>165</sup> In Osborne’s account it is the ‘postcolonial’ that

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<sup>163</sup> Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, p. xx; p. xxvii; Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 31.

<sup>164</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 31. (italics in original).

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

actualizes the future, a future whose American articulation is embraced, in Rothman's view, by Las Vegas and its delirious post-industrial dream of a capital that manufactures, not industrial products, but entertainment spectacles, sensations, and libidinal intensities.<sup>166</sup> Rothman's sketch certainly holds true for 'the aural surround' that Keith is immersed in, but yet, as Andrew Niccol's film *Good Kill* (2014) dramatises, the 'vast band of trembling desert neon' is also surrounded by US Air Force bases from which the 'War on Terror' is waged remotely, through drone warfare (FM 229).<sup>167</sup> *Good Kill* charts the psychic breakdown of a drone pilot, a process whose lateral movements connect the spectacular milieu of the casinos to the homogenised container units from which the drone program is operated. The geopolitical coordinates and material realities of the 'War on Terror' constitute an arrived future that *Falling Man*'s domestic narrative frame cannot encompass—or, which can only appear as the negation of the 'biopolitical soldier': the suicide bomber.<sup>168</sup> This is an obstacle that DeLillo self-consciously foregrounds through Lianne's belief that 'she could imagine' Martin's revolutionary history and can 'detect the slurred pulse of an earlier consciousness' (FM 195). Indeed, it is the 're-theologisation of social conflicts' which remains unintelligible to Lianne, who can only comprehend the secular violence of 'godless, Western, white' terrorists—a limitation that might also be true for DeLillo himself (FM 195).<sup>169</sup> That said, perhaps the 'War on Terror' does flicker momentarily into view, in displaced form: Keith 'wondered if he was becoming a self-operating mechanism, like a humanoid robot that understands two hundred voice commands, far-seeing, touch-sensitive, but totally, rigidly controllable' (FM 226). A hybridised image that conflates the immaterial worker with the machinic might also be

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<sup>166</sup> Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 32; Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, p. xxvi.

<sup>167</sup> *Good Kill*. Dir. Andrew Niccol. ICF Films. 2014.

<sup>168</sup> 'The suicide bomber is the dark opposite, the gory doppelganger of the safe bodyless soldier', Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 45.

<sup>169</sup> Balibar, 'Critique in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p. 13. Balibar's thesis that 'the religious emerges where the economy ceases to be thought and practiced as a *political* institution' underpins one of the central points of contention in *Falling Man*, whose narrative world is no longer abandoned by God.

considered as perforating the narratorial register, exposing it to systems and flows that otherwise exceed *Falling Man*'s inhabitation of room space.

### III. 'Time That Precedes Us and Survives': *Point Omega* and the Crisis of Historicism

The 'multiracial realities' of the American borderlands novel, Ramón Saldívar writes, give articulation to a 'dialogical narrative of American social life based on multiplicity, heterogeneity, and difference'.<sup>170</sup> American borderlands fiction, Saldívar continues, 'repeatedly reminds us of the erasure of some identities within the idea of multiplicity and the instability of the relationship between the one and the many in American history'.<sup>171</sup> Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* is too a borderlands novel, but one where the state's territorialising violence—material, epistemological, historiographical and cultural—has been overtaken by the 'force of geologic time': a monstrously inhuman 'time that precedes us and survives us'.<sup>172</sup> Unlike other notable borderlands novels such as Cormac McCarthy's historical *Blood Meridian* (1985) or Yuri Herrera's contemporary *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (2015), which in distinct ways re-present the disavowed and contested history of the US-Mexico border region, the desert hinterland that enfolds DeLillo's text is 'an alien being [...] both saturating and remote'; a 'science fiction' landscape into which one of the novel's characters vanishes, most likely murdered (PO 25).<sup>173</sup> Set in hostile 'badlands', the desert in *Point Omega* is considered an archive nonetheless, but one whose fossilised natural history of 'seas and reefs of ten million years ago' divines 'later extinctions' (PO 116; 25). Saldívar's heterogeneous people are

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<sup>170</sup> Ramón Saldívar, 'The American Borderlands Novel', in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. by Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1031-1045 (p. 1031).

<sup>171</sup> Saldívar, 'The American Borderlands Novel', p. 1032.

<sup>172</sup> DeLillo, *Point Omega*, p. 24; p. 56. Hence forward all further references will be cited parenthetically PO.

<sup>173</sup> These novels though might be connected through a shared interest in estrangement and abstraction. 'Abstraction in the work of art functions not only to visualise a structure but also to mark the irrelevance of the subject's experience to that structure [...] attention to experience alone will not yield a clearer understanding of the concrete', Emilio Sauri 'The Abstract, the Concrete, and the Labour of the Novel', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 51.2 (2018), 250-271 (p. 252).

missing from this ‘protoworld’—or simply abandoned, like a group of Mexican workers whose uncertain fate momentarily coincides with the narrative’s unravelling domestic plot (PO 25). But, *Point Omega* is also a novel where ‘the sphere of collective human thought’ is felt to be ‘played out’: ‘matter wants to lose self-consciousness’, insists Richard Elster, *Point Omega*’s ‘outlaw’ philosopher, ‘we’re the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter’ (PO 64-65).

Driven by a ‘need to think’ beyond humanity and to ‘leap out of our biology’, *Point Omega* imagines an evolutionary historical schema quite distinct from ‘the unbroken evolution of mankind’ forecast by Lukács (PO 65; 67).<sup>174</sup> For Lukács, ‘the Marxist philosophy of history is a comprehensive doctrine dealing with the necessary progress made by humanity from primitive communism to our own time and the perspective of our further advance along the same road’.<sup>175</sup> As Ian Duncan glosses, this is an ‘account of history as a progress of the species, a *Bildung der Humanität*’ whose anticipated ‘omega point’ in DeLillo’s novel, however, is ‘paroxysm. Either a sublime transformation of mind and soul or come worldly convulsion’ (PO 91).<sup>176</sup> Universal extinction not communism is the historical ‘future’ that the desert ‘landscape unravels and reveals’, a terminus Elster thinks of as consciousness passing ‘completely out of being’ (PO 109; 92). Reflecting on the climate as ‘the sublime horizon of historical totality’, Duncan himself questions whether the dialectic ‘itself may not work anymore—may no longer be adequate to parsing the relation of human agency to its material conditions of existence’.<sup>177</sup> Indeed, the ‘old dialectic between individual and collective life’—a dialectic which sustains so much of the Marxist-Hegelian theorising of the novel—‘has withered away’: the self-coherent subject is now displaced and traversed by waves of impersonal affects, intensities, and feverish states, whilst the collective ‘is no longer organised by, hence can no longer be interpreted

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<sup>174</sup> Quoted in Duncan, ‘History and the Novel after Lukács’, p. 388.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Duncan, ‘History and the Novel after Lukács’, p. 393.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388. (italics in original).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394; p. 392.

through', the analytical 'categories of nation or even social class'.<sup>178</sup> *Point Omega* is precisely such a novel where the dialectic corrodes: not only does its version of collectivity seek to disaggregate itself from national history and be lost in the chromatically sensual time of 'light and darkness [...] not time passing, mortal time', but characters are also overwhelmed by 'visual states of mind' whose sensations and 'feelings' exceed 'physical dimension' (PO 56; 24). The waning of psychologically centred subjectivity and the enclosure of a collective in a planetary history that exceeds human control registers a crisis of historicist interpretation.

### *Renditions*

One of the challenges recent fiction poses to historicisation, Timothy Bewes suggests, can be related to the fact that 'the *idea* of "contemporaneity", of "the present"' has 'become implicated as never before in the way we read literature'.<sup>179</sup> Set in late summer/early fall 2006, *Point Omega* explores the temporal experience of the present through a triptych structure, whereby a central panel, narrated in the first-person by Jim Finley and preoccupied with the 'blind' cosmological time of the desert, is framed by 'Anonymity' and 'Anonymity 2', narrated in the third-person and which documents an unnamed 'watcher' 'mesmerised' by the microscopic time of Douglas Gordan's 'slow-winged' *24 Hour Psycho* (PO 30; 16; 77). The novel is composed of contemporary spatio-temporal forms of exception: the de-chronologised time of the desert which flees the 'slinking time of watches, calendars, minutes left to live', and the 'fractured motion' of the conceptual art installation exhibited in New York's Museum of Modern Art (PO 75; 15).<sup>180</sup> An experimental film-maker himself, Finley has flown out to Anza-

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

<sup>179</sup> Timothy Bewes, 'Paul Auster's Cinematographic Fictions: Against the Ontology of the Present', *New Formations*, 58 (2006), 81-98 (p. 81). (italics in original).

<sup>180</sup> As Jonathon Crary notes, *Psycho* reveals how 'the remaking or congealing of life into things or images disrupts the framework of a historical time in which change can occur. The darkness of *Psycho* is of a present in which a pathological attempt to freeze time and identities collides disastrously with the rootlessness and anonymity of modernity', *24/7*, p. 95.

Borrego in order to cajole Richard Elster, a former defence intellectual, into appearing in a single-take Godard style interview envisaged by Finley as ‘the barricade [...] where somebody stands and tells the truth’ (PO 58). An emeritus professor who lectures on the dream of extinction, Elster was formerly an ‘outsider’ scholar hired by the Bush Administration to help ‘conceptualise’ the Iraq War for ‘the metaphysicians in the intelligence agencies, the fantasists in the Pentagon’ (PO 23-24). The two men are eventually joined by Elster’s ‘otherworldly’ daughter Jessie, and Finley slowly abandons the film project, conceding that ‘the reason for being here had begun to fade’ (PO 47; 90). In contrast, the gallery space of Gordan’s video installation instantiates ‘an ideal world’ as the watcher ‘might have drawn it in his mind’, a world ‘where everything is so intensely what it is’—a cinematographic ontology that interests Bewes (PO 10; 147). If the distributive unity of *Point Omega* recalls the disjunctive conjunctions of DeLillo’s previous twenty-first century novels, it also differs in an important way. *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* clinch through the direct collision between discontents—the vengeful ex-worker Benno Levin, the Islamic radical Hammad—and the social order that they seek to annihilate; whereas, in *Point Omega*, this clinching is more oblique: Jessie vanishes into ‘a hole in the air’, a disappearance that might be related to the watcher, who is possibly her ex-boyfriend turned stalker (PO 104).

Despite *Point Omega*’s extended reflection on geopolitical distempers, its enigmatic prose style is said to forestall historicist and allegorical readings of the symptomatology of empire. Alessandra De Marco’s contention that the novel ‘may be read as a metaphor for a terminal stage within the evolution of a particular historical and economic cycle under the aegis of US hegemony’, thus belongs to a minority position.<sup>181</sup> The desert, according to De Marco,

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<sup>181</sup> Alessandra De Marco, ‘Late DeLillo, Finance Capital and Mourning from *The Body Artist* to *Point Omega*’, *49th Parallel*, 28 (Spring 2012), 1-33 (p. 25). The framework supporting such an argument is Giovanni Arrighi ‘Hegemony Unravelling—1’, *New Left Review*, II/32 (March/April 2005), 23-80 and ‘Hegemony Unravelling—2’, *New Left Review*, II/33 (May/June 2005), 83-116. Arrighi’s reflections on the state as a ‘protection’ racket (‘Hegemony Unravelling—2’, pp. 108-109) are shared by Elster: ‘A government is a criminal enterprise’, *Point Omega*, p. 41.



operates as a ‘geographical correlative’ for Elster’s psychic disavowal of the disastrous intervention in Iraq, a wilderness that informs his speculative universalisation of civilizational entropy—‘we want to be stones in a field’—by circumventing contact with ‘multiplicity, difference, and heterogeneity’, as Saldívar would say (PO 67).<sup>182</sup> Elster remains an unrepentant apologist of the administration: ‘I still want a war. A great power has to act. We were struck hard. We need to retake the future. The force of will, the sheer visceral need. We can’t let others shape our world, our minds’ (PO 38). However, as David Cowart points out, DeLillo avoids didacticism in *Point Omega* and ‘deflects problems of immediate political legitimacy’ in order to ‘perpend the prospect of an omega point for the American empire’.<sup>183</sup> Cowart insists that DeLillo should be taken ‘at his word’ when he reports that the novel is ‘not at all political’, and can instead be seen as a compassionate effort ‘to represent the anguish’ of Elster: as Finley wonders, perhaps Elster ‘was right, that the country needed this, we needed it in our desperation, our dwindling, whatever we could get, rendition yes, and then invasion’ (PO 44-45).<sup>184</sup> If there is a ‘geographical articulation’, to borrow from Edward Said, then it perhaps concerns the multitude of ‘unmarked trails, ‘remote trailheads’, and ‘primitive trails’ along which Finley diagonally travels (PO 24-25; 41; 26).<sup>185</sup> Here, DeLillo could be said to obliquely index the wars of extermination against the indigenous peoples of America, whose slaughter prepared the conditions for the rise of US hegemony.

Much of the caution against interpretation comes from the novel itself, a wariness given its sharpest expression in Elster’s confession that he ‘wanted a haiku war’ (PO 37). ‘Haiku’, Elster informs Finley, ‘means nothing beyond what it is’, an indiscernibility between meaning

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<sup>182</sup> De Marco, ‘Late DeLillo, Finance Capital and Mourning’, p. 21; Saldívar, ‘The American Borderlands Novel’, p. 1031.

<sup>183</sup> David Cowart, ‘The Lady Vanishes: Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 53.1 (Spring 2012), 31-50 (p. 32).

<sup>184</sup> Cowart, ‘The Lady Vanishes’, p. 42.

<sup>185</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 61. This belongs to Said’s notion of reading ‘contrapuntally’: ‘with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominant discourse acts’, p. 59.

and existence that plugs the damaging rift in historical being that political criticism hopes to illuminate and repair (PO 37). *Point Omega* instantiates itself as a post-critical artwork: an ‘event’, as Bewes would say, where the ‘sensible and intelligible’ are momentarily unified.<sup>186</sup> With Finley’s abandonment of the truth-telling documentary and acceptance of the ‘self-contained, unreferring’ nature of his and Elster’s ‘talk’, DeLillo might also be said to share some sympathy with Anna Kornbluh’s polemical critique of ‘nondialectical’ symptomatic criticism—whose luminaries include Jameson, Moretti, and Toscano—for its restriction of the novel to ‘the limited operation of reporting the truths and reflecting the facts of the made world’ (PO 90).<sup>187</sup> Instead of treating literature as merely exemplifying socio-economic tendencies, Kornbluh advocates a formalist reading practice addressing how novels produce a social ‘space adequate for human beings’, a space that *Point Omega* is itself unable to build: ‘the physical crux’ of Jessie’s disappearance is ‘a hole in the air’ (PO 104).<sup>188</sup> *Point Omega*’s irrational cut from a philosophical novel of time to a despairing crime-detective novel which fails to discover ‘an indication, a glimmer of intent’, contributes to what Matthew Shipe calls the ‘nonharmonious, nonserene tension’ of DeLillo’s ‘late style’: its ‘refusal to grant the reader any closure’ (PO 100).<sup>189</sup> Late style, in Shipe’s reading, similarly detaches the novel from the consensual order of reference and representation, but serves, however, ‘as a “catastrophic” commentator on the present’ rather than the utopianism that Kornbluh orientates towards.<sup>190</sup> Catastrophe is most clearly visible in *Point Omega*’s transition from the final moments of Finley’s narrative where he imagines a ‘telephone ringing’ as he enters his apartment, to ‘Anonymity 2’ with a ‘scary bland’ Norman Bates ‘putting down the phone’ (PO 126-127).

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<sup>186</sup> Timothy Bewes, ‘The Novel as an Absence: Lukács and the Event of Postmodern Fiction’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 38.1 (2004), 5-20 (p. 8).

<sup>187</sup> Anna Kornbluh, ‘We Have Never Been Critical: Toward the Novel as Critique’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 50.3 (2017), 397-407 (p. 400).

<sup>188</sup> Kornbluh, ‘We Have Never Been Critical’, p. 404.

<sup>189</sup> Matthew Shipe, ‘War as Haiku: The Politics of Don DeLillo’s Late Style’, *Orbit: Writing around Pynchon*, 4.2 (2016), 1-23 (p. 8).

<sup>190</sup> Shipe, ‘War as Haiku’, p. 3.

This looping back to a day several weeks prior to the central tale, Shipe concludes, ‘keeps us hermitically sealed in a cycle of violence that seems as perpetual as it does inexplicable’.<sup>191</sup>

The absence of closure, which for Shipe underpins DeLillo’s non-reconciliation with the dominant order of signification, is nonetheless contextualised by Peter Boxall, who remarks that *Point Omega*’s ‘formal balance’ is overdetermined by a ‘sense of anti-climax’ and the ‘failure of the millennium to deliver an apocalyptic catastrophe’.<sup>192</sup> ‘What the novel witnesses and performs’, Boxall writes, ‘is the thinness of Elster’s theorising. The incapacity of the millenarian historical narrative to account for the first wars of the twenty-first century, and the consequent sense that time, in the new century, is flowing or passing in a new way’.<sup>193</sup> Elster himself becomes infected by this ontological emaciation: ‘a man drawn down to sparest outline, weightless’ (PO 122). Bathed ‘in the tempo, in the near static rhythm of the image’, the anonymous watcher too parses a new ‘broken’ temporality, but one in which every physical movement ‘was a revelation’: ‘every action was broken into component parts so distinct from the entity that the watcher found himself isolated from every expectation’ (PO 146; 11; 9-10).<sup>194</sup> At the same time, the watcher questions whether the film was ‘thinking into him, spilling through him like some kind of runaway brain fluid’; a redistribution of the sensible that terminates ominously with his becoming-Norman, waiting ‘to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates’ (PO 138-139; 148). DeLillo’s assimilation of Hitchcock’s movie and Gordan’s video installation, as well as Finley’s recycling of archival footage of Jerry Lewis—‘some deviant technological lifeform struggling out of the irradiated dust of the atomic age’—prompts Mark Osteen into positioning *Point Omega* as a ‘metacommentary or deconstruction’ of cultural form (PO 32).<sup>195</sup> A machine for cultural

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>192</sup> Boxall, ‘Late’, p. 694.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>194</sup> For the modernist tissue of DeLillo’s cinematic form see, Gourley, *Terrorism and Temporality*, pp. 85-94.

<sup>195</sup> Mark Osteen, ‘Extraordinary Renditions: DeLillo’s *Point Omega* and Hitchcock’s *Psycho*’, in *Hitchcock and Adaption: On the Page and Screen*, ed. by Mark Osteen (Plymouth: Roman and Littlefield, 2014), pp. 261-278

rendering, DeLillo foregrounds the ‘complicity’ individuals have with the order of the visible: either in terms of instruments of state violence, whose words are ‘redesigned to be synthetic’, Finley notes, to conceal ‘the shame subject[s]’ they ‘embrace’; or, as ‘objectification’, a cruel gazing Osteen associates with Finley’s creeping obsession with Jessie (PO 44).<sup>196</sup>

Mobilising a loose free indirect subjectivity, the ‘Anonymity’ sections report that the ‘slowing of motion’ reveals ‘the depths of things so easy to miss in the shallow habit of seeing’; forms of perceptual estrangement, however that are accessible only through ‘close attention’ and the ‘pious’ work of seeing (PO 16-17). The ‘becalmed’ decomposition of scenes into ‘the raw makings of a gesture’ recalls Walter Benjamin’s observation that ‘slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones [...] a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye’ (PO 128).<sup>197</sup> For Benjamin, film famously bursts ‘this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second’, discovering ‘entirely new structural formations of the subject’ whose topographies are captured by the camera’s ‘unconscious optics’.<sup>198</sup> The world might not explode in *Point Omega*, but the ‘pace’ of *24 Hour Psycho* is experienced as ‘paradoxically real’: ‘bodies moving musically, 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’ (PO 18). It is this paradoxical realness that attracts contemporary fiction to cinema, Bewes suggests, because the cinematographic image abolishes the principle of representation, structured around presence and absence, and instead instantiates ‘a pure optical and sensory perception’.<sup>199</sup> Cinema provides the literary with a model for how the ‘dialectic of the sensual and the conceptual’ can be materially realised and, in so doing, charts a way through

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(p. 261). Deleuze’s description of Jerry Lewis as loser who ““goes too far”” suggests to another possible overlap between Finley’s narrative and that of the watcher, *Cinema 2*, p. 65.

<sup>196</sup> Osteen, ‘Extraordinary Renditions’, p. 274.

<sup>197</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 230.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230.

<sup>199</sup> Bewes, ‘The Novel as an Absence’, p. 16.

the split between sensuousness and intelligibility that constitutes what Bewes elsewhere calls the ‘novels problematic’.<sup>200</sup> Cinema thus reintroduces immanence into the literary, an event ‘where everything is intensely what it is’ (PO 147).

The indiscernibility between the actual and the virtual identified by Bewes as informing a ‘renewed epic’, crystallises in Deleuze’s work, into images of sensory thought.<sup>201</sup> The watcher too appears to endorse this comprehension of the materiality of the ‘time-image’: ‘the less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw. This was the point. To see what’s here, finally to look and to know you’re looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of motion’ (PO 6-7). In the ‘time-image’ perception and bodily sensations are liberated from action and the inscription within narrative, an emancipation that shadows the watcher’s impression that ‘the old gothic movie’ is ‘subsumed’ by ‘pure film, pure time’, ‘all broken motion, without suspense or dread’ (PO 7; 11). For Deleuze this would amount to a rendering of the film out of an ‘organic narration’—where characters react to situations—into a ‘crystalline narration’ where the chronological time of action ‘collapses’ and is replaced by a ‘chronic non-chronological time’ that ‘produces movement’.<sup>202</sup> Deleuze’s definition of a ‘crystalline regime’ of description which no longer presupposes the independence of the material referent and which ‘stands for its object, replaces it, both creates and erases it’ might capture the ‘dissociative force’ of DeLillo’s novel more generally.<sup>203</sup> If DeLillo’s use of ekphrasis seems indicative of description’s self-constitution as ‘the sole decomposed and multiplied object’, *Point Omega*’s abstraction—Elster’s homestead is ‘somewhere south of nowhere’—equally suggests to a medium that has become autonomous

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<sup>200</sup> Timothy Bewes, ‘How to Escape from Literature? Lukács, Cinema, and *The Theory of the Novel*’, in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, ed. by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 36-48 (p. 46); Timothy Bewes, ‘The Novel Problematic’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 44.1 (2011), 17-19.

<sup>201</sup> Bewes, ‘Paul Auster’s Cinematographic Fictions’, p. 94

<sup>202</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 127-129.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126; p. 167. A ‘dissociative force’, for Deleuze, introduces a “figure of nothingness”, a “hole in appearances”, *Cinema 2*, p. 167. Indiscernibility is Jessie’s response to Finley: ‘Footsteps in movies never sound real’ [Finley]. ‘They’re footsteps in movies’ [Jessie], *Point Omega*, p. 59.

(PO 25).<sup>204</sup> A sensuously material experience of time is asserted by Elster who notes that ‘there’s none of the usual terror. It’s different here, time is enormous, that’s what I feel here, palpably’ (PO 56). To ‘describe’, Deleuze adds, ‘is to observe mutations’, and it is to the mutations in the Marxist philosophy of history that this discussion concludes.<sup>205</sup>

### *Deraiment*

In a recent intervention in the ‘ambient discourse’ around ecological Marxism and its conceptual struggle against the hegemonic theorisation of the Anthropocene, Alberto Toscano advances the ‘theme of exhaustion’ as a ‘prism’ through which to question ‘the relationship between the limits to capital and the limits to nature’.<sup>206</sup> Drawing on Anson Rabinach’s *The Human Motor* (1990), Toscano proposes a ‘preliminary’ distinction between the ‘normative’ category of fatigue—understood as the time required for a source of value creation to recover after productive activity—and the ‘pathological’ category of exhaustion—‘an accumulation of fatigues that are only incompletely restored’. Fatigue, Toscano suggests, can be located ‘on the side of *production*’, whereas exhaustion encroaches on the domain of reproduction, occurring ‘when a limit or threshold has been crossed such that the reproduction of a certain bodily or relational state is no longer possible’. Viewed in a properly ‘systemic vein’, exhaustion potentially illuminates the unfolding dialectic between a biosphere driven to collapse by the historical and ongoing by-products of accumulation and the ‘multiple crises of reproduction’ precipitated by climate change. Exhaustion is thus a ‘limit concept that allows the exploration of the zones of indiscernibility between the philosophy of history and the philosophy of nature, an indiscernibility whose proper name might be materialism’.<sup>207</sup> ‘Consciousness is exhausted’

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<sup>204</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 126.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>206</sup> Alberto Toscano, ‘Antiphysis/Antipraxis: Universal Exhaustion and the Tragedy of Materiality’, *Mediations*, 32.1 (Spring 2018), 125-144 (pp. 125-126).

<sup>207</sup> Toscano, ‘Universal Exhaustion’, p. 125. (*italics in original*).

in *Point Omega* and yearns to return ‘to inorganic matter’: as Elster informs Finley, ‘we want to become stones in a field’ (PO 67). The desert is ‘clairvoyant’ in DeLillo’s novel, a zone of maximal contact between the ‘philosophy of history and the philosophy of nature’, but one which grounds a weird inorganic materialism that insists ‘matter wants to lose its self-consciousness’ (PO 109; 64). What Toscano frames as the ‘(negative) dialectic of exhaustion and acceleration’ breaks down and mutates in *Point Omega*, where ‘what drives us now’ is the realisation that it is ‘time to close it all down’; that the project guiding human agency is the annihilation of the species, hence ‘we keep inventing folk tales of the end’ (PO 64).<sup>208</sup>

‘Language’, Elster remarks, is ‘struggling towards some idea outside our experience’, a struggle that also places *Point Omega* ‘outside’ its own national ‘moment’ and pushes the novel into ‘some larger surround, ahistorical’ (PO 91; 33). In Elster’s estimation ‘exile’ is associated with secular institutions like the World Bank, whereas the rural homestead ‘is different, a spiritual retreat’: a desert hermitage isolated from the ‘goddamn echoes’ that reverberate around New York and Washington—the financial and political hubs of empire (PO 29; 26). Elster’s withdrawal from the apparatuses of state warfare might, however, be said to re-enact Hegel’s observation regarding the novel’s flight from ‘great national events into the restrictedness of private domestic situations in the countryside or small town’.<sup>209</sup> Retreat into the private sphere is absent-mindedly confirmed by Finley, who wonders whether ‘we were becoming a family, no more strange than most families, except that we had nothing to do, nowhere to go, but that’s not so strange either, father, daughter, and whatever-I-was’ (PO 69). Although Hegel holds out the possibility that private consciousness can still become enmeshed with events so as to enable an epic presentation of national history, epic totality, for Elster, is

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>209</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Volume III, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1109. Flight also characterises Finley’s detour from a stalled artistic career and failed marriage in New York, as well as Jessie’s apparently doomed attempt to outrun a male stalker—the novel’s post-*Psycho* inscription of social violence.

available only in the night sky, where ‘everything that came before’ is ‘there to see and map and think about’ (PO 62). Moreover, Finley’s visionary reckoning with the legacy of the Iraq War becomes congealed in the ‘viscous and sticky’ time that Bakhtin suggests regulates social life in provincial communities, a ‘time without event’ that disabuses Finley of his mission: ‘the reason for being here had begun to fade’ (PO 90).<sup>210</sup> Indeed, Finley resignedly concludes that ‘we’ll be here the way flies and mice are here, localised, seeing and knowing nothing but whatever our scanted nature allows’ (PO 90).

There is a point of stress here between the novel’s broad thematic interest in species annihilation and its considerably more restricted setting, which is confined to the bourgeois household. Or, to put it alternatively, there appears to be a contradiction between the ‘enormously old [...] deep time, epochal time’ that is the express subject of Elster and Finley’s wayward discourse and the novel’s own formal instruments, anchored to purely ‘localised’ forms of consciousness (PO 91; 90). DeLillo’s turn to the family unit is all the more surprising given Nancy Armstrong’s conviction that the household has been ‘declared obsolete as a way of imagining a national community and as the means of reproducing its subjects’.<sup>211</sup> The household, in other words, ‘no longer shapes the future *in* novels’; an ‘impasse of reproducibility’ that perhaps links back to Toscano’s discussion of capital’s accelerated exhaustion of workers and the environment—which is also an accelerated depletion of historical futures.<sup>212</sup> Of course, the family is not able to stabilise Elster and Finley’s future either. Jessie’s disappearance ‘beyond geography’ forces Finley to grimly concede that the conversations on ‘transcendence, paroxysm, the end of human consciousness’ all ‘seemed so much dead echo now. Point Omega. A million years away. The omega point has narrowed, here and now, to the point of a knife as it enters a body. All the man’s grand themes funnelled

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<sup>210</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 248. Although, in *Point Omega* this time without ‘advancing historical movement’ is not ‘ancillary’ to other ‘temporal sequences’, pp. 247-248.

<sup>211</sup> Armstrong, ‘The Future *in* and *of* the Novel’, p. 8

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8 (*italics in original*); Toscano, ‘Universal Exhaustion’, p. 125.



down to local grief, one body, out there somewhere, or not' (PO 101; 124). The enfolding of the biological individual into collective destiny that preoccupied much of the novel's theorising collapses here, and Jessie, who is said to be 'imaginary to herself', is subtracted from history and projected into 'mystery' (PO 89; 104).<sup>213</sup>

With the 'omega point' of history 'narrowed' down to 'local grief', *Point Omega* reactivates a distinction Lukács makes in *The Theory of the Novel* between novels that 'narrow down' and those that 'show polemically the impossibility' of representing the social totality (PO 124).<sup>214</sup> 'The epic of an age in which the totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality', the novel's 'problematic' is to provisionally resolve the rift between the sensible and the intelligible so that the experiential life of the individual subject can be invested with historical meaning.<sup>215</sup> One option available to the novel is to 'narrow down and volatise whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it'.<sup>216</sup> In *Point Omega* this narrowing down involves Elster's flight 'from the tight minds that made the war' and its renewed interest in how the family, one of the biopolitical apparatuses for social reproduction, shapes the material conditions of embodiment (PO 23). To reuse Bruce Robbins's caustic phrase, it is a 'ritual of retreat'.<sup>217</sup> Yet Finley's uncertainty about what happened to Jessie, whose body is 'out there somewhere, or not' perforates any sense of an encompassed totality (PO 124). Tracking down a possible lead in a former Air Force 'bombing range' called the 'Impact Area', Finley gazes out onto the 'whole scorched world':

I looked out into blinding tides of light and sky down toward the folded copper hills that I took

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<sup>213</sup> Armstrong suggests that the most significant contemporary novels 'insert a strange and estranging microworld within a framework loosely identified with liberal society and presumably occupied by the reader who expects the future to take shape as a family'. The inhabitants of these microworlds, however, belong to a 'subrace of liberal society, a population on which those with the right to have rights depend for both labour and self-definition', 'The Future in and of the Novel', p. 9. The installation space in MOMA might be considered as a type of microworld, although it is one that stages 'the heat death of the universe', *Point Omega*, p. 60.

<sup>214</sup> Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 35.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>217</sup> Robbins, 'The Worlding of the American Novel', p. 1098.

to be the badlands, a series of pristine ridges rising from the desert floor in pattern alignment. Could someone be dead there? I could not imagine this. It was too vast, it was not real, the symmetry of furrows and juts, it crushed me, the heartbreaking beauty of it, the indifference of it and the longer I stood and looked the more certain I was that we would never have an answer. (PO 114-117)

Privately embodied consciousness is overwhelmed here and enfolded into the indifferent landscape: the short bursts recording Finley's reflections on the disappearance are flanked by the elongated and undulating description of the desert. Geometric shapes, contours, and sweeping movements of impenetrable rock formations present a world inhospitable and unyielding to human life. The desert intrudes as a 'heartbreaking' limit point, not just to representation but also to Finley's search for a humanly intelligible 'answer', a reconciliation of meaning and existence that is suspended by the cosmological geographies of the 'badlands'. *Point Omega* is a disjunctive synthesis of the novel of narrowing down and the novel of polemical impossibility, a text which introduces a ruinous 'black hole' into the biopolitical genre of the family and, in so doing, questions whether the dominant modes of social reproduction can continue to produce viable historical futures for its private citizens to inhabit.<sup>218</sup>

Put more speculatively, the novel's Hegelian flight from 'great national events' is overtaken by a Deleuzian deterritorialising line of flight which spirals into 'a sort of delirium' and goes 'off the rails'.<sup>219</sup> The 'revelation' that the 'world' has 'loomed into view as the sublime horizon of historical totality' has derailed 'History', in Ian Duncan's view, which can no longer be interpreted 'as the medium of human progress'.<sup>220</sup> 'Future history', Duncan adds, becomes 'unthinkable' and the 'dialectic between individual and social life' is unable to mediate 'the vastly disparate scales of individual life and the life of the species'; that is, it cannot think on the required 'cosmic scale', as Finley remarks (PO 59).<sup>221</sup> 'Time' is 'falling

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<sup>218</sup> Finley is called 'a black hole' by his estranged wife, *Point Omega*, p. 34.

<sup>219</sup> Deleuze, 'On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature', p. 40

<sup>220</sup> Duncan, 'History and the Novel after Lukács', p. 394; p. 389.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

away' in *Point Omega* 'becoming slowly older. Enormously old'; a 'deep time, epochal time. Our lives receding into the long past [...] the rule of extinction' (PO 91). There is a curious vacillation here between the contingency of human existence and the necessity of its 'receding' into an incomprehensible past, an oblique form of historicity without the scarring of human history. Étienne Balibar introduces the idea of 'historicity without history', or an '*ahistorical historicism*' to underscore that 'the cost' of Marx and Engels' 'critical recognition' of 'the *historicity* of capitalism'—that 'capitalist social relations are neither "natural" nor "eternal"—is 'an incapacity to think and to analyse capitalism's own *history*'.<sup>222</sup> There is a sense that history is unthinkable for *Point Omega* too: the dialectical mediation of the one and the many is forestalled and displaced into the margins of the text. Indeed, collectivity is present but only spectrally, in the guise of the invisible Mexican workers who have been led across the border and 'abandoned'—to either their death, or incarceration and eventual deportation (PO 99). These labourers, much like Jessie, have 'strayed past the edge of conjecture': they belong to an exodus whose history now exceeds and exhausts the resources of DeLillo's narrative poetics, the 'collapsing time' of the global re-distribution of collective destiny which is presented as a 'polemical impossibility' in the American borderlands novel (PO 101).

#### IV. 'Archaeology For A Future Age': *Zero K*

In 'Baghdad Towers West', the 'junk sculptress' Caroline tells the nameless narrator 'that in unearthing' cultural detritus and other 'contemporary artefacts': 'she was merely anticipating the Martian archaeologists who, eons hence, would rummage the bombed-out cities of this planet and discover a truth which no philosopher of the 20th century has thought to suggest; namely, that civilization is nothing more than the gears that drive it'.<sup>223</sup> Mocking in tone, this

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<sup>222</sup> Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, p. 148. (italics in original).

<sup>223</sup> DeLillo, 'Baghdad Towers West', 197.

envisioning of an alien future to which the twentieth is a shattered prehistory and site of excavation is revisited in Don DeLillo's most recent novel *Zero K*—although, the mood here is of sober introspection. Escorted around serried banks of cryonically preserved bodies—without organs or personality—Jeffrey Lockhart, the novel's bewildered first-person narrator, remarks that 'this was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing [...] and was there something nearly prehistorical about the artefacts ranged before me now? Archaeology for a future age'.<sup>224</sup> While the narrator of 'Baghdad Towers West' is 'reclining upon the earth itself, the 20th century, which is surely no more or less than a surplus raft', Jeffrey is left contemplating 'individual lives stranded in some border region of a wishful future' (ZK 256).<sup>225</sup> The pods, with their cargo of precious biological material, represent an exodus of sorts; but, rather than collective emancipation, they are the 'heralds' of a 'decimated future' where 'life everlasting belongs to those of breathtaking wealth' (ZK 141; 128; 76).<sup>226</sup>

This 'archaeology for a future age' is the work of 'the Convergence', an experimental scientific facility located somewhere in the wild hinterlands of the former Soviet Union, whose researchers are 'making [...] a new idea of the future' (ZK 30). There is a tacit opposition throughout *Zero K* between the 'battered and compacted' surface history of the state and the underground, 'buried' history of 'the Convergence', a community 'outside the limits' of humanity (ZK 30-31). Bored into the earth, Deleuze and Guattari would perhaps suggest that 'the Convergence' is 'inventing a holey space'; the 'heart of a new metropolis', as Jeffrey's father Ross Lockhart puts it, 'maybe an independent state, different from any we've known' (ZK 33).<sup>227</sup> As Jeffrey discovers, this separation and autonomy from the world-system is a

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<sup>224</sup> DeLillo, *Zero K*, p. 256. Hence forward all further references will be cited parenthetically as ZK. 'The other thing I didn't know was what constituted the end. When does the person become the body?', p. 139.

<sup>225</sup> DeLillo, 'Baghdad Towers West', p. 197.

<sup>226</sup> For accounts of surplus life and biocapitalism see Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) and Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Post-Genomic Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>227</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 457.

maxim promoted by the intellectuals of ‘the Convergence’: ‘we’ve fallen out of history’, one intones; or, during a later encounter, prospective patients are informed that ‘you are completely outside the narrative of what we refer to as history. There are no horizons here’ (ZK 129; 237).<sup>228</sup> ‘Climate change’, McKenzie Wark pointedly writes, ‘exceeds what the form of the bourgeois novel can express’. On the one hand, this is related to the conquest of the foreground by the background, whose predictability simultaneously eliminates ‘the weird and the miraculous’ as deviant historical rhythms and ‘clog[s]’ the novel up with ‘naturalist detail’, securing a fixed reality ‘so that bourgeois subjects can keep prattling on about their precious “inner lives”’. On the other hand, through the use of ‘setting’—‘as metonym for the nation’—and ‘period’—‘as metonym for history’—the novel presupposes a ‘stable object of study’ ‘bracketed off from the world’. The novel relies on ‘discontinuities with the world’; a discontinuity explicitly foregrounded by DeLillo in *Zero K*.<sup>229</sup> ‘Located at the far margins of plausibility’, ‘the Convergence’ is a ‘dynamic enclave, where we breathe safe air and live outside the range’ of the climate storm ‘blowing over the planet’ (ZK 115; 245).

The Utopian ‘enclave’, Fredric Jameson notes, is a ‘pocket of stasis within the ferment and rushing forces of social change’. As such, it simultaneously ‘registers the agitation’ of ‘transitional periods’ whilst distancing ‘Utopia from practical politics, on the basis of a zone of the social totality which seems eternal and unchangeable’.<sup>230</sup> What *Zero K* registers is a declension in the Utopian telos—‘collective will’ is guided by a ‘shallow spirit’—and ‘the widespread belief that the future, everybody’s will be worse than the past’—a belief that is supported artistically through a series of video installation which depict ‘our climate enfolding

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<sup>228</sup> Jeffrey’s observation, ‘were these people deranged or were they in the forefront of a new consciousness’ (ZK 120), could perhaps be read alongside Deleuze’s conceptualisation of the ‘trickster’, who ‘has plenty of future, but no becoming whatsoever’, ‘On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature’, p. 41.

<sup>229</sup> McKenzie Wark, ‘On the Obsolescence of the Bourgeois Novel in the Anthropocene’, *Verso blog*, 16 August 2017 <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3356-on-the-obsolescence-of-the-bourgeois-novel-in-the-anthropocene>> [accessed 30 April 2018].

<sup>230</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 15.

us' (ZK 242; 200; 36).<sup>231</sup> *Zero K* though, is not so much a science-fictional re-working of the recent past, than it is a realist novel which pushes realism to a breaking point, which enjoins Jeffrey 'to get beyond your experience [...] beyond your limitations' (ZK 35). That is to say, DeLillo is less interested in exploring the technologies of cryonic freezing, than he is in introducing what Wark calls '*new probabilities*' into the domestic space of the novel: 'a future beyond imagining', as Jeffrey reflects, that overwhelms the 'dimpled history' of the private individual (ZK 15).<sup>232</sup>

*Zero K*, in this sense, is triangulated around family: Part One opens with Jeffrey having been flown out to 'the Convergence' by his father Ross so as to be able to keep vigil with Ross's second wife, Artis Martineau as she prepares to 'become a clinical specimen' and who believes she 'will reawaken to a new perception of the world' (ZK 47). In Part Two, the initial focus is on Jeffrey's relationship with Emma Breslow, a relationship which deteriorates after Emma's adopted son Stak goes missing—and whose death, fighting alongside Ukrainian troops against pro-Russian fighters in the Donbass region, Jeffrey witnesses at 'the Convergence', where he has returned to support Ross undergo cryonic freezing in a special 'Zero K' unit. 'Time is so overwhelming', Ross comments, 'that we don't feel it pass in the same way', a discontinuity from the world-system that is gestured to by the respective titles for each part: 'In the Time of Chelyabinsk' and 'In the Time of Konstantinovka' (ZK 28). Indexed to the cosmological time of a meteorite strike and the time of civil war, *Zero K* outlines a possible mediation of existential life and historical intelligibility; a mediation that is shattered, however, by the extraordinary eternal present of its core section, titled 'Artis Martineau'. Narrated in 'the open prose of a third-person voice that is also her alone', this is an encrypted centre that blasts

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<sup>231</sup> The subjects that populate these video installations are the victims of climate change and the destabilisation of the world-system; to appropriate Hito Steyerl, they are 'the wretched of the screen'. For an account that establishes points of resistance and refusal within the Anthropocene see Marco Armiero and Massimo De Angelis, 'Anthropocene: Victims, Narrators, and Revolutionaries', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116.2 (April 2017), 345-362.

<sup>232</sup> Wark, 'On the Obsolescence of the Bourgeois Novel in the Anthropocene'. (italics in original).

open the novel's historical continuum (ZK 272).<sup>233</sup>

Jameson concludes *A Singular Modernity* (2002) with the striking formulation that 'ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past'.<sup>234</sup> In their initial framing, the 'archaeologies of the future' belong to a modernist cultural project which seeks 'to combine a Poundian mission to identify Utopian tendencies with a Benjaminian geography of their sources'.<sup>235</sup> What such a project might entail is perhaps crystallised in Jameson's study of the relationship between Utopia and science fiction, *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005). Here, Utopia is presented as enacting a formal break with the present; a 'disruption' or 'discontinuity' that 'forces us precisely to concentrate on the break itself: a mediation on the impossible, on the unrealisable in its own right'.<sup>236</sup> This notion of 'a rattling of the bars' returns in the long concluding chapter of *The Antinomies of Realism*, where Jameson claims that 'the historical novel of the future (which is to say of our own present) will necessarily be Science-Fictional inasmuch as it will have to include questions about the fate of our social system, which has become second nature'.<sup>237</sup> To estrange the present and to reawaken extinct forms of historical consciousness, the novel must render the present as the determinate prehistory of some future alien totality. 'For better or for worse', Jameson signs off, 'our history, our historical past and our historical novels, must now include our historical futures'.<sup>238</sup> The 'archaeology for a future age' that Jeffrey is both awestruck and appalled by—it is 'science awash in irrepressible fantasy'—belongs to a bourgeois collective who want to

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<sup>233</sup> 'Open prose' is how Jeffrey imagines this consciousness. For example: 'Time. I feel it in me everywhere. But I don't know what it is. The only time I know it what I feel. It is all now. But I don't know what this means. I hear words that are saying things to me again and again. Same words all the time going away and coming back. But am I who I was', *Zero K*, p. 157. Cut up into paragraphs that at most run for two lines, this part anticipates chapter nine in Part Two, where Jeffrey's account fractures into short punctual bursts. Artis's sense of 'being artificially herself' and a 'clinical specimen', would be another example of Nancy Armstrong's 'microworlds', *Zero K*, p. 67; p. 47.

<sup>234</sup> Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*, p. 215.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>236</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 231-232.

<sup>237</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 233; *The Antinomies of Realism*, 298.

<sup>238</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 313.

‘follow’ their ‘words bodily into the future tense’ (ZK 257; 253). This future re-embodiment of consciousness cuts somewhat against the thrust of Jameson’s ‘Science-Fictional’ optics: *Zero K* launches capsules—‘lives in abeyance. Or the empty framework of lives beyond retrieval’—into an indeterminate future from which, if successful, an ‘ahistorical’ humanity will emerge, ‘free of the flatlines of the past’ (ZK 141; 130).<sup>239</sup> For Jeffrey, Ross and Artis are ‘entrapped’ and ‘enfeebled’ in a ‘still-life future’ which is subtracted from the commons and the distributed subject of modernity—a collectivity whose destiny is increasingly imperilled by ‘planetary woe’ (ZK 256; 271; 127). But, *Zero K* also appears to grasp within this abeyance an apparition, a historical future that is both on the point of arrival but also belongs to an age ‘beyond imagining’ (ZK 15). An archaeology of the future that perhaps, finally, lies beyond the range of DeLillo’s poetics. And with this surprising conjunction of DeLillo and Jameson at the level of the sentence this thesis too comes to a close.

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<sup>239</sup> ‘We are becoming citizens of the universe’, *Zero K*, p. 69.



## Conclusion

### ‘Symptoms of the Future’?

‘The glory of the Anthropocene’, Fredric Jameson concludes, ‘has been to show us that we can really change the world’. ‘Now’, Jameson laconically adds, ‘it would be intelligent to terraform it’—science-fictional processes of world formation that are the manifold ‘symptoms of the future’.<sup>1</sup> Terraforming in *Zero K* is the preserve of the scientists at ‘the Convergence’, the experimental cryonic research facility that Jeffrey Lockhart increasingly regards as an ‘endland’ (ZK 266). Indeed, as one of its theorists pushes: ‘if our planet remains a self-sustaining environment, how nice for everyone and how bloody unlikely [...] either way, the subterranean is where the advance model realises itself’ (ZK 238). This underground ‘civilization’ is quite distinct from the model of nonsynchronous synchronicity discovered by Angelo Cavallo in ‘Take the “A” Train’ and is ‘designed’, Jeffrey speculates, ‘to be reborn one day long after the catastrophic collapse of everything on the surface’ (ZK 256). Yet *Zero K* ends with a non-scientific convergence too: the miraculous ‘natural phenomenon’ of the Manhattan solstice where ‘the sun’s rays align with the local street grid’ (ZK 273). Riding a crosstown bus, Jeffrey confides that ‘I didn’t know what this event was called but I was seeing it now’; a nameless experience heightened by the ‘unceasing’ and ‘exhilarating [...] prelinguistic grunts’ of a fellow traveller, a young boy, whose ‘cries of wonder’ absorb Jeffrey more than ‘heaven’s light’ (ZK 273; 274). Jeffrey: ‘the full solar disk, bleeding into the streets, lighting up the towers to either side of us, and I told myself that the boy was not seeing the sky collapse upon us but was finding the purest astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun’ (ZK 274). This struggle between eschatology and ‘purest astonishment’ crystallises a decades long antagonism between allegory and affect in DeLillo’s work; a battle that affect

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<sup>1</sup> Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology*, p. 348.

appears to win, although the boy's 'human wail' causes Jeffrey some consternation: 'I hated to think that he was impaired in some way, macrocephalic, mentally deficient, but these howls of awe were far more suitable than words' (ZK 273; 274). 'Howls of awe' and their assault on 'language and its naming of things (and feelings)' perhaps inscribes *Zero K* in 'a tradition of literary celebrations of temporal immediacy from Wordsworth's imbeciles and Flaubert's "simple heart"'.<sup>2</sup> Temporality is reduced in such Utopian evocations, Jameson suggests, to the de-chronologised present of the body, a lyrical suspension in which the mass transit bus becomes 'the carrier of this radiant moment' (ZK 273). In a novel split between an epistemological account of enfolding climate change and a micrological reconstruction of consciousness in the cryonic pods, the boy's wonderous voice without language shatters DeLillo's historical dialectic into a multitude of free-floating sensations.

The ephemeral 'tide of light' drowning Manhattan in *Zero K* takes on a rather more existentially threatening and rising form in the intertidal metropolis of Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) (ZK 273). Robinson's novel imagines a historical future that also involves terraforming the earth, although here, New York's skyscrapers like the MetLife Building have been repurposed and transformed into apartment blocks. Social being in *New York 2140* is still organised by capital and its search for surplus value; however, Robinson's multi-perspective narrative is totalised through the becoming-collective of a struggle against the commodification of the commons. Collective agency in *New York 2140* takes the form of a debt strike orchestrated by the 'Householders' Union'; financial non-compliance from below which leads to legislative reform and the nationalisation of the banking system. 'Science fiction is the realism of our age', Robinson insists, because it takes over the nineteenth century realist novel's mediation of the 'individual's relationship to society and history' and 'adds the

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 29; p. 28.

nonhuman and the planet' to its narrative combinations.<sup>3</sup> If *New York 2140* is a self-conscious reworking of the 'genre of the French apartment novel'—developed by writers like Emile Zola—it is also explicit about its pedagogical intentions:

History happened. It does not stop happening. Seeming frozen moments are transient, they break up like the spring ice, and then change occurs. So: individuals, groups, civilization, and the planet itself all did these things, in actor networks of all kinds. Remember not to forget, if your head has not already exploded, the nonhuman actors in these actor networks. Possibly the New York estuary was the prime actor in all that has been told here, or maybe it was bacterial communities, expressing themselves through their own civilizations, what we might call bodies.<sup>4</sup>

Historical time remains suspended in *Zero K* and, despite an interest in demography and 'planetary woe', the novel is surprisingly depopulated (ZK 127). In contrast to the surrealist compositional structure of DeLillo's other 'science fiction' novel *Ratner's Star*, in which episodes and characters take on a semi-autonomy from the plot, the cognitive labour process is missing entirely in *Zero K*: 'all the zones, the sectors, the divisions that I hadn't seen. Computer centres, commissaries, shelters for attacks or natural disasters, the central command area. Were there recreational facilities? Libraries, movies, chess tournaments, soccer matches? How many numbers in the numbered levels?' (ZK 250). According to Jameson, the absence of an allegorical collectivity 'leaves only a desolate landscape of dystopian simulacra on the frozen screen of history'; a formulation that captures the video installations depicting anthropogenic climate disasters which recur throughout DeLillo's novel.<sup>5</sup> As Jeffrey realises, these screenings 'were visual fictions, the wildfires and burning monks, digital bits, digital code, all of it computer-generated, none of it real' (ZK 152). *Zero K* is a novel where the general intellect has gone awry and envisages its enclave as 'the lunar afterlife of the planet': 'what is here now is what is completely different' (ZK 123). Paradoxically, the sequestration of ontological

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Stanley Robinson and Helena Feder, 'The Realism of Our Time', *Radical Philosophy*. 2.01 (February 2018), 87-98 (p. 88).

<sup>4</sup> Robinson and Feder, 'The Realism of Our Time', p. 93; Kim Stanley Robinson, *New York 2140* (London: Orbit, 2017), p. 603. For an alternative rewriting of Zola see Jeffrey Vandermeer's weird naturalist *Area X: The Southern Reach Trilogy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology*, p. 347.

difference contributes to the waning and thinness of DeLillo's prose, which latches onto an idea that it cannot substantiate within the realist novel and splutters out into interminable and vacuous dialogue.

The question of 'how to survive a dead idea' fascinates Bucky Wunderlick, the 'hero of rock 'n' roll' and narrator of *Great Jones Street*.<sup>6</sup> Sucked into 'viscid history', Bucky ends the novel with a 'double defeat', being neither able to stage a messianic reappearance 'in the midst of people and forces made' to his 'design', nor enter 'permanent withdrawal [...] where all sound is silken and nothing erodes in the mad weather of language'. Temporarily stuck between these alternating states, Bucky lets 'the rumours' of his fate 'accumulate':

The most beguiling of the rumours has me living among the beggars and syphilitics, performing good works, patron saint of all those men who hear the river-whistles sing the mysteries and who return to sleep in wine by the south wheel of the city.<sup>7</sup>

'Our empirical experience of the defects, the insufficiencies, and the failures of our particular collective system' are compensated, Jameson glosses, by 'Utopian foreshadowings of a radically different system'.<sup>8</sup> Bucky maintains an ironic detachment from such catholic impulses, whose 'beguiling' rumours transform him into a faith-healer and miracle-worker for the part of no part: the 'beggars and syphilitics' excluded from the commodification of rock music, and expropriated from property by Bucky's record label turned real estate company, 'Transparanoia'. Bucky declares that 'fame requires every kind of excess', and the poor with whom he garners a phantasmatic renown certainly represent an excess: a surplus humanity or subproletariat whose refusals inform the aesthetics of Pier Paolo Pasolini, a cultural producer similarly interested in sainthood.<sup>9</sup> Taking Pasolini as a reference point, the hearsay and myth that Bucky himself enjoys consuming perhaps belong to a heretical communist poetics

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<sup>6</sup> Don DeLillo, *Great Jones Street* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> DeLillo, *Great Jones Street*, p. 250.

<sup>8</sup> Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology*, p. 214.

<sup>9</sup> DeLillo, *Great Jones Street*, p. 3. For a recent publication see Pier Paolo Pasolini, *St Paul: A Screenplay*, trans. Elizabeth A. Castelli (London and New York: Verso, 2014).

struggling to actualise itself and revolutionise the prosaically ordered world of capital as encountered by the novel.

But, as this thesis has argued, these are DeLillo's people more generally, the 'union of the dispossessed' who appear insistently throughout his oeuvre.<sup>10</sup> Whilst the destitute and unemployed might not be organised politically by DeLillo, his texts nonetheless seek to re-historicise, if not re-collectivise and re-dialecticise, the surplus population as a multitude. *Zero K* represents a culmination of this narrative arc, launched in the 1960s, and which has sought to disjunctively synthesise bodily sensation and historical form-giving; a narrative operation that finally breaks down and is abandoned in Jeffrey's neo-romantic conclusion. The climate represents an absolute limit to DeLillo's project, a barrier to which his capitalist epics can neither imagine a viable historical future beyond, and nor can his indigent collectives transversally sidestep the coming planetary catastrophe. It is perhaps this short-circuiting of the dialectical narrative apparatus which contributes to a tendency in his late fiction to reproduce an ideological homogenisation of humanity as a species—whose bleak extension is universal extinction: 'Stak talked to the rock. He told it that we were looking at it. He referred to us as three members of the species *H. sapiens*. He said that the rock would outlive us all, probably outlive the species itself (ZK 216-217).

If this marks an impasse in DeLillo's literary thinking, his representation of capital and its dislocation of Marxist theories of the novel, opens new prospects for the study of the savagery of accumulation and its civilization by labour—a civilization not necessarily synonymous with communism.<sup>11</sup> The monstrous future-presents anticipated by and which overwhelm late novels like *Point Omega* and *Zero K*, are in turn addressed by texts such as Robinson's *New York 2140* and Jeffrey Vandermeer's *Annihilation* (2014), which continue

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<sup>10</sup> Robinson and Feder, 'The Realism of Our Time', p. 97.

<sup>11</sup> I take this notion of the savagery of capital and its civilization by the workers' movement from John Kraniauskas's remarks at 'The Narco-Culture of Narco-Accumulation' workshop held at Birkbeck, University of London. 15 March 2019.

DeLillo's reworking of the philosophy of history. Likewise, novels like Wu Ming's *Manituana* (2009) and Marlon James's *The Book of Night Women* (2009) draw on the irrational historicism of DeLillo's historical novels, but channel their non-presupposition of the people through labour power excluded from or enslaved by the political constitution of the nation—as a republic or a colony. Ricardo Piglia's *Target in the Night* (2015) points to a comparative use of conspiracy and lateral detection to register the spatio-temporal penetration of finance capital in the 1970s, but this time in the internal peripheries of so-called developing nations. Finally, the incarcerated women workers of Rachel Kushner's *The Mars Room* (2018) can be referenced to Jarold Bradway of 'Hammer and Sickle', and his 'breathing the fumes of free enterprise forever'; a dialectic, however, that is sharpened in Kushner's novel which demonstrates the identity of capitalism and subjugation. Such political intervention is frequently absent from DeLillo's own epics of capitalism; novels, however, which turn the limitation of form into points of stress where the 'unrepresentable transcendence' of Utopia momentarily burst onto the historical present.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology*, p. 247.

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