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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
AMERICAN STUDIES**

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**LIVING “IN THE GLOW OF CYBER-CAPITAL.”
FINANCE CAPITAL IN DON DELILLO’S FICTION**

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***LIVING “IN THE GLOW OF CYBER-CAPITAL.” FINANCE CAPITAL IN DON
DELLILLO’S FICTION***

SUMMARY

The present thesis reads Don DeLillo’s fiction as expressive of the process of financialization which emerged in response to the 1970s capitalist crisis in the United States and gave rise to a specific social materiality and peculiar “structure of feeling” grounded in finance capital.

I will argue that DeLillo’s works offer a powerful representation and critique of the workings of finance capital and of American hegemony pursued via the emergence, consolidation and expansion of finance. As DeLillo’s novels depict a specifically finance-driven US hegemony, they also register the attempts to resist such hegemony. Simultaneously, I shall focus on DeLillo’s analysis of a culture immersed in what Keynes called “the fetish of liquidity”, and on DeLillo’s investigation of how the seemingly dematerialising power of speculative capital modifies the construction of a new social materiality and human experience. By articulating a comparison between specific mechanisms within finance capital and the workings of mourning and melancholia, I shall explore the anxiety and dread pervading DeLillo’s characters as originating within the erasure of the commodity form from the dominant financial mode.

Within such purview, I will first explore those texts, written in the 1970s, which best depict the crisis in US capitalism and the response to such crisis via the emergence of a chiefly financial economic and cultural mode. Subsequently, I will investigate DeLillo’s latest production in order to highlight how such works expose the contradictions and limitations of a finance-dominated economy and its attendant “structure of feeling”, and express an ever-growing need to return to less virtual, less evanescent forms of economic production.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the thesis, I will refer to DeLillo's works using a series of abbreviations, a list of which is provided below. Full bibliographical references are given in the Bibliography. Quotations from DeLillo's works will appear parenthetically in the body of the text. Abbreviations will precede those quotations which refer to the novels which are not under analysis in the single chapters.

<i>A</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Americana</i> .
<i>EZ</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>End Zone</i> .
<i>GJS</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Great Jones Street</i> .
<i>P</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Players</i> .
<i>RD</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Running Dog</i> .
<i>N</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>The Names</i> .
<i>WN</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> .
<i>L</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Libra</i> .
<i>M</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Mao II</i> .
<i>U</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Underworld</i> .
<i>SC</i>	Don DeLillo, "Silhouette City: Hitler, Mason and Modernity."
<i>BA</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>The Body Artist</i> .
<i>RoF</i>	Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future."
<i>B-M</i>	Don DeLillo, "Looking at Meinhof."
<i>C</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Cosmopolis</i> .
<i>FM</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>Falling Man</i> .

INTRODUCTION

LIVING IN THE GLOW OF CYBER-CAPITAL

The financial system usually appears as “a world of its own, [its] immense speculative energies seemingly unrelated to the world of material production”¹ and unable to shape and affect daily life. However, in the face of the deep global recession triggered by the “Great Financial Crisis”² in 2007, I would argue that it is no longer “possible to sustain the view that [finance] capitalism has only a shadowy relation to daily life [and that] the abstractions and fictions of capitalism’s logic [we construe] as the property of some mystical external force—“capital”—[exist] outside of the web of life and immune to materialist influences.”³

Even in an overtly financial stage, capitalism remains a system where, according to economist Michel Aglietta, economic relations express, in hiding them, social relations.⁴ As Marx posited, social relations generate ideas, thoughts, conceptions which find in language as “practical consciousness” their expressive tool. Language is social insofar as this “agitated air” fulfils men’s need to interrelate with other men; language reflects as much as it shapes the mental productions of men “as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its further forms.”⁵

¹ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capital*, (London: Verso, 2006), 83.

² John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis. Causes and Consequences*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 8.

³ Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capital*, 80-83.

⁴ Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation. The US Experience*, trans. by David Fernbach, (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 9.

⁵ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 46-51.

I would argue then that “social relations are...a cause of what stories can and cannot be told (and of the manner of their telling); and that, therefore, economic structures may be read as the generative source of fictional forms.”⁶

Such fictional forms do not constitute “mere reflexes, epiphenomenical projections of infrastructural realities.”⁷ Rather, as Jameson posits, one can locate their origin within their historical referent via an act of “transcoding.” Literary works fashion and elaborate, though their peculiar linguistic and narrative means, the material informing them. A hermeneutical act of transcoding entails establishing a relation between the literary, the cultural and the economic levels, while at the same time it allows to preserve the autonomy and “the determinate contradictions of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems [which] coexist [within the interpretative framework] as well as in its general social formation.”⁸

In effect, capitalism is never entirely homogenous, but rather the result of “the complex interrelations”⁹ between what Raymond Williams called “dominant”, “residual” or “emergent” social formations.”¹⁰ Thus, at any stage of the history of capitalism the dominant social formation coexists alongside ‘residual’ or ‘emergent’ socio-economic structures and their attendant cultural productions. Williams argues that the ‘residual’, while belonging to the past, nonetheless continues to operate effectively within the present, often constituting an alternative or oppositional force in relation to the dominant economic structure and its culture.

Over the last 30 years finance capital has been the dominant form of capital, giving rise to specific social relations which appear entirely autonomous and in tension with those social positions emerging from the productive economy, now deemed residual or archaic.

Finance capital, in David Harvey’s reading of Marx, constitutes “a peculiar kind of circulation process of capital” which appears in the form of interest-bearing capital and centres around the credit system.”¹¹ Capital formation and circulation occur via the process that Marx summarises with the general formula $M-C-M^1$, (with M standing for money, C for commodity and M^1 for money plus a surplus). On the contrary, with interest-bearing capital the total movement of capital is abridged, $M-M^1$, with M^1 resulting from the money lent plus an interest.

⁶ Richard Godden, *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.

⁷ Fredric Jameson; *The Political Unconscious*, (London: Methuen, 1981), 42.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121.

¹⁰ Ibid., 121-122.

¹¹ David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital. New Edition*, (London: Verso, 2006), 283.

Interest-bearing capital "appears as money that begets money, without any intermediary movement."¹² In obliterating C, the property of capital's expansion appears as "the product of a mere *thing*"¹³ rather than that of a process. As interest-bearing capital, "capital assumes its pure fetish form...being the saleable thing. Firstly through its continual existence as money, a form in which all specific attributes are obliterated and its real elements invisible...Secondly, the surplus value produced by it, here again in the form of money, appears as an inherent part of it."¹⁴ Money is now "pregnant" with itself and no longer appears as "a mere point of transit" but exists only in this form.¹⁵ Marx concludes that interest-bearing capital, "no longer bears the birth-mark of its origin. The social relation is consummated in the relation of a thing, of money, to itself. Instead of the actual transformation of money into capital, we see here only *form without content*."¹⁶

Finance capital, by erasing the commodity from capital's formula M-C-M¹, renders invisible "the social content of economic relations"¹⁷ embodied within C, thereby resting on a "structured forgetting"¹⁸ of labour. Such erasure opens a gap over and around which the economic agents perpetuating the circuits of finance capital must consequently organise their social relations. Since these relations do not find material embodiment in the commodity form, they are no longer grounded within the referential network of production and consumption which constitutes the productive, or 'real', economy. Such erasure generates the perception of a dematerialised reality, and attends to the creation of a culture whose "structure of feeling"¹⁹, to use Raymond Williams' formulation, originates within finance capital. As finance capital can thus flow unbridled, unfettered by the constraints of the commodity form, volatility, unfixity and its tendency to avoid "uncomfortable collisions with matter"²⁰ gradually inform the meanings and values, the experiences, the actions and motifs of that social group whose workings occur within the medium of finance capital. Within such medium, its class agents

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1959), 345.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 392.

¹⁷ Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 9.

¹⁸ Stephen Shapiro, "Transvaal, Transylvania: Dracula's World-System and Gothic Periodicity", *Gothic Studies* 10:1 (May 2008), 33.

¹⁹ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.

²⁰ Doug Henwood, *Wall Street. How it Works and for Whom*, (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 235.

immerse within the fetish of liquidity, as Keynes used to call it, and consequently must endure “the experiential effect of [their medium’s] fetishism.”²¹

Since the late 1970s the US economy has revolved pre-eminently around credit rather than material production. If finance capital in its varied forms constitutes the essence of late capitalism, then Postmodernism may be read as the cultural logic ²² and expression of finance capitalism. Indeed, materialist geographer David Harvey suggests that “postmodern concerns for the signifier rather than the signified [may be recast as concerns for] the medium (money) rather than the message (social labour) [with an attendant] emphasis on [the] fiction [of finance] rather than [the real]” of the productive economy.²³ I would affirm that a number of fictions which have been defined postmodern may be read as narratives of finance capital.

I shall argue that Don DeLillo’s works are expressive of the process of financialization which, in response to the crisis of profitability which beset the US (and world economy) from 1973, produced a structural change within US capitalism. Via Greta Krippner, I gloss “financialization as a pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production. ‘Financial’ here refers to activities relating to the provision (or transfer) of liquid capital in expectation of future interest, dividends, or capital gains.”²⁴ Don DeLillo’s novels address the peculiar structure of feeling which emerges within the financial sphere and then gradually infiltrates the domains of everyday life. His fictions pin down the experiential effects of the liquidity fetish and expose the structural contradictions within finance capital, contradictions which its class agents internalise. In so doing, DeLillo’s works produce a compelling representation of American hegemony in the last thirty years constructed around the neoliberal political-economic project, and enforced via financial markets and instruments. By exposing the contradictions and limits of a finance-dominated economy, DeLillo offers a powerful critique of speculative capital’s underside.

DeLillo has become a canonical American novelist, praised for his ability “to anticipate and to comment on cultural trends and tendencies...[for his] repeated invitations to think

²¹ Richard Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital: *American Psycho* and the Poetics of Deregulation”, unpublished paper. Permission to cite given by the author.

²² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism. Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

²³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge, MA & Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 102.

²⁴ Greta Krippner, “The Financialization of the American Economy”, *Socio-Economic Review* 3 (2005), 174.

historically [and for his skill in exploring] the ways in which contemporary American personal identity (as fragmented as it may be) is related to larger social and cultural forces.”²⁵ DeLillo’s extensive focussing on the commodification of culture, on the power of the media, on the logic of the simulacrum, “his rapid-fire recycling of popular literary genres...his not fully realised, autonomous individuals [who struggle to operate within] decentered networks...of power”²⁶ have undoubtedly helped identify DeLillo’s works either as symptom or diagnosis of the postmodern condition, even though they “absorb and incorporate the culture without catering to it.”²⁷

DeLillo has insisted that “the writer should be someone who thinks ‘against’: against the powers that be, against big business, against uncontrolled consumerism, against unceasing waste, against everyday cynicism.”²⁸ For DeLillo novelists “have to see things before other people see them”²⁹ and must “understand the currents flowing through the culture around us.”³⁰ Furthermore, they must “work in the margins”³¹ in order to maintain their critical purchase over “a ‘culture’ so powerful that it absorbs absolutely everything, including artists, who have a tendency to become more and more impotent, as banal as disposable products.”³² However, he has always attempted to resist labelling, possibly because any classification of his work risks drawing him into “the dead centre of things”, thus neutralising the writer’s critical distance.

I will therefore attempt to demonstrate that reading DeLillo against the backdrop of a materialist analysis of economic and social relations arising from the process of financialization highlights his ability to describe, in a prescient way, social and cultural phenomena before they “have been formalized [and] classified.”³³

²⁵ John N. Duvall, “Introduction: The Power of History and the Persistence of Mystery” in John N. Duvall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1, 2.

²⁶ Peter Knight, “DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity”, in Duvall, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, 35, 36.

²⁷ Don DeLillo in Adam Begley “The Art of Fiction CXXXV: Don DeLillo”, *Paris Review*, 35:128 (Fall 1993), 290.

²⁸ François Busnel, “Je n’ai pas de réponse littéraire au terrorisme”. An interview with Don DeLillo, *L’Express*, translated by Charles T. Downey, *IONARTS*, September 14, 2003. <http://ionarts.blogspot.com/2003/09/translation-of-interview-with-don.html>. Last visited 5 March 2010.

²⁹ Maria Moss, “Writing as a Deeper Form of Concentration: An Interview with Don DeLillo.”, *Sources* 6.2.2 (Spring 1999), 88.

³⁰ Mark Binelli, “Intensity of a Plot. An Interview with Don DeLillo”, *Guernica. A Magazine of Art and Politics*, (July 2007). http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/373/intensity_of_a_plot/, np. Last visited 5 March 2010.

³¹ DeLillo in Begley, “The Art of Fiction”, 290.

³² DeLillo in Busnel, “Interview”, np.

³³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

Cosmopolis (2003), DeLillo's rendition of financier Eric Packer's self-destruction, addresses directly the dominance of finance capital within the US and world economy and seems to anticipate the spectacular crisis that has brought down financial institutions since 2007. In discussing *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo stated that "the day on which the novel was set was the end of an era."³⁴ According to DeLillo, Spring 2000 marked the moment when "the 20th century truly ended"³⁵ with the collapse of the stock market and the burst of the New Economy bubble. The crash precipitated a recession with worldwide consequences "revealing the mountain of corporate indebtedness" originating in the financial spree that had been taking place for nearly 10 years.³⁶

Indeed, *Cosmopolis* expands and fictionalises those concerns DeLillo had previously expressed in one of his most famous essays, "In the Ruins of the Future". In the initial passage of the essay, DeLillo states that we have reached the end of an era in which

the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit (*RoF*, 33).

For DeLillo, the era of global capital markets has constituted the "world narrative" (*RoF*, 33) of the last ten years of the 20th century, a narrative which has effectively "reshape[d] economic, political and social landscapes."³⁷ DeLillo locates within the ever-growing interaction between capital and technology the force that has propelled a sea-change in our cultural and mental habits, and in our perception of time and space as "basic categories of human experience."³⁸ He argues that our once subjective experience of space and time has come to be increasingly subsumed within the spatial and temporal logic of capital markets. In particular, DeLillo claims that in "the glow of cyber-capital" spatial distances collapse into an endless continuum which constitutes the delocalised space of cyber-capital exchanges. Similarly, time has entered "a curious...warp. Time moves faster, memory is more or less obliterated, events seem to repeat themselves endlessly."³⁹ DeLillo voices "a widely recognised perception in contemporary culture that, with the globalisation of capital, history has reached a kind of end point"⁴⁰ and that,

³⁴Don DeLillo, "Great American Novel? Terrifically Outdated", *The Times*, 14 May 2003, 17.

³⁵ *Idem*.

³⁶ Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble. The US in the World Economy*, (London: Verso: 2003), 292-293.

³⁷ John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 3.

³⁸ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 201.

³⁹ Gerald Howard, "The American Strangeness: An Interview with Don DeLillo", *Hungry Mind Review*, 47:1997, 15.

⁴⁰ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo. The Possibility of Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

through the collapse of temporal distinctions, “[w]e have awakened from the nightmare of history” (A, 234) as David Bell proclaims in *Americana* (1971). When Owen Brademas in *The Names* (1982) claims that the “world that has become self-referring” (N, 297), he describes a condition arising from the self-referential nature of speculative capital that was becoming dominant.

The world narrative which, according to DeLillo, reached its climax between the 1990s and the year 2000, had started unfolding at a much earlier date, back in the 1970s when a profound crisis within the Fordist age of capitalism gave rise to the era of “flexible accumulation” as David Harvey defines it. Flexible accumulation constitutes for Harvey a new accumulation regime characterised by a “new syste[m] of production and marketing...more flexible labour processes and markets...geographical mobility, [accelerated turnover time] and rapid shifts in consumption practices.”⁴¹ Harvey argues that the shift in regimes of accumulation, which he dates back to 1973, originated “the cultural turn to postmodernism.”⁴² The degree of innovation in technology produced an acceleration in turnover time in production, exchange and consumption, communication and information flow which eventually allowed to “bypas[s] the rigidities...of Fordism-Keynesianism that erupted into open crisis in 1973.”⁴³ The shift towards flexible accumulation has accentuated volatility, ephemerality, instantaneity, disposability and has brought about an “intense phase of space-time compression that has had a disorienting and disruptive impact upon political-economic practices as well as upon cultural and social life.”⁴⁴

Read against Harvey’s description of flexible accumulation, the origins of the spatio-temporal compression which DeLillo describes in his essay can be located within the specific historical transformation of US capitalism. Nonetheless, to grasp fully the extent of DeLillo’s account of such compression, and to appreciate DeLillo’s insight into the “dominant discourse [which] shaped global consciousness” (*RoF*, 33), one must analyse the peculiar role that financial markets have played within this new phase of accumulation. As DeLillo clearly recognises, the history of the emergence of capital markets is the narrative of our time, a peculiarly American narrative which has had worldwide consequences. I will therefore provide an account of the emergence and consolidation of the process of financialization from 1973 to

⁴¹ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 124.

⁴² *Idem*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 286, 284.

the present in order to establish its significance within the broader context of US capitalism and worldwide hegemony.

For economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein, the US exercised “unquestioned [economic, military and ideological] hegemony” over the world-system from 1945 to 1970.⁴⁵ Giovanni Arrighi, drawing from Gramsci, defines hegemony as “the *additional* power that accrues to a dominant group by virtue of its capacity to *lead* society in a direction that not only serves the dominant group’s interests, but is also perceived by subordinate groups as serving a more general interest.”⁴⁶ By reconstructing the national economies and the financial stability of the countries ravaged by World War II (most notably Western Europe and Japan), the US prompted the reconstitution of a world market from which its manufacturing industry and its products benefited enormously. Furthermore, the US also asserted its domination by imposing the dollar as the world reserve currency.

Over the 1950s and 1960s, both Japan and Western Europe successfully equalled the US in production and started competing with the latter for even greater shares of the global market.⁴⁷ Inter-state competition caused “a system-wide over-capacity and over-production [in the international manufacturing sector which brought about a] decline in the manufacturing rate of profit across the advanced capitalist economies.”⁴⁸ Giovanni Arrighi however affirms that decline in profitability resulted not solely from inter-capitalist competition. A “strong upward pressure on the purchase prices of primary inputs [whose more evident manifestation was] the first ‘oil shock’” of 1973, coupled with a much faster rise in “[r]eal wages between 1968 and 1973 [than labour productivity], provoke[d] a major contraction in returns to capital invested in trade and production.”⁴⁹

From Arrighi’s perspective, the crisis of profitability was only one, though significant, aspect of a much broader crisis of American military and ideological hegemony originating in US defeat in Vietnam. For Arrighi, US military expenditures to finance the war (and other operations, aimed at containing the threat of communism in Third World countries), heavily

⁴⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Curve of American Power”, *New Left Review* 40, (July-August 2006), 77.

⁴⁶ Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing. Lineages Of The Twenty-First Century*, (London: Verso, 2007), 149.

⁴⁷ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 9-15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7, 17, 18. Brenner dates the onset of the crisis of profitability in the US and world economy back to the period “between 1965 and 1973” (18), whereas Arrighi signals the period 1968-1973 as the turning point in the US-led world-order established after the Second World War. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 300.

⁴⁹ Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 304-5.

impinged on the profit squeeze and played a considerable part in the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements in 1971 and the dollar devaluation which characterised the 1970s.⁵⁰ The escalation of military spending to sustain the Vietnam War, coupled with extensive domestic consumerism, accelerated inflation, thereby worsening the competitiveness of American manufacturers. As David Harvey underlines, increased military spending within an intense system of economic competition on a global scale provided only a short-term outlet for surplus capital. As a result, the US suffered from a crisis of liquidity that forced it to abandon the system of fixed exchange rates and dollar convertibility into gold.⁵¹

For Arrighi, the growth of Eurodollar offshore markets furthered the US crisis of liquidity. Originally dollar deposit-markets for communist countries, offshore Eurodollar markets in London became the privileged depositories of US corporate and banking capital, which could thus escape the constraints on capital outflow imposed by the US government. Such massive flights of capital to offshore money markets in the phase of overaccumulation aggravated the shortage of US liquidity reserves.⁵² The collapse of the Bretton Woods system established a pure dollar standard system and the dollar's inconvertibility to gold; it allowed the US to enhance its right of seigniorage and print more dollars regardless of its balance of payment deficit. In a system of floating exchange rates, the US resorted to loose fiscal and monetary policy and sustained the dollar depreciation to recover competitiveness in manufacturing, since a depreciated dollar facilitated US exports while rendering foreign products more expensive, albeit worsening inflation.⁵³

In 1973 the crisis manifested in all its intensity with the OPEC countries' embargo on oil-exports to the West. The embargo produced a surplus of petrodollars which swelled Eurodollar markets. At this stage the US initiated a gradual process "of financial liberalization, above all the scrapping of capital controls and the opening of other national financial systems to American operators."⁵⁴ Such measures allowed US banks to appropriate the petrodollars deposited offshore, thus entering into possession of an enormous amount of liquidity. Via a gradual elimination of controls on foreign capital movements, the US could deploy such liquid

⁵⁰ Giovanni Arrighi, "The Social and Political Economy of Global Turbulence", *New Left Review* 20, (March-April 2003), 41-42.

⁵¹ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61.

⁵² Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 308.

⁵³ Ibid., 311.

⁵⁴ Peter Gowan, "Crisis in the Heartland. Consequences of the New Wall Street System.", *New Left Review* 55, (Jan-Feb 2009), 8.

funds in foreign direct investment (primarily to Third World countries).⁵⁵ In the meantime, the manufacturing sector, burdened with unusable excess capacity (idle plant and equipment), initiated the shift towards a regime of flexible accumulation.⁵⁶

Yet, for Harvey, as much as Arrighi, the cutting edge of this new regime of accumulation consisted in “the complete reorganisation of the global financial system and the emergence of greatly enhanced powers of financial co-ordination.”⁵⁷ Since the 1970s, the US government explicitly located within the financial system “the condition of survival and growth of the capitalist economic system.”⁵⁸ Paul Volcker’s monetary counterrevolution, starting in 1979 under President Carter, with its tight credit policy and record-high interest rates curbed inflation and paved the way for the global financial revolution that escalated under Reagan and reached its apogee under Clinton. Brenner argues that Volcker’s policy “delivered a decisive shock to the manufacturing sector [causing] an explosion of business failures and layoffs...and the parallel shedding of unprofitable plant and equipment.”⁵⁹ The monetary counterrevolution also initiated “a massive rerouting of capital flow towards the United States.”⁶⁰ High interest rates, tax breaks and a deregulated financial system, compounded by the explosion of new financial activities and markets, generated a wave of mergers and acquisitions provoking a shift in capital ownership towards financiers and speculators.

Wall Street trading activities started to gain influence, becoming a crucial source of profit for both investment banks and commercial banks. As Gowan points out, since 1977, the creation of a New Wall Street System brought “speculative arbitrage” center-stage, with its “buying and selling financial and real assets to exploit— not least by generating—price differences and price shifts [and creating asset-price bubble blowing].”⁶¹ Such new system introduced a lender-trader-model, via the creation of mutual funds and the expansion of security markets. New financial institutions, such as hedge funds, could loan up to 20 times their own capital to play the market, and the growth of financial instruments such as derivatives allowed to bundle

⁵⁵ Ibid., 311-313.

⁵⁶ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 184.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁹ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 50. According to Brenner, real interest rates rose from 2% to an average of 7.5% in 1981; the exchange rate of the dollar rose by 37% between 1978 and 1985 and its nominal value by 46.5%. In contrast, manufacturing output between 1979 and 1982 decreased by 10% and investment in manufacturing by 8%. Manufacturing unemployment reached 11% in 1982. Ibid., 50, 56.

⁶⁰ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 160.

⁶¹ Gowan, “Crisis”, 9.

and securitize assets without any collateral supporting them, thus facilitating more debt contraction.⁶²

If banks pioneered the financial revolution, the process of financialization, as both Krippner and Arrighi underline, succeeded primarily due to the non-financial, i.e. manufacturing sector: “high incumbent firms responded to falling returns by diverting a growing proportion of their incoming cash flows from investment in fixed capital and commodities to liquidity and accumulation through financial channels.”⁶³ Brenner’s economic data reveal that between 1981 and 1989 non-financial corporations invested only 21% of borrowed funds in productive capital, whereas 50% was used to finance net equity purchase.⁶⁴

Disinvestment in production through financial speculation and mergers and acquisition armed industrial capitalists with greater flexibility in re-allocating their surplus capital away from those regions where working-class resistance was stronger. A massive wave of industrial relocation to areas with cheaper labour and cheaper resources took place in the 1970s. Mike Davis stresses the importance of industrial relocation along the non-unionized, cheaper labour area of the Sunbelt, which disrupted the spatial and social structure of the US North East. He clearly indicates “deindustrialization as a deliberate financial strategy” since deindustrialization allowed industrial capitalists to reduce expense in productions and thus to divert their cash-flows into financial markets.⁶⁵ Of course, such structural transformations took place alongside a political turn away from the welfare state and social provisions, as well as from a politics of capital-labour mediation which had dominated the post-war boom.

David Harvey defines such political turn the “neoliberal turn.” Neoliberalism at first emerged as an economic doctrine, which aimed to promote the advancement of “human well-being...by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.”⁶⁶ Harvey contends that in the US “the neoliberal turn” within the economy soon turned into a “political project to re-establish the conditions of capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.”⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., 8-10.

⁶³ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 141.

⁶⁴ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 58.

⁶⁵ Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, (London: Verso, 1987), 137-38.

⁶⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

Neoliberalism created a new fusion between the territorial logic of power and that of capital. By "territorial logic of power" Harvey means "the military, political and diplomatic strategies used by a state to assert its interests and achieve its goals in the world at large." On the contrary, a capitalist logic of power refers to "the pursuit of capital accumulation through space and time."⁶⁸ These two logics intertwine but are by no means the same. The state operates over a territorialized space, pursuing collective advantage. On the contrary, capital flows across and through continuous space, operating to its own advantage. Furthermore, capitalism is highly asymmetrical, with asymmetry configuring itself as "unfair and unequal exchange, spatially articulated monopoly powers, extortionate practices attached to restricted capital flows, and the extraction of monopoly rent."⁶⁹ Provided that some capitalist centres benefit from "an uneven patterning of natural resource endowments and locational advantages...uneven geographical development [emerges as a result of] the uneven ways in which wealth and power themselves become highly concentrated in certain places by virtue of asymmetrical exchange relations."⁷⁰

The neoliberal era, therefore, constitutes a phase in the political and economic history of the United States when "the state's key task [was] to try and preserve [the] pattern of asymmetries [and uneven development which pertains to the capitalist logic] that work to its own advantage."⁷¹ By endorsing a set of political and social practices which could open capital markets around the world to US capital, the US greatly benefited in terms of state power and wealth.⁷² To the degree that Neoliberalism "deepened the hold of finance over all other areas of the economy as well as over the state apparatus", the US countered its declining hegemony through finance.⁷³

As Peter Gowan summarises, Neoliberalism transformed the US domestic environment modifying internal social relationships: the state operated in favour of creditor and rentier interests, subordinating the productive sectors to the financial ones, shifting wealth, power and security away from the bulk of population. Globally, Neoliberalism entailed "the opening of a state's political economy to the entry of products, companies, financial operators from the core

⁶⁸ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 26-27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁷¹ Ibid., 26, 31-32.

⁷² Ibid., 32.

⁷³ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 31-33.

countries, making state policy dependent upon developments and decisions taken in Washington, New York or other main capitalist centres.”⁷⁴

For Harvey, the transformation of both the global and the domestic environments occurred primarily by means of “accumulation by dispossession.” Accumulation by dispossession comprises a series of predatory practices which amount to a contemporary version of Marx’s process of primitive accumulation. As in the original phase of primitive accumulation, Harvey argues that, since 1973, the US has carried out a massive wave of “privatization of land and public assets, commodification of natural resources and labour power, the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption, colonial, neo-colonial and imperial appropriation of assets...usury, the national debt, and ultimately [has used] the credit system as a radical means of [accumulation by dispossession].”⁷⁵ The state (as in primitive accumulation) played a crucial role since it exercised its monopoly and coercive powers to support and promote such practices via financial means in order to reassert the US hegemonic position.⁷⁶

However, by liberating the power of finance, neoliberal political and economic practices also increased the opportunities for speculation, fraud and predation through the creation of fictitious wealth, subjecting the markets to increased volatility and risk of financial crises.⁷⁷ In the face of a decreased buying power of salaries and wages, the government fuelled credit consumption of commodities to keep high levels of consumer spending, but at the same time it incurred high-levels of indebtedness to attract cash flows from abroad by selling US treasury bonds (whose value increased the more the dollar appreciated). As Arrighi argues, “the rerouting of capital flows transformed the United States from being the main source of world liquidity and foreign direct investment...into the world’s main debtor nation and absorber of liquidity from the 1980s to the present.”⁷⁸

Internationally, the US used its financial power as the cutting edge of accumulation by dispossession to “open up as much of the world as possible to unhindered US capital flow and

⁷⁴ Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble: Washington's Faustian Bid for World Dominance*, (London: Verso, 1999), vii-viii.

⁷⁵ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 145.

⁷⁶ The peculiar financial character of accumulation by dispossession manifests itself primarily in the form of “stock promotions, Ponzi schemes, structured asset destruction through inflation, asset-stripping through mergers and acquisitions, the promotion of levels of debt incumbency...even in the advanced capitalist countries...credit and stock manipulations...and speculative raids carried out by hedge funds.” Ibid., 147.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 160-63.

⁷⁸ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 146. Citing an IMF report, Arrighi shows that the US account balance deteriorated slowly from a few billion dollars in 1980, to around 200 billions between 1985 and 1990 until it reached almost 1000 billion dollars in 2005. Ibid., 146-147.

exact tribute from the rest of the world.”⁷⁹ Usually, tribute was exacted from a number of developing countries which, having contracted dollar-denominated debts to finance their economic development, had become extremely vulnerable to currency speculations or debt insolvencies caused by an appreciating dollar. These countries had to submit to IMF structural adjustment programs or SAPs, which entailed strong waves of privatization and destruction of assets, and facilitated the redistribution of wealth towards the upper tier of the population. As a result “whole economies were raided and their assets recovered by US finance capital.”⁸⁰ Latin America in the 1980s and the 1990s, South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand in 1997-1998 are most notable examples of US finance capital predatory practices. Particularly, the crisis in South-East Asia revealed the extreme risk attached to financial crises within such an interconnected global market: that crisis invested Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Estonia, and the Federal Reserve had to intervene with a \$ 3.5 billion bailout to save Long Term Capital Management. In that occasion, Alan Greenspan warned against “the irrational exuberance”⁸¹ of financial markets, which had already produced a stock crash in US markets in 1987.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1990s, centred around the Wall Street-IMF-Treasury complex, and with ramifications in Tokyo, London, Frankfurt, the financial system “cast its net around the world” creating a transnational web of capitalist corporations and a “transnational elite of bankers, stockbrokers and financiers.”⁸² Especially between 1998 and 2000 the so-called New Economy produced an unparalleled rise in equity prices. It granted “both households and corporations unprecedentedly easy access to cash [prompting high levels of] investment and consumption [and generating] a wealth effect that gave US expansion a new lease.” Yet, in spite of a mild recovery between the mid-1980s and the mid 1990s, the rate of profit within the manufacturing sector continued to be substantially low in comparison.⁸³

The burst of the New Economy bubble in 2000 and the accounting scandals that plagued the US “dramatically revealed that ‘fictitious capital’ could easily remain unredeemable.”⁸⁴ Wall Street’s credibility was undermined; the fall of assets values such as pension funds exposed the tangible effects of vulture and predatory financial practices. The

⁷⁹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 93.

⁸⁰ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 66.

⁸¹ Greenspan made this statement at the speech given at the Annual Dinner and Francis Boyer Lecture of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, D.C., 5 December 1996.

⁸² Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 67.

⁸³ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 188-189.

⁸⁴ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 70.

ensuing recession in early 2001 showed, in Brenner's words, a "historically unprecedented vulnerability of the US economy to capital flight and a collapse of the dollar."⁸⁵

The events of 9/11 precipitated the recession and also ushered in a new phase within US foreign policy. According to Harvey, Bush's unilateral intervention in Afghanistan and reliance on heavy military force to command oil resources in the Middle East have launched the US on an explicitly imperialist path. Arrighi indicates that the Bush administration's response to 9/11 has accelerated an already existing terminal crisis of US hegemony, a terminal crisis whose signals manifested in the enormous expansion of the financial phase within the US cycle of accumulation.⁸⁶

For Arrighi, the "financialization of capital...[provided the] predominant capitalist response to the joint crisis of profitability and hegemony." Yet financial expansions contain within themselves a highly destabilising potential for the existing order. Economically, diverting investment systematically from production (and labour power) to hoarding and speculation exacerbates realization problems. Politically, financial expansions tend to occur as new configurations of power emerge, configurations which undermine the power of the hegemon. Socially, "financial expansions entail the massive redistribution of rewards and social dislocations, which tend to provoke movements of resistance and rebellion among subordinate groups and strata, whose established ways of life are coming under attack."⁸⁷

After 9/11 financial markets recovered quite easily, launching a new round of speculation and a credit binge which led, among other things, to the emergence of "a housing-market bubble in the US from 2001."⁸⁸ As Gowan observes, the sub-prime crisis only triggered the credit crunch which precipitated the heavy recession we are experiencing. The primary cause rests in having placed the reins of American economy (and that of much of the world) into the hands of a private "capitalist credit and banking system, subordinating all other economic activities to [the latter's] own profit drives."⁸⁹ By pushing to unprecedented levels the creation of

⁸⁵ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 295.

⁸⁶ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 161-162. Arrighi (who grounds his analysis in Braudel's work) distinguishes four systemic cycles (a Genoese, a Dutch, a British and US cycle) and explores the beginning, the expansion and the terminal crisis of each cycle in the course of 5 centuries. Using Marx's general formula of capital M-C-M' as a synthetic description of "a recurrent pattern of historical capitalism as world system", Arrighi contends that "the central aspect of this pattern is the alternation of epochs of material expansion (MC phases of capital accumulation) with phases of financial rebirth and expansion (CM' phases).... Together the two epochs or phases constitute a systemic cycle of accumulation (MCM')." The second phase signals the decline of one cycle of accumulation as another emerging centre enters the first phase. Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 6.

⁸⁷ Arrighi, *Adam Smith*, 162.

⁸⁸ Gowan, "Crisis", 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 25.

fictitious values vis-à-vis real value production in manufacturing, the financial system has failed to revive US' industrial capitalism. One may conclude with Gowan that the US' reliance on "financial dominance as a national strategy" on the one hand, and as a "Faustian bid for world dominance" on the other has ultimately proven detrimental, also to those who voluntarily or involuntarily adhered to its global neoliberal model.⁹⁰

My extended historical interlude spells out the ascent and dominance of finance capital within the US economy, and parses how significantly US financial powers helped restore US hegemony. Financial operations, carried out "in the realm of the promissory rather than the fixed, the fictional rather than the real"⁹¹ seemed to propel US capitalism away from the crisis towards new and heightened levels of accumulation, and bestowed on money capitalists the power to appropriate vast chunks of surplus value.

Read against my summary of US recent economic history, the compelling beginning of "In The Ruins Of The Future" reveals DeLillo's ability to condense thirty years of American and world economic, political and social history, by pausing over its most significant features. Not only does DeLillo evidence that "human activities— from politics to social policy to culture— [for 30 years have been] perceived principally through the prism of economics"⁹², but he also demonstrates that more and more facets of the human experience have been subsumed within the logic of finance capital living a "ghostly electronic life" of computerized trading.⁹³

Characters such as stockbroker Lyle Wynant in *Players*, risk analyst Jams Axton in *The Names*, former currency analyst Richard Sheets in *Cosmopolis* all belong to a class fragment which emerged from the explosion of FIRE (finance, insurance and real estate) in the late 1970s. Following Barbara and John Erhenreichs, these characters may be said to belong to the PMC or professional managerial class, a class "of salaried mental workers whose major function in the social division of labour may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations."⁹⁴ These characters not only act as reproductive agents of speculative capital, but they also interiorise their medium's opacity and self-referentiality originating in forgetfulness over labour. As a result, the professionals of finance in DeLillo's fiction are

⁹⁰ Ibid.26-29.

⁹¹ Godden, "Fictions of Fictitious Capital", np.

⁹² Saul, *Globalism*, 17-19.

⁹³ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 228.

⁹⁴ Barbara and John Erhenreich, "The Professional-Manual Class", in Pat Walker, ed. *Between Labour and Capital* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979), 12.

“[d]ivorced from both the site and the experience of material production, separated by virtue of the mystified opacity of [their] own professional codes from the real systemic function of the reproductive functions.”⁹⁵ While DeLillo masterfully describes these characters’ world-view, he also highlights how fragile, how laden with contradictions such a world-view is. As I shall argue, DeLillo demonstrates that since these characters construct their existence upon the fetishism and the fictionality of finance capital, they must eventually come to terms with the weight of their medium’s fictitiousness.

Similarly, even those characters who do not belong to the medium of speculative capital, such as for example rockstar Bucky Wunderlick in *Great Jones Street*, are increasingly drawn into an apparently dematerialised world and gradually embrace a peculiar financial structure of feeling marked by a willing suspension from the constraints of matter and the peculiar collapse of the flow of time that finance capital generates.

Throughout his oeuvre, DeLillo probes into the collapse of temporality and the transformation of the concepts of value and money that the shift towards immaterial forms of capital produces. As financier Eric Packer affirms in *Cosmopolis* nowadays “money is talking to itself” and “the present is ...being sucked out of the world to make way for the future”(C, 79). And yet his lover Didi Fancher, despite the proliferation of money talk, must admit “I don’t know what money is anymore”(C., 29). In order to understand fully DeLillo’s preoccupation with the notions of temporality, money and value in a pre-eminently financial age, one must inquire into the peculiar temporality and properties of finance capital, particularly in the form of credit.

As Suzanne DeBrunhoff points out in her analysis of *Marx and Money*, “though adapted to the needs of capitalism, credit is never contemporaneous with capital.”⁹⁶ Severed from the long-time horizon of commodity production and circulation, finance capital as interest-bearing capital can self-expand on a shorter-time span. The time horizon of interest-bearing capital, never represents the present of the circulation of productive capital, but rather its past and future. As capital completes its circuits, part of the ensuing money capital does not re-enter circulation, but rather the credit system hoards it to constitute a fund that allows the financing of other capitalists’ productive activities. Within this context, money capital in the form of credit

⁹⁵ Fred Pfeil, “ ‘Makin’ Flippy-Floppy’: Postmodernism and the Baby-Boom PMC”, in Fred Pfeil, *Another Tale to Tell* (London: Verso, 1990), 116.

⁹⁶ Suzanne DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, trans. by Maurice J. Goldbloom, (New York: Urizen Books, 1976), 99.

constitutes for Marx the past of productive capital.⁹⁷ When money capital in the form of credit is advanced against a collateral of unsold commodities, finance capital as fictitious capital can facilitate the purchase of fresh means of production and labour power. The money capitalist receives a claim on future surplus value, which he can then monetise and use for further investment. The credit system therefore rests on a expectation of future gains and the temporality of credit heavily bends toward the future.⁹⁸

The sophisticated financial instruments (such as derivatives) that have emerged since the 1970s have rendered possible the creation of circulating debts as credit which has no link with capital arising from past production. Also a system of fiat dollar unbacked by convertibility into gold, facilitated the creation of fictitious capital in quantities that far outran the production of capital in the realm of the real economy. Financial operations (speculations on stocks, commodities, currencies and collateralised debts) increasingly ceased to rely, as Charles P. Kindleberger argues, on “the assumption that the values of certain variables in the future are extensions of these values in the recent past.” Rather, the predominant assumption now has it that “the prices that are anticipated next week and next month determine the prices that prevail today, in effect a backward-looking view from the future to the present.”⁹⁹ Arguably, the temporality of credit produces “a sense of collapsing time horizon ...in which the future has come to be discounted into the present [and originates] the loss of a sense of the future”¹⁰⁰ as much as loss over the past.

Similarly, when credit substitutes for money proper within a predominantly financial age, performing many of the money functions, it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the real nature of money. Credit creation and circulation can only exist by virtue of the credit system’s link to its monetary basis. Fictitious capital can circulate as money simply because its monetary basis validates its circulation. Furthermore, credit internalises money contradictions while performing only some of the money functions. The economic existence of money is fully defined only when one accounts for all the functions that money possesses and their articulation. To the degree that “its character of general equivalent is [money’s] animating principle”, Marx’s theory of money implies that “only [a] combination [of all the three functions

⁹⁷ Ibid., 96-97.

⁹⁸ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 254.

⁹⁹ Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics and Crashes. A History of Financial Crises*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2005), 33.

¹⁰⁰ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 291.

of money] preserve and reproduce the general equivalent form. To omit a single one...is to put in doubt...the specific character of money.”¹⁰¹ Money (which for Marx appeared in the form of gold) functions as a measure of value (price or value in the form of money), money as a medium of circulation (liquidity, in the form of credit), and money as an expression of the general equivalent, in the form of the hoard, which preserves the notion of value as a certain quantity of socially necessary labour time and therefore the notion of value as social relation.

Credit can substitute for money as a medium of circulation, as a means of payment or as money of account. Yet, in credit, money that circulates endlessly dematerialises itself and credit undermines the utility of money as a measure and store of value, for which it can never be a substitute. At this point hoarding, even as it severs money from circulation, remains a necessary function to restore the quality of money. For this reason, “the tendency towards excess in the realms of finance is ultimately checked by a return to the eternal verities of the monetary base.”¹⁰²

As I shall point out, DeLillo not only describes the dematerialisation of money through credit, but he also focuses on the “crisis of representation in advanced capitalism”¹⁰³ which emerges when money ceases to be a “secure means of representing value.”¹⁰⁴ The world which emerges in *Players*, *Great Jones Street*, *Running Dog* and eventually *Cosmopolis* has been deprived of a hard, tangible precious metal and has to cope with the need to find alternative means to store value in order to preserve the meaning of money and value.

The world-narrative of finance capital that DeLillo investigates in his novels represents a world held in a state of abeyance, that is a world suspended over the gap that the obliteration of the commodity C opens between M and M¹. If such state of suspension or abeyance originates with the loss of C within the realm of fictitious capital, one may possibly look into the reaction to such loss within speculative capital’s class agents in order to apprehend the condition of a finance-dominated economy. Yet, reading the reaction to such loss against the normal process of mourning, as theorised by Freud in his “Mourning and Melancholia” (1919), would fail to capture the peculiar condition that such loss originates. As one may recall, Freud defines mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the

¹⁰¹ DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 26,25.

¹⁰² Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 254

¹⁰³ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 297-98.

¹⁰⁴ Idem.

place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal and so on."¹⁰⁵ The work of mourning entails a painful process of acknowledging and recognising such loss. When such process "has been accomplished, the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object."¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, I argue that the loss of the commodity form within the realm of speculative capital produces a reaction akin to that of melancholia. Melancholia, Freud posited, manifests as a response to a "loss of a more ideal kind, [a loss withdrawn from consciousness in that] one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost...and what he has lost in him."¹⁰⁷

According to Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, melancholia proceeds from "a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence, albeit, unwittingly, by the sufferers themselves."¹⁰⁸ Melancholia gives rise to what Abraham and Torok call 'incorporation': "[i]ncorporation results from those losses that for some reason cannot be acknowledged as such [and produces] a refusal to mourn.....Inexpressible mourning erects a tomb inside the subject [where] the loss is buried in [a] crypt."¹⁰⁹ As a consequence of this refusal to mourn, they argue, consciousness is thus split and prey to disavowal: on the one hand the person acknowledges that there is a lost object buried inside, on the other hand he/she chooses to disavow that such a loss has occurred. Such split of consciousness rests on a precarious balance, where the buried object may resurface as a haunting presence.

Abraham and Torok's theory of incorporation will help me gloss the peculiar condition and temporality of finance capital that DeLillo's characters live and experience as unacknowledged grief over loss of the productive economy, and possibly to read some of their actions and behaviour as an unspoken attempt to recuperate the lost body of the commodity, and with it the link with the productive economy.

Those who conform to the speculative medium of finance capital, interiorise a state of profound disavowal typical of the world of finance. Disavowal, a process which also plays a central role within the notion of fetishism, consists in both acknowledging and denying the interdependence between finance and other forms of capital, particularly capital arising from

¹⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XIV*, ed. by James Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 243.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 252.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 254, 255.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas T. Rand in N. Abraham and M. Torok, *The Shell and The Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 99.

¹⁰⁹ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130.

the productive economy. Therefore, one may arguably describe the world of finance as resting on a split. On the one hand “the circuits of financing remain in the last analysis dependent on the needs of productive capitalists.”¹¹⁰ On the other hand, finance capital denies such interdependence: given “the monetary endogeneity of its speculative means (credit financed by further credit)”¹¹¹ C is lost to the realm of finance. Those who operate within such medium internalise such a split, which entails disavowing both the existence of the world of the productive economy, and the social relations arising from it, and its persistence in spite of finance capital’s dominance.

Reading DeLillo’s characters as “being deluded into behaving as if no trauma or loss ha[s] occurred”¹¹², while at the same time manifesting, without acknowledging it, a profound sense of grief over what they have lost with C, helps to bring out the peculiar critical insight that DeLillo possesses. Seen through the hermeneutic paradigm of the work of melancholia, DeLillo’s characters reveal their behaviours, actions and feelings as expressive of the structural contradictions which animate the shift within late twentieth century US capitalism towards a predominantly financial economy. In exposing such contradictions, DeLillo’s narrative consequently reveals the limits and fictions of finance capital, thus acting at one and the same time as representation and critique of the historical referent in which it finds its origins.

In the attempt to bring out the critical power of DeLillo’s fiction, that power which renders him such an acute commentator and historian of our contemporariness, I have pursued an analysis that compares his early and latest fiction as the most adequate fictional representations and critique of both the emergence, and the end, of finance capital’s world narrative as described in “In the Ruins of the Future.”

I will read *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), *Players* (1977), *Running Dog* (1978) and *The Names* (1982) as fictions which illustrate the emergence of finance capital as a dynamic force that seems to put an end to the crisis of overaccumulation. Such novels not only capture the structural contradictions of finance capital as that which renders such form of capital the most appropriate to overcome the crisis of overaccumulation. More significantly, they reveal DeLillo’s ability to grasp and pin down the structure of feeling deriving from the

¹¹⁰ DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 98.

¹¹¹ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

¹¹² N. Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 104.

incipient process of financialization as emergent, as a “social experienc[e] in solution”¹¹³ and in contrast with the structure of feeling deriving from the productive economy, deemed residual or archaic. These novels manifest fully the mechanisms of melancholia or refusal to mourn as structuring the experience of these early novels’ characters.

By contrast, I shall argue that his latest works, *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007), expose the structural contradictions of finance capital as the ultimate cause for the failure to provide a successful and permanent solution to the crisis of overaccumulation. DeLillo’s late fiction reveals the most negative underside of both finance capital and Neoliberalism and possibly their failure to grant the US unquestioned hegemony. I shall contend that these novels chronicle the end of the world narrative of cyber-capital by depicting a shift from melancholia to mourning proper and from incorporation to “introjection”, which in Abraham and Torok terms signifies a process of “successful survi[ing] death-dealing traumatic occurrences.”¹¹⁴ Via such novels DeLillo questions, in an extremely prescient way, what may happen when the self-reflective, self-reliant and fetishistic structure upon financial capital relies implodes exposing its fictionality.

¹¹³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133.

¹¹⁴ N.Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 101.

CHAPTER 1

MORBID TEARS OF IMMORTALITY: *PLAYERS* AND THE TRANSITION TOWARDS FINANCIALIZATION

DeLillo's early fiction arises from the "conjuncture of a contracting economic long-wave and a newly expansive one"¹¹⁵ following the US and world economic crisis, which gained momentum in 1973, and tracks the emergence of a new "dominant form and geography of social intercourse"¹¹⁶ under the aegis of finance capital. His novel *Players* (1977) offers the best starting point to study DeLillo's early texts as an account of the transition from the crisis of the 1970s to the financialization of the 1980s as it focuses on such transition and manifests a financial-induced structure of feeling already at work, albeit not yet fully dominant. Economist Douglas F. Dowd, analysing the crisis of US capitalism in that same year, asserted that "the present [US capitalist] system has lost its vitality and we are probably in an era of transition."¹¹⁷ Indeed, transition dominates *Players*, as the recurrent words 'transient' and 'transit' testify (99, 132, 200, 207). Via his protagonist, stokebroker Lyle Wynant, DeLillo directly engages with the mechanisms and workings of finance capital operating through the circuits of Wall Street. *Players* foregrounds the structural forgetting at the heart of finance capital and readily lends itself to articulate an investigation of such forgetting as an instance of Abraham and Torok's melancholic incorporation.

¹¹⁵ Shapiro, "Dracula", 34, 29.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹¹⁷ Douglas F. Dowd, *The Twisted Dream. Capitalist Development in the United States since 1776*, (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers Inc, 1977), 116.

Read against *Players*, earlier texts such as *End Zone* (1972) and *Great Jones Street* (1973) emerge as “inde[xes of] the articulation between a fading phase and an emerging one within capitalism’s long duration [which are able to] apprehend what is beyond the immediate reach of...the mental horizon”¹¹⁸ informing the fading phase of the capitalist system. These novels presciently anticipate some of the preoccupations within transitional texts such as *Players*, while *Running Dog* (1978) and *The Names* (1982) show the consolidation of the process of financialization and of a financial structure of feeling .

The semantics of 'transient', a key term within *Players*, may constitute an interesting point of departure to gloss the novel’s dominant preoccupation with the transition towards a finance-induced phenomenology. “Transient”¹¹⁹ may be defined as “remaining in a place only a brief time,” a distinctive feature of unfixed capital, and particularly of finance capital. “Transient” may also be a “synonym for transitory”, a usage which aptly defines a specific phase within the American economy, evident in 1977. Both words evoke ideas of impermanence, volatility and unfixity, recalling the tendency of finance capital to avoid “uncomfortable collisions with matter.”¹²⁰ DeLillo might have had in mind a third meaning for ‘transient’, “one that is transient, *especially a hotel guest or boarder* who stays for only a brief time,” since *Players* opens with “The Movie” (3), set on an airplane, and closes with “The Motel” (209). Thus, from the novel’s very inception, DeLillo places transit at the core of his narrative technique.

Structurally, the story shifts between the Wynants (Lyle and Pammy) instantiating “the individual characters’ constant motion [and] their transience in each other’s lives.”¹²¹ Osteen suggests that transience underpins the Wynant’s inability to “engage in authentic exchange” and posits that such inability may derive from the “abstracting [and] dematerializ[ing] financial exchanges”¹²² upon which the Wynants model their lives. In order to grasp how dematerialisation within the financial medium affects the Wynant’s consciousness, one must locate the origin of such dematerialization. As I have shown in my introduction (p.8-9), dematerialization occurs with the obliteration of the commodity (and of the social relations C

¹¹⁸ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 33.

¹¹⁹ All definitions from The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by [Houghton Mifflin Company](http://www.thefreedictionary.com). Updated in 2003. Published by [Houghton Mifflin Company](http://www.thefreedictionary.com). Available at www.thefreedictionary.com

¹²⁰ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 235.

¹²¹ Mark Osteen, *American Magic and Dread. Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 144.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 146,148.

expresses) from capital's general formula $M-C-M'$, whereby capital appearing as interest-bearing capital "assumes its pure fetish form, $M-M'$ being the subject, the saleable thing...a form in which all its specific attributes are obliterated and its real elements invisible."¹²³ As a result, finance capital may be considered "form without content."¹²⁴ The erasure of C from capital's formula creates a gap between M and M' upon which the Wynants' lives are suspended.

If the couple is incapable of "authentic social exchange"¹²⁵ their incapacity may be grounded in their belonging to a "social group [whose workings] occur within a medium—speculative capital— which systematically seeks to avoid uncomfortable collisions with the matter of the real economy."¹²⁶ The gap opened with the loss of C causes the Wynants' to experience "anxiety [and] nameless dread"(7). The Wynants' "nameless dread" may be recast as melancholia, resulting from a "loss of a more ideal kind"¹²⁷ which, for Abraham and Torok, "for some reason cannot be acknowledged as such."¹²⁸ Suffering from melancholia manifesting as "inexpressible mourning", the Wynants refuse to mourn and are subject to the mechanism of 'incorporation.', that is an act of ingestion, by means of which they not only swallow within their respective consciousnesses their loss, but also the elements that may disclose their refusal to mourn. In swallowing, they bury and preserve their lost objects within an intrapsychic "crypt"¹²⁹ and, as a result of encryption, they are split, a part of them acknowledging the trauma of loss, another part disavowing it.

Thus, one may ground the Wynants' structural discomfort in their being immersed within a medium which refuses to acknowledge the loss of C and what is lost with the erasure of the commodity form. By interiorising such refusal the Wynants cannot "recogniz[e and account for] the real when they glimpse it through their anxieties."¹³⁰ Therefore *Players* may "foreground a problem of representation"¹³¹: finance capital produces a new set of social practices, in which the 'real' does not disappear, but is instead is reappropriated and reworked in ways fungible to the new dominant logic. *Players* attempts to represent a new reality, to extricate it from an only apparent historical vacuum generated within "the fetish of liquidity."¹³²

¹²³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 393.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 392

¹²⁵ Osteen, *American Magic*, 145.

¹²⁶ Godden, "Fictions of Fictitious Capital", np.

¹²⁷ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", 254.

¹²⁸ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130.

¹²⁹ Idem.

¹³⁰ Godden, "Fictions of Fictitious Capital", np.

¹³¹ Idem.

¹³² Keynes quoted in Henwood, *Wall Street*, 206.

From such a perspective, the novel may be read as an effort to define and recuperate “lost historical categories”¹³³, categories which are reduced to haunting presences to be exorcised.

The narrative shifts that DeLillo deploys may instantiate a first representation of the gap upon which the Wynants are suspended. DeLillo moves from Lyle’s narrative to Pammy’s, and back, without explaining his transitions. Each shift, in effect, creates a parataxis, usefully glossed by Adorno’s reading of the paratactical structure of Holderlin’s late poetry. Parataxis, Adorno argues, is

[f]aithfulness to something that has been lost....The real is honoured...in that Holderlin keeps silent about it...in lines that have no direct relationship of meaning but [which show] only the relationship of something omitted...through the hiatus of form...the content becomes substance.¹³⁴

Parataxis is “an artificial disturbance that evade[s] the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax”¹³⁵, an evasion which appears in the form of the series and of the “serial order” of Holderlin’s poems. The serial juxtaposition of verses within Holderlin’s poems manifests the primacy of form in the face of absent content and reveals the agency of form as the organising principle of the poem. The paratactic organisation of verses mediates the movement between stanzas, so that the unity of the poem emerges not from verses which are bridged by an explicit content, but rather from that absent content made manifest through paratactical construction, through the gap opened by the caesura between stanzas.¹³⁶ The absent content therefore becomes the very substance of that form.

Through parataxis, DeLillo represents the separation of form from its content in the medium of finance capital, whereby the content once represented by the commodity form becomes the very substance of self-generating capital. DeLillo thus foregrounds the medium of finance capital as the very medium through which characters associated with fictitious capital and its movements must cast their actions and motives.

Series and seriality are structural elements of the financial medium, and, as such, relationships between the *Players’* characters are subsumed within them. Seriality best informs the novel’s opening section “The Movie”, “a lesson in the intimacy of distance”(8). Inside the plane, effectively sitting in queues in the manner of Sartre’s serial crowd, the anonymous characters appear as “a *series* of relative densities”(6, emphasis added):

¹³³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 68.

¹³⁴ Theodore W. Adorno, “Parataxis. On Holderlin’s Late Poetry” in *Notes to Literature, Vol II*, trans. by Shierry Weber-Nicholsen, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 116, 128, 129.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130-133.

a plurality of isolations...they exist side by side...members of a temporary and contingent gathering [whose] reciprocal isolations, as a negation of reciprocity, signify the integration of individuals into one society....[E]ach of them is effectively produced by the social ensemble as united with his neighbours...a simple identity, designating the [passengers] as an abstract generality by means of a particular praxis.¹³⁷

Their unity lies in the plane and in the inflight movie they are watching. The film, whose sound the passengers cannot hear, depicts some terrorists slaughtering a group of golfers. “The golfers posing in massed corporate glory before a distant flag”(7) drift into the background as the camera closes in on the terrorists. The latter emerge in their old-fashioned attire and weaponry: “bandoliers...a cut-down Enfield...fringed buckskin pants...a machete”(7). The slaughter “takes place in slow motion...[the terrorists are] creatures of gravity...struggling towards some fundamental transition, their incomparable crude beauty a result of carefully detailed physical stress”(8). The images produce a quasi “immobilisation of [the violent] event [which] invites a pleasurable identification with its enactment....The subject of violence encourages a mimetic excitement.”¹³⁸ DeLillo tags such an excitement “[t]he glamour of revolutionary violence, the secret longing of the most docile soul”(8). Violence, Bersani and Dutoit explain, “is thus reduced to the level of a plot [which we can master through] narrative conventions as beginnings, explanatory middles and climactic endings.”¹³⁹ However, the serial juxtaposition of filmic images erases precisely the “explanatory middles” which may account for the depicted terrorist act. The discordance between the music in the background and the silent images “prevent[s] a [fully] fascinated identification with acts of violence.”¹⁴⁰ While the music prompts the audience “to remember something”(9), the film “has the effect...of lifting the weight of intervening decades....[T]he disjunction between sound and vision opens a kind of plug-hole which drains the historical specificity of the terror on the screen.”¹⁴¹ Reduced to the paratactical structure of a filmic montage, “[h]istory this weightless has an easy time...contending with the burdens of the present day”(9). Weightlessness becomes the “poetic form of anxiety and isolation”(108). The film eventually resembles a “spectacle of ridiculous people doing awful things to total fools”(9).

As in Holderlin’s poems, the paratactical montage of the scenes becomes the organising principle of the film and only the serial juxtaposition of images does bestow unity to the movie

¹³⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason Vol. 1*, trans. By Ann Sheridan-Smith, (London: Verso, 1976), 256, 257, 259.

¹³⁸ Leo Bersani and Ulyse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence. Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 52.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴¹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 59,76.

and provide the substance which should have pertained to a historical mediating content now evacuated. The film unifies the nameless characters under the structuring principle of seriality, which produces within the audience a unified response, laughter (8), and thus testifies to the power of the serial structure organising the filmic montage to affect individuals as they relate to each other as the film audience.

Seriality continues to mark Lyle Wynant's daily existence and habits: he shaves symmetrically, in "left-right series"(24), and checks his pockets "six or seven times a day" for "keys, wallet, cigarettes, pens and memo pad"(26). Lyle acts in conformity with his working environment, the Stock Exchange, where the buying and selling of stocks happens serially, a "game", as Keynes would define it, akin to Musical Chairs "where...intelligences [are devoted] to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be."¹⁴² Within the Stock Exchange everything is "worked out. There [are] rules, standards and customs" and each individual broker, with his serial "cries...quotes...bids...cadence and peal of an auction market"(28) conforms to the actions of the other stockbrokers. Within the Exchange "everyone reconnoitre[s] toward a balance", and the serial logic of buying and selling provides brokers with a sense of "order...elucidation...identity"(28).

Passivity generated by the serial behaviour on the Stock floor marks Lyle's bodily habits outside the Exchange. He often appears inertly observing his home television, enjoying the "repetitive aspects of commercials" and the "pleasing abstractions" of channel surfing (16). His repetitive gestures are reassuring insofar as they help him create a connection between "his objects and their location"(26) within his apartment. These habitual gestures mirror his daily watching "the stock codes stilted figures...the computer spew"(22) on the boards of the Stock floor. Arguably, Lyle's flat is an extension of the Exchange, where he tries to replicate that "order and elucidation" emanating from the "electronic clatter"(28) of the Exchange. Physical habits such as Lyle's can be inscribed within a phenomenological process whereby "the body is our medium for having a world"¹⁴³, the medium through which the subject actualises and materialises what Merleau-Ponty defines as an inborn power of projection. For Merleau-Ponty, being as consciousness is a network of intentions and the body is the centre of the potential

¹⁴² Keynes quoted in Henwood, *Wall Street*, 206.

¹⁴³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith, (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan, 1965), 146, 121.

action through which these intentions can be enacted: “consciousness is being towards the thing [or world surrounding it] through the intermediary of the body.”¹⁴⁴ Without the bodily experience of movement understood as an actualisation of such intentions, a being relapses to the condition of thing. A habit attests to the power of the individual to interiorise, via his body, new significances and meaning to the point that the body itself becomes the substance of such new meanings.¹⁴⁵

Lyle’s home habits may therefore attest to his body having interiorised passivity and seriality as experienced on the Stock floor as meanings and significances structuring his existence. Outside these habitual bodily practices, Lyle experiences “a kind of torpor...generated by three dimensional bodies”(100). Such torpor testifies to his refusal to engage with the physical matter of the real world, a refusal which is entirely consistent with the rejection of the commodity’s physical materiality characterising the speculative medium he inhabits.

Two of Lyle’s habits require closer reading. Lyle habitually “stack[s] pennies on the dresser”(32), even as he “carri[es] yellow teleprinter slips with him for days”:

He saw in the numbers of stock symbols an artful reduction of the external world to printed output....On the slip of paper in his hands there was no intimation of lives defined by the objects around them, morbid tiers of immortality....This was property in its own right, tucked away (70).

Pennies and teleprinter slips represent two worlds; the former that of “outside money” as it pertains, in its metallic weight, to the material world of the real economy; the latter “inside money” coming from within the Exchange,¹⁴⁶ in which “legally private contracts between debtors and creditors”¹⁴⁷ circulate and substitute for commodity transactions. As “morbid tiers of immortality”(70) we may read the serial sequence of inked stock symbols on the teleprinters slips as “property” liberated from the “mortality” of the commodity form; as such, the “tiers” of numbers and symbols appear to Lyle like “tears” cried over the corpse of the commodity itself. In contradistinction, the stacked pennies express a certain nostalgia for a world in which the physical substance of coins represents, in Marx’s terms, real money. One might recall that money for Marx is real insofar as it fulfils all three its functions: money as a measure of value, as a medium of circulation and as a means of payment and store of value. As such, money has the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 121,139.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 146

¹⁴⁶ Both definitions are taken from N.Kiyotaki, John Moore, “Evil is the Root of all Money”, *Clarendon Lectures*, 26 (November 2001), 5.

¹⁴⁷ DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 116.

“capacity socially to validate private production.”¹⁴⁸ Thus money, which through fetishism makes “value a property of things”,¹⁴⁹ can also be “a compression of one’s worth”(110). But within the circuits of finance, the nature of money changes.

Inside some of the granite cubes, or a chromium tower here and there, people sorted money of various types, dizzying billions being propelled through machines, computers scanned and coded, filed, cleared, wrapped and trucked, all in high-speed din....He’d seen the encoding rooms, the micro-filming of checks, money moving, shrinking as it moved, *beginning to elude visualization, to pass from paper existence to electronic sequence, its meaning increasingly complex, harder to name.* It was condensation, the whole process, *a paring away of money’s accidental properties, of money’s touch...What remained, he thought, could hardly be identified as money* (109-10, emphasis added).

The qualitative change within money does not consist in a substitution of electronic sequences for paper money, but rather in real money being replaced by credit money. Credit money does not realise value as contained within the commodity, but anticipates:

[v]alue-in-process currently held in non-monetary form.... It is precisely because *it represents a value in the course of realisation* that credit money is able to play the part of “real money”, as a means of payment; it is embodied in a set of written symbols rather than in the *product* of labour.¹⁵⁰

Such values-in process are taken “as realised”¹⁵¹ without their realisation; values-in-process thereby effectively compound the fetishism of the money form. As Lipietz puts it: “values [in-process] represented are not really validated...they still are not *really* validated, but they are treated as if they were.”¹⁵² Via Lipietz, one can see the specific temporality of credit at work, where a claim on future values determines the present of current transactions. Precisely such anticipation of values-in-process produces that peculiar sense of future collapsing onto the present that structures the era of finance capital.

Money, by assuming the role of the commodity being exchanged, ceases to be ‘the general equivalent form or money’ which differentiates one commodity from all others and all commodities from money”¹⁵³; thus, one of “money’s accidental properties”(110) is lost. Money loses the “touch” whereby it bestows value on commodities. Lyle’s only way to preserve a notion of ‘real’ money involves hoarding (of which both Lyle’s habits are an expression). Hoarding expresses “a demand for money as money, the general equivalent possessing special qualities”¹⁵⁴:

¹⁴⁸ Alain Lipietz, *The Enchanted World. Inflation, Credit and the World Crisis*, (London: Verso, 1983), 84.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁵³ DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 25.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

Lyle thought of his money not as a medium of exchange but as something to be consigned to data storage, traceable only through magnetic flashes. Money was a spiritual indemnity against some unspecified future loss. It existed in purest form in his mind, *my money* (110).

Hoarding is “a demand for value [meant] to preserve [the] uniqueness [of money] as general equivalent.”¹⁵⁵ Severed from circulation, Lyle’s money “temporarily ceases to be a social flux and becomes the object of private possession.”¹⁵⁶ As a “reserv[e] of value which sustain[s] the value of the general equivalent”¹⁵⁷ once associated with gold, the hoard preserves the preciousness of such equivalent. With the end of the gold standard in 1971, Lyle’s hoards are symptomatic of an attempt to find, via private money, a substitute for gold in order to give substance to the system. Furthermore, hoarding becomes, if only in Lyle’s mind, an “indemnity” against the loss of value understood as that which is generated by the product of social labour expended in the production of commodities.

Contextualised within the ambience of finance capital, Lyle’s hoarding mirrors the activities within the Exchange where “[u]nit managers accrued and stockpiled”(132), an activity which evokes the US attempt to recreate hoards of dollars within its domestic territory in order to constitute “monetary reserves...set up for purposes of [future] investment.”¹⁵⁸ Within the specific US historical context, the hoarding process within the Exchange prefigures the return of offshore capitals to the US due to the deregulation politics of the subsequent neoliberal era.

Nevertheless, Lyle’s habits do not prevent him from experiencing discomfort when he is pitted against the “physical city [and its] ghostly roar”(148). Miming the inside-outside money metaphor, members of the Exchange split the city into an “Inside” and an “Outside”(22), the latter perceived as decaying and easily forgettable:

The district repeated itself in blocks of monochromatic stones....It was sealed off from the rest of the city, as the city itself had been planned to conceal what lay around it, the rough country assent to unceremonious decay....The district grew repeatedly inward (49, 132).

The district’s inward growth and self-containment are an architectural manifestation of finance capital’s self-referential nature. Moreover, the “inside” is for Lyle and co-workers “the place where we want to be”(66), “the inmost crypt”(132) where the loss of C is safely buried, a place marked by “sanity”(28), sanity which helps preserve forgetfulness over the outside world. As

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵⁷ Idem.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

Lyle admits, “I thought we had effectively negated it. I thought that was the upshot”(23). Negation of the outside world, as DeLillo depicts it, is symptomatic of a substantial disavowal of the interdependence between finance and other forms of capital.¹⁵⁹

Disavowal is a mechanism that lies at the core of the fetish, the latter understood, via Henry Krips’ reading of Freud, as an object which “stands for that which cannot be remembered directly.”¹⁶⁰ As such, the fetish is “a site of disavowal...and specifically of a contradiction: we know that fur is not pubic hair, *but even so*, in a way that is never specified, we know that it is.”¹⁶¹ Krips draws from Freud’s account of the fort-da game, where the child compensates for the mother’s absence by throwing and pulling a cotton reel. The child knows that the reel is not the mother, but even so, in substituting the object of need (mother) for another object (the reel) the child passes from needing into desiring. The reel as fetish, with its comings and goings, produces pleasure which “fuels the game and thus sustains the substitution, despite the palpable gap separating substitute from substituted.”¹⁶² Desire experienced through the fetish can only occur thanks to the mechanism of disavowal, where the fetish is not really the desired object and yet the subject acts as if it were so.

A similar substitution operates within money. As Slavoj Žižek points out, “the value of a certain commodity, which is effectively an insignia of a network of social relations within producers of diverse commodities, assumes the form of a quasi-natural property of another thing-commodity, money.”¹⁶³ Adapting Žižek to Krips terminology, I know that value is not a property of money, but even so I know that it is. Within the realm of finance capital, where M yields M¹, we have a fetish yielding a further fetish. Desire for money capital arises from the gap opened when money now “pregnant” with itself substitutes for the absent object, that is the commodity as a “crystallization of social substance” Marx calls value.¹⁶⁴ Thus value, of which money was only the form, becomes money’s own substance.

As a broker Lyle participates in the “mystification” of M-M¹, but, as opposed to the finance capitalist Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis* (2003), he remains conscious of the existence of “the competitive mechanism of the world, of greasy teeth engaging in the rim of the wheel”(70),

¹⁵⁹ “The circuits of finance remain in the last analysis dependent on the needs of productive capitalists; [nonetheless] they can endlessly revolve confusedly about themselves.” DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 98.

¹⁶⁰ Henry Krips, *Fetish. An Erotics of Culture*, (London: Free Association Books, 1999), 7.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 20, 22.

¹⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, “How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?” in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 23-24.

¹⁶⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), 45.

a powerful image to define the “real” economy of value production through commodities. Yet he chooses to act *as if* he didn’t know. In fact, Lyle’s mind operates on a split, “part of it recognising a real fact and part of it repudiating the same fact”,¹⁶⁵ a mechanism which emerges explicitly as the materiality of the real world breaks into “the inmost crypt” (132) of the Financial District.

Everyday 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 crates near the Hudson, people without shoes, amputees and freaks, men splitting off from groups under the highway and limping down past 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 denunciation of capitalism did not strike him as fitting here, despite appearances. It was something else these men and women had come to mean, trailing vomit on their feet (27-28).

Clearly propped against sites of material production (the construction crates towering over the dock areas), these transients emerge as “substitutes for that which is and must remain repressed”¹⁶⁶, labour. The outcasts become haunting presences; like ghosts in the collective imagination, these nameless living entities inhabit rags. These transients use madness and squalor to speak of those who have already been cast out, displaced, and those who are about to join the ranks of “the hospital of the industrial reserve army— or the inferno of lumpenproletariat...: unemployed outsiders (often victimized and stigmatised)”¹⁶⁷ through processes of capital mobility. Lyle is unwilling to acknowledge these outcasts as products of labour restructuring or reconfiguration policies, through processes of factory closing and relocation within areas which “offer a cheap[er and more] docile labour force.”¹⁶⁸ We may trace the working of Lyle’s disavowal through semantics: “despite appearances” may be read as “because of appearances”. Lyle knows that madness and squalor are indeed a denunciation of the new forms of capital exploitation, but refuses to interpret them as if he didn’t know. In the semantic ambiguity of the words “had come to mean” DeLillo expresses Lyle’s knowledge that the destitute haunt the district “in order to mean” what their appearance suggests, and yet he acts as if they “ended up” meaning something else, thus denying their presence in the District the status of a performance of resistance.

DeLillo’s homeless, freaks and amputees (perhaps a covert reference to Vietnam veterans) represent “the working class and ethnic immigrant New York [thrown] into the spirals

¹⁶⁵ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Krips, *Fetish*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 106.

¹⁶⁸ Arrighi, “Global Turbulence”, 37.

of poverty, drug abuse and crime”¹⁶⁹ as a consequence of the city “recentering” around financial activities in the aftermath of the 1975 fiscal crisis. Unable (or rather consciously choosing not) to locate them within the traditional description of labour, Lyle simply dismisses the transients as “infiltrators”, whereas “the sign-holder outside Federal Hall [appears to him] in context here, professing clearly his opposition”(28).

The man, “lean and gray-stubbed, maybe seventy...leaky-eyed and grizzled”(13, 27) holds a sign, “two by three feet, hand-lettered on both sides, political in nature”(13). The sign is an account of the “RECENT HISTORY OF THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD”(151), a history marked by mutilations, labour accidents, death and workers killed. The man has been protesting for 18 years and, as he tells Lyle, he had previously stood in front of the White House. Behind the man’s transition we may significantly read the shift in the real centre of power. In addition, such a transition works as an index of the recent history of the failure of American labour to offset a “sophisticated strategy of gradual deunionization, an internal undermining of the collective bargaining system”¹⁷⁰ which the government and the corporations successfully undertook through a “deliberate financial strategy [of deindustrialization].”¹⁷¹ The man’s *solitary* protest symbolises the incapacity of American trade unions to construct working class cohesiveness through an “independent political representation for labor within national or state politics.”¹⁷² If the words on the sign no longer appear meaningful to the economic realities of the late 1970s, nonetheless the man’s body seems to withstand the sweeping tide of financialisation that seeks to wish labour away. The man’s body is “a mineral impregnation of earlier matter”(150), expressive of the material body of labour and of the physicality of the body which finance seeks to evaporate. The “earlier matter” is a remnant of world now deemed archaic, “a world where people carved on rocks”(150), a world in which everyone “had occupied his own space”(150). Such space defines “socially constructed political economic practices”¹⁷³ on a local scale, a scale which seem to disappear in the new global space defined by finance capital. The body of the sign-holder and the

¹⁶⁹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 47-48. Harvey cites the NY fiscal crisis as one of the first, most successful experiments in neoliberalism. Capital restructuring, de-industrialization and rapid disurbanisation, had already left much of the central city impoverished and extremely reliant on the city’s financial institutions and banks willingness to extend their credit to the municipality. When these institutions refused to roll over its debt, the city went into technical bankruptcy. Financial institutions and banks orchestrated the restructuring, implementing wage freezes and cutbacks in social provisions in order to reconstitute the city’s economy around financial activities. Ibid., 44-8.

¹⁷⁰ Davis, *Prisoners*, 121-22. Collective bargaining during the 1950s had “provided certain basic conditions for capital accumulation” and had secured workers some rights over wages, “provision of social security” and an opportunity to contribute in the economic boom of mass consumption. Ibid., 118.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 138.

¹⁷² Ibid., 113.

¹⁷³ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 108.

sign he holds are thus historical memories of that collective body of labour which is in the process of disappearing due to the dematerialising effects of finance. If what characterises finance is pre-eminently “amnesia over labour”¹⁷⁴, one may posit that labour is Lyle’s lost object, the one buried inside his consciousness, which urges him to make contact with the sign-holder. As Abraham and Torok point out, the object buried and preserved “leads a concealed existence” haunting the crypt guard via “strange and incomprehensible signals or making him perform bizarre acts.”¹⁷⁵ Before leaving, Lyle touches the man, putting a hand on his worn clothes, a gesture “he didn’t understand” (152). Such a gesture constitutes an unwitting attempt to avow the loss of labour as the source of Lyle’s anxieties. Lyle’s subsequent involvement in a terrorist plot may instantiate his endeavour to retrieve embodied forms of labour, which materialise in the bodies of Rosemary Moore and Marina Vilar.

Like her husband Lyle, Pammy Wynant is also at odds with her life, prey to a discomfort which she disavows: “[something] had been bothering her, the vague presence. Her life. She hated her life. It was a minor thing, though, a small bother” (32). As we first see her, she’s busy escaping contact with the crowd of the World Trade Center. The immaterial purview of the medium in which Pammy works impinges on her representation of the outside world. As an employee of the Grief Management Council, she works with grief, “intense mental suffering, deep remorse...extreme anguish, acute sorrow and the like” (18), qualities rendered as ineffable as finance capital. Her success in her job relies on her perpetration of a fetishised notion of grief: less the product of some significant human and emotional loss than a codifiable, commodity generating profit. Grief Management provides a “personal-service organisation [offering] fees for individuals, group fees, special consultation terms, charges for booklets and teaching aid, payments for family sessions and marital grief seminars” (18). Pammy glimpses that “[h]er job in the main, was a joke” (63), yet she refuses to deal with the true import of “sorrow and death” (62). Her own life, like the words she uses for her brochures, partakes in an abstractedness which “mysteriously evaded the responsibilities of content” (207). Death is the content which she constantly tries to evade: death is Pammy’s lost object.

¹⁷⁴ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

¹⁷⁵ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130.

Pammy's peculiar habit of buying fruit manifests her attempt to engage with the consequences of mortality:

She loved the look of fruit in crates outdoors, tiers of peaches and grapes. Buying fresh fruit made her feel good. She looked forward to taking the grapes home, putting them in a bowl and letting cold water run over the bunches. It gave her such pleasure, hefting one of the bunches in her hand, feeling the water come cooling through. Then there were peaches. The earthly merit of peaches (32).

The "earthly merit" of fruit enables Pammy to establish some bodily contact with the physicality of matter through the fruit which she holds in her hands. Yet, Pammy's failure to eat the fruit may be thought to exemplify a more encompassing inability to engage fully with matter through the act of eating, to let her body assimilate the physical and earthly substance of fruit. Pammy leaves the fruit "to shrivel in the fruit bowl"(33) guilty for not being able to "deal with the consequences of fruit, its perishability"(35). Pammy's refusal to deal with the body of the fruit as subject to waste reveals the peculiar content of death she disavows: the corruptibility of the body, whose decay in death makes it only ripe for refuse. An apt double of "fields of weed and bulldozed earth" she "severely crop[s]"(18) in her brochures photographs, her denial of the fruit's wasted body anticipates her fleeing the sight Jack's burnt corpse on a mound of waste. Denial of the materiality of the corpse is very deeply grounded in a world driven by the money fetish which structurally displaces the material body of the commodity. Pammy masks death behind the veil of disavowal, which accounts for death as a profit-making event.

Disavowal also marks her failure to understand the real nature of the WTC and why, significantly, her company is located within one of the towers:

It was her original view that the World Trade Centre was an unlikely headquarters for [Grief Management]....To Pammy the towers didn't seem permanent. They remained concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light. Making things seem even more fleeting was that office space at Grief Management was constantly being reapportioned. Workmen sealed off areas with partitions, opened up others, moved out file cabinets wheeled in chairs and desks. It was as if they had been directed to adjust the amount of furniture to levels of national grief (18-19).

In her attempt to explain the WTC as an architectural series of spaces and places, Pammy fails to grasp the real symbolic significance of the towers: the towers, built to host several financial conglomerates are, as much as Wall Street, symbols of US global capitalism.¹⁷⁶ As the locus from

¹⁷⁶ The Twin Towers became the symbol of New York's rebirth after the fiscal crisis. Miriam Greenberg explains how the Regional Plan Authority decided "to restructure a[n] industrial and commercial district into the orderly center of a white-collar, service-based, global metropolis....The RPA's goal was to create 'one enormous central business district' radiating out from Wall Street [and] Manhattan. This, planners held, would radically transform the city's function and image...thus inspiring investment, drawing finance capital, and stabilizing rents....It was believed that creating a uniformly affluent image of the city would yield a perception of order that would undergird wider economic growth."

which financial investments and capital movements are planned and directed, transience and abstractedness aptly emanate from the towers. The link between Grief Management and the WTC becomes visible when we consider, care of David Harvey's work, that the process of capital accumulation entails that of spatial reconfiguration. Relocation of capital activities have a profound impact on both geographical and social configurations. Such activities destroy not only prior local economic structures (no longer functional to capital accumulation), but ultimately the social practices and "the values already fixed in place."¹⁷⁷ De-industrialisation, workers relocation, urban poverty are, or *ought to be*, cause for grief and sorrow. Consequently, Grief Management's spatial reappropriation within its office mirrors the external world's reconfigurations during the 1970s, specifically those associated with deindustrialisation and labour relocation from US North-East to the Sunbelt.¹⁷⁸ Pammy feels dwarfed by the towers' "abstract, tyrannic grandeur" and their abstractedness impinges on her ability to locate her position within their "indefinite locations"(24).

Pammy's structural discomfort finds physical expression in her inability to "associate herself with [her body]"(18). Although possessing the body of a swimmer (45), her physique does not prevent Pammy from showing a certain "gawkiness" when "package-carrying or...skirting the derelicts"(17), clumsiness which may easily be a consequence of her difficulty over coping with the material world. DeLillo constantly describes her yawning or covering her ears, both physical responses to what she calls "boredom" and "embarrassment"(59,61). In fact, Pammy resorts to such gestures to avoid coming to terms with some specific representations of actuality. Her avoidance of derelicts should be considered alongside her reaction when watching certain kinds of TV programmes:

On the screen some people on a talk show discussed taxes. Something about the conversation embarrassed her. She didn't know what it was exactly. Nobody said stupid things or had speech defects....It wasn't a case of some woman in a news film speaking ungrammatically of her three children, just killed in a fire. (She wondered if she had become too complex to put grammar before death). These people discussed taxes, embarrassingly. What was happening in that little panel that caused her to feel such disquiet and shame? She put her hands over her ears (58).

The cause of Pammy's embarrassment seems to lie behind the "language units" which compose the word taxes. At some level, Pammy must know that the issue of taxes may involve reference to

Miriam Greenberg, "The Limits of Branding: The World Trade Center, Fiscal Crisis and the Marketing of Recovery" in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 27.2, June 2003, 389.

¹⁷⁷ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 116.

¹⁷⁸ Davis, *Prisoners*, 137.

redistributional policies and tax cuts implemented by the government to favour the wealthiest class strata. Likewise, a woman's incorrect grammar becomes a source of embarrassment in that language, in its ungrammaticality, becomes the material expression of the pain caused by the death of the woman's children. By focussing on the error rather than death, on the form rather than the content, Pammy deflects her disquiet and shame caused by the materiality of death evoked by language. Her "embarrassment", her "disquiet and shame" are thus physical manifestations of Pammy's disavowal by means of which she represses the image of bodies corrupted in death (as the children's in death by fire), and conceives of death as a grammatical expression exploitable for promotional use. Similarly, "boredom [is] a shield for deeper feelings [and yawning] her countermeasur[e] to compelling emotions"(51), compelling because such emotions oblige Pammy to confront a reference, a content from which she constantly shies away. Pammy's bodily responses to what she sees and hears evidence her anxiety over particular forms of reality which readers may trace to processes of financialisation.

Pammy's engagement with her body is a reaction against a tendency towards "derealisation and loss of physicality"¹⁷⁹, of which her parable of the fruit was an initial instance. In a medium unfettered from the constraints of matter, the human body also seems to be subjected to a certain "disengagement from the physical world"¹⁸⁰ and consequently from death. One may read Pammy's use of her body not so much as an example of "body denial"¹⁸¹, but rather as an effort to counteract the pervasive environment of a dematerialising medium. Pammy tries tap-dancing to regain consciousness of her physical body and to re-establish a connection between her mind and body. If "done correctly" tap would in fact allow her to sense her "body as a coordinated organism able to make its own arithmetic"(78-79), that is to respond to the organising logic of her material body rather than the abstractive logic of the medium she inhabits. Pammy's tap dancing is one instance of how the Wynants instead seek, to collide with "the matter of the real" as an attempt to "articulate a change"(43) which may restore unity of form and content to their life.

¹⁷⁹ Nick Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology in Contemporary American Culture*, (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto, 2000), 93.

¹⁸⁰ *Idem*.

¹⁸¹ Thomas LeClair, *In The Loop. Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987): "DeLillo suggests that [the Wynants'] bodies are essentially denied and forgotten"(152) and that in order for the system of the body "to participate [fully in Wall Street's] system of invented immortality...one must sacrifice physicality"(163).

Pammy escapes to Maine with the gay couple Ethan and Jack in order to flee the disaggregating forces of the city which prevent her from being “a free person... [whose] whole body is aware of the physical and moral universe”(79). Pammy plunges herself into a natural world which she cannot explain, “eager to be surprised by...an avenue of hard blue [water] between stands of pine, sunlight bouncing on the surface”(136) and allowing “the animal presence [of birds to catch] her eyes continually”(141). Nevertheless, Pammy’s retreat into nature does not assuage her discomfort. Removed from the city, her days spent with Ethan and Jack seem to proceed in slow motion, reduced to a “bullshit routine”(111) of meals and conversations subsumed in a “solid void [of missing] references, [a] blank space”(140). Rather than escaping from it, Pammy seems to plunge even more deeply in the weightlessness which had originally caused her disquiet.

Unable to reconcile herself with the natural world, Pammy seeks to retrieve the materiality of the “real” through her affair with Jack Laws. Jack, “a would-be drifter” (19) aspires to escape the spatial constraints which limit his existence: “I see myself doing a lot of travelling in the near future...just place to place. An unsupervised existence...I don’t want to be pinned down anymore. Not in one place and not in one kind of life”(142). On her part, Pammy fails to recognise the import of Jack’s uneasiness. To her, an affair with Jack is only a harmless *play* between two friends, the opportunity to “act out [her] fantasies”(143), and enact what she had truly been seeking when going to Maine: “drama”(111). In their sexual encounter, entirely constructed around “game-playing moods”(166), Jack becomes Pammy’s “make-believe lover”(166) who would finally liberate her from “years of sensory and emotional deprivation”(166). However, like the sex she has with Lyle, the act becomes a performance by “body parts” (167). Pammy fails to see Jack’s involvement with her as an effort to resolve “his agonising drama of self-definition [and] interior anguish.”¹⁸²

Jack’s death is the consecration of a life “made to feel expendable”(173). On “mounds of ...[burnt] garbage...Jack was sitting crosslegged....That stump was Jack...[h]is head was slumped forward and black and he was badly withered”(198). Fire consigns Jack’s body to the waste. Anticipating the fireball which should envelop the Exchange in the plans of the terrorists later on in the novel, Jack’s suicide appears “as an act of emotional terrorism”¹⁸³, from which “the

¹⁸² Joseph Dewey, *Beyond Grief and Nothing. A Reading of Don DeLillo*, (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 55.

¹⁸³ Osteen, *American Dread*, 151.

possibility of death as a protest”¹⁸⁴ emerges. Pammy acknowledges the “ceremonial” quality of Jack’s death, but once again fails both to recognise her role in it, or to appreciate the consequences of death as an event beyond “some of her much-rehearsed grief-management platitudes.”¹⁸⁵ By rejecting the sight of Jack’s stump, Pammy refuses to come to terms with the materiality of death as expressed through Jack’s body consigned to waste among disposed-of commodities.

Pammy looks only to be “spared”(204) all the consequences of Jack’s act; therefore her journey back home becomes an escape from confrontation with the real content of death, a journey haunted by “dead elms...dark rangy things”(203), apt counterparts to Jack’s stump. Secluded in her apartment, which spares her from the city as a “system of desolation, perhaps a truer *necropolis*”(204, emphasis added), Pammy abandons herself to “an old movie...fifties vintage” which fills her “TV screen with serial grief”(205), and which eventually makes her cry for hours. Here again disavowal operates on Pammy. She knows that tears do not flow because of some filmically generated “bogus sentiments”(206), but rather due to the loss of Jack. Yet Pammy refuses to acknowledge her grief. Later on, while walking through the city, Pammy encounters a sign: “TRANSIENTS”(207). The word does not seem to have “a functional value”: Pammy can neither relate its “abstract tone”(207) to any of the transient figures she encounters, nor can she relate it to her personal condition, herself a transient both in relation to disavowed grief and to tidal social and economic changes. Nor can she perceive beyond its homonym ‘transience’, any association with the perishability of the body contained in death. Condemned like the words “to evade the responsibilities of content”(207), Pammy is “left suspended, denied revelation,”¹⁸⁶ unable to overcome her melancholia and attendant disavowal.

Lyle’s involvement in the terrorists’ plot manifests an attempt to overcome the isolation and the passivity he has been experiencing in order to reconstruct both a personal and a “social individuality.”¹⁸⁷ Although partaking in the ambiance of the financial medium, “Lyle wondered how much of the world...was still his to live in....[Everything in the Exchange] is all so organised.... I’d like to question a little bit, to ask what this is, what that is, where we are, whose life I am leading and why”(28, 62).

¹⁸⁴ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 75.

¹⁸⁵ Dewey, *Beyond Grief*, 55.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁸⁷ James O’ Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis. A Theoretical Introduction*, (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987), 12.

Lyle's questions may express a wish to restore a *positive* notion of crisis as a time "to sift, to decide"¹⁸⁸ and to find an alternative to the hegemony of finance capital. In Lyle's case, the alternative to the logic of finance capital may consist in recuperating labour, "the lost historical categor[y] that [in *Players* is] given a kind of ghostly articulation"¹⁸⁹, an effort which the stacked pennies and teleprinters, his engaging in a discussion with, and touching, the sign-holder seemed to point to.

Lyle's entanglement with the terrorist group may also instantiate an endeavour to pierce the glamorous veil which envelops revolutionary violence. In "The Movie" section the "glamour of revolutionary violence"(8) arose from a depiction of violence which evacuated the historical specificity of the golfers' slaughter. DeLillo's account of the terrorists' plot to bomb the Exchange should be read as a potential critique of US hegemony (as undertaken through the medium of finance) and therefore as an extreme example of "the specific and diverse histories that have not yet been erased by the excoriating power of capital."¹⁹⁰ The Exchange bombers in fact seek to replicate another "Wall Street blast" occurred in 1920 which the sign-holder quotes among the most notable events in the recent history of the workers of the world (151-52). As Peter Boxall suggests, "the grim remainder of [September 16, 1920] terrorist attack on Wall Street [is] a hieroglyph that points to a continuing form of revolutionary, anti-capitalist resistance"¹⁹¹ now embodied by the Exchange bombers in the late 1970s.

Arguably, DeLillo's creating of a deliberate confusion over the nationality of the Exchange bombers allows him to articulate a broader meditation over the outcome of "the massive redistribution of rewards and the social dislocation entailed by financial expansion."¹⁹² Perhaps, one may identify the terrorists as Latin Americans by virtue of their names (Ramirez, Vilar), an association which reminds of countries such as Chile and Argentina, where military regimes supported by the US government in the 1970s implemented Neoliberal policies and subjected their countries' economies to programmes of structural adjustments and to processes of "accumulation by dispossession."¹⁹³ Such processes in the long run tend to generate movements of resistance, movements which may arise locally, but nevertheless constitute a response to the global peregrinations of finance capital. The terrorists (Ramirez and Vilar) may

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 69.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 74.

¹⁹² Arrighi, "Global Turbulence", 68.

¹⁹³ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 39.

claim that they wish only to “disrupt the system, the idea of worldwide money...[its] secret power....The electronic system. The waves and charges...this invisible power...the flow of electric current that unites moneys, plural, from all over the world”(107). Nonetheless, I would posit that the terrorist who wishes to hit “ideas”, “systems” and “waves”, in actuality strikes not at an “invisible power”, but rather at a system whose functioning, beyond the fetish of invisibility and immateriality, has profound visible and material effects on social reality.

Lyle’s involvement is mediated through his bodily engagement with both women in the group, Rosemary Moore and Marina. Rosemary Moore’s physical appearance marks her as an outsider to Lyle’s class fragment. Rosemary, with her “little or no make up...[t]eeth and nails on the drab side...white blouse, pleated blue skirt and white shoes”(47), her migrating from one job to another, is the embodiment of “casualized labor”¹⁹⁴. Lyle’s attraction to her derives from her ability to resist him, resistance which leads Lyle to resort to “discredited tactics” in order “to be recognised by this woman, accepted as a distinct presence”(75). Rosemary, “an animal creature of gravity”(8) obsesses Lyle in her fleshly presence: “her overample thighs, the contact chill of her body, colour and touch, bland odours”(91) solicit Lyle’s “oral libido”¹⁹⁵: “he gripped and bit at her, leaving spits everywhere....He wanted to scratch at her flesh, to leave teeth marks...he wanted to put his mouth inside hers”(91). Lyle’s saliva on Rosemary’s flesh may be an equivalent of people’s “spittle dripping from the lacy openwork of art”(70), and his “teeth marks” and “scratches” on her skin recall “the greasy teeth engaging on the rim of a wheel”(70).

Yet Lyle is never able to possess fully Rosemary’s body: “she never let him undress her...she showed little sign of whatever measures of desire his own body might have been expected to arouse in her...[s]he never approached orgasm”(91-92). Beyond the dynamics of Lyle and Rosemary’s intercourse, we may glimpse an antagonism which opposes the financial class fragment to labour or labour-assimilated lower class strata. Lyle’s “hands mixing and working [Rosemary’s body] into a mass of mild discoloration”(92) do not prefigure a recuperation of the physical body of labour, but rather indicate a recuperation undertaken in order to subject such a body to the process of dematerialisation. Rosemary’s resistance is arguably an expression of labour’s hostility against that mediating class which allows finance capitalists to reinforce the

¹⁹⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 48.

¹⁹⁵ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 114.

obliteration of labour and that of the body of the commodity. Rosemary partially surrenders her body only insofar as her body works as a means to lure Lyle into Marina Ramirez's plot. Within such a "trite commonplace sex[ual]"(92) relationship, Lyle seems able to find only narcissistic sexual pleasure,¹⁹⁶ pleasure which nonetheless he can neither foresee nor master and which signals his failure to command fully his body. Such a failure prompts Lyle to elaborate a fantasy which masks the true nature of their encounters, a fantasy in which the real Rosemary with "a plodder's thighs"(91) becomes a lady :

rosy with fulfilment. Two waiting maids enter to prepare her perfumed bath. On the bed of carved walnut, he thought, her lover reclines against a mound of silk pillows, recalling how she'd groaned with pleasure (93).

Rosemary's body appears as a fetish, "an object precariously attached to a desiring fantasy [in which the lost object, labour, continues to appear] unlocatable, and ultimately unimportant."¹⁹⁷ Lyle's desiring imagination shifts onto an another object, according to a mechanism by which "desire continuously changes one image for another and is thus intrinsically an unending process of displacements and substitutions."¹⁹⁸ Thus, Lyle's desire leads him to pursue another fantasy as sexually pleasurable as an extramarital affair:

the secret dream of the white collar. To place a call from a public booth in the middle of the night. Calling some government bureau, some official department...of the government. 'I have information about so-and-so'.... Imagine how sexy that can be for the true-blue business man or professor. What an incredible nighttime thrill...[t]he suggestion of a double life (100).

The real function of such fantasy and the effects that carrying out such fantasy have on Lyle are paramount insofar as their analysis will reveal if Lyle can actually recuperate the body of labour now lost to finance capital. The group of exchange bombers arguably seems to offer Lyle an opportunity to fulfil his secret dream. As he engages with the terrorist group, Lyle encounters a body incarnating the real essence of labour in the body of Marina.

In Lyle's eyes, Marina appears as the ideal labour woman whose features are filtered through the lens of the "social constructions [which enable Lyle to position Marina] within [a specific locus in] the class system"¹⁹⁹:

Marina was squat, close to shapeless, dressed in what might have been thrift-shop clothing. Her face had precise lines, however, strongly boned, a trace of the socialist painter's peasant woman, broad arcs and shadow. Her hair was parted in the middle and combed back over her ears. She had eyes

¹⁹⁶ Lyle's narcissism is "entirely in keeping with the monetary endogeneity of [finance] speculative means (credit financed by further credit)." Godden, "Fiction of Fictitious Capital", np.

¹⁹⁷ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 69.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁹ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 106.

that concentrated intently and would not easily surrender their assertiveness (98).

Marina's squatness and poor clothes, her strong features not only work as to give her a stronger physicality than Rosemary and Pammy, as respective examples of different class fragments, but place her within the collective imaginary of the working class. Her bodily presence is engulfing, and "her body in transit"(99) has on Lyle the same dwarfing effect the towers have on Pammy. Throughout all of her descriptions, Marina's body really works as the medium through which she projects her deepest motives and goals onto the outside. Marina possesses a clear idea of balance, which derives from her ability to position herself into a space where "every exchange [is locatable] inside an absolute structure"(144). Marina's body exudes "vengeance...exact[ing] satisfaction for some wrong"(120), wrong which, consistent with her representation as the embodiment of labour, operates as an index of offences against labour. In opposition with the sign-holding man, however, Marina transcends any "sweeping reference to movements and systems"(120); she consequently seems to endorse a purer form of labour struggle, uncontaminated by social compromise with the state pursued within a political arena. Her fight against "the secret invisible power" of finance capital must be undertaken through purer means—through terror—because "terror is purification"(102). The fireball which, in both her and his brother's mind, should envelop the Exchange would revive a purer struggle against the form of capital emerging as dominant. Read through the work of the RETORT group, the DeLillian formula "terror as purification" however already sounds like a "magical, unanalyzable...mantra" and the fireball's "effectiveness— the specific political force— of this form of symbolic action [only gives] an illusion of political effectiveness."²⁰⁰ As the alleged leader of the group, A. J. Kinnear, senses, the explosion would only work as to produce "another media event"(180). As RETORT members argue, when the terrorist act is reduced to a spectacle, the effectiveness of the act, aimed at hitting "the real dynamic (and pathology) of American power is conjured away by pinning it thus to a single image-event."²⁰¹ Consigned to a filmic existence, the fireball would be "drai[ned] of its contemporary political torque [and its] historical specificity."²⁰²

²⁰⁰ RETORT, *Afflicted Powers. Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War*, (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 24, 25, 189, emphasis in the text.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁰² Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 77,78.

For Marina, Lyle is one man in a series who is picked out because of his “interchangeability.”²⁰³ So while to Lyle Marina’s decision to have sex with him constitutes a diversion from her “rigid adherence to codes”(144), Marina uses her body merely as a “a sweeter mediation...her body for [Lyle’s] risk”(187). The two bodies, although united in the sexual act, remain alienated from one another, in a manner which reinforces the impossibility of Lyle’s original effort, if only at a disavowed level, to recuperate labour. During their intercourse Marina’s “thick waist...her solid legs ha[ve] a sculptural power”(188) which seems to overwhelm Lyle’s “leanness and fair skin”(188). Her body speaks a language which remains unintelligible to Lyle, so that her “spacious” limbs enfold him, regardless of Lyle’s “failure to understand”(189). Completely swallowed within the physical and psychological space of Marina’s body, Lyle feels “more deeply implicated in some plot”(188) and experiences, for just once, a total unity with his own body. Marina’s body movements “attach[ed] him to his own body...he felt himself descend, he felt himself occupy his body”(189). The act, however, is only “a shoaling transit”(200), a failure on Marina’s part to use successfully her body to accomplish a task (or reach a destination). Through intercourse with Marina, Lyle seems to reconstitute his own inner balance: the sexual act releases within Lyle a sexual energy that functions as “a vast assertion of his worth”(189), worth which derives from his role as a reproductive agent of capital. Lyle’s inability to understand Marina’s “grammar” manifests the impossibility to constitute a new class map where labour and PMC could significantly work together in order to offset the dominant discourse of finance capital (at least at the level of his own ontology). On the contrary. Lyle’s fantasy of a double life seems to refuse the possibility of recovering the lost object in order to develop new forms of social and personal definitions alternative to finance capital.

By pursuing a series of desiring fantasies attached to fetishes which render “present that object whose absence they both designate and deny”²⁰⁴, fantasies marked by fetishistic disavowal, Lyle in effect continuously replicates the disavowal of the loss of C which lies at the heart of his melancholia. As such, Lyle’s fantasies, like the fantasy of incorporation, “gravitate toward the opposite effect, that is, the preservation of the status quo”²⁰⁵: the preservation of that dematerialisation proper of speculative capital, of which Lyle is an agent. Lyle’s choice to act as a counter-terrorist and to consign Marina’s organisation to the CIA rather than extricating him

²⁰³ Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. I, 259.

²⁰⁴ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 67.

²⁰⁵ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 125.

from the medium which is the source of his anxieties, further relegates him to the immaterial purview of finance capital.

In addition, Lyle's function as a counterterrorist may express the crucial role that finance plays in helping the state to overcome its crisis of hegemony, particularly when we analyse Lyle's relation to Kinnear. J. Kinnear, the group's alleged chief, is particularly elusive, ineffable and protean. As Lyle himself notices:

Kinnear was hard to fit into an imagined context— Lyle could not reposition him or invent types of companions or even the real color of his hair. He occupied a self-enfolding space, a special level of exclusion. Beyond what Lyle had seen and heard, Kinnear evaded a pattern of existence (123).

Kinnear's ability to change appearance (he's also known to train in order to assume different facial expressions) renders him arguably akin to finance capital. Lyle cannot locate "the material existence of the space [Kinnear had] chosen to occupy"(145) because, like unfixed capital, Kinnear seems only to occupy a "pure void"(179) in which he flows like the electronic current, "the waves and charges" of the system his organisation wants to destroy. In fact, after only two appearances, Kinnear becomes "sort of transient, indefinitely"(132); all is left of him is "his voice, a vibratory hum, coming from nowhere in particular"(133). Kinnear appeals to Lyle precisely because, like Lyle himself, he seems to move within "the liquid medium"²⁰⁶ of the very thing to which he is opposed. As Lyle progressively turns away from Marina— the latter a representative of "the blunter categor[y] of reality"(159)— so "his own participation [in the plot reduces itself] to this one element, J.'s voice, the carrier waves relaying it from some remote location"(158). In effect, Kinnear, despite being "[d]eprived of all but phonetic value...was [to Lyle] no less a regulating influence, a control of sorts"(179).

Kinnear's virtual existence may be modelled on the same principles structuring the offshore financial markets. Offshore markets found their "quintessential" expression in the Euromarket, whose "explosion took place, during so called 'crisis of Fordism' in the 1970s and 1980s."²⁰⁷ Offshore designates "not a geographical location, but rather...a set of juridical realms [that are fundamentally fictive] marked by more or less withdrawal of regulation and taxation on

²⁰⁶ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 72.

²⁰⁷ Ronen Palan, *The Offshore World. Sovereign Markets, Virtual Places, and Nomad Millionaires*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 12. Offshore financial markets are only part of a wider offshore economy comprising tax havens, export processing zones, flags of convenience and international banking activities. The peculiarity of this virtual world, only apparently separated from that of the real economy, produces a whole array of economic practices which affect the materiality of social configurations: "[o]ffshore offers access to cheap labor and lower taxation,...relocation and investment overseas...provid[e] the material infrastructure for the internationalisation of manufacturing [and more recently, via the Internet] the material infrastructure for the internationalisation of retail and services [including] shipping, pornography, gambling and...commerce" Ibid., ,3, 13.

the part of a growing number of states.”²⁰⁸ Offshore’s “virtual world of make believe” allows a series of agents (individuals or corporations) to carry out a whole array of operations unfettered from territorial and regulatory constraints. Such operations are possible because the offshore realm, as Palan tags it, allows its subjects to exist “under various jurisdictions, each representing a spatio-analytical territory....The fiscal subject [is] denied full legal unity, [while] the real subject— whether corporate or individual— remain[s] whole.”²⁰⁹ Offshore virtuality produces a series of fictionally “dispersed subjects [who] take advantage of their fragmentation by rearranging their legal existence in whatever way they see fit...and spread themselves into different localities.”²¹⁰ Thus, “operators in virtual markets appear to reside somewhere other than where they actually are located, or even disappear altogether.”²¹¹

My brief digression on offshore seeks to define Kinnear as a character who partakes in, and draws his power from, a fragmentation of identities similar to that operating within the offshore realm, a fragmentation enabling him to appear, disappear and resurface, to exist in an unregulated void and be at the same time J.Kinnear, A.J. Kinnear, terrorist, or counterterrorist, or both. Kinnear’s floating between his identity as a terrorist and that as a counter-terrorist is a form of mediation between an unregulated space and a regulated one. As such, Kinnear’s double-role may anticipate the incorporation and institutionalisation of the “unregulated offshore economy into [the US state system’s] very structure [through] deregulation, liberalisation and market integration [as a means to reaffirm the state] legal and political infrastructure [and its support for capitalist accumulation on global scale].”²¹²

Lyle’s decision to side with J. ultimately signals his definitive acceptance of finance as the regulatory influence in his life. The motel becomes the architectural manifestation of transience as the structuring principle of Lyle’s existence, its “nearly identical rooms, worldwide”(210) an instantiation of that “powerfully abstract”(209) and virtual space of financial exchanges and offshore markets that Lyle, following Kinnear, decides to inhabit. Such space contrasts with the spatial universe of a map Lyle observes. The map, marking the names of places such as “Old Mill...Manor Road, Shady Oaks”(211) charts a geography of the rural, a “universe ...with the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 141.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 141.

²¹¹ Ibid., 4.

²¹² Ibid., 142, 3.

merits of substance”(211) that the delocalised space of financial exchange is about to radically reconfigure.

As he waits for Kinnear’s call in a motel, Lyle is compelled to “organise this emptiness”(211), emptiness left by Kinnear’s failure to turn up. Possibly, the emptiness, the void, that Lyle is called to organise implies organising the emptiness opened with the gap produced by the obliteration of C within the immaterial medium of finance. Such organisation in 1977 can only appear partial, since the transition towards an overt financial phase was still occurring.

Captured in this transitional moment, Lyle slowly becomes “an intrinsic form perceivable apart from the animal glue of physical properties and functions”: “[a] propped figure...barely recognisable as male. Shedding capabilities and traits by the second, he can still be described (but quickly) as well-formed, sentient and fair”(212). In describing the gradual separation of Lyle’s form from the material physicality of his body, and consequently from that material value the physical body may contain, DeLillo metaphorically recalls the very process of abstraction from the hard materiality of the commodity form, the separation of form from content proper of finance capital. Suspended, Lyle can only wait for such a transition to be fully accomplished. Until then, “we know nothing else about him”(212).

CHAPTER 2

END ZONE: FROM MILITARIZATION TO FINANCIALIZATION

In *Players*, fetishism and melancholic disavowal emerge as central features of the new structure of feeling produced by the process of financialization which transformed the US economy and the networks of social relations in the late 1970s.

DeLillo's novel *End Zone* (1972) foregrounds the experiential consequences of melancholia, fetishism and disavowal originating within a different structure of feeling (understood as a set of "practice[s] and social and mental habits")²¹³ which results from a process that historian Michael S. Sherry defines "the militarization of the United States."²¹⁴ For Sherry, "[s]ince the 1930s, Americans have lived under the shadow of war,"²¹⁵ engaged in several conflicts and *yet isolated* from all war theatres by virtue of their country's geographical position. Militarization gradually emerged as a consequence of "war and national security [becoming] consuming anxieties and provid[ing] the memories, models and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life."²¹⁶ In particular, war became associated with prosperity both at home and

²¹³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, xiv.

²¹⁴ Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War. The United States since the 1930s*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), x.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ix, xi.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ix.

abroad,²¹⁷ it enhanced the power of large corporations and facilitated the alliance between the corporate world, the military and the government.²¹⁸

According to sociologist C. Wright Mills, the coincidence of interests between the military, the economic and political spheres within US society gave rise to a “power elite”, an elite wielding “the effective means of [national] power.”²¹⁹ As Mills underlines, an “increased personnel traffic between the military and corporate realms,”²²⁰ and a higher education system which (through the presence of ROTC units in universities) encouraged college students to savour the military “all-encompassing system of discipline”,²²¹ helped to blur the distinction between civilian and military values and views.

Furthermore, from the speeches of Franklin Delano Roosevelt onwards, as Sherry demonstrates, the war metaphor and models provided linguistic legitimation for the governmental actions, so that over the years the metaphor of war was applied to refer to all sorts of social problems, such as poverty, drugs, AIDS.²²² The use of the war metaphor shows “how the war mentality was a cultural as well as a political phenomenon [often] drained of real content, more thoughtlessly habitual than meaningful”: taken literally, the war metaphor “posited something good in war to be extracted from it and applied to other endeavours.”²²³

I shall argue that *End Zone*, via Gary Harkness’s retrospective first-person account of “that first season [at Logos College]” (3, 63), constitutes a meditation on the war mentality which so extensively pervaded “contemporary [American] life...relationships, institutions and formations”²²⁴ in the early 1970s and reveals that the mental and social habits so peculiar to militarization paved the way for the financial structure of feeling.

DeLillo sets his novel at Logos College in order to describe the “military invasion of the civilian mind [through] the pursuit of knowledge.”²²⁵ Offering courses in “Aspects of Modern War”, Logos trains a new generation into accepting a definition of “reality as essentially

²¹⁷ Arrighi demonstrates that military aid to foreign governments and US direct military expenditure abroad (in the periods between 1950 and 1958 and from 1964 to 1973) provided a conspicuous source of liquidity for the US economy. Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 294-297.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79, 81.

²¹⁹ C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 278, 276, 4.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²²² Sherry, *War*, x, 456, 460.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 461.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

²²⁵ Mills, *Power Elite*, 222.

military.”²²⁶ Yet, as DeLillo demonstrates, Logos successfully pursues its educational goal by refusing to acknowledge that the war mentality is deeply in the grain of American life. Appearing as an institution founded on “Reason” and “the Word”, foundations which seem to purify from violence and brutality, Logos provides (to paraphrase Sherry) a vision of the good in war which can be best applied to a sport such as football. Football appropriates military values and cast of mind, its principles and its language so that, through sport, militarization effectively influences everyday life. However, DeLillo depicts characters who constantly hover between compliance and resistance to the war mentality. While their “resistance does not...entail conscious defiance”²²⁷, these characters are able to voice their anxiety over the view that the imperative to “MILITARIZE” constitutes a form of “apotheosis”(161,162). Alan Zapalac, professor of exobiology at Logos, best voices such anxiety: “[every] bit of fear I have doesn’t concern our national enemies, our traditional cold-war or whatever-kind-of-war enemies. I’m not afraid of those people at all...I’m afraid of my own country...I don’t trust...i-z-e word[s]. I-z-e words make me nervous”(155, 161). Zapalac fears that “everybody will wake up one morning and get out of bed and put on a uniform, an actual military uniform, because everybody will know that the word is out”(159). His concerns seem to echo President Eisenhower’s who, in his farewell speech, had warned against “the total influence...economic, political, even spiritual [of] the military-industrial complex, [the danger] that public policy could itself be captive of a scientific technological elite [and] the impulse to plunde[r] the precious resources of tomorrow.”²²⁸ Eisenhower understood very clearly that militarization was insidiously colonizing the nation’s culture and feared that the nation could only “define itself...by military power.”²²⁹ Of course, Eisenhower, a military man, had endorsed militarization and made “the pursuit of national security congruent with dominant aspirations as peace and prosperity.”²³⁰ Similarly, while Zapalac fears the influence of militarization, he nonetheless refuses to see the war mentality at work in football: “I reject the notion of football as war. Warfare is warfare. We don’t need substitutes because we’ve got the real thing”(107). For people at Logos, assimilating football to war means “risk[ing] death by analogy”(107) since football, as opposed to war, offers the “benign illusion [of] not just order but civilization”(107-08).

²²⁶ Ibid., 195.

²²⁷ Sherry, *War*, 168.

²²⁸ President Eisenhower cited in Sherry, *War*, 234.

²²⁹ Ibid., 235.

²³⁰ Idem.

However, through tautologies (such as Zapalac's "warfare is warfare") language renders invisible the "unspoken and implicit logic of the war metaphor"²³¹ pervading the most diverse aspects of American culture. In continuously repeating that "warfare is warfare" Zapalac, like Gary Harkness, cannot see the similarities between the constitutive elements structuring both football *and* war. The best way I can gloss the similarities between football and war is via an analysis of the ways in which language hides such similarities.

"I was one of the exiles....Exile in a real place, a place of few bodies and many stones, is just an extension (a packaging) of the other exile, the state of being separated from whatever is left of the center of one's own history"(4, 29-31). By casting himself as an exile, Gary Harkness seeks to displace his past, "to lead a simple life...uncomplicated by history, enigma, holocaust or dream"(4). Gary's desire to "be set apart from all styles of civilization as I had known or studied them"(5) finds its fulfilment at Logos College, an obscure institution "in the middle of the middle of nowhere"(29) plunged into the desert, "a stunned earth...born dead, *flat stones burying the memory*"(30, emphasis added). Gary may wish to escape from the sign "MILITARIZE", which one day "[i]n late spring...appeared all over [his home] town"(20). However, as he shows in his brief account of his peregrinations preceding his arrival at Logos, a deeper cause may motivate his flight. "Exile", "packaging", "separation", "burying the memory": the terms that Gary uses point to a refusal to mourn. Prior to his coming to Logos, Gary has killed a young player in a game between Michigan State and Indiana. The desert seems an apt geographical location for his exile. In allowing Gary to "bur[y his] memory", the desert reinforces that psychic process by means of which an individual, incapable of coming to terms with a loss, denies that such a loss has ever occurred. Falling prey to incorporation and erecting an intrapsychic "crypt" where the lost object is laid to rest, the subject must continuously preserve a "topography of the crypt".²³² Functioning as a crypt, exile at Logos College, defined as "packaging" connotes, via association with the verb "pack", both a psychic process and a protective environment which wraps up Gary's traumatic loss and prevents it from leaking outside.

²³¹ Ibid., 461.

²³² Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130.

Abraham and Torok argue that inexpressible mourning profoundly alters language. Those who fall prey to melancholic incorporation obscure the linguistic elements that might reveal the existence of a traumatic secret buried within themselves. Specifically, inexpressible mourning originates a linguistic mechanism which works to destroy “the expressive or representational power of language”²³³, a mechanism which they term “*demetaphorisation* (taking literally what is meant figuratively).”²³⁴ In order to understand demetaphorisation, I must first recall how metaphors construct their expressive power.

According to Paul Ricoeur, a metaphor rests on what he calls, borrowing from Jakobson, split reference.²³⁵ A metaphor refers to two terms simultaneously, one of which is implied, hidden or buried beyond the first term’s literal meaning. As the etymology of the word metaphor suggests, a metaphor produces a translation, or slippage, which reveals “the semantic proximity between the terms in spite of their distance” and thus produces a new signification.²³⁶ Ricoeur terms such slippage “semantic impertinence”, slippage which preserves the literal meaning of the first term while at the same time yielding the elusive, buried meaning such term keeps in hiding.²³⁷ Read against Ricoeur, demetaphorizing a metaphor implies denying the metaphor its status of split reference, since demetaphorization blocks the slippage from the literal term to the buried one, and reduces such term to its literal meaning only.

Indeed, the idea of a blocked slippage is central to Abraham and Torok’s explanation of demetaphorisation as the linguistic equivalent of incorporation. Incorporation stands in opposition to introjection (the acceptance of mourning and its transformative effects upon the mourner) which occurs via “the broadening of the ego...by virtue of the intervening experience of the empty mouth.”²³⁸ Originally filled with the mother’s breast, a baby signals the detachment from the mother and the entrance into a relationship with the community by filling his mouth with words. The passage (or slippage) from breast to words “figuratively...presupposes the successful replacement of the object’s presence with the self’s cognizance of its absence.”²³⁹ A similar movement occurs when the work of mourning is successful, in that the subject fills with words the emptiness left by the departed object of love. On the contrary, refusal to express

²³³ N. Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 105.

²³⁴ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 126.

²³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 5, No.1 (Autumn 1978), 145.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153, 147.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

²³⁸ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 127.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

mourning via incorporation “implements the metaphor of introjection literally” in that one fills his mouth with words which function as an “illusory nourishment [which] has the equally illusory effect of eradicating the idea of a void being filled with words.”²⁴⁰ Words that point to the loss are literally swallowed. Linguistic incorporation “is not simply [a] matter of reverting to the literal meaning of words, but of using them in such a way— whether in speech or deed— that their very capacity for figurative representation is destroyed.”²⁴¹ Abraham and Torok coin the term “antimetaphor” to describe that figure of speech which represents “the active destruction of representation”²⁴² as a result of repressed mourning.

Arguably, via both Ricoeur and Abraham and Torok, the words Gary uses reveal a mechanism of demetaphorisation, whose workings find an adequate location at Logos. Logos’ founder, Tom Wade, being mute, could only “grunt and [make] disgusting sound”(7). Muteness could be defined an extreme form of antimetaphor. Tom Wade’s grunts echo in the language of football that “fills the mouth” of Logos players: “hit and get hit”, “Cree-unch. Creech.Crunch” “Footbawl. Footbawl. Footbawl”(124). Babbling, “words broken into brute sound”(3), may be read as another example of Gary’s immersion in the unproblematic immediacy of antimetaphor. Through the teachings of Coach Emmet Creed, football at Logos provides Gary, and co-players, with a language that they can use to disavow mourning: they emerge not as a “community of empty mouths” engaged in introjecting loss through language, but rather as a group which empowers itself through a literal representation of reality. Creed possesses a single-minded belief that football “[i]s only a game...but it’s the only game...brutal only from a distance. In the middle of it there’s a calm, a tranquillity”(15, 194). Such vision allows Gary to perpetuate demetaphorisation, and thus to disavow death as the product of the violence of football.

Demetaphorization and antimetaphor predispose Gary to accept Creed’s teachings, teachings in which language plays a seminal role. Football is “the one sport guided by language, by the word signal, the snap number, the color code, the play name”(108). The play name has a central linguistic function within this sport: “[e]ach play must have a name. The naming of plays is important. All teams run the same plays. But each team uses an entirely different system of naming”(114). Naming the plays best exemplifies the mechanism of operationalism, of which functional language, as theorized by Herbert Marcuse, is an instance. Marcuse draws the

²⁴⁰ Ibid.,128,129.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 132.

²⁴² Idem.

concept of operationalism from P.W. Bridgman, who defines it as a method where “[a] concept is synonymous with [a] corresponding set of operations”. Similarly, functional language “tends to identify things and their functions...words and concept tend to coincide. The former has no other content rather than that designated by the word.”²⁴³ In Creed’s teachings, each play has only one function, just as does each player in the team. Function is a word that players at Logos know very well: “Function...a rule of correspondence between two sets related in value and nature to the extent that there is a unique element in one set assigned to each element in the corresponding set”(145). Seldom does Gary define his college mates without their lineup role, (halfback, quarterback, tight end), thus displaying how operationalism, via Creed, influences Gary’s mental habits: “Write home on a regular basis. Dress neatly. Be courteous. Articulate your problems. Do not drag-ass. Anything I have no use for, it’s a football player who drags asses”(11). Creed’s language is functional in that it “orders and organizes...[his] syntax...is abridged and condensed in such a way that no tension, no ‘space’ is left between the parts of the sentence.”²⁴⁴ Creed’s use of functional language “helps to repel non-conformist elements”²⁴⁵ both from language and from the team. If referred solely to the names of play, phrases like “monsoon sweep, string-in left”, “blue turk right, zero snag delay” (112, 137) “produce a response adequate to the pragmatic context in which they are spoken.”²⁴⁶ Yet, Gary recognises that, as if moved by his name, Creed rather uses football to impose a belief system, to instil “the conviction that things here were simple”(3). Beyond the rhetoric that sees “football players [as] simple folks [who] travel the straightest of lines”(3, 4), “Big Bend” Creed “had done plenty to command respect...to temper and *bend* us....Coach wanted our obedience and that was all”(52, emphasis added). Like founder Tom Wade, “[Creed] had an idea and followed it through to the end...his life was unfolding toward a single moment”(7, 52). Basing his life on a form of operationalism, Creed finds in functional language “his power: *to deny us the words we needed*. He was the maker of plays. The name giver. We were his chalk scrawls”(131, emphasis added). As Marcuse warns, applying the abridgement of meaning to “terms which denote things or occurrences beyond their noncontroversial context”²⁴⁷ may deny things their power to signify beyond their

²⁴³ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 15, 90.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

literal meaning. Creed's functionalism thus becomes a counterpart to demetaphorization and the two processes mutually reinforce themselves in affecting Gary and his co-players.

A brief analysis of the word Logos may evidence a further linguistic process which compounds the work of demetaphorization and usage of antimetaphor. "Logos" is a Greek word which means both "The Word" and "Reason". One may also consider a third meaning of Logos: Logo as an iconic sign. For Umberto Eco, "an iconic sign has the same function as the object it represents by virtue of some similarities between the imitans and the imitatum."²⁴⁸ Eco takes as an example a child who, wishing to represent the sun, draws a circle with rays emanating from it; in so doing, the child produces an iconic sign. Therefore, although in actual fact the star called the sun is not really as the child represents it, the drawing reproduces the conventional image that, in that culture, is associated with the sun. Eco claims that iconicity functions by means of a perceptual cramp which banishes other possible representations : prey to iconic representation, one fails to think of the sun in terms of the undulatory theory of light.²⁴⁹ Such cramp, however, is also a cultural cramp, because:

[i]conic representations of an object imply transcribing the cultural properties bestowed on that same object through graphic devices. A culture, in defining its objects, draws upon codes of recognition which identify the relevant and characteristic parts of its content. The expressive units in the iconic sign recall not what one *sees* of the object, but what one has *learnt about it* or has *learnt to see*.²⁵⁰

So with logos as iconic brands : the sign becomes what it claims to be by means of a similar cramp that Marcuse finds at work within functional language. Iconic signs as described by Eco may be said to produce, in Marcuse's words, "an abridged syntax which cuts off development of meaning by creating fixed images which impose themselves with an overwhelming and petrified concreteness."²⁵¹ One may use iconicity as the interpretative paradigm to understand DeLillo's use of capitalised words in *End Zone*. As used in signs like "MILITARIZE" and "SACRIFICE", capitalization exerts on Gary a "sinister" (17) appeal, an appeal which is particularly emphatic in relation to an sign posted by Gary's on the boy's room wall:

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH THE TOUGH GET GOING

I began to perceive a certain beauty in it...beauty flew from the word themselves....All meaning faded. *The words became pictures...words can escape their meaning*. A strange beauty that sign began to express (17, emphasis added).

²⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, *Trattato di Semiotica Generale*, (Milano: Bompiani, 1984), 275. My translation.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 274n. My translation

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 273, emphasis in the original. My translation.

²⁵¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 94.

DeLillo may effectively be using capital letters to indicate words perceived as icons (logos), words which, mired in literalism, produce a “blocked development of content, the acceptance of that which is offered in the form for which is offered.”²⁵² Thus Logos College is the place where the “word” possessing a single meaning blocks the very dialectical function of “reason” understood as the ability to reason over implied references within a word. The word becomes a sign prompting a very specific response. I would argue that iconicity plays a central role in *End Zone*: the perceptual cramp that icons induce prevents Gary from reading figuratively the analogies between football and war, and exposes a “cultural cramp” which causes American society, even as it thrives on technological progress and an economy of destruction, to be “preoccupied with technique— *with the process rather than the results of delivering destruction*”²⁵³, a cramp expressive of a culture which cannot see the death it produces.

Football training at Logos shares many similarities with military training. Creed’s “ordering” word effectively leads Gary to accept football as a “[p]reparation for the future...what I learn on the gridiron about sacrifice and oneness will be of inestimable value later on in life. In other words...the more important contests of the future”(19). In the past, Gary had refused to embrace the notion of “oneness as elevenness or twenty-twoness” because he felt it implied sacrificing his own individuality to create “the winning team”(19). But at Logos, Gary agrees to the principle that “no boy place[s] his personal welfare above the welfare of the aggregate unit”(195), thus caving in to what he had earlier defined the “spiritually disastrous” mechanism “of human xerography”(19). Previously, Gary interpreted oneness as “oneness with God or the universe”(19). But at Logos, in training appropriately named “drills” or “blitz drills”(28), the individual player must accept the logic of the “aggregate unit”, of the numerical element. As an “interlocking of a number of systems”(196), Creed’s football team might be understood as drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s “principle of numerical organization”, a principle which these theorists take as constitutive of war machines.²⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism as a structurally numerical organization may help gloss the analogies between football and war.

A nomadic structure differs from lineal organisations (based on kinship) and from territorial organisations (centred around territoriality) in that it is arranged on the basis of

²⁵² Idem.

²⁵³ Sherry, *War*, 268, emphasis added.

²⁵⁴ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), 387, 389, 392.

“numerical relationships”. Within nomadic structures the number becomes the organising principle. A nomadic structure (of which the war machine is the best instance) functions on the basis of numerical sets or aggregations, organised in the form of series (sets of ten, one hundred, so on and so forth.)²⁵⁵

Ronen Palan, who uses Deleuze’s and Guattari’s analysis in his study of offshore capital, thus summarises their concept: “soldiers are perhaps ‘fathers’, ‘mothers’, ‘uncles’ as in the lineal mode, or ‘Englishmen’, ‘Yorkshiremen’ or ‘Frenchmen’ as in the territorial mode, but in the context of the army [and thus of any nomadic structure] they are defined...as numbers in a numerical organization.”²⁵⁶ Soldiers lose their individuality and assume a purely numerical existence; moreover, as part of a series, they function according to their place in the series and in relation to the other components of the same series. The army’s numerical principle combines soldiers in “arithmetic units [with] anonymous, collective function and situational [properties]” depriving soldiers of their individual, intrinsic properties.²⁵⁷ For Deleuze and Guattari, numerical organizations become extremely mobile, since the number becomes a means of moving, of pursuing a trajectory over what they call “smooth space” within which points are only “factual necessity[ies].”²⁵⁸

Read against Deleuze and Guattari, Gary’s notion of “human xerography” may be recast as the numbering of individuals within football’s structural organisation. With its subsets offense, defence and special unit, the football team displays a war machine-like structure based on the numbering principles and numerical aggregations. In the words of Creed, the individual becomes part of a “small cluster. The larger unit, the eleven”(194). The individual player, although a son, a teenager a friend (to paraphrase Palan), becomes a number, an arithmetic unit within the larger numerical unit (the eleven), which determines the player’s function. Precisely the numerical organization allows the team to move along the chalked lines of the field towards the end zone.

Interestingly, the existence of a special unit within football recalls the formation of a special unit within the war machine, special unit which becomes paramount when the state appropriates the principles of the war machine and of the special unit to constitute a

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 389,392.

²⁵⁶ Palan, *Offshore World*, 169.

²⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 352.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 380.

bureaucratic staff or technocratic body in order to pursue its own ends.²⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the special bodies echoes that of Mill's "power elite"; interestingly they posit that the creation of such special bodies occurs by means of specific schools or institutions which adapt the principles of the war machine to civilian life. By merging sports and military values in football, Logos represents an institution engaged in the creation of a special body, an elite which the state will eventually employ to pursue its interests. In effect, Creed himself is part of the power elite. A former B-27 pilot during the war Creed has his own connections which he deploys when he takes over as coach for Logos team (10).

By preaching self-denial among his athletes as a form of de-individualization, Creed enforces his normative numerical principle. Denial of the self, he argues, can only be attained through the infliction of "insults to the body. The humiliation and fear. The players accept the pain...Pain is part of the harmony of the nervous system"(193, 194, 195). Pain is crucial to Creed since, through pain, he asserts "his power to deny [players] the words [they] needed"(131). Creed uses physical and psychological pain to destroy the individual character and to inculcate a team spirit. Players, he claims, accept pain for the sake of the team and the game (194).

As Elaine Scarry demonstrates, pain and language are strictly related. Pain lacks "referential content" in the outside world, remaining utterly "unsharable" since it resists language. More importantly, "physical pain does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it": by destroying language, physical pain destroys the voice of the individual experiencing pain.²⁶⁰ Following Scarry, Creed's inflicting of physical pain allows him to substitute his own voice, and his use of functional language, for that of the players: "[w]hen the coach says hit, we hit. It's so simple"(33). If Creed sees pain as a means to achieve a knowledge of one's self, in actual fact pain works precisely towards a destruction of the self that Creed deems necessary for any football player.

Thus, Creed's linguistic usage and training methodologies not only inculcate a war mentality, but also work to reinforce the perceptual cramp which prevents players to associate football and war. In order to reinforce the perceptual cramp, Creed changes the name of the team from "Cactus Wrens" to "the Screaming Eagles" and provides the team with a symbol, a logo of "a screaming eagle [with] the word SACRIFICE inscribed beneath"(10, 29). Both the

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 393.

²⁶⁰ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4-5.

eagle and the word “SACRIFCE” appeal to the power of icons to instil in Creed’s players a sense of order, power and self-sacrifice. Incidentally, “The Screaming Eagles” is the nickname of the 101st Airborne Division, a special Air Force unit designated for air assault operations. The division’s motto, “Rendezvous with destiny”²⁶¹ echoes Gary’s description of Creed as a man whose life “was unfolding towards a single moment” (52). Bing Jackmin, a player in Logos’ special unit, best expresses the power of Creed’s logo to transform his players into eagles: “we perform like things with metal claws” (33). References to the 101st Airborne Division, whose logo is an eagle called Old Abe after Lincoln (known as ‘the war president’) ²⁶², might not be casual in a school with army and Air Force ROTC based on campus and whose principal, “Mrs Tom Wade”, widow of the founder, is defined as “Lincolnesque” (6).

Despite Gary’s attempts at denying possible analogies between football and war, such analogies do exist. His denial nurtures the illusion that football expresses “violence put to positive use” (210). Similarly, Major Staley’s notion of war as a game displaces “the negative violence...the inhumane blindness to the human misery of war.”²⁶³ War games constitute only part of a much broader discourse with which DeLillo engages in order to expose American culture’s fascination with war.

Major Staley, who commands the Air Force ROTC unit at Logos, and teaches a course in “Aspects of Modern War”, best expresses the cast of mind deriving from the ideological and cultural impact of militarization. Furthermore, Staley’s theoretical conversations with Gary about nuclear war summarize 30 years of concerns about how to live with the bomb. Staley’s “father was the school’s most famous alumnus, a three-letter man and a war hero, one of the crew on the Nagasaki mission” (69). Having launched the Bomb and contributed to the end of a world war, Staley’s father can perhaps be seen as one of those men who changed history, where history is defined as “a placement of bodies, the angle at which realities meet...the angle at which great masses collide. The angle at which projectiles are aimed [and] strike a particular surface” (43, 44, 46). First and foremost Staley enunciates that “there’s a kind of theology at work here. The bombs are a kind of god....We begin to capitulate to the overwhelming presence. It’s so powerful. It dwarfs us so much” (77). Such “fatalistic belief in technological determinism,

²⁶¹ Sources: US Army Center of Military History <http://www.army.mil/cmh/> and 101st Airborne Division official website <http://www.campbell.army.mil/UNITS/101ST/Pages/default.aspx>. Last accessed 11 March 2010.

²⁶² See Sherry, *War*, 1.

²⁶³ Michael Oriard, “Don DeLillo’s Search for the Walden Pond”, *Critique*, 20.1 (1978), 20.

as if the bomb, rather than the people, determined the world course”²⁶⁴ was fostered by the religious and apocalyptic language (“Atomic doom” or “nuclear Armageddon”) scientists used to talk about the potential outcome of nuclear war. Arguably, the destructive effects of the Bomb could transcend the control of those wielding such a potent weapon. Politicians capitalised on such language to consolidate the belief that national security, preparedness and deterrence strategy needed reinforcing. As the nuclear arms race between the USA and USSR escalated, to the point that both superpowers could count on the same nuclear capability, Americans felt they had lost their leverage and that their cities were liable to experience nuclear holocaust.²⁶⁵ As Staley perceives, “We have too many bombs. They have too many bombs....The big danger is that we’ll surrender to a sense of inevitability and start flinging mud all over the planet”(77).

DeLillo uses Major Staley to convey common theories and discourses within the political and military establishment in the early 1970s, related to doctrines of “the balance of Terror” and “Mutual Assured Destruction” (M.A.D.). Such doctrines, intending to stabilize the competition, effectively produced the sensation that one of the two powers, perceiving itself as weaker, and fearful that it could never survive a first strike, might launch such a strike itself.²⁶⁶ Staley argues that the resultant sense of inevitability is compounded by an assessment that war provides the ultimate test for a nation constantly preoccupied with asserting its superiority, superiority which now finds its best expression in “a country’s technological skills”(81). He comments that, “war [has always been] the great challenge and the great evaluator. It told you how much you were worth....Your technology doesn’t know how good it is until it goes to war, until it’s been tested in the ultimate way”(81). As an alternative, Staley proposes “humane war”, operating via “clean bombs” and a “limited human variant”(78), a suggestion which he considers a rational solution to a nation’s need to assert its dominance: “we’ll get together with them and there’ll be an agreement that if the issue can’t be settled, whatever the issue may be, then let’s make certain we keep our war as relatively humane as possible”(78). His conflation of the irreconcilable (“humane” and “war”, “clean” and “bomb”) exemplifies how, in Marcuse’s terms, functional language would seek to bestow “moral and physical integrity” on “destruction”.²⁶⁷ Limited war would be fought with “all sorts of controls. You’d practically have a referee and a

²⁶⁴ Sherry, *War*, 134.

²⁶⁵ Gary Harkness often imagines big American cities like Seattle, Chicago and Milwaukee swept and destroyed by nuclear firestorms and explosions.

²⁶⁶ Sherry, *War*, 222.

²⁶⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 97.

timekeeper”(79). While Staley admits that “the humanistic mind crumbles at the whole idea”, the prospect of war seems to him “unavoidable” given “national pride”: consequently limited war becomes a necessary route to the reduction of “collateral damage”(79, 219), or so his argument runs.

Given such a purview, the war games Gary and Major Staley play amount to preparedness training for humane war. Based “on information taken from a study by some military research institute”(218), the game proceeds in twelve moves presenting a “crisis scenario” derived directly from Herman Kahn’s book *On Escalation*: Kahn establishes an ‘escalation ladder’ in order to gauge “how a crisis might move up the rungs into nuclear war.”²⁶⁸ Yet, while Gary and Staley’s game should prove that “limited war options” and “selective target bombing”(219) are feasible, the game instead culminates in “spasm response” and total war (220). Possibly, the self-contradictory nature of Staley’s game works as a critique of civilian war games which played a key role in US strategic defense planning and evaluation of possible responses to nuclear assault. As journalist Fred Kaplan described in his book *The Wizards of Armageddon*, for thirty years Rand Corporation (of which Kahn was one of the most eminent figures) hired civilians and military to think about, simulate and prepare for Armageddon.²⁶⁹ Joseph Von Neumann’s Game Theory arguably played a key role within Rand’s projects. Von Neumann’s theory posited that in the face of critical uncertainties, one must think about the opponent’s best strategy and act accordingly: while not guaranteeing maximum gain, such strategy arguably warrants minimum loss. In addition, RAND thought these games to be highly educational and advocated their use at “intercollege plays” to prepare the future members of the power elite for the challenges of real life.²⁷⁰

The undesired outcome of Staley’s game evidences Delillo’s critique of such games and of the state policies they exemplify— not least because those games and policies remain alienated from what Elaine Scarry defines as the reality of war, its “gripping unpredictability, [its emotional impact]”and tragic devastation.²⁷¹ Those who manage such games instil an iconic perception that the game is the real thing, leading combatants to believe that, in war as in

²⁶⁸ Osteen, *American Magic*, 40.

²⁶⁹ Fred Kaplan, *The Wizards of Armageddon*, (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1983).

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 65. It’s worth stressing that Von Neumann developed his theory in order to calculate uncertainty and risk in mathematical ways. His theory found enormous application within finance and economics particularly since the 1970s. See Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods. The Remarkable Story of Risk*, (New York: Wyley and Sons, 1996), 244-246.

²⁷¹ Scarry, *Pain*, 82.

games, they may “enter and exit...freely.”²⁷² Witness how a telephone ringing in Major Staley’s room at the end of the game produces a terrified look: Staley freezes in his chair, “terrified for a long second” because, immersed as he is in the game which he experiences as a real war situation, the call may effectively herald the news of a real war (220).

Major Staley’s war games and the game *Bang You’re Dead* further compound the iconic cramp produced by football at Logos, a cramp which assimilates games to war. Gary recalls how

one day in early September we started playing a game called Bang You’re Dead.... Your hand assumes the shape of a gun and you fire at anyone who passes. You try to reproduce, in your own way, the sound of a gun being fired. Or you simply shout these words: *Bang, you’re dead*. The other person clutches a vital area of his body and then falls simulating death (30).

The hand, or the sound of the voice acting as a real weapon, operate as iconic signs: the shots induce iconic deaths, in which participants cramp their bodies in suitable postures. *Bang you’re dead* effectively perpetuates the powerful narrative of iconic signs. As in limited war, Gary specifies “we did not abuse the powers inherent in the game...we devised unwritten limits” (31). Such limits, such as avoiding “massacre”, transform the game in a pleasurable amenable, experience: “I began to kill selectively. When killed, I fell to the floor or earth with great deliberation, with sincerity. I varied my falls, searching for the rhythm of something imperishable, a classic death” (32). Gary feels that the game “possessed gradations, dark joys, a resonance....To kill with impunity. To die in the celebration of ancient ways” (31). The game invented “to break the silence and the lingering stillness” (32) of the days at Logos, enables Gary to experience war, to kill and to die. However, death experienced via the game is hardly the brutal death or killing of mass murders and genocides. In *Bang You’re Dead* Gary experiences the illusion of death as “total relaxation” and is able to grasp the game’s educational value: “[the game] enabled us to *pretend* that death could be a tender experience” (32, emphasis added).

In contradistinction, the game between Logos and Centrex Biotechnical Institute, which occupies the central part of the novel, exposes the extent of such pretence. Centrex embodies the brutality and violence of football, and represents all that Logos masks beyond the pretence of football as a “tender experience”: “The game’s violence...as a series of lovely and sensual assaults” (94). “Centrex is mean....They’re practically evil. They like to humiliate people....They like to hit” (91-92). Gary, whose duty as a narrator would be “to unbox the lexicon [of football]” in order to prove that football is not war, fails to provide such account: instead the game

²⁷² Idem.

remains “boxed” in the garbled jargon of sport, a jargon which can neither “express” nor “clarify”(68), but rather reproduces the moves as “combat writing”: “The special teams collided, swarm and thud of interchangeable bodies, small wars commencing here and there, exaltation and firstblood, a helmet bouncing on the splendid grass, the breathless impact of two destructive masses”(107). The account does not foster “the exemplary spectator[’s] benign illusion that [football is] order”(107). On the contrary, readers recognize that Centrex sees football as war. Indeed, Centrex’s end zone, as in war, is “injuring”²⁷³. The game concludes with a casualty bulletin: “Billy Mast...clean fracture”, “Conway...collarbone”, “Randy King...wrenched knee”, “Dickie Kidd...shrapnel”, “Bobby Iselin, pulled hamstring. Terry Madden, broken nose”(142-143). Gary closes the list with the statement: “They killed me”(145).

Gary’s fascination with “disaster technology” complements Major Staley’s ruminations about limited war. At one point in *End Zone*, Anatole Bloomberg views technological violence and destruction as a “metaphysical [force] able to...maim or kill whatever dark presence envelopes the world. The moral system is enriched by violence put to good use”(210). Anatole’s vision of good stemming from violence reflects a particular ideological character, undergirding the American war mentality, a character that sees the waging of war as a necessary element of economic affluence, freedom and democracy. Since World War II, Americans have always seen themselves as a “pacific people [pitted against] bad guys – Nazi, Japs, Commies, Russians” an assumption which allows them to perform war’s destructive impulses “while seeing themselves as different from their enemies...disguising their visceral attractions to destruction.”²⁷⁴ As Mark Osteen argues, “a key element in the attraction for nuclear weapons is [that] they can be ‘present’ in our minds only when not used– when absent physically– because when truly ‘present’ [when unleashed] they could cause...the end of civilization.”²⁷⁵ Indeed, as Bloomberg affirms, “[t]he capacity overwhelms everything. The mere potential of one form of violence [nuclear war] eclipses the actuality of other forms”(210). However, I would argue that nuclear capability represents the ultimate technological example of that complex technology of war which shielded Americans from experiencing the psychic and physical cost of destruction.²⁷⁶ The power of annihilation contained in the Bomb does not seem able to stop Gary from feeling “a

²⁷³ Scarry, *Pain*, 84.

²⁷⁴ Sherry, *War*, 81.

²⁷⁵ Osteen, *American Magic*, 37.

²⁷⁶ Sherry, *War*, 81.

thrill almost sensual”(20) in reading his course books on disaster technology. I would say that Gary’s fascination with technology is a form of fetishism, which feeding on an intense disavowal of the death it produces, “translat[es] loss into desire, absence into erotic presence.”²⁷⁷ “The mushroom-shaped cloud, the corporate logo of the nuclear age”²⁷⁸ acts for Gary as an “object of fascination, prompting pleasures inseparable from a disavowal of anxieties over loss.”²⁷⁹ Gary’s affective “pleasure in the words”(20) of nuclear destruction derives from the displacing power of the language of war which eliminates from view the human element in war:

I liked to think of huge buildings toppling, of firestorms, of bridge collapsing....I became fascinated by words and phrases like thermal hurricanes, overkill, circular error probability, post-attack environment, stark deterrence, dose-rate contours, kill-ratio, spasm war...hostage cities, orbital attacks (20).

The war terminology effectively conveys images of destruction, whose scientific precision and order erase the violence behind technological agency, producing an “abdication of responsibility.”²⁸⁰ Gary’s war jargon is a form of verbal fiction which renders “meaning unrecoverable....The language of killing and injuring ceases to be morally resonant because...injury is...rendered invisible”²⁸¹: “[f]ive to twenty million dead. Fifty to a hundred million dead....Two hundred thousand bodies”(20). The number becomes the subject of the enunciation, since, as Scarry argues, “the fictiveness of ‘body counts’ [makes] live tissues inanimate [and renders human suffering] invisible.”²⁸² Gary is aware that he’s using “numbers [to cover] the words used to cover silence”(71), silence deriving from human annihilation. Major Staley deploys the same language: “millions of bonus kills, mortality rate in low percentiles...average lethal mutation ...collateral damage”(78,81,219). The plethora of acronyms infusing his jargon, “ICBM” “MIRV” “SAC”, don’t need explanation since they “have become official vocable, constantly repeated in general usage.”²⁸³ Such linguistic abstractions mask the “relentless object of military activity” as it inflicts pain through injury, pain which in turn destroys “embodied persons, [their] material culture [and] national consciousness, political belief, and self definition.”²⁸⁴ Thus the language of war gives substance to what is invisible, the outcome of war, but it substantiates it in a way which constantly disguises the horror and death

²⁷⁷ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

²⁷⁸ Sherry, *War*, 248.

²⁷⁹ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

²⁸⁰ Scarry, *Pain*, 73.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁸³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 98.

²⁸⁴ Scarry, *Pain*, 114.

it produces. Gary argues “[t]here’s no way to express thirty million dead. No words. So certain men are recruited to reinvent the language....They don’t explain, they don’t clarify, they don’t express. *They’re painkillers*. Everything becomes abstract”(81, emphasis added). War jargon, with its abstracted, numerical terminology, effectively works to produce a historical amnesia over the human consequence of war, and prevents Gary from acknowledging death as something other than a numerical account of losses.

Gary constantly hovers between fascination for and “revulsion and dread”(41) towards such language. While on the one hand he responds to the logic of such speech, on the other hand he attempts to resist the insistence of military jargon. Resistance finds its forms in the attempts to restore the metaphorical function of language itself: “I thought of men embedded in the ground, all killed...flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails”(86). Here Gary attempts to substantiate, by reference to human matter, the abstraction of numerical loss. Indeed, one may recognize Gary’s thoughts as exemplifying the work of what Abraham and Torok call “the ghost of the crypt [which] comes back to haunt the cemetery guard”, a linguistic haunting whereby “unspeakable words” surface within Gary’s consciousness.²⁸⁵ But then he rebukes himself for such thoughts, viewing them as “misspent reflections”(86). Rebuke may be read as a form of censorship which reveals Gary’s anxiety over his own disavowal of death. Thus Gary must counteract the work of his deeper consciousness, which revolts against the insensate discourse of Staley’s “humane war”, by searching for “something that could be defined in one sense only...a thing unalterably itself”(85), the literal, the thing as iconic sign.

Walking through the desert to reach the college after one of his meeting with Staley, Gary comes across something “that terrified me...it was three yards in front of me, excrement, a low mound of it, simple shit, nothing more”(85). Although he sees shit as “a terminal act, nullity in the very word”(85), Gary is overcome by fear and “want[s] his senses to deny this experience”(85). Gary perceives a “curse in that sight” because, in the silence dominating the desert, the word “shit” takes Gary beyond its literal meaning: “[s]hit, as of dogs squatting near partly eaten bodies, rot repeating itself; defecation, as of old women in nursing homes fouling their beds; faeces, as of specimen, sample, analysis, diagnosis, bleak assessment of disease in the bowels”(85). Escaping Gary’s predilection for the pleasures of functional language, shit becomes a metaphor for human decay, disease, for humanity as refuse. Its “infinite treachery” consists in

²⁸⁵ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130, 132.

forcing Gary to think about the end of life: “final matter voided, the chemical stink of the self discontinued”(85). Gary’s thought then moves from “butchered animals’ intestines slick with shit and blood” to “armies retreating in that stench, shit as [the] history”(85) of human slaughter and butchery in war. Having temporarily rid himself of the mystifying terminology of military language, which “shields users from responsibility for planning and carrying out mass destruction”²⁸⁶, Gary can read the desert as a metaphor for nuclear wasteland. The desert, a geographical manifestation of the crypt buried within the consciousness of Gary as a faulty mourner, suddenly opens up revealing its hidden, repressed content. Gary can thus restore metaphor and temporarily becomes “a metaphorist of the desert”: “I thought of men embedded in the ground, all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails”(86). The desert no longer appears as “born dead, flat stones burying the memory”, but rather *made* dead by the conflation of earth and flesh resulting from a nuclear explosion. For an instant then, not only does Gary acknowledge loss and death as the product of war, but he also avows the desert as a burial ground and a memorial for the dead. Ontologizing the dead and recuperating them via an act of memory might effectively oppose the work of inexpressible mourning and lead Gary to overcome his melancholia.

However, rather than accepting the implications of shit’s multiple meanings, Gary retreats into the linguistic bareness of literalism:

to reword the overflowing world. To subtract and disjoin. To re-cite the alphabet. To make elemental lists. To call something by its name and need no other sound...[t]he sun. The desert. The sky. The silence. The flat stones. The insects. The wind and the clouds. The moon. The stars. The west and the east. The song, the color, the smell of the earth(86).

His elemental list echoes verses from Rilke’s *Ninth Duino Elegy*.²⁸⁷ Gary indirectly refers to a college course called “The Untellable”, taken by his colleague Billy Mast. The course, as Billy tells Gary, consists in “delv[ing] into the untellable”(176) by shouting in German, a language that students attending the course must not know. Billy, unable to explain the untellable, admits that the course is hazardous for “[y]ou pick up things you’re better off without”(176). The untellable qualifies as what must be not said openly, something which must remain secret, obscured by language. In this sense, the untellable may well be what Osteen calls “‘the unthinkable’...the real horror of nuclear war” as elements of that horror filter through the

²⁸⁶ Osteen, *American Magic*, 39.

²⁸⁷ Cft. Rilke “To say:/ House, Fountain Bridge, Gate, Jug, Fruit tree, or Window?/ Or even rise higher and say the word: Column?/Say: Tower?.” Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. By Stephen Cohn (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989), 73. Billy Mast at one point recites the same exact verses (138).

“sterile language of nuclear strategy.”²⁸⁸ DeLillo’s reference to Rilke has further significance for *End Zone*. DeLillo recalled in an interview that “Rilke said we had to rename the world. Renaming suggests innocence and rebirth.”²⁸⁹ His claim finds an echo both in Gary’s words and Creed’s adaptation of football as a route to purification. However Logos takes Rilke’s proposition rather literally. For Rilke, the *Duino Elegies* celebrate both life and death as *inseparable constituents of our life*. To disavow death would prevent us from “achiev[ing] the greatest consciousness of our existence.”²⁹⁰ Death is that which we cannot experience directly. Poetic language can, according to Rilke, help establish a connection with the invisible, the untellable pertaining to death, by learning to acknowledge everyday objects, the world’s materiality, as the bearers of “higher order of reality” which is hidden from view. Language can help us transcend the literality of common objects such as “house, bridge, fountain, gate, jug, fruit-tree, window”²⁹¹ and reveal that higher order of reality of which the world is expressive. Death for Rilke should lead the individual to understand and experience this world more fully, including pain and sorrow as experience of growth and self-renewal.

Thus, via the aesthetic experience of the *Duino Elegies*, students of “The Untellable” at Logos should understand the experience of pain and death and overcome linguistics functionalism, literalism and demetaphorization. In actual fact, the course only serves to implement denial of death and pain through linguistic literalism. In a sense, *End Zone* might be read as an elegy itself, “a mournful song” for a nation whose sin, as Alan Zapalac would have it, is amnesia over death, which renders Americans unable “to lament for the dead” (206).

Consequently, when death as a real fact interrupts the seemingly endless repetition of the days at Logos, Gary can only grasp its essence through cliché and tautology. Mrs Tom Wade’s death in a plane crash can only be accounted for as tautology: “I wonder if she was ever burned beyond recognition [because] that usually happens in that kind of crash” (178). Similarly, the account of Norgene Azamanian’s death arrives through the State troopers’ notes, all “writing in their little notes, all copying from each other” (69). Arguably, “death [becomes] the best soil for clichés” since cliché has “a soothing effect on the mind....The trite saying is never more comforting, more restful, as in times of mourning” (67). For Marcuse, clichés and tautology

²⁸⁸ Osteen, *American Dread*, 39.

²⁸⁹ Thomas Le Clair, “An Interview with Don DeLillo”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 23 N.1 (Winter 1982), 25.

²⁹⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Letter to Witold von Hulevitz. November 13, 1925”. in *The Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke. Volume Two 1910-1926*, translated by Jane Bannard Greene and M.D. Herter Norton (New York : Norton and Co, 1947), 373.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

represent the quintessential form of linguistic functionalism. Through their continuous repetition of an evident reality, clichés and tautology, “don’t express, don’t clarify”(79): their “analytic structure ritualizes a concept [and makes it] immune against contradiction.”²⁹² Clichés prompt a response substantially similar to antimetaphor: they are taken literally in that one accepts them without delving into the reality that clichés only superficially describe. Clichés facilitate denial of loss since they block the development of words which, by filling the empty mouth, render introjection possible. But for those, like Gary, who suffer from melancholic incorporation and literalism, and whose life is “guided by clichés”(67), introjection becomes a “menace”, a crime to be “hidden with th[ose other] darker crimes of thought and [metaphorical] language”(67).

As he indulges in such reflections, Gary manifests a continuous tension between a refusal and an acceptance of death-as-cliché, insofar as he recognises that the war mentality feeds on cliché in order to reduce death to a series of “facts [or] a mass of jargon for the military mind...jargon [which] resembling clichés, passed from mourner to mourner in the form of copied notes”(70). Furthermore, death “overwhelm[s] Norgene’s mediocrity and we conspired to make him gigantic...he was indeed a fallen warrior”(68). Similarly, the dead coach Tom Cook Clarke (dead by his own hand) is remembered through Creed’s eulogy, as merely as a series of slogans: “one of the best football minds in the country...a moulder of young man and a fine interdenominational example”(68). Only a few weeks before, Gary had “tried to imagine where Tom Cook Clarke came from, what he thought, what kind of life he led...who he was...when he seemed no more that a face, a hat, a certain way of talking”(70). Facing his death, Gary feels that “[p]erhaps the man had a need to live in another man’s mind”(70). The fact that Gary considers Clarke’s suicide as evidence of his own failure to go beyond the mere appearance of Clarke’s existence reveals Gary’s anxiety and indicates, care of Abraham and Torok’s work, that “the grim tomb of [his] repression” may be on the verge of exploding.

While Gary attempts to resist the assault of totalitarian language, Anatole Bloomberg embodies the football player’s “simplicity”, his “wholesomely commonplace [thoughts]”(4) and best exemplifies the successful work of demetaphorisation and functional language. Anatole is a Jew who at Logos seeks to unjew himself. The process of unjewing constitutes Anatole’s end zone. Appropriately he finds in the “desert an ideal place to begin the process of unjewing”(182).

²⁹² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 91-92.

He senses Jewishness as a form of “enormous nagging historical guilt...[t]he guilt of being innocent victims”(44). Why Anatole should feel guilty about the Holocaust would appear rather obscure, unless one sees his guilt as symptomatic of a culture which rejects death as the consequence of war, and in particular, death by government or “democide”²⁹³. His refusal to commemorate the Holocaust of his people may be read as his response to “a trauma [with] devastating emotional consequences which [must] be entombed and consigned to internal silence.”²⁹⁴ Impaired mourning for his people extends into a negation of personal loss: Anatole refuses to participate in his mother’s funeral, a mother whose murder at the hands of a lunatic, marks her as “another innocent” victim. Recalling the Jewish tradition of leaving pebbles at gravesides, Anatole leaves a black stone in the desert, a gesture which may suggest an attempt to mourn in displaced form and in the wrong place. However, the black-painted stone he leaves in the desert as a burial-marker, rather than a memorial to his mother, functions as a crypt for his “unspeakable heartbreak”(183).

Anatole’s unjewing is first and foremost a linguistic process: “ [y]ou revise your way of speaking. You take out the urbanism...[t]he inverted sentences. You use a completely different set of words and phrases...simple declarative sentences...[s]ubject, predicate, object”(44, 183). Deprived of “the old words and aromas”, Anatole sense that his mind is “transfor[ed] into a ruthless instrument”, as he teaches himself “to reject certain categories of thought”(44). Through the “hypnotic formulas” used to enforce such process, Anatole effectively accomplishes via “linguistic abridgements...an abridgement of thought.”²⁹⁵ By such means, he rejects “the smelly undisciplined past”, smelly with the odour of “the black bones” of the Holocaust victims. Anatole’s language “repels recognition of the facts, and of their historical content.”²⁹⁶ If “it is history which memory preserves”, then memory, for Anatole, might “recall the terror...that passed.”²⁹⁷ Anatole’s “nonethical superrational man” can only “walk in straight lines...keep [his]

²⁹³ R.J. Rummell, *Death By Government*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994). Available at <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/welcome.html>. Last visited 11 March 2010. Rummell defines democide as “the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder”: “democide subsumes *genocidal killing*, as well as the concepts of *politicide* and *mass murder*, democide is for the killing by government definitionally similar to the domestic crime of murder by individuals, and that *murderer* is an appropriate label for those regimes that commit democide.”

²⁹⁴ N. Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 99.

²⁹⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 100.

²⁹⁶ Idem.

²⁹⁷ Idem.

mind set on one thought or problem”(180), and by “training himself toward that end”(180), may annul the “subversive contents of memories.”²⁹⁸

Anatole’s preoccupation with weight as another instance of incorporation. In order to accomplish his project of self-renewal, Anatole stops fasting in order to accrue his body weight. Anatole’s eating might instantiate incorporation manifesting pre-eminently as an act of “swallowing”: “in order not to have ‘to swallow’ a loss, we fantasize swallowing...that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing.”²⁹⁹ Indeed, Anatole manages through his weight to attain “single-minded[ness] and straightforward[ness] in the most *literal sense of the word*”(74,emphasis added).

Finally, in his new name “EK 17” (182) Anatole finds freedom from the burden of his past, his Jewishness. As in Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘war machine’, the number becomes the subject. But deprived of his historical memory, of his geographical and family ties in Creed’s football-war machine, Anatole’s numerical self-nomination disavows the fact that in “concentration-camp society [Jews were] no longer anything more than...numbers.”³⁰⁰ His rejection of the past should be recognized as a form of incorporation.

Logos’ defeat by Centrex undermines the credibility and power of Creed’s system of beliefs and training techniques. After the match, Creed is forced on a wheelchair: his physical impairment may symbolize the paralysis of functionalism and literalism which Creed personifies and a gradual waning of Creed’s power over his players. Taft Robinson, the player Creed had hired to win the season, is the first player to abandon football and reject Creed’s values and beliefs.

“One of the best running backs in the history of Southwest”(3) Taft had been recruited “for his speed”(3). Speed is Taft’s “dark art”(186), but also “the last excitement left, the one thing we haven’t used up, still naked in its potential, the mysterious black gift that thrills the millions”(5). Again, one may feel the influence of the war language in Gary’s definition of speed, an influence which combines with a very specific racial connotation. Arguably, Taft embodies speed, or rather, in keeping with Logos’ penchant for iconic representation, Taft *is* speed. As he is an African-American, he is also an “invisible man”(3), so that for Gary cliché compounds icon.

²⁹⁸ Idem.

²⁹⁹ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 126.

³⁰⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 390.

Taft's function within the novel only amounts to releasing his speed in order to project Creed's football machine towards the end zone. His function is entirely consistent within a football team which is modelled upon a war machine, since the war machine "implies the release of speed" given that speed "invents the weapon."³⁰¹ Indeed, for Creed Taft should, because of it speed, be the most powerful weapon in his arsenal. But as Gray points out, Taft's existence is limited only to the chalk lines of the football field. Outside the field, Taft is socially dead, invisible, a ghost which "no more than haunts this book"(3).

Taft's immobility, his search for stasis and silence at the end of the novel significantly manifests rebuttal of speed and of his role within Creed's team. Taft decides to quit football in order to reject the "package" constructed around him, his iconic image, and Gary's stereotypical vision of Taft as a savage from "the doldrums of the old land" mastering "a magic art"(186). More importantly, by rejecting football, Taft refuses Creed, who, as Taft tells Gary, "part Satan, part, Saint Francis" had lured him into believing that "work, pain, fury, sweat...[would] get [me] past my own limits"(232). Creed had offered Taft a different "prospect of glory", different from the perspective of the "the modern athlete as a commercial myth... his life story on the back of a cereal box"(3). In fact, Creed's project involved the translation of the modern athlete into a war machine. In rejecting football, Taft seeks to resist Creed's functionalism and "the deathly power of [Creed's] language"(WN, 31). Taft endorses silence, which he opposes to the cacophony of military and football jargon. Whereas such cacophony produces "the silencing of the dissenting voice and [expresses] the movement of [American] culture towards compliant, uncritical inarticulacy,"³⁰² Taft's silence becomes "a new language [for a new way of life]"(229). Silence "becomes almost a spiritual exercise. Silence, words, silence, silence, silence"(234). Taft's babbling (as opposed to football babbling) may represent "a purer form, an alternate speech...another way to speak."³⁰³ Silence offers language an escape from the abridged syntax of functionalism and access to thoughts and meanings which functional language prevents from expressing. Via silence Taft seeks to grasp the untellable understood as death as the product of war.

Taft's choice to sit in the lotus position of Tibetan monks may be best glossed by Murray Jay Siskind's statement in *White Noise* (1984): "[t]ibetans see death for what it is. It's the end of

³⁰¹ Ibid., 396, 395.

³⁰² Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 47.

³⁰³ Don DeLillo in Tom LeClair, "Interview", 24-25.

an attachment to things. This simple thing is hard to fathom. But once we stop denying death, we can proceed calmly to die and then on”(WN, 38). DeLillo voices, through both Taft and Siskind, a cultural need to recover death as an experienced presence, in order to oppose the prevalent fascination with “those very technologies that promise to eradicate death [and their deathly potential].”³⁰⁴ Seen as an attempt to accept the reality of death, Taft’s reading “about the ovens” may represent his effort to come to terms with the horror of death as the *real* outcome of war: “I like to read about atrocities: I can’t help it...the ovens, the showers, the experiments, the teeth the lampshades, the soap....Laying waste to villages full of kids. Firing into the ditches of kids, infant, babies”(235). Taft’s language is very far from Major Staley’s technological jargon. Taft’s focus on “kids” and “ovens”, and on everyday artefacts such as “soap” and “showers”, insists on horror: in Elaine Scarry’s terms, Taft’s “attach[ment] to the wilful infliction of...bodily agony makes language and civilization participate in...destruction.”³⁰⁵

If Taft embodies total resistance to Creed, Myna Corbett (the only relevant female character in *End Zone*) constitutes a female version of Gary. She also attempts to lead a simple life, an effort which for her consists in rejecting the “the responsibility of beauty”(65), beauty which she associates with an aesthetic canon of slim bodies and smooth skin. In contrast to such notion of beauty, Myna opposes her own weight since, as she tells Gary, she feels overweight both inside and outside (65). In a sense the girl perceives herself as a person “that could be defined in one sense only”(85).

When Gary first sees her, Myna appears “wearing an orange dress with a mushroom cloud appliquéed on the front of her dress”(39). The mushroom cloud on her dress effectively works as a logo, which prompts Gary to identify her as a bomb, as an “explosion over the desert”(66). Thus Gary’s fascination with Myna derives from an affective association, in Gary’s mind, between the girl and the Bomb, Bomb which, we have seen, constitutes a generative source of fascination for Gary. While fascination with the Bomb prompts Gary to experience guilt given its destructive power, by substituting Myna for the bomb, Gary can experience pleasure without guilt and “feel at peace with [his] own environment”(63). To the extent that “women’s sexuality [came to be associated] with war’s destructiveness”³⁰⁶, the image of the bomb can turn into an image nurturing aesthetic pleasure. The association between Myna and

³⁰⁴ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 10.

³⁰⁵ Scarry, *Pain*, 43.

³⁰⁶ Sherry, *War*, 134.

the Bomb is further reinforced when we consider that her massive weight evokes the bomb's megatonnage, another word that fascinates Gary when thinking about the bomb. Thus, Myna's decision to lose weight and to endorse "the responsibilities of beauty" may be taken as a rejection of Logos' literalism. Her fasting may represent a form of resistance against weight as an iconic representation of the bomb, as an "expression of humanity's reckless potential" (47). Her rejection of weight as a search for a new self-definition, read alongside Taft's decision to abandon football, may signal that the functionalism, literalism and war mentality as Logos' founding principle may be exhausting their affective powers and significance.

As the novel unfolds, stasis and immobility dominate the narrative. Signalled by the end of the football season which leaves Gary idle, by Creed's confinement to a wheelchair and Taft's lotus position, stasis well represents the atrophy of a culture that apparently cannot find its definition beyond war. Arguably the atrophying of the war mentality within Logos as a dominant structure of feeling, may reflect America's disenchantment with war in the wake of the Vietnam War and indicate the crisis of military hegemony which compounded that of US economic hegemony. In fact, stasis may also point to the stagnation of US economy in the early 1970s, the economic impasse of the US capitalism caught between an overaccumulation crisis and need to maintain "the golden rule of never-ending domestic consumerism."³⁰⁷ Although apparently unconcerned with economic problems, *End Zone*, as it investigates the war mentality undergirding American culture and values, prompts recollection of the economic role that war has had in constructing American hegemony. Delillo does not casually associate, via Harkness, the word "MILITARIZE" and "apotheosis". For many years, "MILITARIZ[ATION]", relying on a permanent arms economy, had sustained the US economic hegemony, arguably a form of "apotheosis." Economist Ernest Mandel speaks of a "permanent arms economy" which absorbed "additional surplus labor and creat[ed] additional surplus-value— extracted from labour power [diverted from the other sectors of the economy]."³⁰⁸ For Mandel, the arms economy constitutes (in his adaptation of Marx's definition) a third Department solely concerned with arms production which differs from Department I, as that which produces the means of production, and Department II, engaged in manufacturing consumer goods. Mandel argues that such distinction is necessary because "Department III, unlike Department I, produces commodities

³⁰⁷ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 61.

³⁰⁸ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. by Joris De Bres, (London: New Left Books, 1975), 301n.

which do not enter into the process of reproduction of the material elements of production (replacing and extending the means of production and labour-power consumed).” Mandel shows that the production of arms as a particular form of “commodity production” accelerated “the accumulation of capital in ‘the long wave’ of 1945-65,” complementing capital accumulation in Departments I and II.³⁰⁹ However, a permanent arms economy, although it produces capital accumulation, is fundamentally parasitical, because it prevents capital from being invested in the other departments. When too much capital flows in Department III, Department I and II risk paralysis and inertia.³¹⁰

Already inertial given the crisis of overaccumulation and overproduction, the US economy could not rely on its permanent arms economy to overcome its economic crisis, since “military expenditures could provide only short-run outlets for surplus capital and generate little in the way of long-term relief to the internal contradictions of capital accumulation.”³¹¹ These commodities cannot find a profitable outlet in the general market: their circulation can neither regenerate the means of production nor labour power since their circulation would entail destruction of both.³¹²

Ultimately, my economic review wishes to offer a further interpretation to the novel’s conclusion. Possibly, one may read Gary’s final fast (coming after his becoming co-captain and entering Creed’s “law’s small tin glitter”(197)– a sentence strangely evocative of a gun) as a reaction to Taft’s and Myna’s resistance and as his unconditional adherence to Logos values, despite their atrophy and exhaustion. His fast symbolizes an economy that has reached a sort of end zone. Within this purview, Gary’s last words, “[i]n the end they had to carry me to the infirmary and feed me through plastic tubes”(236) point to the failure of the permanent arms economy to constitute a solution to the economic crisis which beset the US, and the liquid nourishment feeding Gary’s body prefigures the liquid nourishment of finance capital which eventually fed the agonising US economic system.

DeLillo’s *End Zone* reveals how militarization, with its meanings and values paves the way for a financial structure of feeling. Logos, by training students in *disavowing* death, in accepting iconicity’s *fetishism*, in *vaporising* words, prepares its students to accept the vaporization of the commodity economy at the heart of finance capital and the fetishism of

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 306;

³¹⁰ Idem.

³¹¹ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 61.

³¹² Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 302.

speculative capital. *End Zone*, by foregrounding the refusal to acknowledge death as the product of war, reveals incorporation to be already at work within the American culture, thus facilitating the perpetuation of incorporation as a result of the obliteration of the commodity form within the financial realm. Trained to experience war as game through both football and war games, Logos students are taught to detach war from the experiential reality it produces, much as players of financial markets tend to detach the effects of the unfettered movement of speculative capital from the “real” economy of production. The anxieties pervading Gary when confronting the actual materiality of death are thus similar to the anxieties pervading Pammy over death itself and to the structural discomfort Lyle experiences when he has to face the world of commodity economy that finance dematerialises. Even as the war mentality gives way to the finance mentality, students educated at Logos possess the cast of mind to become the financial class of tomorrow, the new “power elite” of fetishistic finance capital.

CHAPTER 3

GREAT JONES STREET, OR THE “MELLOW PROMISE” OF FINANCE CAPITAL

With *Great Jones Street* (1973), DeLillo abandons Texas, and its geographical and spiritual desert, to return to the more familiar environs of New York City. The imaginary journey back east could read as an escape from Logos' stifling immobility in the attempt to discover an alternative to both a military culture and a permanent arms economy which have exhausted their capacity to legitimate US moral and military hegemony.

A similar escape from Houston, Texas, back to native New York, initiates rock-star Bucky Wunderlick's withdrawal from the scenes in *Great Jones Street*. In Houston, Bucky realises that “culture had reached its limit, a point of severe tension”(2). His music and language, reflecting an exhausted culture, have become meaningless and have lost their capacity “to make people move”(105), consigning Bucky's audience to stillness and immobility. Excerpts from Bucky's lyrics, inserted mid-narrative, describe the country's cultural exhaustion. Bucky's first record, “American War Sutra”, denounced America's commitment into the Vietnam War and the collapse of political consensus vis-à-vis the war (97-102), while the song “Protestant Work Ethic Blues” addressed the middle class' anomie as a result of the US economic impasse (110-111). However, in “Pee-Pee-Maw-Maw” words have turned into a “blank mumble...[a]

babble foaming at the mouth”(118), exemplifying a language which, once the late 1960s counterculture has been drained of its revolutionary potential, can no longer signify. All that is left, Bucky sings, is a cultural and linguistic “nil nully void”(118). Therefore, Bucky withdraws from the excesses of fame, deliberately embracing “isolation” and “solitude”(86) in order to “survive a dead idea [and overcome] certain personal limits” (3-4).

The cultural exhaustion and ambient stillness dominating *Great Jones Street* exemplify the more general exhaustion and paralysis of the US market in 1973, the year in which the oil embargo enforced by the OPEC countries exacerbated the world economic crisis. Indeed, the market, pictured as “big wheel,...is getting smaller everyday. The bright lights are dimming, [the wheel] is spinning ever slower”(48, 163). A “dull sort of horror”(87) and “unexplained fear”(32) compound cultural exhaustion, and one may read such fear as a response to the intrinsic crisis, caused by the search for unending profit, which threatens the social order as the US hegemon (and with it the brief ‘American century’) fades.

As I have pointed out in my introduction (p 15), while on the one hand the oil embargo precipitated the downward spiral of the US economy, on the other hand it eventually allowed the US “to relieve [its] price-reducing domestic over-supply of capital [via an unexpected capital infusion]”³¹³ deriving from the US banks’ appropriation of a massive surplus of petro-dollars previously held in offshore deposits.³¹⁴ After 1973, the liberalization of the international credit and financial markets allowed the NY banks to deploy their financial liquidity in the form of credit to foreign governments, thus starting the financialization of the US economy.

Consequently, *Great Jones Street* may be read as a novel which, on the one hand, records the anxieties resulting from a fading phase within US capitalism, but, on the other hand also reveals that forces are at work to restore the accumulation process by means of finance capital as a source of value and liquidity. One may read DeLillo’s portrayal of rockstar Bucky Wunderlick’s withdrawal as a metaphorical account of a subject “caught in the conjuncture of a contracting long-wave and a newly expansive one, [who] seems able to presciently perceive”³¹⁵ the financial turn which promises to deliver renewed prosperity.

³¹³ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 35.

³¹⁴ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 27.

³¹⁵ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 21.

Like *End Zone* character Taft Robinson (who chooses isolation and silence as an alternative to Creed's functional language and war mentality), Bucky withdraws in order to "test the depths of silence. Or one's willingness to be silent. Or one's fear of this willingness"(25). While silence and immobility are markers of a negative market performance, nonetheless they seem to offer Bucky the opportunity to refashion himself. Within silence, Bucky hopes to discover "uncharted territories, embryonic forms of beauty"(161), unexplored sources of artistic inspiration. Generally, critics have tended to read Bucky as the embodiment of the artist in opposition to the dominant structures and to see his retreat as an attempt to craft new artistic forms ³¹⁶ by means of which he may "shape art as a moral form to master commerce"(70). For instance, Peter Boxall argues that silence offers Bucky an alternative to the cacophonous "languages and patterns of behaviour that have been prepared for him by his audience and the all powerful Transparanoia Inc."³¹⁷ Personified by Globke, Bucky's manager and head of the company, Transparanoia is "an inkblot of holding companies, trust, acquisitions" which also speculates in real estate (138). Transparanoia exemplifies the US corporate world whose "dollar volumes...grosses, unit sales"(144) rest, in part, on credit as a source of "diversification, expansion...growth potential"(10). Globke's presence within Bucky's apartment at the beginning of the novel (an apartment which Transparanoia owns), seems to rule out the possibility that Great Jones Street may effectively constitute "a space of a formless negation of the demands made upon him as an artist/commodity."³¹⁸

Boxall rightly stresses Bucky's role as both artist *and* commodity, a double role which complicates Wunderlick's artistic search. In effect, while on the one hand Bucky may be trying to resist commodification within the contemporary culture industry, on the other hand his decision to retreat seems to arise from a need to refashion himself *in accordance with* the new economic needs of the business. Globke continuously emphasises Bucky's commodified nature, claiming ownership over the singer: "[I] took him out of the rain when he was a scrawny kid and *made* him what he is today"(10-11, emphasis added). In effect, for Globke, Bucky's departure entails enormous economic loss: withdrawing, Bucky is "failing to deliver product...[he] *owed us* product...Enormous sums of money [are gurgling down the drain with his] disappearing

³¹⁶ Possibly such readings originate as a response to DeLillo's claiming that the artist must express opposition to the dominant structures: "to the state, the corporation and to the endless cycle of consumption and instantaneous waste." Don DeLillo in Moss, "Interview", 92.

³¹⁷ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 38.

³¹⁸ Idem.

act”(186, emphasis added). Globke strives to throw Bucky back into the process of exchange and circulation, since he knows that Bucky’s severance from circulation entails the commodity’s failure to valorize, and realise surplus. Consequently, Globke’s attempt to accelerate Bucky’s return must be entirely cast within a purely capitalist logic, and the manager’s preoccupation with failure to materialise gains mirrors the general US economic crisis resulting from an overaccumulation of commodities and capital. In contradistinction, I would argue that Bucky’s apparent attempt “to exist in a space uncontaminated by the market”³¹⁹ must instead be read as an attempt to renew himself as a commodity fetish and that Bucky conforms to a fetishised existence, deeply grounded in disavowal.

As a rockstar, Bucky embodies all the “characteristics of bad-boy superstardom.”³²⁰ The “Superslick Media Kit” which Transparanoia fabricates to recount “The Bucky Wunderlick Story”— a collection of interviews, excerpts and newspaper clips on Bucky— effectively elicits in those “who buy what [Transparanoia] sells”(145), an excessive fascination with a glossy or “superslick” surface: Bucky’s carefully constructed image stimulates purchase. Wolfgang Haug’s theory of the commodity’s “second skin” may help expound the power of such fascination.

Haug, following Marx, argues that in any commodity exchange mediated by money, two antagonist agents interact according to opposing viewpoints and aims. Those who seek to buy a commodity are urged by the aim to satisfy some want or need: for the buyer, endorsing a use-value standpoint, the commodity’s exchange-value paid in the form of money constitutes only a means to achieve a certain use-value contained *within the material body* of the commodity. For a seller, instead, a commodity’s “use-value is only the bait”³²¹, a transitory stage towards the transformation of the commodity exchange-value into money. In fact, “not an atom of matter”³²² enters the commodity when considered from the view point of those who wish to sell: exchange-value detaches from any commodity-body and becomes independent of any need.³²³ As a result, according to Haug, a capitalist, who produces commodities in order to profit, will certainly produce a use-value, but more importantly, he will produce the *appearance* of use value ³²⁴ by means of the commodity’s image or packaging. A commodity’s image offers consumers “the

³¹⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 39.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

³²¹ W. F. Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, (London: Polity Press, 1986), 15.

³²² Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, 55.

³²³ Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics*, 14.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

detached yet technically perfect appearance of a highly promising use-value.”³²⁵ Via its image, or appearance, the commodity lures consumers to purchase by way of a “promise” of use (rather than use itself); such promises or “lures” translate the commodity from the realm of use and need to “the enchanted realm of money”: as Haug puts it, commodities “become an instrument in accumulating money.”³²⁶ Advertising appeals to the consumer’s senses and desires, transferring them onto the surface of the commodity, which now yields the promise to satisfy the consumer’s “unfulfilled aspects of their existence [and give them] a sense of meaningfulness...a language to interpret their existence and their world.”³²⁷ Because it appeals to the consumer senses, the commodity is laden with sensuality:

[s]ensuality in this context becomes a vehicle of economic function, the subject and object of an economically functional fascination. Whoever controls the product’s appearance can control the fascinated public by appealing to them sensually.³²⁸

The commodity thus produces a pleasure akin to sexual enjoyment.³²⁹ Yet, as Haug argues, the commodity’s use-value, translated via “the viewpoint of exchange” into a “promise of use”, is only illusory. Effectively, the commodity’s second skin transposes the purchaser’s desire for use-value onto the act of purchase itself, out of which act sensuality arises. The commodity effectively becomes disembodied since its value attaches not to its concreteness but to what Haug defines its “second skin”, its appearance which is “more important than the commodity’s being itself.”³³⁰ Thus, the second skin becomes a substitute for use-value, originating the desire for purchase, even as use-value proper originally constituted the source of that desire. The commodity’s second skin functions as a fetish, where the fetish (in Freudian terms) operates as a substitute (via a symbolic connection) for a further, absent object, originally the locus of sexual desire.³³¹

Henry Krips’ reading of the fetish, via the Lacanian concept of the *objet a*, best glosses the fetishistic character of the commodity’s second skin. For Lacan the *objet a* may best be viewed as the chaperone who stands in triangulated relation between the suitor and the object of his love. The chaperone impedes the suitor’s pursuit of the object of desire, the beloved; yet, for

³²⁵ Ibid., 50.

³²⁶ Ibid., 16. I am indebted to Richard Godden’s use of Haug’s notion of the second skin in his “Maximizing the Noodles: Class, Memory, and Capital in Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon A Time In America*”, *Journal of American Studies*, 31 (1997), 3, particularly 379-381.

³²⁷ Ibid., 52.

³²⁸ Ibid., 17.

³²⁹ Ibid., 56.

³³⁰ Ibid., 17, 52.

³³¹ Krips, *Fetish*, 8.

reasons that are not always clear, the chaperone becomes the object-cause of the suitor's desire. The chaperone functions as an *objet a*: "although not herself desired, she is nonetheless the cause of his desire as well as the center of the evasive activities through which [the suitor] produces his pleasures."³³² For Krips, the fetish is a special sort of *objet a*, and is also an appropriate locus of disavowal. Thus the suitor falls prey to a fetishised disavowal: he knows that the chaperone is not the beloved, "but even so" she is.³³³ Consequently, the "second skin" is not the object of desire, the commodity's use-value, but like the chaperone, "it produces pleasure, becoming the cause of desire rather than its object."³³⁴

The media kit that *Transparanoia* distributes does reinforce Bucky's image built around "hysteria in limousines, knife fights in the audience, bizarre litigation, treachery, pandemonium and drugs"(1). Thus, the excess that true fame requires— excess which DeLillo describes on the novel's first page— can arguably refer to the excessive reality of the fetish, with Bucky a fetish for the public's desire, able (as Haug would have it) to embody the audience's "unrealised existence and to provide them with a meaningful language to interpret their own world." Such a man, entirely in keeping with his fetishised nature, "impart[s] an erotic terror to the dreams of the republic"(1). Bucky has become the object-cause of his audience's desire and, as he himself recognises, "people depended on [him] to validate their emotions"(14).

However, "desire is constantly on the move...[it] continuously changes one image for another [giving rise] to a continuous process of displacement and substitutions."³³⁵ In fact, before withdrawing, Bucky notices how his audience would "merely pantomim[e] the kind of massive response the group was used to getting"(2), as if he had exhausted his power to exert erotic fascination over his crowd. In effect, Bucky is aware that the fetish must constantly renew the production of desire, as he admits that: "I can't go out there and make new and louder and more controversial sounds. I've done all that. More of that would be just what it says- more of the same"(87). Significantly, Bucky knows that 'more of the same' would break the chain of desire production. I would argue that by concentrating on Bucky as fetish one might best explain his statement that "the famous man is compelled, eventually, to commit suicide", an observation which he further glosses: "my death to be authentic, must be self-willed— a successful piece of

³³² Ibid., 28, 29.

³³³ Ibid., 9, 30.

³³⁴ Ibid., 23.

³³⁵ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 66.

instruction only if occurred by my own hand”(1, 2). Bucky articulates one of the underlying principles of commodity aesthetics: regeneration of demand through planned obsolescence, or aesthetic ageing, an imperative which constantly replaces old desire with new in order to maximise profits.³³⁶ In addition, and aptly, Bucky is himself a fetishist. When asked how he can possibly survive in the music business, Bucky reveals “a sweater fetish”(115):

Sweaters absorb the major impact. I wear three or four sweaters everywhere I go...not on stage...On stage you've got to be naked at the moment of impact. That's the moment of ultimate truth and ultimate falsehood....Off stage, I wear sweaters (117).

Bucky's on-stage nakedness can hardly be taken as an expression of his genuine self. On stage Bucky must appear as the audience's object cause of desire. Nakedness thus functions as Bucky's second skin, the audience's fetish and source of disavowal. Indeed disavowal may explain the contradictory nature of nakedness as a moment of both “truth and falsehood”. Bucky *knows*, as do the audience, that his nakedness is a fetish, but *even so* he and the audience participate in the falsehood, yet so real to the audience's senses, of the commodity's second skin. While preserving his own fetishised self on stage becomes a necessity in order to perpetrate his own survival as a commodity within the industry, Bucky's need to safeguard the affective space of his own fetishised existence off stage, by means of the sweater fetish, requires investigation. Possibly, his off-stage fetishism, and attendant disavowal may be recast, via the work of Abraham and Torok, as a response to a refusal to mourn a loss of an ideal kind: Bucky's refusal to acknowledge that the music industry has appropriated his creative and artistic capacities along with the product of his work. The sweaters constitute a protective barrier which keeps his “secret” from breaching its burial site within his consciousness. Bucky's wearing of sweaters, which recall the fetish guise he wears on stage, helps him perpetrate his own disavowal. Since disavowal generates a divided, or split, consciousness, Bucky lives constantly on the split between his fetishised self (the artist as commodity within the capitalist music industry) onto which he leans to disavow and repress the loss of his uncommodified existence. Indeed, refusal to mourn his uncommodified self explains Bucky's statement that “my life is tinged with melancholy”(106).

However, his seclusion may hinder the precarious balance upon which Bucky's fetishised existence rests. His meditations in isolation reveal that Bucky effectively experiences the resurfacing of an uncommodified artistic consciousness, which attempts to emerge from his innermost recesses. For example, Bucky explains that isolation means “becoming fixed in place.

³³⁶ W.F.Haug, “Commodity Aesthetics Revisited”, *Radical Philosophy* 135, (January/February 2006), 21.

The artist sits still, finally because the materials he deals with begin to shape his life, instead of being shaped, and in stillness he seeks a form of self-defense, one that ends in putrefaction”(126). On the one hand, Bucky expresses his desire to regain command over his own art, art which seems to have become independent from him. With aesthetic production now a part of commodity production, art seems to have entered, as Marx would have it, “the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world [where] the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life.”³³⁷ Yet, although isolation extricates him from the “mystical character” of commodity fetishism, his choice of the term “putrefaction” renders that isolation problematic: “putrefaction” signals a semantics of disavowal, whereby Bucky-as-commodity knows that he must necessarily return to circulation, since the value contained in the commodity that does not circulate is destroyed (literally putrefies). Similarly, the image of a disconnected phone in Bucky’s apartment indicates that its owner’s repressed connections may at any time resurface. The mute phone reveals “another source of power”:

The fact that it will not speak (although made to speak, made for no other reason) enables us to see it in a new way, as an object rather than an instrument, an object possessing a kind of historical mystery. The phone has made a descent into total dumbness and so becomes beautiful (31).

The disconnected phone symbolically becomes an embodiment of the artist/commodity, even as it ceases to be an instrument geared to capital accumulation. In ceasing to function as an instrument of exchange, the phone’s beauty (a symbol of artistic beauty) emerges by rendering a commodified aesthetics somehow redundant. Severed from the circuits of exchange and circulation, the concrete materiality of the commodity, which recedes within exchange, re-emerges and thus beauty springs from within the primary body of the commodity, the original body containing the use-value as the real source of human need and wants. Bucky’s project to remake himself as “nothing” and return to his public as the audience “barren hero”(67,68) further reveals the working of his encrypted, uncommodified self resurfacing during his withdrawal. Returning as “nothing” would be impossible from the standpoint of the market, since nothingness expresses Bucky’s desire to reveal the fictionality of the fetishism which attaches to his existence as a commodity; such fictionality revealed would render him “barren”, that is unable, as a commodity, to yield any profit.

³³⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, 83.

While indulging in silence and immobility Bucky temporarily “exist[s] in a space uncontaminated by the market”³³⁸ ultimately, however, Bucky’s withdrawal ends up being functional to his renewal as a fetish. In fact, despite his withdrawal, Bucky eventually decides to return on the scene on Globke’s conditions, thus yielding to the requirements of the industry that sees him as profitable commodity and fetish. Yet, in order to retain his affective power as a fetish, Bucky must discover which new form would appeal more efficaciously to his audience. As Globke remarks, “this is a pivotal time in the music business and in the future of the country as a whole” (145). Consequently in his search for a new “guise for a profit”³³⁹ Bucky will have to grasp the import of the epochal changes looming over the country. Great Jones Street then becomes functional to his renewal as a fetish since there he may potentially realise changes emanating from the street. Great Jones Street, in fact, “hovers on the edge of self-revelation [and echoes with] the suggestion of new forms about to evolve” (18). Within such context, the deformed Micklewhite kid living in Great Jones Street epitomises the spirit of change that Bucky feels at work in the air. The kid’s face and body possess “the consistency of pounded mud [his entire physical being exemplifying] the progress of some impossible mutation” (161). For Bucky, the sight of the kid, rather than eliciting horror, becomes a source of “embryonic beauty” and Bucky sees the boy as almost on the point of transcending his body, reading the boy’s existence as a “hint of structural transposition” (161) away from the material constraints of a deformed body. If the Micklewhite kid incarnates the beginning of a process of transformation, Bucky feels to be the end point of that progression (161). Yet, whatever transformation the kid and Bucky may incarnate, the actual process of transformation seems to escape materialization, it appears consigned to wordlessness and to resist referential objectification within language.

I would affirm that Bucky’s return will be orchestrated following a logic which mirrors, and anticipates, that of finance capital and that, via Bucky’s metamorphosis, DeLillo represents the gradual shift towards the alleged vaporization of reality which will attend upon cultural immersion in speculative capital and its experiential effects .

Possibly, Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain*, even as it addresses the issue of sentience and the ways in which it finds objectification in the external world, may help foreground DeLillo’s representation of such shift. Scarry argues that sentience becomes sharable the

³³⁸ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 40.

³³⁹ Godden, “Maximizing the Noodles”, 380.

moment it is given a referential content in the outside world through language or a material artefact. Thus, the act of verbalizing or shaping an imagined object projects that object outside “a self-contained loop within the body” so that “sentience becomes social, thus acquiring its distinct human form.”³⁴⁰ Culture, understood from such perspective, constitutes a collective act of imagination: interior objects *made up* by every individual’s act of “imagining” are *made real* and social as artistic, literary and material artefacts. The making of the world, as Scarry defines it, has as its underlying principle a continuous process of imagining and objectification.

In contradistinction, pain is a bodily or psychic event whose occurrence fails to find externalization, in that physical pain not only “resists language, but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language”: pain is the obverse of imagination since “it has no referential content” beyond our body.³⁴¹ An inability to express pain often causes those who are not in pain to doubt its existence, to doubt the realness of pain itself. Therefore, any “state of consciousness other than pain will, if deprived of its object, begin to approach the neighbourhood of pain”³⁴² requiring, in the attempt to demonstrate its realness, an act of “analogical verification [or] substantiation.”³⁴³

Scarry’s theory proves useful in that it offers an interpretative route to an understanding of the writer Eddie Fenig, Bucky’s neighbour. Eddie sees in art, and specifically writing, a form through which he can master commerce. Fenig appears more concerned with spotting the markets’s fluctuations (29), understanding the market’s desires and needs. Fenig sees the market as an all-encompassing living entity which “changes, palpitates, grows, excretes...ingest[s] human arms and legs”(27, 48). Fenig believes that “everything is marketable. If no present market exists for certain material, then a new market automatically develops around the material itself”(49). His frustration at being unproductive does not derive from his inability to write. He admits having written millions of words, temporarily *hoarded*, accumulated in an enormous trunk which dominates his whole room. Fenig measures his productiveness in terms of sales: “I can’t sell a thing lately. Rejection everywhere. It must be an inner failing”(140). Eddie’s preoccupation with inventing a literary genre that would pry open markets and yield money partakes in *Great Jones Street’s* general and metaphorical depiction of a country trying to transcend an economic crisis deriving primarily from an accumulation of

³⁴⁰ Scarry, *Pain*, 170.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14.

unsold commodities and uninvested capital. Fenig clearly notices that the market is changing, but appears unable to give his own mental perceptions a referential object, “a permanent base to express [him]self from”(225). In actual fact, the real source of Fenig’s inspiration and future economic and literary prosperity has already started to take shape within Fenig’s consciousness. The writer has in fact “a terminal fantasy...a recurring obsessive thing”(221), whose significance Fenig is at pains to grasp. Within his fantasy, Fenig murders those who intrude into his building; he rips open the bodies of such intruders with a machete and a shotgun, and by having two German shepherds leaping at the intruders’ throat. The “whole thing is like choreographed movie violence”³⁴⁴ which releases “lovely blood...the ripe red blood flowing everywhere, lovely”(222). Fenig imagines “dragging the dead and wounded down the stairs...along the street. Pouring gasoline. Lightning the bodies. Bonfires of the dead and dying”(223). Such pyres are intended to compound the pleasure arising from watching the blood flow.

Blood has a paramount importance within Fenig’s fantasy because it functions as powerful symbol for money. N.Kiyotaki and John Moore aptly define the flow of money through the economy as analogous to the flow of blood. Money, they affirm, is the blood that dispatches the resources through the body of an economy and, like blood, it circulates feeding the economic system.³⁴⁵ Fenig’s blood-lust effectively mirrors US capitalism’s liquid thirst, while his destruction of corpses by means of fire prefigures the vaporisation and dematerialisation at the heart of finance capital’s structural mechanism.

The fictional Fenig, who inflicts pain and watches the blood flow from the hacked imaginary bodies, may undertake what Scarry defines an act of analogical verification. Just as the open body of the sacrificial animal lends its truth to the prophecy of the founding of the city, or the torturer substantiates the fiction of his power via the infliction of pain,³⁴⁶ so the fictional Fenig verifies “the idea of domination [and] privacy”(162, 164), an idea which he feels taking form within his consciousness. The real Fenig undergoes a similar process, but this time the analogical verification occurs via his own body when, one day, Bucky finds his neighbour Eddie, bruised, battered and bleeding copiously after an assault (163). Fenig wants to bleed and “experience discomfort”(164) because he senses that the flowing of his blood may be revelatory in so far as it discloses the profit potential of a whole new literary genre: “Fi-nance. Financial

³⁴⁴ DeLillo here anticipates the movie section in *Players*.

³⁴⁵ Kiyotaki and Moore, “Evil is the Root of all Money”, 3-6.

³⁴⁶ Scarry, *Pain*, 125, 27.

writing. Books and articles for millionaires and potential millionaires. The floodgates are opened and words are pouring out. Financial literature. Handled right it's a damn goldmine, relatively speaking"(164). Bleeding and experiencing discomfort (165), Fenig's body lends itself to the verifying act that substantiates "the disembodied idea" of finance revealing it to represent the newfound source of his (and metaphorically of the whole country) economic prosperity.

Fenig has an edge over Bucky, whose problematic character prevents him from grasping the metaphorical valence of blood, even as he experiences its flow. At the opening of Chapter 2, Bucky recalls how, on his very arrival in Great Jones Street, he had cut himself while shaving: "It was strange watching the long fold of blood appear at my throat, collecting along the length of the gash, then starting to flow in an uneven pattern. Not a bad color"(5). One may justifiably object to reading the effects of a razor nick as a metaphorical anticipation of US capitalism's structural transformation. Yet, the fact that Bucky may wish to recall such an occurrence, and the vividness of the description, when read alongside Fenig's subsequent experience, signals that Bucky perceives the importance of blood, without fully comprehending its meaning. The antithetical movement of blood, evoked by the verbs "fold" and "flow", extends the money-blood metaphor: the fold of the collecting blood collecting instantiates those reserves of liquidity that may be released to restart flows of money at times of crises.

As he waits for the appropriate time to make his return onto the scenes, Bucky gradually glimpses that his new self must fulfil the imperative to "to minimize. (A corporation word but perfect for our times)"(67). He posits that "[m]aybe what I want is less, to become the least of what I was"(87). In effect, Bucky appears to be heading towards bodilessness, even as it compounds his already disembodied nature as a commodity fetish. Bodilessness also parallels the general drive towards the disembodied forms of finance capital, unfettered from the constraints of materialisation within an albeit temporary commodity form. In fact, Bucky senses immobility as having caused him to become "immense and heavy"(183): his stasis has made him "tired of his body"(231). Bucky's drive toward disembodiment signals his endeavour to escape the limitations of the commodity, which, again, is entirely consistent with capitalism's attempt to restart the accumulation via credit. As he prepares to return on the scenes, he affirms: "I want to become a dream[.] I want to be a dream, [the audience's] dream. I want to flow right through them."(231). Of course, Bucky has so far been the incarnation of people's dreams (an idealised

version of their lives). While his solution may in fact sound as “more of the same”, I would argue that the innovation lies precisely within Bucky’s desire to escape the constraints of his body and its limitations, glimpsing that the future of the market rests on an immaterial fetish.

While Bucky starts to conform to a logic akin to that of finance capital, Transparanoia has already resorted to the money-market in its attempt to harness economic loss emerging from Bucky’s withdrawal. In fact, as Bucky asks Hanes, the company factotum, to provide him with cash, he discovers that he can’t access his money because it is “tied up”, being “put to work in order to make more money” (44,145). Bucky retorts that he doesn’t want his money to work:

I want my money to sit quietly. That’s my idea of the value of money. While I work and sweat, I want to think of my money resting in a cool steel-paneled room. It’s stacked in green stacks, very placid and cool, resting up. I realise this isn’t everybody’s approach to money...I envision luminous green stacks. A stainless steel room. Hundreds of green stacks. I don’t like the idea of my money working. I’m the one who works (44-45).

Bucky’s statement requires careful scrutiny. The words “my money” repeated three times, highlight that Bucky considers himself to be the rightful owner of the money originating from his own work as an artist. In fact, Bucky does not control the flux of such monies. Transparanoia appropriates it because the company considers such money as the product of its capital investment in Bucky as a commodity, that is as capital arising out of the realization process M-C-M¹. In discovering that money is working in his stead, Bucky effectively recognises what John Maynard Keynes defines the deeply antisocial character of fetish capital.³⁴⁷ When money becomes the “saleable thing”, as Marx would have it, profit ceases “to be the product of a social *relation* [however alienated within the commodity form, and becomes] the product of a mere *thing*.”³⁴⁸ Bucky therefore perceives, of himself, that finance capital’s investment in him has effectively resulted in “a structured forgetting”³⁴⁹ of the productive economy (or, in his case, of making music). But the passage also introduces the problem of value, and of money as an appropriate measure of value. Bucky’s vision of money is that of a hoard, an accumulation of money severed from circulation. As a hoard, money ceases to be “the mere means of the circulation of commodities” and petrifies into “the commodity’s gold-chrysalis”, “the money-form.”³⁵⁰ Although it no longer performs the function “of a perpetuum mobile of circulation”, Marx affirms that hoarded money “continu[es] to be the universal equivalent form of all other

³⁴⁷ Quoted in Henwood, *Wall Street*, 206.

³⁴⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 391.

³⁴⁹ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 8.

³⁵⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 147.

commodities, and the immediate social incarnation of human labour.”³⁵¹ Bucky’s hoard has a double meaning: Bucky’s desire to see the “luminous green stacks” resting while he toils signals an attempt to counteract the virtualisation of labour that the selling and buying of interest-bearing capital in the form of credit operates. His desire for hoarded money does not mirror the miser’s insatiable desire for gold, but rather a structural necessity: the hoard may represent the only expression of the value of his artistic labour available to Bucky. Viewed within the broader historical cadre of the early 1970s, Bucky’s hoard may effectively symbolise the endeavour to preserve the value of the dollar whose devaluation, coupled with the inflation affecting the country, had significantly eroded the buying power of the currency. In addition, Bucky’s insistence on money’s brightness and colour may also represent an attempt to safeguard money’s value through its paper materiality, with paper as a substitute for gold as real money in the wake of the demise of the gold-dollar convertibility in 1971. In a world of dematerialised money, (dematerialisation compounded by credit formation and the production of fictitious values) the idea of a hoard functioning as a treasure becomes a necessary requirement. Hoarding “serves ceaselessly to preserve and reconstitute the money form as such, whatever the deformations, transformations, and disappearances it undergoes as a result of money functioning as both a measure of value and as a means of circulation.”³⁵² Bucky’s luminous stacks complement Eddie Fenig’s manuscripts hoarded in a trunk (and anticipate Lyle’s stacked pennies in *Players*) instantiating the idea of structural preciousness the hoard represents.³⁵³ Yet, in contradistinction to Bucky’s imaginary ‘hoard’, such monies for Transparanoia function, “as [a] device of remonetarization, [and a] symptomatic figuration of capital infusion”³⁵⁴ within the US corporate world.

Eventually, Bucky decides to return to the public with his Mountain Tapes, a collection of “strange...ramblings”, “genuinely infantile” babbling, “repetitions, mistakes and slurred words”(148). Bucky receives the tapes, which Opel Hampson has stolen from Bucky’s house in the mountains, as a birthday present: the tapes, Opel senses, will provide the means of Bucky’s *artistic rebirth*. He recalls registering the tapes in his refuge in the mountains “at a certain time under the weight of a certain emotion. Done on the spot and with many imperfections”(188). I

³⁵¹ Ibid., 146, 149.

³⁵² DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 39, 38.

³⁵³ Ibid., 40, 67.

³⁵⁴ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 20.

believe that the Tapes are the product of Bucky's emotional response to his experiencing the effects of losing artistic freedom and integrity and that, therefore, they record the encryption of Bucky's traumatic loss. Indeed, Bucky admits his inability to recognise the voice that he hears on tape as his own (147). Plausibly, the voice he hears on tape belongs to his lost self lodging, entombed, within Bucky's inner consciousness since, as a result of an intrapsychic splitting, two distinct people coexist, albeit unaware of each other.³⁵⁵ Given that Bucky's self-willed exile from the world causes him to suffer the resurfacing of his encrypted self, I would affirm that his sojourn in the mountains, equally marked by isolation from the rest of the world and silence (121), has allowed Bucky's lost self to re-emerge and to recount the illness of mourning afflicting the other Bucky, an illness which the latter chooses to disavow.

Excerpts from the Mountain Tapes (202-207) provide useful material to substantiate my claim. In excerpt 16, the transcription of Bucky's voice hints at a "long gone something/in a blinding light/ dead all dead"(202). In the next excerpt, Bucky hints at a transformation befalling him which entails his "becoming god/begin[nig] to glow"(204). Read together these verses may be interpreted as an attempt to speak Bucky's traumatic loss: such loss (that of an uncommodified self) occurs the moment Bucky embraces rock'n'roll stardom. Stardom turns him into a god-like figure, whom his audience venerate and adore, a figure whose "glow" derives from the glossy, "superslick" image Transparanoia confections around him

While the lyrics initially suggest a search for "maiden words to learn" in order to "story tell"(203), the verses eventually "read as exhausted gibberish, or nonsense pop, [banal] infantile repetition...and short circuited repetitive and tautological structures."³⁵⁶ The last excerpt closes with Bucky affirming "I close my mouth"(207). The tapes could therefore describe a process of linguistic encryment which attends the inability to cope with bereavement. In the previous chapter, I have discussed extensively Abraham and Torok's notion of "demetaphorization" as the linguistic equivalent of incorporation (p 59-60). The Mountain Tapes record a similar process of "hiding [a loss] in language" by destroying language's expressive and representational powers.³⁵⁷ By means of babbling such as "Baba/baba/baba" or "Gadung, gadung, gadung", Bucky makes himself unintelligible. Drawing from Abraham and Torok, I would affirm that Bucky, unable to speak certain words that might reveal his traumatic "secret", takes such words into his mouth

³⁵⁵ N.Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 100.

³⁵⁶ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 39-40.

³⁵⁷ Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*,105.

and swallows them, sealing them within himself by closing his mouth. By impeding his mouth to pronounce such unspeakable words, Bucky accomplishes an act which stands in opposition to introjection, understood as an act “filling the empty mouth”, i.e. channelling the experience of loss through language in order to make it sharable and to overcome mourning.³⁵⁸

Bucky’s inability to understand the nature of his work (188) may disguise a refusal to understand the process of incorporation that the Tapes describe since, as a melancholic, he cannot recognise that a loss has occurred. He can only resort to a tautology: “the effect of the tapes is that they’re tapes.” (188), with tautology exemplifying a language which “evade[s] the responsibility of content” (*P*, 207).

Yet, the Tapes, in representing a unique moment through which the effects of a process of incorporation befalling Bucky can be glimpsed, constitute an adequate instrument for Bucky’s rebirth, since via Bucky’s incorporation, the Tapes may function as an appropriate soundtrack for the structural incorporation proper of a financial structure of feeling. The tapes’ authenticity, their “tapeness” emerges from their bearing witness to a moment of “precognitive prolepsis”, when Bucky had been able to represent, if only unwittingly, “the effects of [the capitalist] system change.”³⁵⁹

While the Tapes cannot represent the artist’s “uncommodifiable integrity”³⁶⁰, they will indeed constitute a valuable source for profit. Even as they are not released, the simple promise of the Tapes’ existence can regenerate market demand. Globke foresees the tapes generating a fever in the market, and thus gains for Transparanoia, to the extent that the tapes’ release appears almost redundant.

Globke’s desire to appropriate the tapes (which he will eventually steal from Bucky’s apartment) rests entirely on a purely economic motive. In actual fact, within Globke’s business strategy, the Tapes constitute only one stage, almost an incidental occurrence, within a more complex business restructuring. Within his strategy, Bucky’s fetishised image seems to be the greatest source of revenues. Globke orchestrates the former’s return insisting on the opportunity to profit from Bucky’s appearances:

Guest appearances...You show up with one group in one place, a different group two nights later a thousand miles away. This way we build up tremendous interest...a

³⁵⁸ See Abraham and Torok, 127-128. Like a child who is unable to fill the emptiness of his mouth left by the absence of his mother breast, so Bucky’s regression to infantile babbling further signifies his incapacity to undergo introjection. In addition verses like “eat the nose/eat the toes” point to an act of incorporation understood as swallowing or ingesting the lost object, an ingestion which complements linguistic incorporation.

³⁵⁹ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 9.

³⁶⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 39.

whole series of appearances, different places, different times, weeks on end...tremendous speculation on your movements and whereabouts....It doesn't make the slightest bit of difference [what material you perform]. You can jam, you can whistle...you can just stay there...the idea is to get you out there, get the whole mystique going again (197).

In this passage, Globke's language clearly reflects the language of finance capital. In Globke's plan, Bucky, like speculative capital, moves from town to town, as if his simple circulation would suffice to restart Transparanoia's profits. Bucky's mysterious reappearance would generate *interest* and *speculation*, although Bucky wouldn't perform anything new. Actually, even if the tour appears as a preparation to the release of the Mountain Tapes, the money potential of Bucky's mere and continuous movement obviates Bucky's need to create anything new. In granting Globke permission to reproduce the tapes, in accepting to return at Globke's conditions, Bucky effectively yields once again to the comforts of his fetishised existence. Intriguingly, Globke uses the word "mystique" to refer to Bucky's appeal to the audience, a word which not only evokes Marx's mystical world of commodity fetishism, but also the mystifying powers of fetish capital.

A whole host of characters gravitate around Bucky, particularly when he becomes the unwilling repository of a packet containing a new experimental drug, tagged "the product", which a group, called Happy Valley Farm Commune, has stolen from a secret governmental facility. Significantly, each character interacting with Bucky shares with the protagonist the need to reorganize his or her own existence, and more specifically, to discover more profitable activities. In depicting the frantic search of these characters for the drug, DeLillo effectively introduces within the novel an additional and ramifying figure for the liquidity of finance capital. Via the liquid medium of the drug, each character seeks to reconstitute his personal economic fortunes, fortunes that the spiralling US economy has significantly impaired. Among the characters in question are Azarian, Bucky's former band-mate; Watney, a former British rockstar turned drug dealer; the Happy Valley Farm Commune; Hanes, Transparanoia's employee, who first works as intermediary for the Commune and then tries to sell the drug on his own. In addition, Dr Pepper, legendary scientist of the underground, wishes to appropriate the product for personal gain, while Opel Hampson, Bucky's girlfriend, (in order to resolve personal liquidity problems) becomes involved as bargaining agent for the Commune. In reading the drug, the work of David Harvey on the "spatial fix" provides a useful gloss: for

Harvey, capital faced with “the crisis-prone inner contradictions of capital accumulation”³⁶¹ resorts to a ‘fix’. “Spatial fix” defines the process whereby capitalism, in its endless thirst for profit, “seeks to create a geographical landscape to facilitate its activities at one point in time, only to have to destroy it and build a wholly different landscape at a later point in time.”³⁶² Harvey argues that the liquidity of finance capital and credit can aptly offer stagnating economic systems “a fix” by mobilising otherwise unavailable resources on a global scale.³⁶³ Finance capital therefore provides a fix, where fix is understood as that which “return[s] things to its normal functioning again.”³⁶⁴ However, the word “fix” possesses a further metaphorical meaning, that “of a burning desire to relieve a chronic or pervasive problem” as in the case of “a drug addict that needs a fix.” Indeed, finance capital, like a drug, will effectively “fix”, that is “relieve a chronic or pervasive problem” within capitalist accumulation; yet its effects “as in the case of the drug addict, [are] temporary rather than permanent, since the craving soon returns.”³⁶⁵ Via Harvey’s investigation and use of the multiple meanings of the word “fix” to describe the working of finance capital, the drug in *Great Jones Street* emerges as an appropriate representation of finance capital. Interestingly, as DeLillo will disclose at the end of the novel, the drug’s effects slowly disappear with time.

The peculiar nature of the drug’s effects possibly renders it the most an appropriate symbol for liquid capital. “The product” is “a mind drug...affecting the language sector of the brain, causing loss of speech”(255). By harnessing the neural faculty that produces words, both at a mental and verbal level, the drug parallels the experiential effects of pain that Scarry enumerates. Leaving the subject who’s been injected with the narcotic with the ability only to produce sounds, the drug effectively causes a regression to a pre-linguistic stage which averts any attempt to endow language with a referential content. The drug appears “[v]aguely alarming, and yet unreal, laden with consequence, yet evaporating before the mind, because not available to sensory confirmation,”³⁶⁶ and, in so doing, it recalls the mystifying qualities of fetish capital. Furthermore, privatisation of the euphoric well-being follows Keynes in accentuating

³⁶¹ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 87.

³⁶² Ibid, 101.

³⁶³ David Harvey, “Globalization and the Spatial Fix”, *Geographische Revue* 2/2001, 24.

³⁶⁴ Idem.

³⁶⁵ Idem.

³⁶⁶ Scarry, *Pain*, 4.

the antisocial aspect of the finance for which it stands: as Keynes puts it: “there’s no such thing as liquidity of investment for the community as a whole.”³⁶⁷

My account of the drug’s figurative resonance already intimates its similarity to the tapes; both drug and tapes are known as “the product” and are stored in the same “brown wrapping”. In disintegrating language’s signifying, expressive and representational powers, the drug produces linguistic encryption not unlike that befalling those who suffer from melancholic incorporation. The drug (read as a gloss on the tapes) intensifies a sense of “derealisation and abstraction”³⁶⁸ (perceived by Bucky as a seductive “void”[67]) which originates in the dematerialising effects of finance capital.

In addition, DeLillo may wish to characterize the emergence of new class configurations via the numerous figures who wish either to possess the drug or who work as intermediaries, bidding for the drug. On the one hand, Pepper and Happy Valley, who attempt to own the drug, may prefigure the rising power of a new class of brash entrepreneurs owing their fortune to risky financial operations.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, Azarian, Hanes, Watney and Opel do not seek to own the drug, but hope to make consistent gains on behalf of their respective organizations. In effect, they may anticipate a new class of stock, insurance and real estate brokers—a class whose rewards amounted to 25-30% of the gross investment they mediated and whose salaries in 1970 topped the average worker’s salary by 58%.³⁷⁰ In their working for a third party, these characters effectively anticipate Wall Street broker Lyle Wynant in *Players*.

Hanes’s drive toward bodilessness—which reprises Bucky’s similar drive—further instantiates the finance-induced phenomenology that will characterise the protagonists of his subsequent novels. Such a drive manifests when Hanes starts to mediate for the drug. In fact, his work as an intermediary has brought him to cross “so many time zones [that] *I’m almost bodiless*”(210), and admits that “[t]here’s a tremendous lure to become bodiless. I see but I fear it. It’s like a junkie’s death. A junkie’s death is beautiful because it’s so effortless”(211). If the lure toward bodilessness mirrors a similar drive within finance capital, the imagery of the junkie reflects a preoccupation with the effects that the injected drug has on the body. Hanes’ image of the liquid drug which kills the body may symbolise finance capital’s ability to eliminate C from M-C-M’.

³⁶⁷ Keynes quoted. in Henwood, *Wall Street*, 206.

³⁶⁸ Heffernan, *Capital, Class, and Technology*, 169.

³⁶⁹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 31.

³⁷⁰ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 78.

In effect, in *Great Jones Street* bodies and their disembodying occupy a central space within the thematics of novel, particularly in so far as DeLillo attends scrupulously to bodily circulation and the ways in which circulating bodies are altered. Opel, a trained traveller to “timeless lands”, affirms that travelling from place to place narrows people (55) and makes them “become a thing”: “Look at me. What have I become in the scheme of human evolution? Luggage. I’m luggage. By choice, inclination and occupation. What am I if not luggage? I open myself up, insert some very costly items and then close up again and get transported to a timeless land”(91). Possibly, Opel’s parable reflects the “*formal* subordination of human activity to capital, exercised through the market...complemented by that *real* subordination which requires the conversion of labour into the commodity labour power.”³⁷¹ Opel in fact points out that reified bodies in circulation “lose their souls”(54). DeLillo may use Opel’s statement to reflect on the particular transformations within the body of labour brought about by the restructuring of capitalist activities during the 1970s. Like so much luggage, embodied labour was forced to move carrying its commodity (labour power) to sites where it might more profitably be put to use. Opel accounts luggage transportation as “losing one’s soul”, which, by analogy, might recall processes of labour de-skilling and re-skilling as a consequence of flexibility and labour casualization. Such processes entail capital’s destruction of prior social and economic values, of which labour skills are one instance. Arguably, bodilessness may represent DeLillo’s attempt to dramatise, to borrow and summarise Shapiro’s argument, the shift within capitalist activities from a tangible commodity economy with commodified labour power towards the economy of credit and finance which virtualises labour power via intangible credit transfers.³⁷² It might be worth noting that all those characters who mediate for the product on behalf of a third party end up dying or disappearing. Opel dies, her body eaten up from the inside by several concomitant diseases; Azarian is killed, his throat slashed, Watney and Hanes disappear. In Opel’s case, her death occurs the moment she stops travelling from place to place and returns to the Great Jones Street flat. Given her having become a “thing”, her death may symbolically configure the destruction of commodities as they lie idle. In the other cases, the death or disappearance of all the intermediaries may prefigure the vaporisation of C within the equation M-C-M’.

³⁷¹ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 373.

³⁷² Shapiro, “Dracula”, 21.

In addition to anticipating the emergence of the new financial class, the different groups who attempt to get hold of the drug cast themselves as antagonists to the Government. In inventing a drug that the Government might deploy to “brainwash gooks and radicals”(58), DeLillo reflects on the government’s military and economic legitimacy crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The various parties’ endeavour to appropriate a drug originally created to silence radicals and dissenters clearly marks them as representing private interests who try to benefit from heavy state investment. Dr Pepper is one notable example. Pepper— structurally akin to *Players’* A.J. Kinnear – manifests an ability to move over space and time and to appear simultaneously within different identities, in different areas: his divergent ubiquity may reflect offshore capital’s capacity to appear, disappear and resurface, to exist in an unregulated void. Pepper, is in fact, an expert in disguises. Furthermore, his being a figure from the underground seems to fit the “obscure, dark” character of the offshore market, particularly in its early days. His desire to possess the drug to start a new drug market may symbolise the idea of offshore as antagonistic to onshore markets operating within the regulatory constraints of the State.³⁷³

Happy Valley Farm is perhaps the most ambiguous pursuer of the drug. A rural group that has moved to the city, the Commune wants “to return the idea of privacy to the American life”(36,16). In choosing Bucky as the temporary repository of the drug, the Commune in effect epitomises Bucky’s followers who see the rockstar as an incarnation of their aspirations and ideals. For the Commune, Bucky, in withdrawing, has become the emblem of their search for privacy, privacy which they seek to restore in order to counteract the notion of “the mass man”. They believe Bucky “exemplif[ies] some old idea of men alone with the land”:

You stepped out of your legend to pursue personal freedom. There is no freedom...without privacy. The return of the private man...is the only way to destroy the notion of mass man, mass man ruined our freedom for us. Turning inward will get them back (60).

The Commune affirms that “[p]rivacy is the essential freedom this nation, country or republic offered in the beginning”(60), a freedom, they argue, that must be “sustain[ed] with aggressive self-defence”(60). Paradoxically however, I would argue that the commune’s ideological standpoint expresses an archaic notion of capitalist accumulation, a notion that Michel Aglietta

³⁷³ See Palan, *Offshore World*.

defines “the frontier principle [which identifies] a specific mode of capitalist penetration.”³⁷⁴ In effect, the commune’s idea of “men alone with the land” resonates with images from the period when American industrial capitalism developed via “the formation of a growing agricultural surplus product” thanks to capitalist agriculture’s subsumption of “an immense reserve of agricultural land.”³⁷⁵ The frontier’s expansion, Aglietta argues, gave rise to new social relations, and constituted a process in which *individual* energies and activities contributed to the economic progress of the nation as a whole, thereby helping sanctify the principle of “the free enterprise” as the ideological foundation of the capitalist development of the US.³⁷⁶ In addition, the Commune, in seeking to restore “privacy” and to facilitate the return of “the private man”, seems presciently to anticipate the fundamental principles of Neoliberalism, insofar as the movement reflects the sum of “economic practices [centered around] individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills [and] characterised by private property rights, free market and free trade.”³⁷⁷ Bohack, one of the Commune’s leader, tells Bucky that New York should endow the group with a new identity, since the West can no longer provide them with the necessary privacy (195). As the nation’s financial activities increasingly center on NY, the city can arguably satisfy Happy Valley’s hunger for the necessary liquidity to maintain privacy. Furthermore, Bohack argues that privacy can be restored only by turning inward, and through the use of an “intense programmatic kind of violence that comes from “having to defend or some kind of historical impetus”(192). One may possibly discover some similarities between the Commune’s programmatic intents and the ways in which US capitalism managed to give way to a new round of accumulation. Again, the need to minimize reflects, in anticipating it, US capitalists’ decision to reduce to a minimum investment in commodity production, given the opportunity to secure profits from financial activities. Such opportunity arose given interest-bearing capital’s ability to “expand its own value independently of reproduction”³⁷⁸. Since expansion via financial means occurs because reproduction becomes an inherent property of such specific form of capital, the inward movement to which Bohack alludes, may symbolically recall the inward movement of interest-bearing capital which, “pregnant” with itself, becomes mysteriously “the source of its

³⁷⁴ Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 73.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁷⁷ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 2.

³⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 392.

own increase.”³⁷⁹ The commune’s idea of a “programmatic kind of violence” appears entirely in keeping with the violence underlying all capital movements: in particular, as the waves of privatizations and the IMF’s SAP programs from the 1970s on demonstrate, the recovery of US economic hegemony on a global scale has entailed a violent redistribution of assets and an equally violent reconfiguration of “pre-existing cultural and social achievements.”³⁸⁰ Consequently, rather than liberating the nation from the fetters of commodity capitalism, the Commune seems to endorse a project which rather sustains the renewal of US capital accumulation process via ‘free-market fundamentalism’ and neoliberal orthodoxy”.³⁸¹

The Commune’s inability to understand the contradiction at the heart of their project also prevents their recognising the real potential of the drug. Yet, in injecting Bucky with the drug, they enable him to experience its effects. While consigning Bucky to an “unworded void”³⁸², the drug allows him to undertake a journey into the heart of the city, journey which enables Bucky to foresee the emergence of new spatial, social and economic configurations under the aegis of finance capital.

Bucky’s flaneurish trip across the oldest part of New York provides an account of the historical geography of the city’s commodity capitalism, revealing how human activities under capitalism possess a specific spatial articulation.³⁸³ Great Jones Street teems with “signs of commerce”(18): amidst industrial loft buildings (6), “shipping and receiving”, “export packaging”, “custom tanning”, trucks loading and offloading goods constitute the essence of Great Jones and adjacent streets (18). Great Jones Street clearly revolves around networks of production, exchange and distribution; the image of people gathered around “a cart banked with glowing [apples]” with a toothless vendor yelling “YOU’RE BUYING I’M SELLING”(264) exemplifies how a commodity economy shapes the neighbourhood’s social relations. Great Jones Street “was an old street. Its materials were in fact [its] essence....Paper, yarn, leather, tool, buckles, wire-frame-and novelty”(18). The hard materiality of these elements, Bucky argues, “explai[n] the ugliness” of the street: ugliness and oldness may be recouched as obsolescence, obsolescence which results from the activities that animate Great Jones Street as

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 393.

³⁸⁰ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 146-47.

³⁸¹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 29

³⁸² Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 48.

³⁸³ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 374.

pertaining to a mode of production on the verge of “decline” (18). The “city’s older precincts”(259) are emblems of an industrial Manhattan, where “[p]eople possessed of the utmost diversity of historical experience, liv[e] in an incredible variety of physical circumstances.”³⁸⁴ In fact, the neighbourhood is a cauldron of races, African-Americans, Latinos, Chinese (260), “the oldest immigrants living in tower blocks...these streets now ruled by darker races of the plains”(259). The city hosts a stratified immigrant labouring population who “have been welded...into a complex unity”³⁸⁵ as a result of capital’s requirements over the decades. The entire narrative of Bucky’s ‘trip’ evolves around Great Jones Street, Bond Street and Essex Street, names evoking a geography of the archaic. Such names offer a residual “history of immigration, of movement and growth, written spectrally in the streets.”³⁸⁶ Names testify to an endless flow of historical-economic changes that have modified the city. New York, Bucky recalls, “seemed older than the cities of Europe”(3). Arguably, the archaic atmosphere pervading this area of the city conjures the spectre of radical transformation looming over both Great Jones Street and the city as a whole. Recall how Bucky had chosen Great Jones Street because the area “hover[ed] on the edge of self-revelation”, its “decline possessing a kind of redemptive tenor, the suggestion of new forms about to evolve”(18). The city appears as “a material text...organised around an immanent possibility [evoking forms of renewal] which have yet to be imagined.”³⁸⁷ However, the vision of men “property-hunting” (261) suggests that the future of the city has been already appropriated, and the built-in, physical space of the city will be transformed into “property titles...freely traded as a pure financial asset”³⁸⁸ in accordance with the new capitalist requirements.

Walking southward, Bucky observes the city harbour, a “trading interface between nations and between old and new worlds”³⁸⁹ which discloses the “city’s power, its lust for money and filth”(262). Here Bucky distinguishes “the lone mellow promise of an island, tender retreat from strait lines, an answering sea-mound. This was the mist’s illusion and the harbour’s pound of flesh”(262). The lower part of Manhattan, seen as a “promise”, as an “answering sea-mound”, reveals itself as the geographical place where a whole series of new financial conglomerates will be located, whose activities will provide an answer to the structural requirements of US capital.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 373.

³⁸⁵ Idem.

³⁸⁶ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 48.

³⁸⁷ Idem.

³⁸⁸ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 396.

³⁸⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 48.

The word “promise” evokes the promissory quality of financial operations. In this sense, the potential profits that the harbour’s activities may yield represent “the pound of flesh”, the collateral which backs the promise of financial gains. Furthermore, the image of “the mist’s illusion” already hints at the illusory quality of fictitious capital and to the highest degree of fetishism it embodies.

The suggestion that financial forces have already appropriated the future of the city, and that prior spatial and social values there embedded are bound to be swept away within a new financial economy, gain consistency the moment Bucky rides past “an urban redevelopment project”: “machine-tooth shovels clawed past half finished buildings stuck in mud, tiny balconies stapled on. All spawned by realtor-kings”(263). The bulldozers, as they violently devour old constructions, eradicate the affective values such buildings embodied. Anticipating *Players*, DeLillo focuses on real-estate speculation, financed by New York bankers and financial institutions, as marking beginning of the financialisation of the city, and subsequently of the whole nation.³⁹⁰ Such geographical reorganizations leave behind “millions of acres of rubble”, rubble, Bucky notes, that the government is very glad to provide as free standing repository of scraps of food for homeless derelicts (262), “a transient population of thunderers and hags, traceless men and women”(263). The derelicts population of the city had already figured prominently in the novel, “often too wasted beg”(13):

Many of them had an arm and a leg in a cast, and the ones with bottles mustered sullenly in doorways, never breaking their empties, leaving them behind as they themselves moved north to forage, or simply disappeared. Two feeble men wrestled quietly, humming wordless curses at each other, and an old woman limped into view, bundled in pounds of rags, an image in the pencilled light of long retreat from Moscow....A black woman emerged from the smear of an abandoned car, talking a scattered song (13,18).

The outcasts possess a striking materiality that Bucky finds difficult to ignore. The derelicts, with their impaired bodies, symbolise an impaired labour class, displaced at the hands of cheaper labour lodged within alternative national, or global sites. The sight of these derelicts clearly conveyed “a sense of failed souls and forgotten lives on a new scale.”³⁹¹ Read against the sight of the derelicts, “Great Jones, Bond Street, the Bowery are deserts too”(90), an urban desert which, not unlike the desert in *End Zone*, offers an adequate burial site for the body of labour.

³⁹⁰ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 44-48.

³⁹¹ DeLillo in Begley, “Art of Fiction”, 287.

As the derelicts represent those who are excluded from capitalism's promise of renewed abundance, so "SHIT", "VOMIT" and "GARBAGE"(260) stand in contraposition to the glowing brilliance of the apples on the vendor's cart. One may tentatively interpret the image of excrement infesting the city's kerbs as an extension of Norman O. Brown's famous "excremental vision".³⁹² Brown's definition emerges from his analysis of the symbolic valence of excrement in Jonathan Swifts' oeuvre. In the first instance, Brown affirms that Swift's excrements may function as a symbol of man's primal and more instinctual body; while such excrements constitute an essential part of our being, men, in later stages of civilization, prefer to repress them. In DeLillo, the excrement may symbolise the body of labour as that which *is going to be* repressed or, better, displaced or virtualised via the flow credit. In addition, Brown posits that Swift's excremental vision has a more negative underside, one which reveals that, despite the sophistication of our civilised society, man, like Swift's Yahoos, still remains aggressive, violent, predatory. Translated into the economic language of our time, i.e. the language of financialization, excrements in DeLillo may effectively symbolise the thievery, depredation, violence and aggressiveness, or accumulation by dispossession that lie at the heart of the neoliberal accumulation process. Interestingly, as he travels across the city, Bucky spots a blind newsdealer outside the Criminal Court Building counting money (261). The blind man may not only be read as "something of a parody"(261) of justice's blindness and neutrality, but he may also suggest the non-neutrality of capitalists, as such a restricted class fragment appropriates income, wealth and power, while remaining blind to the social consequences that such redistribution entails for the majority of the population.

Finally, in the closing chapter of *Great Jones Street* DeLillo anticipates the actual effects that the oncoming shift within capitalist activities toward finance has upon New York, understood as a metonym for the whole capitalist world. Although the reader sees New York on the verge of transformation through Bucky's eyes, Bucky is precluded any possibility of understanding what he witnesses. Under the effect of the drug, Bucky falls into "voicelessness"(263): deprived of speech Bucky can neither objectify through language the transformations that the city is undergoing, nor voice the suffering of those subjects consigned

³⁹² Norman O. Brown "The Excremental Vision" in *The Writings of Jonathan Swift. Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism*. Edited by Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper (New York & London: WW. Norton & Co., 1973), 611-630.

to silence by capital: “beggars and syphilitics...men who return to sleep in wine by the south wheel of the city”(265).

The drug produces within him an “unreasonable” and “blessed” happiness (264), which terminates with the waning of the drug effect and which leaves him to wait to make his return “when the season is right”(263). Bucky’s final journey into the city therefore becomes Bucky’s act of analogical verification, since in subjecting to the effects of the drug as a symbol for finance capital, he has in fact “experience[ed] the affects...inherent in the fetish form”³⁹³ which will characterise all those who mirror, in their existence, the workings of finance capital and benefit from the euphoric well-being it produces. If silence may have initially offered an alternative through which one could undertake a critical understanding of the cultural and economic crisis besetting the United States, at the end of *Great Jones Street*, the *drug-induced* silence signals the experiential condition anticipating the structural forgetting which will inform finance capital’s structure of feeling.

³⁹³ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

CHAPTER 4

DESIRE FOR CAPITAL, CAPITAL'S DESIRE: *RUNNING DOG*

In 1973, renewed capital accumulation by financial means is still a “mellow promise” or as one of the characters in *Great Jones Street* would describe it, US’ capital’s “latent history”(GJS, 75). However, Bucky’s journey through the heart of Manhattan in 1973 “burns a hole in time”(RD, 3-4) which reaches out to Lyle Wynant in 1977, as the latter traverses the Financial District, now haunted by the ghostly figures of outcasts symbolising the body of labour that the financial turn is in the process of vaporising. Back in the late 1970s, one can hear the “amplitude pulse of history [pounding from the] inmost crypt”(P, 132) of Wall Street, the heart of the new financial economic order that was gradually emerging in 1977, and which *Players* masterfully describes.³⁹⁴

In *Running Dog* (1978) DeLillo apparently focuses on what he calls the “fallout from the Vietnam experience.”³⁹⁵ I would suggest that Vietnam is important insofar as it produced a military and legitimacy crisis which compounded the US’ already shaky position as world hegemon in the face of the world economic crisis of overaccumulation. The Vietnam debacle exposed militarization as a failed national gambit to support prosperity and expand US corporate and governmental power. More importantly, Vietnam questioned the war mentality undergirding American culture, and produced a *loss* of beliefs, codes and models upon which

³⁹⁴ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 72.

³⁹⁵ DeLillo in Begley, “The Art of Fiction”, 302.

Americans had constructed their identity both nationally and internationally. Such a loss complements the loss of C within the realm of speculative capital. Bereft of the models and values which granted them “a solid footing”(133) in the world, *Running Dog's* characters must adjust to a new socio-economic order and its culture. DeLillo depicts their attempt to redefine their social roles as a driving urge to possess an alleged Hitlerian pornographic movie, an object which should bestow on its final possessor an endless source of economic power and, consequently, the means to preserve a system of domination and control.

Yet, as DeLillo points out, the quest for the film is doomed to fail since the “sense of terrible acquisitiveness [characterising the quest is] coupled with a final indifference to the object.”³⁹⁶ I would argue that DeLillo’s notion of “acquisitiveness” accompanied by “a final indifference” to the pursued object evokes that of fetishism, which results from the novel’s characters experiencing a loss which they refuse to acknowledge. As Henry Krips points out, the fetish is an object which stands in a metaphorical relation to an object of need which is inaccessible. In fixating on the fetish, the subject trades the object of need with “something more accessible but less satisfying”³⁹⁷ which, although not the aim of desire, nonetheless produces pleasure when pursued. Since it attaches to substitutes of the needed object, desire produces a continuing tendency within the subject to displace his or her desire onto new objects in order to distract himself/herself from facing an objectal loss.³⁹⁸ Within such purview, the quest for the Hitler film might effectively be recast as a fetishistic quest for an object which is and is not the desired object, and *Running Dog* as an investigation of fetishism and of the effects and anxieties it produces, through which DeLillo offers a metaphorical reading of the fetishism characterising the financial and credit culture.

The magazine *Running Dog* (as the name suggests, paying tribute to Mao’s famous denunciation of “capitalist lackeys and running dogs”) used to be a “one-time organ of discontent”(21) and used to voice “ideological and material dissent from capitalist hegemony [and from] the US state.”³⁹⁹ The magazine has gone “mainstream”(21), but is “dying and [in need of] a fix”(47): in order to revive its economic fortunes it now “plays to people’s beliefs [in conspiracies]”(111). *Running Dog* magazine testifies to the dissolution of the countercultural

³⁹⁶ DeLillo in Anthony DeCurtis, “‘An Outsider in This Society’: An interview with Don DeLillo” in Frank Lentricchia ed., *Introducing Don DeLillo*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), 64.

³⁹⁷ Krips, *Fetish*, 22.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

³⁹⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 74.

movements which the Vietnam War had brought together and their reabsorption within a mainstream culture which capitalises on people's desire for conspiracies.

Running Dog's journalist Moll Robbins' life partakes the destiny of the magazine. Once a critic of the capitalist consumer society exemplified by her advertisement executive father (39), Moll had embraced revolution and investigative journalism to uncover shady collusions between big business and the government (112). She had also dated a Gary Penner, also known as "Dial-a-bomb", a terrorist targeting banks and other symbols of the establishment (40). Now, instead, Moll leads a life marked by "transience and flash" (109) and feels "disassociated" (86). Arguably, her sense of disassociation originates in the end of the countercultural movements as the source of Moll's unacknowledged loss of "old [revolutionary] values" (32) which provided her with a sense of identity and stability. As a result, I would suggest that Moll conducts a fetishised existence through which she attempts to disavow her having lost that part of her self which enabled her to dissent from the dominant ideology. Moll generally pursues conspiracies which are in fact the product of fantasy (such as an alleged "system of assassination by mental telepathy [devised by the KGB]" [133]), "a product that you offer to the highest bidder or the most enterprising and reckless fool."⁴⁰⁰ However, as one first encounters her, she is in the process of writing a piece on "sex as big business" (14), an inquiry into the relations between smut merchants, the mafia, the police and "highly respectable business elements" (58), through which Moll seeks to preserve some of the magazine's original radical spirit.

Her inquiry leads her to visit Lightborne's erotica gallery, the place around which all those vying for possession of the Hitler film will subsequently converge, and where the film will eventually be screened. The gallery resembles "an antique shop in serious decline" (14), a place of ambient decay emanating from the erotica painting, sculptures and knick-knacks that pack the place. Here, she meets a young man, Glen Selvy, who acts as front for an unnamed erotica collector. At the end of an auction, Lightborne reveals to both Moll and Selvy that "a film exists. Unedited footage. One copy. The camera original. Shot in Berlin, April, the year 1945" (18). The film is allegedly "a filmed record of an orgy" (19) that Hitler shot in his bunker under the Reich Chancellery shortly before killing himself. Led to believe that the man behind Selvy might effectively be a member of the government, Moll finds herself irresistibly drawn into the quest for the movie. While on the one hand the pursuit of the film might offer an insight into the world

⁴⁰⁰ DeLillo in Begley, "The Art of Fiction", 302.

of the sex business, on the other hand her engagement in the quest suggests her attempt to overcome her transience, her sense of disassociation. In my view, her decision to follow the pursuit of the film reveals an unconscious attempt to recuperate that radicalism, the thrill and “the danger”(213) of her former revolutionary life by uncovering an intricate web of links between the government and dubious business enterprises.⁴⁰¹

Moll's resorting to a “deceptive appearance [by means of] clothes [as] a method of safeguarding her true self”(29) further evidences her suffering from a form of melancholic incorporation which leads her to preserve the encrypted knowledge of her loss of radical self. Like Bucky's Wunderlick's “sweater fetish”(GJS, 115), disguise clothes offer a protective barrier that prevents her loss from resurfacing. In addition, in order to counteract a certain disquiet arising from her confronting “the hard surfaces, the blatant flesh of things”(244), Moll seeks a “wholly secure escape”(225) in “a life in the movies”(224).

In *Players* DeLillo had singled out film as a privileged aesthetic medium through which he sought to render visible the organising principles and the effects of the hiatus between form and content proper of finance capital. In *Running Dog*, the movies offer Moll “a permanently renewable...sense of freedom from all the duties and conditions of the nonmovie world”(225), and functions as the locus where she can shed the weight and anxieties of “real events”(225) she seeks to escape. Films offer Moll an endless source of pleasure arising from the multiple filmic existences that she may vicariously experience. The filmic world caters to her desire's “intrinsic instability...its continuing tendency to displace onto new objects” and thus allowing Moll to “distract [herself] from facing the...recurring trauma”⁴⁰² of her own loss.

Film in *Running Dog*, however, does not feature simply as a medium but as a commodity, whose “flimsy ribbon [contains] a magical power”⁴⁰³, a residual materiality that testifies to the resistance of a world that is obliterated within the financial regime. The fascination that the film exerts derives from its problematic nature: absent and immaterial for most of the novel, its existence for most of the time only a rumour, and, at the same time, a tangible, material object of great value. The mere possibility that such film might exist “put[s]

⁴⁰¹ I agree with David Cowart who points out that, in taking part in the quest for the movie, she attempts to produce some piece of investigative journalism modelled on Bernstein and Woodward's Watergate piece. For Cowart, Moll “seeks evidence of a senator's secret corruption— she seeks the “smoking gun” that has its pop art representation in the neon objet d'art on her wall.” David Cowart, *Don DeLillo. The Physics of Language*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 62.

⁴⁰² Krips, *Fetish*, 24.

⁴⁰³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 33.

powerful forces to work”(238), setting in motion various parties who will make no scruples in using violence and intimidation in order to possess such commodity, as the murder of Christoph Ludecke, the original repository of the film, in the novel’s prologue demonstrates.

The erotica dealer Lightborne, who acts as the novel’s theoretician of Nazism (a period of which he happens to be a student [99]), pornography and the relation between the two subjects, initially offers Moll a lesson in the market of erotica. Lightborne posits that such a market is undergoing a shift in that erotica consumers are now drawn by “[m]ovement, action, frames per second. This is the era for better and for worse. It seems a little ineffectual what’s here. It’s all mass and weight”:

“Pure gravity”

“Sure a thing isn’t fully erotic until it has the capacity to move. A woman crossing her legs drives men mad. She moves, understand. Motion, activity, change of position. You need this for eroticism to be total”(15).

Lightborne’s inquiry into the changing habits of erotica consumers does not simply point to a shift towards flimsier and more mobile forms of commodity (a shift entirely consistent with an economy which is transiting towards unfixed forms of capital) but possibly seeks to render visible the ways in which desire arising from motion and change can help foreground an analysis of the financial culture which attends to the medium of speculative capital.

Perhaps the best way I can gloss Lightborne’s theoretical assumptions is via sociologist Richard Sennett’s work on *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, a culture which, he argues, reflects the new economy of high tech and global finance’s emphasis on flow and flux and constant change.⁴⁰⁴ Within such new economic and cultural context, consumers, for Sennett, are attracted to the commodities’ brand or carefully constructed images which lure them with a *promise* of potency and potential.⁴⁰⁵ Consumers are thus led to desire not so much the commodity in its material body (although the use-value therein contained originally motivates their purchase), but rather an immaterial something to the side of the commodity which yields the promise of limitless potential, of constant movement.⁴⁰⁶ The object of desire, Sennett argues, must contain an *excess of potency* which “stimulates the [consumers’] imagination instilling in

⁴⁰⁴ Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, 10, 12.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 142. Sennett’s argument is similar to the one Haug exposes in his *Commodity Aesthetics* concerning the commodity’s second skin.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 149.

[them] a sense “of potential ability, [the object of desire must] emphasiz[e] the prospect of doing things one yet has to do.”⁴⁰⁷

In pursuing the promise of excess of potency and limitless potential, consumers display an intrinsically fetishistic behaviour. What they seek is an affective dimension, a promissory quality which exceeds the object itself and which accommodates the essential character of desire. For Bersani and Dutoit, “desire is always on the move”, an activity of fantasy which requires an unending mobilization of imagination.⁴⁰⁸

In the light of Sennett’s argument, Lightborne’s emphasis on motion and change as the new and essential features of film and erotica reflects the emergence of a new culture which substitutes mobility and unfixity for the deadening fixity and solidity of static objects. Indeed, the Hitler film seems to contain what Sennet calls an “excess of potency” in that it promises not only a valuable content, but the potential to extract even greater value from its distribution. While of course actually possessing the film is paramount for porn mogul Richie Armbrister, for Earl Mudger (head of paramilitary organization Radial Matrix) and mobster Vincent Talerico, their desire to possess the film arises from the prospect that, through the film, they will command an endless source of profit deriving not from production but from marketing and distribution rights over the movie. These characters wish to participate in a rentier economy where profits arise from ownership titles.

Yet the desirability of the Hitler film derives most prominently from in its allegedly being an original, unedited copy which has been stored in a vault for thirty years. As such the original footage would be invested with what Benjamin called “aura”, its mark of authenticity, which, Benjamin argues, “is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantiative duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”⁴⁰⁹ The film’s authenticity and auratic quality render the film “the most eloquent expression [and embodiment] of [a] lost historical dimension.”⁴¹⁰

Arguably, the film possesses a kind of structural preciousness not unlike that which characterised the Mountain Tapes in *Great Jones Street*. If like the Tapes, the Hitler film remains mostly absent from the novel, yet it is able to mobilise the appetites of various parties, it

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 142.

⁴⁰⁸ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 71.

⁴⁰⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations*, trans.by Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hanna Arendt, (London: Jonathan Cape 1970), 222-223.

⁴¹⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 79.

also represents an object which has remained hoarded and which once released, i.e. dishoarded, will generate previously unheard of profits arising from its circulation.

Without such structural preciousness, the film could never become a source of liquidity. Therefore, I would affirm that particularly Lightborne's preoccupation with verifying the structural preciousness of the film exemplifies a monetary concern for preserving money's function as the universal equivalent and store of value within an economic regime which relies heavily of finance and credit, credit which can never act as a trusted measure and store of value. Preserving money's "preciousness" once attached to gold becomes a structural necessity for without the "precious" to sustain the fictionality of the credit system, the system would collapse under the weight of its own fictionality. The Hitler film in *Running Dog* then constitutes another instance of the precious, of the hoard as treasure. As I pointed out in the previous chapters, the need for an alternative to gold as that which is "precious" becomes paramount in the wake of the collapse of the dollar-gold convertibility in the early 1970s. Indeed, one might note that the instantiations of the precious in DeLillo tend to assume more and more immaterial forms, passing from the thinness of tape in *Great Jones Street* and of film in *Running Dog* to become pure electronic form in *Players* (where stacked pennies symbolise residual forms of the treasure as hard cash) and in *Cosmopolis*. Such dematerialization of the precious might indeed symbolise the transformation of the concept of money within the Western culture, dematerialisation which is entirely in keeping with both severance from gold and immaterial forms of money within the realm of finance.

Reading the film as an instantiation of the "precious" helps to gloss Senator Percival's desire to possess the movie. Senator Percival heads a committee inquiring into PAC/ORD. The acronym stands for "Personnel Advisory Committee, Office of Record and Disbursement [and while working] on the surface as the principal unit of budgetary operations for the whole US intelligence", PAC/ORD was instead a cover for the paramilitary activities conducted by Earl Mudger and his Radial Matrix as PAC/ORD's "secret arm"(74). The Senator is known as a "righteous"(25) politician and hopes to uncover "something evil"(25) about the government. Nevertheless, the hearings on PAC/ORD are closed and whatever information the Senator has collected has to remain secret. His gathering valuable information which must not be released complements his privately collecting extremely valuable erotica which, as Moll Robbins discovers, are stored in a secret, vault-like room in his Georgia house. The senator's collection

has enormous value as it includes precious paintings by “Icart, Housaki, Picasso, Balthus, Dali...Botero”(80) and a vast amount of equally precious potteries, sculptures, drawings and so on. Both his private collection and the information he gathers via his inquiry possess the characteristics of a valuable hoard, and indeed one may see the Senator as a hoarder who pursues the Hitler film as a “treasure”. The Senator’s role as a hoarder, given his being the representative of a government which has abandoned gold as that which is treasurable, may appear contradictory. Yet, in pursuing the ‘precious’ in the form of artwork and the film, the Senator may effectively be attempting to preserve the notion of the hoard as a the monetary expression of value. Indeed, the accumulation of “considerable reserves of real wealth”⁴¹¹ in the form of art objects, precious metals and antiques has become, according to Harvey, an effective means to “store value for any length of time...under conditions where the usual forms of [unconvertible] money [particularly within inflationary periods, are] deficient.”⁴¹² In addition, his hoarding activities, as expressive of the need to preserve the function of money as a store of value, are entirely in keeping with the regulatory function that the state must play: even as it creates the conditions for “the untrammelled and continuous flow of interest-bearing money capital” by means of deregulation, the state (either via the central bank or via direct intervention on monetary or credit policies) must guarantee the soundness of money “in the face of over-speculation, distortion and all other ‘insane forms’ that the credit system inevitably spawns.”⁴¹³

While the Senator’s motives for pursuing the movie may differ from those of Mudger, Armbrister or Talerico, and while the same Lightborne remains sceptical about the actual content of the film, they all display a willingness to *believe* in the existence of such commodity and the actual quest for the movie assumes the features of a speculative bid. Indeed the world of erotica is “a world of rumormongers”(18) where the bare rumour of the film’s existence suffices to “heat up the market”(100). In effect, Lightborne helps “create a fever”(100) and propagates it, himself lured by the prospects of high commissions he might earn by locating and selling the film can. One might assume a serial behaviour beyond the propagation of such fever, serial behaviour which informs financial bubbles and panics. If Lightborne helps propagate the rumour about the existence of the film, everyone who shows interest in it does so because he senses

⁴¹¹ Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, 450.

⁴¹² Harvey, *Postmodernity*, 298. Harvey notes however that investment in precious artwork is often speculative and that rises in prices of art objects are subject to inflationary dynamics not unlike those affecting other forms of assets such as houses, real estate or stock on speculative markets. *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴¹³ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 281.

others may be interested in it. Serial behaviour produces a response whereby one acts as the Other: “each isolated individual feels being to be elsewhere, to be outside of him and serial action to be something to which he passively submits.”⁴¹⁴ In participating the speculative bid for the film, all the parties involved seem to yield to the fast-growing influence of the financial culture within business practices. Such parties mimic the restricted group of financial players, their actions might be taken as symptomatic of the growing tendency in every market “to resemble the constantly fluid work of Wall Street, where prices float freely and arrangements are as impermanent as possible.”⁴¹⁵

The quest for the film, therefore, highlights on the one hand a desire for money in its liquid form, thus evidencing aspects of a peculiarly financial culture and its concern for liquidity, but at the same time, by positing the film as treasure or embodiment of an extractable preciousness, DeLillo displays a residual attachment to money in the form of a hoard as one of the three fundamental elements of money. Arguably, in making the film a pornographic movie with Hitler as a protagonist, DeLillo seeks to explore this double movement toward liquidity on the one hand and, conversely, the need to preserve, even if at disavowed level, a residual materiality even further.

Pornography, critics have argued, best exemplifies the “terrible acquisitiveness” that according to DeLillo informs *Running Dog*. Thomas LeClair claims that pornography “is an extreme symbol of [American] consumerism”⁴¹⁶ and the commodification of the body. Mark Osteen also adds that pornography, like fascism or Nazism, is a totalitarian system which “stage[s] power relations [based on] dominance and submission.”⁴¹⁷ Power relations founded on dominance and submission are also central to capitalism, when we consider the struggle between capital and labour and the fierce competition between various factions of capital. Indeed, in times when the creation of surplus value out of commodity production is impaired, money capitalists “who control the social power of money and...are sustained out of interest payments”⁴¹⁸ exert considerable power over other classes of capitalists. As Doug Henwood points out “money is fundamentally about compulsion and command” and money and credit are

⁴¹⁴ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 248.

⁴¹⁵ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 5. As Henwood notes, financial markets are populated by irrational investors who, rather than trading on sound information, act on the basis of pure noise. “Noise traders” tend to spread noise that tends to push prices further up than they should go, thus creating bubbles which eventually burst. *Ibid.*, 177-78.

⁴¹⁶ LeClair, *In the Loop*, 173.

⁴¹⁷ Osteen, *American Magic*, 106.

⁴¹⁸ Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, 260.

important forms of social coercion.⁴¹⁹ Given the historical situation of the US in the late 1970s, certain characters' desire to construct systems of power centred around dominance and submission via possession of the film could effectively mirror US desire to restore power relations of coercion and submission between the US acting as creditor and borrowing nations in the Third World as a renewed form of hegemony.⁴²⁰

Pornography and Nazism may thus offer one way to read the specific demands of US capitalism and hegemony in the late 1970s. Pornography, in the excessive visibility of ejaculation and flow of semen, could effectively instantiate the capitalist system's preference for liquidity, even as bodies remain the source of pornography's organic liquidity, and bodily engagement in multiple acts of exchange the means to produce such flow of bodily fluids. Possibly, however, by focussing on pornography, where desire occupies a prominent place, DeLillo may have wished to investigate a desiring mechanism at the heart of capital itself. I can best gloss the relation between desire and capital via Lyotard's "infamous" work *Libidinal Economy*.

For Lyotard, desire is the sum of virtually endless energies able to invest any object, eroticising it. Such energies or intensities, which would otherwise run "unbound...without meeting a terminus", in order to gain significance and be exchangeable must be subjected to a "libidinal dispositif" which finds in "the great zero" its regulating instance.⁴²¹ The great zero (a particular arrangement of libidinal force) subordinates and exploits the other intensities by originating a "dispositif of confinement [and] produces an exterior and interior."⁴²² When confined within the interior of the dispositif, intensities seek to expand to the exterior, pursuing "a movement of flight, of plunging into the bodiless," which eventually enlarges the confines of the same dispositif.⁴²³ For Lyotard, capitalism is a libidinal dispositif, where money, functioning as its great zero, invests anything that falls inside the dispositif and subjects it to the regulatory principle of exchange. Capitalism emerges as an "unthinkable cohabitation" of regulation and deregulation, for even as it binds forces, it sets them free to promote its own expansion "towards [its] outside, in order to annex it."⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁹ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 231, 232.

⁴²⁰ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 11.

⁴²¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. by Ian Hamilton (London: Continuum, 2004), 4-5.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

In any libidinal dispositif, desire, as the sum of intensities, manifests either as an expenditure of intensities in return for a compensation or as “*jouissance*...expenditure as pure loss.”⁴²⁵ *Jouissance* is “at the same time the reservation and maximisation of intensities.”⁴²⁶ Therefore, desire dissimulates an “impossible” tendency toward reproduction and death.⁴²⁷ Similarly, the capitalist libidinal dispositif dissimulates, on the one hand, a function based “on a commodity standard, on a general structural law of equivalence; guided...by a certain use...of money [but on the other hand] a convulsive anti-functioning, which puts the system of reproduction at risk, in the name of *speculation*.”⁴²⁸ Capital builds itself upon “two uses of wealth: a reproductive and a pillaging use”:

The advance of capital money is not simply an early putting into circulation of the energetic reserves to be subsequently restored by saving; it dissimulates two almost incompatible libidinal functions, one of increased accumulation, the other of looting; but both functions are of conquest, capture and appropriation of unprecedented pieces of the patchwork...these two functions...are dissimulated in credit money...[Credit money] regulat[es] the growth of a regime [but it] may on the contrary turn out to be a major deregulator of all capitalist circuits.⁴²⁹

The beneficial effects of credit money emerge when it is invested “to expand reproduction, to make capital pass into intact energetic regions, to transform ‘objects’ which were not previously there, into commodities, enterprise.”⁴³⁰ Yet, Lyotard warns that “destruction is dissimulated in the most peaceful production, death in the accumulation of wealth. [Speculation] is excess, the limitless...[it is] capital’s libido.”⁴³¹ Credit money used in speculation is “a flight to death, that is to say, exhaustion, in which energy is spent at the height of its force, hence exploiting every reserve, destroying every organised body.”⁴³² Like Marx, Lyotard acknowledges that such dissimulation, that is the intrinsic impossibility of capital, becomes visible when the equilibrium within the system is broken by an excessive reliance on credit money as a source of looting rather than reproduction.

My scant summary of Lyotard’s reading of Marx’s theories on finance capital pins down the mechanism and effects of “capital’s libido”. His theory of the two forms of *jouissance* dissimulated in credit money evidences the positive aspects of desire and capitalism, but more importantly the notion of speculative capital as excess and as flight to death. These two

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 203.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 13-16.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 212.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 212, 223.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 225.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 225, 228.

⁴³² Ibid., 236.

distinctive features of the “desire [which] underlies capitalism”⁴³³ also undergird pornography, or rather what Susan Sontag, in her analysis of George Bataille’s *Story of the Eye*, defines “the pornographic imagination.”⁴³⁴

According to Sontag, the pornographic imagination sees “the extremity of the erotic experience [as] the root of vital energies.”⁴³⁵ Pornography “grossly exaggerate[es] the variety and feasibility of sexual powers, and amount of sexual energies,” an excess of powers and energies which renders “the universe proposed by the pornographic imagination...a total universe.”⁴³⁶ Such a universe “has the power to ingest, metamorphose and translate all concerns that are fed into it, reducing everything into the one negotiable currency of the erotic imperative. All action is conceived as sexual *exchange*.”⁴³⁷ The universe of pornography draws its power from the excessiveness that characterises sexual energies, which one might recouch as desire. Within the pornographic universe, desire, excessive and excessively visible, has the power to invest and eroticise virtually anything (much as money invests and subjects virtually everything to the logic of exchange) thus revealing the “incomparably economic” nature of pornography.⁴³⁸

Furthermore, Sontag highlights that the pornographic universe, in its excessive focussing on the “terminal gratification [of the sexual exercise]”, produces an “obsessional pursuit” which is ultimately “self-destructive.”⁴³⁹ While normally desire invested in the sexual act could produce growth and expansion for the self as a whole, within pornography, to use Lyotard’s terminology “desire [is] invested in *jouissance* as pure loss” and the erotic experience becomes a “a flight to death.”⁴⁴⁰ Indeed for Sontag, “what pornography is really about, ultimately, isn’t sex but death”: the extreme erotic experience in pornography ultimately tends “the gratification of death.”⁴⁴¹ Death in pornography consists in “[the individual’s] extinction as a human being and [his/her] fulfilment as a sexual being.”⁴⁴² Sontag contends that pornography creates “a split ...between one’s existence as a full human being and one’s existence as a sexual being” resulting in disarticulation and “estrangement of the self from the self.”⁴⁴³

⁴³³ Ibid., 104.

⁴³⁴ Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination” in George Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, transl. by Joachim Neugroschal, (London: Penguin, 1982).

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 105, 115.

⁴⁴⁰ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 202.

⁴⁴¹ Sontag, “Pornographic Imagination”, 106, 107.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 104.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 105.

In my view, Lyotard and Sontag's analyses provide an insight into the similarities between desire, pornography and finance capitalism, similarities which arise from excess and a movement towards death being constitutive of each of these systems. Pornography is a fictional universe that founds itself upon the apparently limitlessness of desire and its capacity to perpetuate itself. But desire as dissipation rather than reproduction ultimately reveals its predatory essence and its own innate tendency towards death. Consequently, pornography allows DeLillo to engage the constitutive features of contemporary capitalism under the aegis of finance capital, evidencing on the one hand the elements that render such form of capital appealing, but hinting on the other hand at a high deadly potential it carries within itself. The disarticulation of the self which characterises pornography recalls a similar disarticulation, or split, which, throughout DeLillo's works, invests the individual within a finance-led capitalist system as a result of the erasure of the human component (contained in the commodity form) within the medium of speculative capital.

Like pornography, Hitler and Nazism are fascinating because they represent another extreme universe characterised by what Sennett would call an "excess of potency". Lightborne, claims that Hitler "[i]s endlessly fascinating. The whole Nazi era. People can't get enough. If it's Nazi, it's automatically erotic. The violence, the rituals, the leather, the jackboots. The whole thing for uniform and paraphernalia"(52). In her essay "Fascinating Fascism", Susan Sontag claims that Nazism possessed a highly "erotic surface", whereby eroticism is "converted into the magnetism of leaders and the joy of followers. The fascist ideal is to transform sexual energy into a "spiritual" force, for the benefit of the community."⁴⁴⁴ Nazism produces an aesthetics which glamorises order, rigour, legitimate authority, control, the use of violence and even death to legitimise the leadership of an all-powerful, hypnotic figure constructed on relations of domination and enslavement.⁴⁴⁵ Given its highly sexual image, Nazism becomes an ideal subject for that particular branch of pornography, SM porn, where the already extreme sexual experience generally depicted in pornography has its furthest reach. Yet, according to Sontag, "[t]oday it may be the Nazi past that people invoke, in the theatricalization of sexuality [that SM offers], because it is [those images (rather than memories)] from which they *hope a reserve of sexual energy can now be tapped*."⁴⁴⁶ Interestingly Sontag not only highlights the notion of a

⁴⁴⁴ Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism" in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), 102, 93.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

reserve of energy that consumers of SM porn may access and deploy, but she also points to the fact that whatever renders fascism fascinating results from images of Fascism and National Socialism, constructed by the ideologues of these movements in order to diffuse their ideology, rather than from actual memories of their actions. As Wolfgang Haug points out, the aestheticization of politics that Nazism adopted bears a strong resemblance to the kind of aestheticization at work within capitalism. Like a commodity which through its image promises to satisfy the consumer's "unfulfilled aspects of their existence [and give them] a sense of meaningfulness...a language to interpret their existence and their world"⁴⁴⁷, Nazism donned a carefully constructed political image that *appeared* to serve the vital needs of the German population, creating the illusion of "classlessness, justice, humanity, welfare...that of the need for subjugation, service, discipline and sacrifice."⁴⁴⁸ In fact, film advertising and other instruments of propaganda (whose techniques had been borrowed from the USA) were paramount to the Nazi era, as Lighborne points out (52). Propaganda movies, coupled with rallies and other forms of public spectacle, helped create and reinforce in the population the promise that Nazism as an ideological, political, military and economic structure could fulfil people's desire and dreams.⁴⁴⁹

Indeed, Lighborne concedes that Hitler exerted a fascination not unlike that of "a pop hero. Some modern rock 'n' roller"(147) and that the contemporary enthrallment with such a figure is often the result of "[his] name, [his] face"(148), in short of a "*surface* affection"(147, emphasis added) which derives from the image of the man rather than the man himself. A contemporary fascination with Hitler may in fact derive from an illusory fascination with the power that the figure of Hitler represents, a kind of iconic representation of the man, which helps produce a perceptual cramp which banishes any references to the violence and horror he was responsible for.⁴⁵⁰ Therefore, I would claim that *Running Dog* makes use of Hitler to depict not a fascination with the historical figure of the dictator, but rather a fascination with a

⁴⁴⁷ Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics*, 52, 17.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁴⁹ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extreme. 1919-1991*, (London: Abacus, 1995), particularly Chapter 4. According to Hobsbawm, Hitler was able to respond to the Great [economic] Slump(1929-1933), as Hobsbawm defines it, restoring the productive economy of a nation plagued by soaring unemployment, inflation, war debts. The image that Hitler constructed through propaganda films helped create the promise that through Nazism, those who felt "crushed between the rock of big business on one side and the hard place of rising mass labour movements [could preserve what they] believed to be their due [position] in the social order"(118). With his appeal to a sense of community, his employing a "rhetoric of return to a traditional past"(119) artificially constructed, Hitler not only repealed the threat of labour movements but reconstructed Germany's economic leading position in the Europe by reconstituting a "non-liberal capitalist economy which achieved a striking dynamization of its industrial system"(128).

⁴⁵⁰ I refer to the notion of iconicity theorised by Umberto Eco which I have discussed in my second chapter on *End Zone*, p.62

fetishised version of Hitler, a fascination with his image, and the affective pleasure such image produces ⁴⁵¹, that one pursues in the attempt to make up for some lack or loss.

In his piece “Silhouette City”, DeLillo argues that a fascination with such a figure of power may derive from the fact that Hitler was a “maste[r] of extremity...so steeped in the use of power and submission [that] we may refer to [him] unconsciously when we think about our attempts to dominate certain people, to oppress and control, and when we wonder why our lives seem so empty without these routine shows of power”(SC, 345). DeLillo suggests that with the US’ “weakened position in the world..., after Vietnam and other emblems of decline...we may find ourselves seduced by the imagery of force and domination”(SC, 345) that Hitler and the Nazi constructed; similarly such enthrallment might be the product of a certain wistfulness, “a homesickness for the experience of power unleashed” that produces a suspension in the “moral vision”(SC, 346) of Americans.

By turning to Hitler as an emblem of power, DeLillo suggests, some Americans may unconsciously seek to retrieve something they have lost, possibly the notion of US military, political and economic power founded on war and industrial capitalism. DeLillo thus recognises a kind of melancholia working in the grain of American culture which produces fetishism as a strategy for countering the experiential effects of a loss.

Fetishism offers an interpretative paradigm to explain the behaviour of Earl Mudger, who, while originally pursuing the film, eventually pulls out of the quest to open a zoo. Mudger is a former Korea and Vietnam officer who “fell in love with profits”(75). Deprived, with the end of the war, of his role as head of covert paramilitary operations “directed against [those who tried] to gain power contrary to the interests of U.S. corporations abroad”(74), Mudger seeks to find alternative sources of profit and is urged by the need to “diversify”(74) his business. Capitalising on his experience within system planning and implementation (which on the surface constituted Radial Matrix’s extremely successful business), Mudger has severed any connection with PAC/ORD and has decided to abandon system planning and clandestine activities in order to enter the porn industry (74). Mudger synthesizes the corporate and the military. In the words of Senator Percival,

⁴⁵¹ In *White Noise*, DeLillo will push further his enquiry of Hitler as an iconic, pop-hero-like figure, exploring the conflation in our age between Hitler and Elvis Presley. For an interesting and exhaustive analysis of Hitler in *White Noise*, see Paul A. Cantor “Adolf we hardly knew you!” in Frank Lentricchia ed., *New essays on White Noise*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 39-62.

Mudger hasn't forgotten his field training. He uses the same methods in business he used in espionage activities. In actual combat....What you have in Mudger is the combination of business drives and lusts and impulses with police techniques...surveillance, extortion, terror and the rest of it (76).

Such a combination of the corporate and the military should not surprise given that war is effectively an industry engaged in the production of weapons. On the one hand, Mudger seems to fine-tune to the post-Vietnam age, his military training offering him the cast of mind and mental resolve to thrive home as much as he did during his years in Vietnam. In his Virginia house, Mudger has reproduced the "feudal barony"(84) he had constructed in Vietnam, and controls a web of agents, such as Selvy and Lomax, fronting for him. Yet, while during the war Mudger was subject to PAC/ORD, even though enjoying considerable autonomy to conduct his own private businesses, now he seeks to escape governmental control. Senator Percival admits that "PAC/ORD has lost control of his operation. Radial Matrix has become a breakaway unit...Mudger's completely autonomous"(75). In separating from the government, Mudger may effectively exemplify the disjunction between State and corporate interests which characterised the 1970s insofar as corporations sought to subtract themselves from the influence of state regulation, at least until financial deregulation and the neoliberal consensus reconstructed an equilibrium between State and corporate powers.

Despite his determination to diversify, Mudger displays a profound nostalgia for the kind of life he conducted in Vietnam, the power he had over things and people, his own personal "lackeys and running dogs"(112), all things that he had managed to obtain through war. From Mudger's perspective, Vietnam has been an economic success. Thanks to the war, he profited in drugs, the money black market, land and also acted as a sort of creditor of "money, food and other favours": as he will tell Moll, "we've won as far as I'm concerned"(91). Possibly, in order to stress Mudger's strictly personal victory in Vietnam in contradistinction with the US defeat, DeLillo imagines Mudger commanding two ARVN soldiers, whom he will eventually deploy to kill Glen Selvy.

Nonetheless, Mudger seems at loss for something, something which not even the Hitler film can adequately replace. Indeed, in the course of the narrative Mudger indulges more and more frequently in recollecting his own time in Vietnam (142), and eventually he abandons the quest for the movie because, as his man Lomax explains, "he wants to start a zoo...Earl's nostalgia for Vietnam. He had a zoo there"(218-9). The zoo is very important since it instantiates

another representation of the precious. Mudger's zoo was a private collection of wild and rare animals:

My pride and joy that zoo. We got to the point where we were making exchanges with real zoos halfway around the world...I had more gibbons that I could use...I had this rare type lynx Eurasian, almost extinct, this one variety, and we bred it successfully in captivity (91).

The rarity of the animals he possessed, coupled with Mudger's ability to breed an almost extinct lynx, render the zoo an immense resource of value waiting to be mobilized and put into circulation. Mudger's zoo in effect mirrors Senator Percival's hoard and could help reveal the nature of Mudger's melancholic incorporation.

Mudger's interest in the porn venture derives not solely from the enormous profits it may yield, but from an urge to recuperate something that "systems planning is fundamentally lacking...people"(138). While cherishing the prospects of multimillions arising from porn as a business in which, Mudger suggests, "you don't even have to make"(139), Mudger nonetheless wishes to recuperate a "human interest" of which, he claims, the war, like pornography, was full (139). Through pornography, therefore, Mudger effectively seeks to recuperate something that he originally found in war: a personal system of exploitation and domination, with the human element, even though reduced to a commodity, providing the valuable resource of his system.

That the original cause of Mudger's melancholia may be located within the loss of war as a form of commodity economy, of which pornography constitutes a fetish, may help to gloss Mudger's past-time: manual construction of a device able to penetrate steel in order to detect its chemical composition, which he hopes to market. Such a device, which he has called the "Mudger tip", resembles a weapon and a phallus. As he constructs the tip, Mudger feels compelled to list the tools at his disposal and associate them with their names, since "the names of things constituted a near-secret knowledge. You couldn't use tools and materials well unless you knew their proper names"(119). Later on in the novel, as he has lunch with a former Vietnam comrade and converses upon the latest weapons, Mudger perceives "comfort [arising from] the argot of weaponry" recalling that "reciting [the weapons'] names was the soldier's poetry, his counterjargon to death"(209). For Mudger, the language of weaponry constitutes the only form of precision, "the only true beauty"(208). Possibly, his obsession with naming his working tools is an attempt to revive the pleasure and comfort, the sense of beauty and precision which he used to find in the language of weapons, where names identify unmistakably the

weapons and their functions. The religious awe Mudger displays for weapons recalls Major Staley's in *End Zone*, where "bombs are a kind of god" (EZ, 77). In *Running Dog* on the contrary, "weapons have become godless...[w]eapons have lost their religion" (4).

Yet, associating the tools or weapons with their names constitutes a means to counteract the disassociation between words and their referents. Both Mudger's past-time and his penchant for naming instantiate an attempt to preserve manual labour and a residual commodity economy which finance capital displaces. Mudger's workshop, in effect, constitutes the only residual locus of manual labour within the novel. Testifying to the vaporisation of labour and the obliteration of the commodity economy, DeLillo offers in *Running Dog* the vision of abandoned warehouses in an industrial area of Dallas: "precious embodiments of a forgotten way of life. Commerce and barter. The old city. The market-place" (209).

If Mudger's overt nostalgia for the war masks a melancholic longing for a lost commodity economy and human labour, on the contrary war as a lost object may constitute the source of Selvy's impaired mourning, impaired mourning which foregrounds his behaviour and actions.

Glen Selvy is the novel's "running dog" par excellence, a man, as Moll suggests, one can easily imagine with "a dog tag around his neck" (42). His function as "reader", that is spying upon Senator Percival in the attempt to gather compromising information on him, should help Mudger to counterbalance the senator's investigation into PAC/ORD. Recalling Gary Harkness in *End Zone*, Selvy has constructed his own existence around a notion of "simple life" (EZ, 5) which implies believing in codes (33), performing a strict routine and ignoring "textures, entanglements, riddles, words" (107). Like Gary, Selvy's life amounts to "com[ing] all the way down to walking the straight white line" (192). Such vision derives from his paramilitary training, which he received at Marathon Mines under the lead of Mudger. Interestingly, the paramilitary training camp provides Mudger with a reserve of trained men to be employed in various activities when necessary, which further evidences Mudger's melancholia over loss of a commodity economy. Significantly the name Marathon Mines evokes both the notion of circulation (marathon) and of hoarding (the mines of silver evoking in turn the notion of the precious), reprising a fundamental motif within the novel.

The son of a military who performed “a steady ascent through the ranks”(245), Selvy, as far as DeLillo hints, never joins the army and thus he is denied the possibility to take part in the war. I would suggest that by joining Radial Matrix, and by taking part in its paramilitary activities, Selvy seeks a substitute for the army and for the experience of war. Radial Matrix provides him with a routine, which allows him to lead a “calculated existence”(54), to measure his “personal worth” in terms of his ability to perform like a gun, whose parts, defined by their proper names, fulfil a specific function (82) in ways that recall the peculiar numerical organization of the army in the war machine upon which Creed in *End Zone* models his football team. Indeed, as a result of his training, Selvy’s reality and mental beliefs may be recast within the functionalism which characterises war and its language. Bent on “self-repression”(183) originating within the process of deindividualization proper of war-machines, Selvy refuses to engage in anything that might lead him to question his routine, whereby the routine is “a mind set”(81). Self-denial also amounts to deadening his ability to connect elements and events beyond the connections provided to him by his role: “you made connection-A but allowed connection-B to elude you. You felt free to question phase-1 of a given operation but deadened yourself to the implications of phase-2”(81): “the routine enable[s] Glen Selvy] to bury...queer bits of intelligence”(82). In a sense, Selvy’s refusal to investigate the implications of his work parallels Gary’s attempt to deny analogies between football and war, and to acknowledge death as the product of war. However, despite the degree of control he exerts upon himself, Selvy unwillingly performs acts of “[s]election, election, option, alternative”(192). In fact, Selvy does not simply provide information to Lomax, but also tries to interpret how such information may be used against Senator Percival. He engages in a relationship with Moll Robbins, thus breaking his self-imposed rule about having sex only with married women, in order to avoid any emotional entanglement. Such “minor lapses”(83) in his routine force him, several times in the course of the narration, to question his role as an undercover agent, the real purpose of his mission and then to consider the existence of a connection between Lomax, Radial Matrix, the Senator and the murder of Christophe Ludecke. Such lapses may in fact suggest that something within Selvy unwittingly tries to resist the process of incorporation, a process which finds in Selvy’s supposed *literal* reading of facts in which is involved another instantiation.

When Selvy discovers that Mudger wants him dead for having destroyed inadvertently a bug placed by Mudger in Ludecke’s house, he effectively experiences a moment of epiphany

which recalls Gary's confrontation with a pile of excrements in the desert. Selvy, overcoming the literalism which would usually characterise him, becomes, if only briefly, a real reader, finally able to link the various facts and events he has witnessed, but whose significance he used to disavow. Such moment allows him to understand Mudger's plan to assassinate him, to comprehend that he has indeed been Mudger's "running dog", and to grasp what his training at Marathon Mines:

meant. The full-fledged secrecy. The reading. The routine. The double life...What you are, It was clear, finally...All this time he had been preparing to die. It was a course in dying. In how to die violently. In how to be killed by your own side, in secret, no hard feelings (183).

Selvy's ability to fully acknowledge death at the heart of his paramilitary training amounts to recognising the deathward tendency that structured Radial Matrix and to acknowledge death at the heart of war. Yet, since escaping from the death that Mudger has prescribed for him would effectively entail rejecting all his codes and beliefs, but also recognising that war is totally lost to him, Selvy decides to embrace his death in order to preserve the topography of his entombed secret intact. His renaming himself as "Running Dog", his staging his death as a "ritual suicide"(184) effectively exemplify a fantasy of incorporation, whereby, according to Abraham and Torok, fantasy denotes all those "representations beliefs or bodily states" that help preserve the incorporation of the lost-object.⁴⁵² In effect, if war, with the implication of his own death, is Selvy's lost object, his decision to let himself be killed by Mudger's ARVN soldiers amounts to Selvy's fantasy to take part in the war in Vietnam and to experience death as an act of gratification. Selvy sees his return to the Mines as an exemplary ending to a life devoted to "com[ing] all the way down the straight line"(192). Selvy returns to the Mines in order to pursue a heroic death, according to a Native ritual whereby he should undergo air burial, his head severed in order to grant his spirit eternal rest. Marathon Mines is located at the heart of the desert, a place where "[l]andscape is truth"(229). The desert in *Running Dog*, like in *End Zone*, functions as place of burial, the place where Selvy has buried his own loss, the loss of taking part in the war, and consequently with the loss, the memory of the moment when the traumatic event has occurred. As a result, even though Selvy senses that the place evokes a memory, such memory is only accessible to him as a "playback"(229). Incorporation thus produces a cramped temporality, since the encryption of the traumatic event entails the erasure of the moment when

⁴⁵² Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 125.

loss has occurred. While memory would entail remembering that moment, playback appears as a self-referential movement, the effect of a looped temporality which can only endlessly reproduce the present it generates, without the possibility of accessing a past which is now lost. Of course, playback refers to the filmic equivalent of memory, which as Cowart suggests, is both “virtually illimitable [and] infinitely repeatable” and offers a kind of “cinematic eternity.”⁴⁵³ The “empty time [of film] creates a...kind of simultaneity and a kind of historical vacuum”⁴⁵⁴ which as DeLillo suggests in *Players*, makes “[h]istory...weightless [erasing] the burdens of the present day” (P, 9). Such filmic eternity parallels what Boxall defines “the non-time of bereavement [which is] a kind of evacuated time which has lost its narrative quality, which can neither inherit the legacy of the past, nor move towards the possibility of a new and undiscovered future.”⁴⁵⁵ As I will argue in my reading of *The Body Artist*, the temporality of bereavement is the most powerful instantiation of the kind of cramped temporality proper of the financial age, which DeLillo here attempts to represent via the non-time of the cinematic experience. Indeed the time of film is a frozen time, which cannot go beyond the temporal unfolding of the events that constitute it.

Selvy perceives his confrontation with Mudger’s ARVN as a “film [in which] he had been through...in his mind a hundred times” (239). Like for Moll, film offers Selvy an opportunity to experience vicariously that historical dimension which is lost to him. Selvy’s death is described in filmic terms, a strange mixture of a Vietnam war film and of as a western, where ironically the cowboys are two ARVN soldiers, and by means of whom Selvy can experience his own Vietnam. Arguably, even Selvy’s notion of heroic death (which evokes the heroic, i.e. fetishised, death *End Zone*’s players attempted to experience via the Bang You’re Dead game) seems to build on a kind of cinematic mythology of heroism and stoicism artfully constructed by Hollywood.⁴⁵⁶ The ARVN soldier who eventually kills Selvy denies him a heroic death: given that the ritual burial cannot take place without a strand of hair cut from the dead’s head, the ARVN, in beheading him, prevents Selvy from receiving such burial.

DeLillo punctuates the narration of Selvy’s death with the account of the screening of the Hitler movie that Lightborne has eventually managed to obtain from Christoph Ludecke’s

⁴⁵³ Cowart, *Physics of Language*, 65.

⁴⁵⁴ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 77.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴⁵⁶ See for example Anne Longmuir, “Genre and Gender in Don DeLillo’s *Players* and *Running Dog*”, *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, 37.1 (Winter 2007), 140-142 on the influence of thrillers and westerns on Selvy.

wife. The alternation between the two narratives brings together the various threads that DeLillo has woven throughout the narrative, with the effect that the reader can contemporarily follow the denouement of Selvy, Moll and Lightborne's fetishistic quests. However, the double narrative strands articulate a meditation on "the possibilities and limitations of film as a medium"⁴⁵⁷ through which one can understand contemporary culture.

The screening takes place in Lightborne's gallery, with the dealer and the journalist as the only audience for the film. Senator Percival has in fact pulled out of the quest to pursue a collection of ancient Persian erotica in the hands of his newly-wed wife, Richie Armbrister, the porn mogul, has decided to pull out under intimidation from the Mafia, and Mudger has instead turned his interest on the construction of the zoo and the marketing of his Mudger's tip.

Lightborne, one may recall, despite an original scepticism about the actual content of the movie, has contended for its possession, anticipating, not without risk, both Mudger's and the Mafia's attempt to get hold of the film can. Now, however, he is "in no hurry to look at the footage. At some rudimentary level it was an experience he feared. He had feared it all along, he realised"(188). Lightborne's fear appears at odd with his having finally come into possession of such revered and desired film: "It was all so real. It had such weight. Objects were what they seemed to be. History was true"(188). Yet his fear, his anxiety over disclosing the real content of the film is consistent with the anxiety which accompanies the peculiar mechanism of displacement and substitutions proper of fetishistic disavowal. In fuelling the quest for the film, Lightborne has become himself a victim of the same fetishism which motivated the quest of other parties. For Moll, the screening instead represents another escape from the disappointments of her life: her failure to discover any real secret connection between the government and the business underworld prevents her from re-experiencing the thrill and danger (139) that used to accompany her investigations in the heyday of *Running Dog*.

The images that emerge from the projector disclose not "the century's ultimate piece of decadence"(20) but a home made movie shot in the bunker under shelling, which causes the image to jump and flicker (225). Unedited, shot in natural light, this footage possesses the "mysterious aura"(234) of a lost, long-gone historical time which, trapped within the flimsy ribbon of the film, has been salvaged from a historical vacuum. Finally, Hitler emerges playing an impersonation of Charlie Chaplin. Hitler models his "pantomime"(235) on Chaplin's who, in

⁴⁵⁷ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 59.

his *The Great Dictator*, impersonated “the famous moustache” (235) both in his role as Hynkel and as the barber who will take Hynkel’s place, and whose screening Moll had watched with Selvy earlier in the novel.

The sight of Hitler playing Chaplin produces an uncanny effect, firstly because such impersonation mocks all expectations, to the point that Lightborne doubts they might be watching Hitler at all. Secondly, Hitler’s movements, distorted by the man “trembling arms, nodding head, a stagger in his gait” (235) reveal a “Hitler humanised” (237), a sight which Lightborne finds “disgusting”, failing to convey “something dark and potent. The madness at the end” (237).

Hitler’s masquerade reprises “a considerable interest in sartorial impersonations of one kind or another”⁴⁵⁸ which cross the novel at several moments: Ludecke’s (dressed as a drag queen in the novel’s prologue [7]), Chaplin’s, Moll’s disguises, and finally Hitler’s. Taken together, these impersonations work to visualise a fascination with forms of hiding and masking which seems to characterise 1970s America and which may effectively reflect a coming into hiding of the social relations embodied in the commodity form proper of the financial turn.⁴⁵⁹ From the screen, Hitler, facing the camera, appears to be addressing his 1970s US audience in the attempt to communicate with them, to voice some kind of relation between his empire on the brink of collapse and America at the threshold of renewed hegemony. Yet, since the film is a silent one, only a careful reading of the images could effectively bestow on the film the power to work as an aesthetic form which offers “a space for critical reflection”⁴⁶⁰ over the peculiar condition of contemporary America.

However, neither Moll, who at times works as a movie reviewer, nor Lightborne can actually read the film and, complementing Selvy, as literal readers of what they see, are barred any opportunity for self-reflection and critique. Lightborne experiences bitter disappointment over discovering that the film hardly emerges as the endless source of value he had expected. Rather, from the point of view of the erotica market the film has only the status of junk, even though he acknowledges that, as Moll suggests, it has considerable value as a historical artefact. Moll, on her part, is entirely absorbed by the screening, finding this piece of footage “charming

⁴⁵⁸ Cowart, *Physics of Language*, 63.

⁴⁵⁹ Upon discovery of Ludecke’s body, one of the policemen expresses discomfort over his inability to recognize the man under his female disguise: “It used to be you could go by the clothes. But you can’t go by the clothes anymore.” (9).

⁴⁶⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 59.

[and] almost touching” (235, 237), and the experience of watching it constitutes for her another opportunity to escape “the blatant flesh of things” (244).

Indeed, Moll cannot recognise that her analysis of the self-reflective, self-referential nature of all quests applies to her, even though she affirms her being “suspicious of quest” (224):

[a]t the bottom of most long and obsessive searches...was some vital deficiency on the part of the individual in pursuit, a meagreness of spirit.... Whether people searched for an object of some kind, or inner occasion, or state of being it was almost always disappointing. People came up against themselves in the end. Nothing but themselves. Of course there were those who believed the search itself was all that mattered, the search itself was the reward (224).

Moll’s, or rather DeLillo’s analysis, of quests grasps the crux of the notion of fetishism through which I have read the novel’s quest for the Hitler movie. Fetishes produce “an ambiguous negation of the real...which mobilises the desiring imagination”, a mechanism whose profit for the individual “consists of the general mobility of [his/her] desire” in the service of an “unending process of displacement and substitutions.”⁴⁶¹ Fetishes, as Richard Godden suggests “are affective because formed through an intense disavowal of that which they displace [but also produce] a constant anxiety that the [absence they displace will emerge], the fetish self destruct.”⁴⁶² While Lightborne effectively witnesses the self-destruction of his fetish, Moll “experiences the affects and anxieties inherent in the fetish form, but not as access to critique.”⁴⁶³

I would therefore conclude that *Running Dog*, by offering what Paul Ricoeur (borrowing from Aristotle) calls “an insight into likeness... through the different”⁴⁶⁴ describes the consolidation of a peculiarly financial and credit culture in the US at the close of the 1970s, and constructs a critical insight into the experiential effects of the fetishism proper of the medium underwriting such culture, rendering visible the inherent contradictions which characterise speculative forms of capital and the consequences attending an economic system’s excessive reliance over fictitious value production.

⁴⁶¹ Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Violence*, 71, 66.

⁴⁶² Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

⁴⁶³ Idem.

⁴⁶⁴ Ricoeur, “Metaphorical Process”, 145.

CHAPTER 5

KILLING THE REFERENT. FINANCE CAPITAL AND LANGUAGE IN *THE NAMES*

Don DeLillo's 1970s novels offer an aesthetic representation of the crisis of US Fordism, recording the structural change within US capitalism toward an overt financial phase. Caught in the transition from a system centred around productive forms of capitalist organisation to a finance-dominated one, DeLillo's characters adhere to a new system of values, social relations and materiality structured by the dominant logic of speculative capital. Even as they seem to embrace the freedom arising from being no longer tied to the cumbersome and problematic hard materiality of the commodity form, DeLillo's protagonists from *End Zone* to *Running Dog* manifest an anxiety when confronted with the residual reality of capitalist modes of production which finance capital displaces and renders invisible.

Set at the threshold between the 1970s and the 1980s, *The Names* extends DeLillo's analysis of the financial turn within the US economy, highlighting how the US deployed its liquidity to reassert its hegemonic role on a global scale. However, the project to restore US economic, political and military dominance was then still in the making. The novel unfolds between the summer 1979 and summer 1980, with the Iranian revolution and Iranian hostage crisis looming over protagonist James Axton's Greek interlude:

This was the period after the President ordered a freeze of Iranian assets held in U.S. banks. Desert One was still to come, the commando raid that ended two hundred and fifty miles from Teheran. It was the winter Rowser learned that the Shi'ite underground movement, Dawa, was stockpiling weapons in the Gulf. It was the winter before the car bombings in Nablus and Ramallah, before the military took power in Turkey, tanks in the street, soldiers painting over wall slogans. It was before Iraqi ground troops moved

into Iran at four points along the border, before the oilfields burned and the sirens sounded through Baghdad, through Rashid Street and the passageways of the souks, before the blackouts, the masking of headlights, people hurrying out of teahouses, off the double-decker buses (233).

The historical events serving as a backdrop to the novel's fictional action help to highlight the "regional collapse of American hegemony [in the Middle East] accompanied by a second oil shock in the 1970s [which eventually produced] a major political assault on the 'inflationary' Fordist-Keynesian consensus in America itself."⁴⁶⁵ The crisis in the Middle East compounded an already existing "crisis of confidence in the dollar"⁴⁶⁶ which led to Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volker's policy of tight monetary control and to financial deregulation.

The Names depicts a group of American expatriates, "the corporate transients" (54), who form "a subculture...versed in percentages, safety records" (6) with investment bank executive David Keller, oil corporation consultant Charles Maitland, and risk analyst James Axton working as "handlers of huge sums of delicate money. Recyclers of petrodollars. Builders of refinery. Analyst of risk" (98). DeLillo focuses once more on a class fragment whose role consists in promoting the expansion of US financial and corporate interests in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. As he records Axton's, and fellow corporate transients', movement across the globe, DeLillo offers an account of capital's spatial fix through speculative capital, highlighting the interrelations existing between liquid capital, moving around the global space, and other forms of capital whose networks of production and exchange, webs of social and material relations are profoundly embedded within specific geographical, historical and cultural places. David Harvey continuously underlines that "geographical mobility of [finance capital] on a global scale requires a certain amount of built-in capital (including human capital) fixed in the land."⁴⁶⁷ Thus as it moves from one territory to another, speculative capital has to come to terms, and in part depend on, "[r]egional consciousness and identities, even affective loyalties, [a] defined space of collective consumption and production as well as political action."⁴⁶⁸ In *The Names*, DeLillo describes the friction arising from the encounter between different factions of capital and the tensions that such encounter generates; in particular, he strives to represent how the logic of the spatial fix affects "human experience, human progress" (164) and how local communities react when the interests of US global capital threaten to devalue or destroy those social networks

⁴⁶⁵ Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology*, 182.

⁴⁶⁶ Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 319.

⁴⁶⁷ Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capital*, 102.

⁴⁶⁸ Idem.

which shape these communities' web of life.⁴⁶⁹ Such preoccupation emerges very clearly in *The Names* in the relations between the class of professionals and the local communities, a relation which seems to revolve either around invisibility or death, both fundamental themes within the novel.

I would argue that *The Names* deals very closely with the issue of how social configurations deemed archaic by finance capital try to resist its onslaught. In actual fact "what we see [in the novel] is the grand ordering imperial vision as it is overrun by the surge and pelt of daily life" (269). Through the verbs "surge" and "pelt" DeLillo conveys the force that existing social materialities must exert in order to counteract the equal "surge and pelt" of finance capital. Indeed, via Axton, *The Names* depicts a quest for fixity and referentiality, a search to restore a connection with "earthiness, placefulness and materiality"⁴⁷⁰ in order to counteract the abstractedness of speculative capital. DeLillo pits James' dispersed, deracinated condition, his "travel[ling] between places, never in them" (143) against his wife Kathryn's being "loyal to the place and the idea" (15) of the Greek island to which she has moved in order to work in an archaeological dig. Kathryn's archaeological work exemplifies the need to "restore a connection to the past, to buried societies and ways of life"⁴⁷¹ and consequently to recuperate a productive economy, even within a phase of acute financial domination.

The Names also depicts the cult "Ta Onomata"'s obsession with a self-referential language. The cult's obsession effectively instantiates "the assumption [common to post-Saussurean accounts of language] that where the signified stood, the signifier now stands, and that furthermore it is signifiers all the way down": a language which "operates in the absence of an available signified [produces] a certain dematerialisation and abstraction."⁴⁷² DeLillo uses the dematerialization of language as a metaphor for a concomitant derealization within the medium of finance capital. DeLillo exposes the limitations of such views of both language and finance capital, advocating the rediscovery of the "vehemence with which signs attend to world"⁴⁷³ in language, and through language, the need to recover the "powerful rush of things" (281) as the

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁷⁰ Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology*, 189.

⁴⁷¹ Idem.

⁴⁷² Richard Godden, "Poe and the Poetics of Opacity: Or, Another Way of Looking at the Black Bird", *ELH* 67 (2000), 993.

⁴⁷³ Idem.

expression of the “the actual embodied particularity of human existence”⁴⁷⁴ which persists, although rendered invisible, within a finance-dominated historical phase.

The failure of James Axton’s marriage constitutes “the original fault line”⁴⁷⁵ against which DeLillo props the conflicts between different forms of capital, between US global interests and regional territorialities. Furthermore, in describing the differences between James and Kathryn, DeLillo records the distinctive “structure of feeling” underlying the class fragment immersed in the speculative medium of fictitious capital to which James belongs.

The list of “27 depravities” Axton elaborates “offers a kind of broken frame upon which the entire novel might be hung”⁴⁷⁶: the items on the list, which recur throughout the entire novel, highlight the extent of James’ “failings”(17) both as a father and a husband; at the same time they reveal that the tensions between James and Kathryn mirror those tensions resulting from US speculative capital’s encounter with other modes of production in its global peregrinations and the attendant frictions between cultures based on diverse capitalist modes. Although the list is supposed to enumerate Kathryn’s reasons for leaving him, the “27 depravities” are entirely James’ invention: recited in “a female voice”, the list should offer Axton a means to penetrate Kathryn’s mind, a way to “get inside her, see myself through her, learn the things she knew”(18). In actual fact, the list constitutes an act of colonisation which “ends up recreating the other as self...the other, and indeed world, becomes simply another version of [James].”⁴⁷⁷ Kathryn and James’ marriage reproduces on a personal level the frictions between Americans and Canadians as the latter strive to resist “the whole enormous rot and glut and blare of [the former’s] culture” and US “corporation[s] attempt to appropriate] a huge share of the Canadian earth”(266) and markets. The Americans see the Canadians as “the alien beings”(266) and attempt to turn them into a mirror-image of themselves by “promoting their own values— values they assume [Canadians] share”(266). Indeed, the marriage configures itself as a form of “colonialism [and] exploitation”(266): love is a “funhouse mirror”(18) in which James sees Kathryn as a reflection of himself, thus recalling item n° 9 on the list: “you don’t see anything beyond your own modest contentment”(16). Such inability to see may reflect what

⁴⁷⁴ Jacqueline A. Zubeck, “ ‘The Surge and Pelt of Daily Life’: Rediscovery of the Prosaic in Don DeLillo’s *The Names*”, *LIT: Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 18:4, 355.

⁴⁷⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 93.

⁴⁷⁶ Idem.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 94.

Kathryn perceives as US “power’s ignorance and blindness and contempt”(266): precisely James’ Americanness (“American”[17] is the closing element in the list) may in fact be the key factor against which the other grievances must be interpreted.

However, James’ Americanness derives its distinctive features from his belonging to a “subculture”(6) within the American culture, that of a class fragment immersed in the speculative medium of fictitious capital. In fact, the “27 depravities” reveal how extensively James’s actions and motives are grounded within such medium. ‘Self-satisfied’, the first item on the list, might well describe a man who adheres to the medium of money that is ‘pregnant’ with itself; “uncommitted”(item number two) refers to James’ inability to commit himself to conjugal duties and ties. James’ lack of commitment also reflects a refusal to commit, that is to be bound, to a specific place. James adheres fully to a condition of heighten mobility and unfixity which characterises his job, condition which originates in, and reflects, speculative capital’s tendency to avoid fixing itself in one specific place. James’ job as a risk analyst renders him a perennial “business [person] in transit”(6). As he flies around Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Axton points out: “I was a traveller only in the sense that I covered distance...I travelled between places, never in them”(7, 143). Air-travel, as it facilitates his movements across the globe, also allows James to suspend, to abstract himself from the “onward rushing narrative”⁴⁷⁸ of his life on the ground, but more importantly to avoid any coming to terms with the actualities of “concrete, embedded place[s].”⁴⁷⁹ If the unfettered movement of speculative capital reconfigures the space of global capital, the names that identified places within such space no longer signify.⁴⁸⁰ For James the world amounts to a “vast space, which seems like nothing so much as a container for emptiness”(253).

Indeed, the section titles structuring the narrative in *The Names* (“The Island”, “The Mountain”, “The Desert” and “The Prairie”) describe a landscape which is emptied out, abstracted, deprived of that “concreteness” which differentiates places ⁴⁸¹, concreteness which finance capital, moving transnationally, tends to disregard. Always in transition and looking at the world from the planes he flies into, James (speaking for all the corporate execs) remains “half numb to the secluded beauty [of] the...land we’re leaving behind...we don’t remember it. We take no sense impression with us, no voices....Nothing sticks to us but smoke in our hair and

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁷⁹ Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology*, 186.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. 185-86.

⁴⁸¹ Idem.

clothes. It never happened until it happens again. Then it never happened”(7). By describing himself as “half-numb” to the beauty of places he visits, James unwittingly points to a split in his consciousness whereby on the one hand he acknowledges the beauty of such places, while on the other hand he chooses to disregard it. James experiences disavowal and, as a consequence, amnesia over the specific and distinguishing features of the places he traverses. James’ refusal to preserve the memory of such places results in his inhabiting a cramped temporality, in which the linear unfolding of past into present is entirely lost to him, “dead time”(7). Unable, or rather choosing not to remember the actualities of the countries he visits, James experiences a peculiar “melting of spatial and temporal distinctions”⁴⁸² so that each trip appears as a journey into an endless spatial sameness taking place into an endless present. Transience as a result of his profession leads James to think of himself as “a perennial tourist”: “[t]here was something agreeable about this. *To be a tourist is to escape accountability.* Errors and failings don’t cling to you the way they do back home: you are able to drift from continents and languages suspending the march of sound thought”(43). The tourist-like condition to which he chooses to conform grants him “immunities and broad freedoms”(44). “Perennial tourism” becomes another way to recouch the characteristic condition of speculative capital’s transients. Transience characterising tourism offers James the same escape from responsibilities that Pammy in *Players* seeks by experiencing life as a play. Not only does transience allow James to disavow the actualities (and the concrete materiality) of the places he visits, but also “the trail of devastation and devaluation”⁴⁸³ caused by speculative capital’s continuous movement from place to place in search of more profitable opportunities. Possibly, migrating from one country to the other, Axton can avoid the sight of misery and poverty arising from devaluation that, for example, Lyle in *Players* comes across in New York, or he may disavow responsibility on the part of American capital for other countries’ economic failures. Indeed James states his contentment at “not knowing”, at living in an “opaque medium”(44). The list of “27 depravities” reminds the reader that James pretends, and “pretends not to see other people’s motives”(17): here the term “pretend” may be a further recouching of disavowal.

In fact, even as he seems to cherish the suspended condition of air travel, and all the consequences attending such condition, James nonetheless feels the gravitational pull of “the

⁴⁸² Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 222.

⁴⁸³ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 116.

realised space, common objects, domestic life going on in that sculpted hush”(8) that distinguish Greece and the “tactile” dimension of family life, made of “hands, food, hoisted children”(31). While on the one hand *The Names* investigates Axton’s “growing intimacy with finance capital”⁴⁸⁴ and his conforming to its abstractive logic, on the other hand the novel records his anxieties deriving from his highly deracinated and mobile condition. The end of his marriage exacerbates his sense of deracination and split: even if on the one hand he acknowledges that his marriage is over, on the other hand he denies such fact.⁴⁸⁵ As a result, James also denies the past in which the separation occurred, which causes him to live within a suspended time where past is indistinguishable from the present, a suspension which doesn’t allow James to experience “the full pleasure of things”(92) (item 11 on the list).

Axton’s pursuit of the cult will represent an endeavour to overcome his “failure to cohere”, failure which causes him to perceive himself as “a man living apart”(44) and to move, as Peter Boxall suggests, “towards a physical occupation of the moment, and of remembered time.”⁴⁸⁶ His investigating the cult will constitute a “quest for experiential intensity and material connectedness”⁴⁸⁷ embodied within his family and within social relationships arising from alternative modes of capitalist production.

The opacity pervading the medium James inhabits (44) impinges on Axton’s ability to apprehend the world surrounding him. As a risk analyst, Axton writes reports for a NorthEast Group, a huge corporation selling risk insurance to companies investing abroad. Axton’s company exemplifies profits arising from financial services offered to “the world’s biggest, richest companies protecting their investments”(12). James specialises in data collection: prison statistics, number of foreign workers, unemployment rate, average salaries increment (33) which have to provide Roswer, James’ direct superior, with “data on the stability of the countries he’d been visiting”(45). In addition, Roswer “s[ells] portions of the original policies to syndicates to spread risk and generate whatever cash flow the parent did not supply”(48).

Peter L. Bernstein argues that the “capacity to manage risk, and with it the appetite to take risk and make forward-looking choices, are key elements of the energy that drives the economic system forward”: “the essence of risk management lies in maximising the areas where

⁴⁸⁴ Heffernan, *Capital, Class, and Technology*, 191

⁴⁸⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 94.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁸⁷ *Idem.*

we have some control over the outcome while minimising the areas where we have absolutely no control over the outcome and the linkage between effect and cause.”⁴⁸⁸ The data James collects are paramount to US corporations investing abroad, since such data enable them to choose the most profitable locations for investment and to minimise losses which may derive from an unfavourable business environment. Particularly in the light of the geopolitical unrest sweeping the Middle East, James’ “review [of a country’s] political and economic situation” (34) allows the companies using his data to anticipate “what seems likely [to happen in the future and to foresee w]hatever endangers an investment” (34). James’ experience of a present time is therefore conditioned and shaped by the future his data should “subdue and codify” (80).

James’ reviews and reports instantiate “an artful reduction of the external world to printed output” (*P*, 70), whereby a country’s political and economic situation is reduced to “probabilities and statistics” (46), “human experience, human progress, ordinary human language” (164) become numerical entities where numbers are all that matters. The language of business Roswer and Axton use, so dependent upon mathematics and upon the language of war, is “a brisk and assured English with a blend of shortened forms. JDs were Jordanian dinars, DJs were dinner jackets” (193). Similarly, terrorism is accounted for in terms of million dollars in ransom and insurance payments, what Roswer terms “the cost-effectiveness of terror” (45). Thus, the language of business becomes a universal language “drawing some of its technical cant from the weapons pools” (47). Elsewhere in the novel Axton reflects on the beauty of “the language of the destruction” (115), the purity of its mathematical precision. As in *End Zone*, such beauty arises from the ability of such language to neutralise and eliminate the human element from discourse and to reduce death to anonymous numbers. As English dominates business, shortened forms freeze meaning around a single referent that any member of that specific class fragment recognises. Such forms of literalism erase the emergence of other meanings from context.

Nevertheless, both James and Roswer do realise that the numerical entities they use effectively “involve people, waves of people, people running in the street” (34), much as Roswer has to acknowledge the fact that “[r]isk had become a physical thing” (47). In fact, as they both undertake their trips around sensitive areas “U.S. executives [were] being targeted with particular frequency in the Middle East and Latin America” (46). Axton repeatedly asks the

⁴⁸⁸ Bernstein, *Against the Gods*, 3, 197.

“corporate transients” each time they return from their business trips: “Are they killing Americans?”(80). The threat of death causes expatriates to flee the countries in which they operate. James recalls how corporate executives and their families “would come on scheduled flights out of Beirut, Tripoli, Baghdad, out of Islamabad and Karachi, out of Bahrain, Muscat, Kuwait and Dubai.”(96). Eventually, under threat of death himself James “suddenly sees mortality lurking in the data and his own individual jeopardy implicated in the disembodied language of risk.”⁴⁸⁹

While Axton and Roswer deploy the abstractedness of mathematical language, the business expatriates’ community tends to reduce the places in which they live to “one-sentence stories...this became the solid matter of the place, the means we used to fix it in our minds. The sentence was effective, overshadowing deeper fears, hesitancies, a rife disquiet”(94). While reducing these places to a single linguistic utterance may offer American expatriates a way to counteract the threat of death these places contain (possibly the cause of their “fears” and “disquiet”) such a reduction points to a residual need to locate, to fix the expatriates’ lives within the “solid matter” of the earth, and with it, to preserve a language which is able to refer to the external world.

The reduction of places to one-sentence stories also becomes a means to gain linguistic purchase over territories that attempt to resist historical and geographical change at the hands of capital. For example Charles Maitland complains about the “sweeping arrogance”(239) that accompanies changing the names of states. He argues that modifying the name of a state amounts to “a rescinding of memory”(240), an erasure of the history of the country that he attached to that name: “[I] grew up with Persia. What a vast picture that name evoked...a vastness, a cruel glory extending back centuries...and now Rhodesia of course. Rhodesia said something. What do they offer in its place? Linguistic arrogance...Overthrow, re-speak.”(239-40). However, the affective pleasure that Maitland finds in an state’s name might in fact conceal a particular form of nostalgia. In fact, Maitland as a Briton, may wish to keep alive the memory of a faded British empire through older names. Axton’s inability to learn Greek may reflect a change in power relations as they filter through language, and specifically the linguistic supremacy of English as a result of American capital’s domination. Even though the language of

⁴⁸⁹ Zubek, “Rediscovery of the Prosaic”, 368.

money should be universal, at the close of the 1970s it seems to have a typically American accent.

Possibly, the reduced world narrative that the one-sentence stories encapsulate testifies to a specifically American view of the countries the US seeks to dominate via economic and military leverage. Such view limits itself to recording only those elements in the geography of a place which are significant to US capital's interests. The Greek Eliades, apparently a sales representative within the refrigerating business, harshly criticises US indifference to the geography and history of the countries where it exerts its influence, only to recognise the existence of such places when US interests are impaired:

It's very interesting how Americans learn geography and world history as their interests are damaged in one country after the other...I think it's only in a crisis that Americans see other people. It has to be an American crisis of course. If two countries fight that do not supply the Americans with some precious commodity, then the education of the public does not take place. But when the dictator falls, when the oil is threatened ...they tell you where the country is, what the language is, how to pronounce the names of the leaders...All countries where the U.S. has strong interests stand in line to undergo a terrible crisis so that at last Americans will see them (58).

Eliades recouches the fraught relationships between the US and the other countries in terms of US blindness over local geopolitical configurations of the world. The world to America appears as an extended version of itself, its own mirror-image. Eliades' grievance reflects Kathryn's grievances towards James. The countries in which the US operates are hollowed out, their specific histories and material and social configurations spectralised, rendered invisible. A crisis therefore, becomes an education in "the business of seeing"(3), and specifically seeing how US global interests bear on local and regional ones. Particularly, the Greek disputes the indifference of American investment banks when it comes to lending money via Athens to Turkey (59): "[our government lets] American strategic interests take precedence over the lives of Greeks...the occupier fails to see the people they control...they don't know we're tired of the situation, of the relationship"(235, 237). Precisely a similar kind of forgetfulness, or blindness, over the complex and tense historical relationships between Turkey and Greece may spark resentment towards the US and tensions which could degenerate into conflicts between local and global forces.

Moreover, Eliades argues that "our future does not belong to us. It is owned by Americans...the military officers who fill the US embassy, the political officers who threaten to stop the economic aid, the businessmen who threaten to stop investing, the bankers who lend money"(236). Eliades' notion of ownership might usefully be glossed by regulatory school

economist Michel Aglietta as “proprietary control over the structural forms necessary for the continuing cycles of valorization thanks to [money capital at the disposal of government and capitalists alike].”⁴⁹⁰ As the Greek tells Axton, “[y]ou structure the loan and when they can’t pay the money, what happens? I will tell you. You have a meeting in Switzerland and you restructure”(59). Eliades’ remarks are intended for David Keller, Mainland Bank’s representative in the region. Eliades focuses on the pre-eminence of US foreign direct investment and IMF’s “structural adjustments” as a source of “accumulation by dispossession” undertaken by the US government *and* US capitalists in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, such operations represent the core of Keller’s business, who significantly talks to James about his job:

“Why do I miss my countries?” David said. “My countries are either terrorist playpens or they’re viciously anti-American or they’re huge tracts of economic and social and political wreckage....Why can’t I wait to get back into it? Why am I so eager? A hundred percent inflation, twenty percent unemployment. I love deficit countries....When they allow you to monitor their economic policies in return for a loan. When you reschedule a debt an it amounts to an aid program. These things help, they genuinely help stabilize the region. We do things for these countries. Our countries are interesting”(232-33).

Keller’s love and nostalgia for what he defines *his* countries evidences how profound his own immersion within the medium of speculative capital is. In actual fact, one may read Keller as an embodiment of private investment capital; his reiterate use of possessive pronouns *my* or *our* reflects the process of appropriation and assets stripping US capital undertook through “the debt trap [and] crisis creation, management and manipulation.”⁴⁹¹

Arguably, Eliades’ economic comments expose the negative side of US financial capitalism and remind readers of the mediator role finance capital should play within “world capitalism [understood as] an asymmetrical systems of power politics, working through hierarchical interdependencies”⁴⁹² between global and local structures. However, Eliades’s role as member of a terrorist cell which makes an attempt on Keller’s life, represents an act of resistance to “regional crises and highly localised place-based devaluations”⁴⁹³ promoted by Keller’s predatory capitalist practices.

James’ tourist-like existence does not offer him the means to cope with the actualities of Kouros island, where his wife Kathryn and son Tap have moved. Kouros “wasn’t an island abandoned to tourism”(14), and it configures itself as a pre-capitalist enclave. The contrast with

⁴⁹⁰ Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, 253.

⁴⁹¹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 162.

⁴⁹² Michel Aglietta, “Into a New Growth Regime”, *New Left Review* 54, (Nov-Dec 2008), 63.

⁴⁹³ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 151.

Athens swarming with tourists, ready to consume a commodified version of the country's history, emerges very clearly when one considers the nature of the work Kathryn has come here to carry out: unpaid work in an archaeological dig, whose findings, once excavated, collected and classified, will never reach a museum since the excavation projects has currently run out of money (20). The island offers Kathryn an opportunity to complete her separation from James, separation which can be recast as a "kind of decolonising gesture."⁴⁹⁴ The island becomes the locus where she can "dig a place for her betrayed marriage and reestablis[h] the fractured foundations of her life. She also works for the satisfaction of labour itself."⁴⁹⁵

Kouros, whose name evokes a Greek statue of a standing youth, left foot forward, qualifies as the locus where bodies can aspire to fixity, fixity which manifests in "the form of a Greek statuary [a place that offers the opportunity to counteract] the urge towards movement [towards fluency, towards modernity]"⁴⁹⁶ informing Athens and other finance capitalist outposts. Such "conflict between archaic stasis and contemporary movement"⁴⁹⁷ finds a further instantiation in the opposition between Kathryn's work in the digs and James' "largely airborne existence"⁴⁹⁸. Although the dig limits the space and scope of Kathryn's actions, it "enables [her] to see what's really there...new sight, new touch. She loves the feel of workable earth...The trench is her medium by now"(133). Digging the earth becomes for Kathryn a means to discover the pleasure of materiality, of embodiedness arising from the earth; through her manual labour she seeks to reappropriate a connection with the hard materiality of objects and , through them, a connection with her body, somehow thinned by her exposure to James, under whose influence she had been evacuated, spectralised, hollowed out. The trench also offers "a five-foot block of time abstracted from the system"(133), providing an alternative to the "spatial and temporal melting"⁴⁹⁹ characterising James' medium. If the opacity of James' medium impinges on James' ability to see the other as other, and the interdependencies between local and global capitalist networks, the earth offers Kathryn purchase over James. The earth endows Kathryn with a new sight which allows her to feel an allegiance to past civilizations whose cultural and historical heritage continues to cling, although residually, to contemporary social formations and to influence them. More significantly, she can appreciate "[o]bjects themselves"(133), as "things

⁴⁹⁴ Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology*, 183.

⁴⁹⁵ Zubeck, "Rediscovery of the Prosaic", 365.

⁴⁹⁶ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 97.

⁴⁹⁷ Idem.

⁴⁹⁸ Heffernan, *Capital, Class and Technology*, 189.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 222.

[that possess the property] to define the boundaries of the self”(133). Objects here appear not as the containers of an exchange value, but as use-values, as “a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.”⁵⁰⁰ By contrast, James, care of the fetishising power of speculative capital which renders “the entire process of reproduction...as a property inherent in [capital] itself.”⁵⁰¹, cannot see objects as products of human toil.

Axton cannot understand Kathryn’s interest in the dig and contends that he can only take his wife’s interest in material artefacts *literally* (133) as an interest for coins, vases etc. Within an economy dominated by finance capital, where structural amnesia of the “real” economy dominates, literalism instantiates a linguistic form of incorporation: “*demetaphorisation* (taking literally what is meant figuratively.)”⁵⁰² In effect, a literal vision of language will emerge as the structuring principle of the cult which strives to liberate language from its referential content.

Therefore, given the structural differences underlying the mediums in which Kathryn and James operate, James and Kathryn can only “connect through the agency of...Owen Brademas”(20). Owen’s role as a mediator between James and his former wife derives from the peculiar position he occupies at the threshold between James and Kathryn’s media, care of his double role as both archaeologist and epigraphist. While as an archaeologist Owen seems to “[yield] himself completely to things”(20) in order to “se[e] what is there”(19), his more recent interest in epigraphy reveals his desire to occupy a space “unconnected to the earth”(171), where he can engage solely with forms of “writing on the surface, never with whatever exists under that surface.”⁵⁰³ Owen feels drawn to uncover “the mysterious importance in the letters as such, the blocks of characters”(35). His rejecting “what one might call the archaeological or depth option [in favour of] the epigraphical option [relegates Owen] to a world wedded to the literally superficial, a world that has come to traffic only in images— giving up in despair the belief in the more substantial, three-dimensional things those images were once thought to stand for.”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Marx, *Capital Vol 1*, 41.

⁵⁰¹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol 3, 392.

⁵⁰² Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 126.

⁵⁰³ Cowart, *Physics of Language*, 169.

⁵⁰⁴ Idem.

Arguably, his retreat into “the endless epistemology of surface”⁵⁰⁵ originates Owen’s “grief”(19), grief over the lost “subsurface reality...represented by language”⁵⁰⁶ which constituted his original archaeological calling.

Yet, Owen’s “infatuation”(35) with letters, “with the alphabet itself” concentrates on characters as they take material form in writing: “the shapes of the letters and the material they used. Fire-hardened clay, dense black-basalt, marble with a ferrous content”(36). Thus the elemental forms of language possess a striking hard, tangible materiality. Although Owen refuses to engage in “a conversation with ancient people”(35), to “trace the geography of language”(35), to let the stones speak, his obsession with inscribed stones may arguably reveal a residual, buried attachment to the inscriptions’ power to be readable and therefore to signify. Owen finds the “beautiful shapes” of carved letters strangely “reawakening”(36) as if the carving of the hard surface of the stone might restore, re-originate the referential powers of the words the letters form. In effect, in following the cult from Greece to India, Owen also undertakes a linguistic journey through which he aims to recuperate the original “bond between word and thing.”⁵⁰⁷

Unsurprisingly, James feels at the same time attracted to and in antagonism with Owen, perceiving how much of himself, and of the anxieties troubling him, James can glimpse “in Owen’s refracted light”(20). Owen is an older version of James, whose existential medium, epigraphy, with its interest in a language which is “form...without content”⁵⁰⁸ mirrors James’ speculative medium. Although he cherishes the abstractedness of language, Owen knows at a deeper level that letters were first brought together to form words in order to denote “[e]veryday objects, animals, part of the body...these marks, that appear so pure and abstract to us, began as objects in the world, living things in many cases”(116).

Thus, both Owen and James’ predicaments instantiate, within different fields of action, what Hal Foster (analysing the work of the avant-garde visual arts movements in the 1970s and in the 1980s) calls “the passion of the sign...under advanced capitalism.”⁵⁰⁹ Foster argues (borrowing from Fredric Jameson), that the “dissolution [of the sign] to the point...where,

⁵⁰⁵ Idem.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, 168.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 169.

⁵⁰⁸ Marx, *Capital*, Vol 3, 392

⁵⁰⁹ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real. The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1996), 74.

signifiers became literal, 'freed from the ballast of their signifieds'⁵¹⁰ was the product of a shift towards an advanced form of capitalism which relied on immaterial capital.⁵¹¹ Foster, however, recognises that such dissolution is by no means total, "that there are always resistances to factor in", resistances that attest to the residual force with which the referential world returns as a haunting, traumatic presence.⁵¹² For Foster, serial repetition within contemporary visual art works both as "a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out onto it":

repetition...is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or simulation (of a pure image, a detached signifier). Rather, repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also points to the real, and at this point that the real ruptures the screen of repetition.⁵¹³

Foster's argument allows to recast *The Names's* interest in the serial juxtaposition of letters as DeLillo's aesthetic representation of the erasure of the world of commodity and the anxieties emerging from such erasure. DeLillo, I would argue, reformulates in different aesthetic terms the separation of form from its content in the medium of finance capital, and foregrounds it as the very medium through which characters associated with "fictitious capital" and its movements must cast their actions and motives. While in *Players*, DeLillo instantiated such representation through paratactical narrative shifts, here in *The Names*, Owen, and the cult's interest "in letters, written symbols fixed in sequence"(30) reveal, to use Adorno's definition of parataxis, "[f]aithfulness to something that has been lost...the relationship of something omitted...through the hiatus of form...the content becomes substance."⁵¹⁴

Owen's first encounter with the members of the cult, which occurs in a cave formation on Kouros, resembles a "medieval tale"(29): the question one of the members asks Owen "How many languages do you speak?" reminds him of "a question asked of travellers at the city gates"(29). The question however reveals itself more as a form of initiation to the cult's philosophy, with Owen being an ideal candidate given his command of several ancient language. Brademas finds the primitive, archaic lifestyle the members of the cult endorse particularly intriguing. By living in caves, by wearing "old shabby loose-fitting clothes", by their being immersed in filth (29) the members occupy a medium structured by "dirt"(30). Such primitive

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 72.

⁵¹² Ibid., 132.

⁵¹³ Idem.

⁵¹⁴ Adorno, "Parataxis", 116, 129.

lifestyle, Owen understands, is evidently a rejection of their European origins, of their erudition, the latter manifesting itself in the cult's ability to speak several ancient languages. The earthly residue in which they are immersed, which clings to them resisting their attempt to detach themselves from material relations, appears at odds with their interest in alphabets, in letters, that is, detached from their signifying power. Although he perceives an aura of danger emanating from these people (29), Owen feels attracted to the cult given its interest in epigraphy. Owen senses that the cult may have discovered in the serial order of letters some "pattern, order, some sort of unifying light"(169), which Owen hopes to find in epigraphy in order to counteract a "deep restlessness in him, an insecurity...[l]oneliness"(78), possibly his "grief"(19).

One might argue that James embraces Owen's interest in the cult precisely because he partakes Owen's restlessness and insecurity. Via Owen's attempt to uncover the secret of the cult, James may in turn assuage his own peculiar fear: "[m]y life is going by" he tells Owen "and I can't get a grip on it. It eludes me, defeats me"(300). Both Owen and Axton's quests for "order and elucidation"(*P*, 32) may well reflect the "ordering instinct"(115) pervading their native country, the US, as it endeavours to reconstruct a new capitalist world order along the organising principles of finance capitalism. Owen and the cult's shrinking "language to its lowest common denominator –the alphabet– denies the prosaic richness of language, its ability to give expression to human possibility"⁵¹⁵ and thus mirrors finance capital's denial of social labour embodied in material commodities.

The cult preserves, by its very sectarian nature, its secret. Owen recognises that the cult is a "closed-in...clustered" aggregation and that its "inwardness" already keeps it "safe from chaos and life"(116). Both Owen and Axton qualify as ideal investigators of the cult's animating logic: the first because of his knowledge of ancient languages and epigraphy, the second because of his belonging to a "closed-in", inward-looking class fragment whose internal coherence arises, as Nick Heffernan underlines, from sharing an actuarial language of data and figures, where numbers "substitute for and displace material objects" and the human element.⁵¹⁶

Upon hearing about the murder of a "feeble-minded"(73) man in the village of Mikro Kaminis on Kouros, Axton and Brademas immediately draw a connection between the killing

⁵¹⁵ Zubeck, "Rediscovering the Prosaic", 370.

⁵¹⁶ Heffernan, *Capital, Class, and Technology*, 194, 195.

and the cult, whose members have abandoned the caves in which they lived. Both feel that this murder is not “a senseless killin[g]”(73), that beyond its “bestiality”(72), the murder has occurred following a certain pattern. From this point on, the novel depicts both men’s endeavour to track the cult’s members down and their intellectual effort to find the hidden meaning behind this murder and a series of other killings.

The peculiar nature of the weapons the cult uses to carry out its murders contrasts with its abstract interest in letters, particularly a “claw hammer...[a s]imple tool of iron and wood”(116), a tool of manual labour devised to grab and nail down, possibly not dissimilar from the one used to carve the inscriptions Owen studies.

While Owen departs on a journey to India, where he will eventually encounter the cult, Axton pursues his own quest by joining director Frank Volterra. Volterra helps James understand that although the murders of feeble-minded, crippled, near-to-death people look “ghastly and irrational”(202), they nonetheless possess “a pattern, something inevitable and mad, some closed-in horrible logic...insane”(199). While Volterra wrongly believes that these killings constitute sacrificial offerings to an unnamed god, he inadvertently leads James to discover the real meaning of these crimes. As Axton follows Volterra to Jordan, James ends up visiting an ancient Roman amphitheatre on Jebel Amman. There, a place “open to the city [and yet] detached from it”(157), James is endowed with the gift of sight which, resembling that of his wife, allows him to read the connection between “[i]nitials, names, places...Jebel Amman/James Axton”(158). He therefore understands that the cult members are not “secular monks ..vaulted in eternity”(199), but people “engaged in a painstaking denial...intent on ritualising a denial of our elemental nature”(175). By matching the initial of the victims’ names with place initials, the cultists “aim to eliminate the deferral of meaning inherent in signification and destroy referentiality itself.”⁵¹⁷ Eliminating referentiality amounts to undertaking “the final denial of our base reality”(175): severing the “knot”(291) with the world of physical things and human relations the cultists inhabit by means of systematic death (175).

James’ intuitions receive confirmation when, again following Volterra, he encounters Andhal, the “apostate”, who, by inscribing the name of the cult on a rock that James glimpse while driving across the Mani desert, “manages his escape [from the cult] by revealing [the] secret of the organisation”(216). The cult’s name Ta Onómata, The Names (188) “is a self-

⁵¹⁷ Osteen, *American Magic*, 130.

referential name...one that names its own infinite regress...a non-name that epitomises what [Andhal] calls a 'self-referring' world."⁵¹⁸ Andhal confirms Owen's original idea that the cult receives its strength from its invisibility: "no one knows we exist. No one is looking for us" (208) except for people like James, Owen, and partly Volterra, who feel at a "preverbal level" that "[the cult's] program evokes something that [they] seem to understand and find familiar" (208). Andhal voices what James had intuitively understood: the matching of initials, the letters referring to each other, constitute a structuring principle, no matter how insane this idea might seem. "Madness has a structure" (210), whose "program leads up to this. Only a death" (209). Yet, such death is a means to reaching a teleology, that is, to escape the world (210) and to substitute a "dead silence" (210) for the chaos of the world, of its languages, with their "unbridgeable gap between signifiers and signified"⁵¹⁹, and to create a "place where it is possible for men to stop making history. We are inventing a way out" (209).

Only in the desert can the cult find such place. The desert, as the cult member Singh (whom Owen meets in India) explains, constitutes "the abode of death: let me tell you what I like about the desert. The desert is a solution. Simple, inevitable. It's like a mathematical solution applied to the affairs of the planet...My mind works better in the desert. My mind is a razed tablet....Vultures do business of the desert" (294, 298). Thus, the desert once more becomes the geographical metaphor for "a world that has become self-referring" (297), the geographical counterpart to "the desert of self-reference" the cult tries to create by pursuing a "purified language"⁵²⁰.

The cultists are "Beginners" (210), beginners of a system structured to contain and eschew the "chaos" (116) which arises from geopolitical unrest and turmoil; their actions, although they apparently "inten[d] nothing, mea[n] nothing", aim to "build a system to against terror...their means to contend with death has become death" (308), a self-referring movement which is in keeping with the self-referential structure of their cult. The chaos cultists perceive around them reflects itself, as Boxall posits, in the waning of the names' "interpellating force", a force which defines the identities of both people and places, and "draw[s them both] into history, communication and interaction."⁵²¹

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 130.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁵²¹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 87.

James and Owen must therefore acknowledge their inadvertent complicity with the cult: although they do not participate in the murders, they occupy mediums whose structuring principles resemble those of the cult. For example, the cultists, moving through Greece, Syria, Jordan and at the border between Pakistan and India, follow the same route as Axton, or Maitland, and more importantly Keller, known as “killer executive”(219). If the cult members are “beginners”, Axton too may be seen as a “beginner” of a new round of accumulation carried out by means of investments and credit to LDC countries. These countries’ subsequent inability to repay their debts in the face of the surge of the interest rate in the US, allowed the US, via the IMF, to impose upon these countries’ *agonising* economies structural adjustments programs which favoured both US and local capitalists, throwing the vast majority of the population into utter poverty. Finance capital then produces its own desert, since financial crises create the conditions for superseding both prior economic and social structures, local productive economies and labour. As Singh affirmed, the desert is where “vulture do business” and finance capitalism often turns into *vulture* capitalism marked by extreme predatory practices.

However, both James and Owen are able to perform their own act of apostasy. In narrating the secrets of the cult to Owen, and later in writing the narrative we are reading, Axton works as an “axestone”(212), producing “a book [onto which] alphabetic symbols [are] incised in wood”(291) and thus dispelling the cult’s secret, “chisel[ing its] name into history.”⁵²² In so doing Axton responds to Andhal’s “call for human pity and forgiveness”: his desire to find “a thing outside the cult. An interface with the world. Something to outlast us. Something to contain the pattern”(212).

Andhal’s call, so seemingly at odds with the cult’s attempt to escape the world and history, reveals a fracture, a fissure within the system the cult builds, a fissure through which one can glimpse an opposite desire to inhabit history, occupy a time and a space in which “events [link] all countries”(40) and the people inhabiting them, a time and a space that bear the memory of past civilisations and events that produced them. Andhal’s is in fact James’ call: “[t]his is where I want to be. History”(97). In order to be in history, to participate in it, one has to immerse in the “surge and pelt of daily life” of which history is made. Avoiding such an immersion, and that within the “river of language”(303), equals to disappearing into oblivion. Andhal laments repeatedly that “[n]o one will know [we existed] when we die away”(212), and

⁵²² Osteen, *American Magic*, 130.

stresses that the cult is slowly folding: “we lose purpose, get sick, some have died, some have wandered off” (208)

Despite its inwardness, its secrecy, its severing its ties from the world of material signifiers in language, the cult’s insane structure does not offer that exit from history which could lead cultists to “vault into eternity”. On the contrary, the cult seems to collapse precisely because of its own abstractedness, self-referentiality, disembodiedness. Therefore, via disembodiedness and self-referentiality, functioning as both the cult’s structuring principle and source of its destruction, one may glimpse the contradictions proper of speculative capital, whose fictitiousness constitutes a means of expansion for the capitalist system, but also a source of crisis formation.

The peculiar nature of the cult’s murders attests to the cultists’ “secret”, secret which, in Abraham and Torok’s term, is “a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence, albeit unwittingly, by the sufferers themselves.”⁵²³ I would argue that the cultists too suffer from a loss, the loss of a linguistic and material referent in the world; arguably, they might be considered melancholic, and therefore subject to the process of incorporation (much like James and Owen). Having incorporated this loss, the cultists undertake a solitary existence with the desert functioning as the geographical counterpart to the “intrapsychic tomb” where, according to Abraham and Torok, “the loss is buried in [a] crypt.”⁵²⁴ Indeed, the origin of the cultists’ loss is never spelled out, but only glimpsed. However, as Hal Foster suggested, in the serial killings the cult perpetrates one might in fact detect “a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out onto it”.⁵²⁵ By killing the victims literally, the cultists perform an act of demetaphorisation. While the killings are supposed to preserve the stability of their psychic constructions, they also let out the cultists’ incorporated loss over referentiality, fixity and embeddedness. Andhal recalls “the experience of killing”, a mixture of sounds produced by the hammers pounding the bodies, and particularly the act of shattering the victims’ skulls, smashing their brains, crumpling their bodies (209, 210). The gruesomeness of the killings testifies to the cult’s endeavour to engage with the matter of their victims’ bodies, to fix them, by hammering their skulls to the ground or, when they substitute a stiletto for the hammer, to incise them.

⁵²³ N. Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 99.

⁵²⁴ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 130.

⁵²⁵ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 151.

Arguably their victims' bodies are "the thing outside the cult"(212), the book Andhal asks James to write. Oddly, Andhal remarks, the bodies released "little blood, not at all what we expected"(210). But such a paucity of blood, the body's inability to let release blood, to let it flow copiously, may actually metaphorically recall the inability of the bodies-as-books to release the flow of language. By reducing language to letters the cultist perform, to return to Abraham and Torok, an "antisemantic" gesture, where the "defunct" words are "relieved of their communicative functions."⁵²⁶ The initials of victims and places therefore come to signify a form of "linguistic resistance to communication...in graphic effects [which testifies to the impact of some traumatic event...to block the symbolic operation]"⁵²⁷ of language: "the opacity [of the letters] registers the deforming effect of a specific historical event"⁵²⁸, namely the financialization of the US economy.

James and Owen's investigation of the cult develops into a lesson in self-awareness for both characters. Owen's refusal to follow the cultists as they commit what is likely to be their last murder, originates in his rejecting the cult-like logic that has informed vast part of his life. Finding refuge in a silo, Owen finally faces the memory of the one episode in his life that marked his whole existence. Recalling his childhood in the Kansas prairie during the Depression as a fiction in which Owen moves as the main character (305), Owen remembers an episode of glossolalia involving his community. Owen recollects the preacher pounding the air (thus recalling the cultists pounding the bodies of their victims), inciting the community to talk freely to God, to "get wet" into the "beautiful babbling brook"(307) of language. The traumatic emotional effect of this occurrence, which I may recouch as Owen's traumatic "secret", will only become evident within the novel's coda, "The Prairie" section, an excerpt from the fictional account of Owen's life written by James' son Tap. The fictional character of Tap's story, Orville Benton, recalls the horror at being unable to "speak in tongue"(336). Rather than being swept by the babbling brook, Orville/Owen, "tongue-tied"(339) draws into a "still pool"(338) of a language which only sounds to him "upside down and inside out"(337). In "creeping despair"(337) the boy, who wishes "to speak as they were speaking"(336), can only hear "poor clattery English"(337), a language whose "normal understanding" is "absent", barred from

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁵²⁷ Godden, "Poe", 993.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 994.

Orville/Owen. The entire community “obliterate[s]” itself within the “holy gibberish”(307) and “escape[s] from the condition...of the self”(307) and of the world. The members of the community enter a state of ecstatic “being beyond themselves” which enables them to regenerate themselves, to return to a pristine state as “children of the race”(307). On the contrary, Orville/Owen, can only hear “words flying out of them like spat stones”(307). Unable to understand the language of the community, Orville/Owen finds himself condemned to pursue the carved stones, both *tombstones* for language’s referentiality and at the same time carriers of residual “semantic rudiments”(180), possibly the only means he has to escape “the nightmare of real things, the fallen wonder of the world”(339) deprived of referentiality.

The memory of such moment enables Owen to confront his “secret”, the traumatic event which originated his grief, the loss of language’s signifying power and thus of language as a means of communal bond between human beings, places and histories. For Owen, “memory is the faculty of absolution”(304), since the act of remembering allows him to “begin to repair [his] present condition”(304). Memory and recollection stand therefore in opposition to disavowal grounded within the process of incorporation which, in Owen’s case, originated within the episode of glossolalia.

Owen’s restored memory allows him to put paid to his peregrinations and to find that ordering principle which his immersion in epigraphy failed to provide. In following Owen in his quest for the cult, James too reaches a new kind of self-awareness, claiming that “whatever Owen had lost in life-strength, this is what I’d won”(309).

James returns to Athens with a renewed “sense of the present” where he can discover “the seeping love of small talk and family chat”(312). Precisely reconstituting a “knot” with “the prosaic detail and regard for the embodied particularity of human existence”⁵²⁹ epitomised by his family originates James’ desire to pursue “a second life”: “to know [his family] twice the second time in memory and language. Through them, [him]self”(329).

In addition, his son Tap’s novelistic feat allows James to rediscover a new linguistic medium, alternative to the virtual language that is “fashioned by [his] telex[es and actuarial reports], that empty language of occupation which threatens to sweep [the world] before it.”⁵³⁰ Tap, as his name suggests, is able to tap the brook of language, to counteract the dead letters

⁵²⁹ Zubeck, “Rediscovering the Prosaic”, 355.

⁵³⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 104.

inscribed within Owen's stones. The child's "misspellings" are "spirited", inhabited, that is, by the spirit of human intellect that allows to re-originate words, to "make them new again...reshapable" (313). The spirit which comes to re-inhabit the dead words, while renewing language's power to signify, also testifies to the persistence of "ancient things" (313) within language. Tap's misspellings produce "mangled words" (313): yet Tap's mangling, his battering, his mutilating the signifier allows language to flow in opposition to the cultists's hammering of bodies which released only little blood. James's decision to return to freelance writing entails producing a personal version of his son's feat and finding a personal version of his son's counter-language Ob. Osteen, who reads the whole novel as "metaphorically [written] in Ob,"⁵³¹ claims that ob, "meaning 'in the way of' or 'against' emerges as a counterlanguage to the smug, self-reflexive and deadening language of his father and corporate friends' language of business."⁵³² In pursuing his own version of Ob, James therefore, might also discover "a form in which to resituate the bankrupt language of global capital in relation to history and landscape"⁵³³ and reestablish the "knot" between the fictitious medium of speculative capital and the structurally forgotten realm of the productive economy.

James' reawakening to the necessary interdependencies between the medium he has so far occupied and the world of the productive economy can only occur the moment he decides to abandon his job as a risk analysts, upon discovering that he has inadvertently served as a dupe for the CIA. As a result of such discovery, James has to revise his notion of America as "world's living myth":

There's no sense of wrong when you kill an American or blame America for some local disaster. This is our function, to be character types to embody recurring themes that people can use to comfort themselves and so on. We're here to accommodate. Whatever people need, we provide. A myth is a useful thing. People expect us to absorb the impact of their grievances (114).

If myths are narratives though which men attempted to "subdue and codify" otherwise inexplicable events befalling them, a fable that no longer bears any trace to its origins in the historical world, James instead has to recognise that the actions of Americans like he and Keller deeply affect the lives of other people. By moving capital around the world, executives like Keller, with the help of so many Axtons, actually promote "regional crises and highly localised

⁵³¹ Osteen, *American Magic*, 119.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁵³³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 104.

place-based devaluations...as primary means by which [US] capitalism"⁵³⁴ can expand and help revitalise US military and economic hegemonic project. Similarly, the CIA is no longer "America's myth....The agency takes on shapes and appearances, embodying whatever we need at a given time to know ourselves or unburden ourselves"(317). James' original view of the agency as a myth, I would posit, reflects his view of the agency as self-referring entity, whose doings, or perhaps wrongdoings, appear as totally independent from the government. In placing the blame on the CIA, one can unburden the load of acknowledging responsibility of governmental structures in deploying the agency to facilitate the construction of profitable business conditions for US capital, of which the coup that deposed Mossadeq and installed the Shah of Iran is one significant example DeLillo may have had in mind. The interdependency between US government and business thus explains why James, rather than Keller, might have been the target of the Greek terrorist cell headed by Eliades.

Such an episode clearly emerges as a form of resistance (like the Iranian Revolution) to US capitalist practices of accumulation by dispossession. The episode configures itself as an act where death, as Volterra had once argued, enacts a "revenge motive": the crime occurs in "return for some injury, some death"(202), in return, that is, for those "local disasters"(114) that predatory capitalist practices unleash by means of financial speculation and crises. Being "American" in the sense that Keller and Axton are by means of their professions is, to other peoples' eye, a "depravity" and cause for actual "grievances"(114): " the single word, the final item on the list. *American*. How do you connect things? Learn their names"(328).

When James learns from Roswer about NorthEast Group's ties to the CIA, he is actually visiting a Moghul tomb in Lahore. This episode, which critics have tended to overlook, has a paramount importance within the novel, because it precedes James' visit to the Acropolis at the close of the novel and marks a significant moment within James' process of regeneration. Both visits signal James' abandonment of his tourist-like mentality and help to understand better how Owen's rediscovery of memory becomes a gift to James.

Recalling James' refusal to visit the Acropolis at the opening of *The Names* perhaps constitutes the best way to gloss both visits. Axton begins the novel stating his refusal to visit the place:

⁵³⁴ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 151

it daunted me, that somber rock. I preferred to wander in the modern city, imperfect, blaring. The weight and moment of those worked stones promised to make the business of seeing them a complicated one. So much converges there. It's what we've rescued from the madness. There are obligations attached to that visit (3).

As a tourist who wishes to escape accountability and, therefore, obligations of all kinds, one may read James' refusal to visit the Acropolis as an extension of his shying away from the complications of familial ties. But the visit also implies that, in order to appreciate fully the Acropolis, James must know how to look at these ruins with a sight he still doesn't possess.

The dismay that Axton perceives while looking at the rock derives from his inability to come to terms with the '*weight*', the hard materiality of "the *worked* stone", where the word 'worked' and 'weight' may suggest his willingness to avoid any contact with the residual trace of human labour which produced the stones. Despite its weight, the rock seems to "float in the dark [over] a street in decline, closed shops and demolition"(4), bestowing on the temple a spectral, ghostly existence, which recalls both the spectre of past ages and, more significantly, the spectre of labour and of the real economy that finance attempts to wish away. Axton feels a sense of "despise"(3) in looking at the rock, rock which he affirms "looms. It's so powerfully there. It almost forces us to ignore it or at least to resist it. We have our self-importance. We also have our inadequacy. The latter is a desperate invention of the former"(5). Arguably, "self-importance", "despise" and "inadequacy" denote a semantics of disavowal vis-à-vis the haunting power of the rock. Confronted with the reality of the rock as an expression of human labour, one might glimpse the extent of Axton's anxiety over the limitations of the self-contained world of speculative capital to sustain single-handedly the motor of the economy, an anxiety that he attempts to disregard.

James's visit to the Moghul's tomb reveals an entirely different attitude towards the worked nature of the tomb itself. Here, "the white marble surface" of the tomb reveals a mosaic of "floral designs" and inscriptions, "shaped stones"(272). Unconsciously re-enacting Owen's gesture of "lay[ing] his hands against [the inscriptions], feel where the words have been cut"(36), James not only sees the tomb, but also *touches* the inscriptions: "My hand moved slowly over the words, feeling for breaks between the inlay and the marble, not to fault the craftsmen, of course, *but only to find the human labour, the individual*, in the wholeness and beauty of the tomb"(272, emphasis added). Axton's touching the inscriptions signals his coming to terms with matter. James sees the human labour in the breaks between the inlay and the

carved word becomes the embodiment of human labour, rescuing it from amnesia and recognising it as the actual product of a concrete individuality.

Upon his return from this trip, Axton can finally visit the Acropolis, “not as a thing to study but to feel”(330). The rock from above appears “big, scarred, broken, rough,”(330) but Axton does not perceive it as “a relic species of Greece but part of the living city below”: “I hadn’t expected a human feeling to emerge from the stones but this is what I found, deeper than the art and the mathematics embodied in the structure, the optical exactitude. I found a cry for pity. This is what remains to the mauled stones in their blue surround, this voice we know as our own”(330). The cry for pity from the stones is a cry to keep the human element alive in the face of transformations, as in the case of finance capital, that aim to erase prior social and economic structures, to impose a virtual and bodiless existence as opposed to the tangible, hard materiality of the commodity, and a collapsing of past, present and future.

James can now see the Acropolis as “compass rose of memory”(104), for only in memory can he retrace its origins, origins which names also help to preserve. Language, James understand, is “an offering” one brings to the temple, an offering which testifies to the productiveness of human activity in the world, an activity which constantly renews itself by tapping the source of history and by preserving a dialogue with its origins.

CHAPTER 6

BODY AND TIME REGAINED: *THE BODY ARTIST*

While James Axton manages to overcome the melancholic incorporation informing the medium of speculative capital, his narrative, which reaches us from a “ghostly, absent place”⁵³⁵ in the future he occupies, records with “focus and clarity...the dawning of the Reagan-Thatcher era...the establishment of a new monetarist world market”⁵³⁶ and the consolidation of the process of financialization of the US and world economy.

Underworld (1997), DeLillo’s compendium of post-World War II American history, describes a world propelled towards the moment when “[e]verything is connected in the end” (*U*, 826) in “the utopian glow of cyber-capital.” (*RoF*, 33). For DeLillo, the end of the 20th century marks the triumph of “Das Kapital”; the worldwide domination of “[f]oreign investment, global markets, corporate acquisition...[. T]he attenuating influence of money that’s electronic...produces an instantaneous capital that shoots across horizons at the speed of light, making for a certain furtive sameness, a planing away of particulars that affects everything” (*U*,

⁵³⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 90.

⁵³⁶ *Idem*.

785-86).⁵³⁷ *Underworld* weaves together all DeLillo's works⁵³⁸, and summarises with the clarity of hindsight the workings of finance capital as the driving force behind the arrival and triumph of "an unimpeachable, unboundaried global American power"⁵³⁹ which DeLillo's early fiction recorded and exposed in the process of becoming.

Indeed, the 1990s signalled "the true ascendancy of finance...the financial sector profits came to constitute a greater percentage of total corporate profits than at any previous time in post-war history."⁵⁴⁰ Low interest rates and a rising dollar facilitated borrowing and investment; further deregulation of financial markets, coupled with the stunning ascendance of the New Economy and property markets, allowed non-manufacturing profits to soar. It seemed then that finance capital had truly provided a solution to the crisis of US and world capitalism. However, as economist Robert Brenner points out, the enormous rise in asset values did not match a concomitant growth of profits within the manufacturing sector. US affluence was "no mere reflection of improvement in the real economy, but rather a financial bubble."⁵⁴¹ First the Asian crisis in 1997-98, and then the burst of the New Economy bubble in 2000 exposed that "both consumption and investment growth [in the US had so far] derived from the wealth effect of the stock market bubble"⁵⁴², a bubble which once burst pulled the US economy, and the rest of the world, into another downward spiral.

Since 2000, a policy of increasing credit formation pursued by the US government and the Federal Reserve brought about a new financial bubble characterised by "overpriced corporate equities, an unsustainable boom in the housing market, and record current account deficits."⁵⁴³ On the contrary, few measures were taken to restore profitability and investment in the productive economy. Today, the Great Financial Crisis triggered by subprimes, the failure of investment banks, and a serious worldwide recession have proved that the faith in what DeLillo tags the "utopian glow of cyber-capital", in speculative capital as the limitless source of profit and wealth has been misplaced.

⁵³⁷ In "Das Kapital", the novel comes full circle offering one way to read its opening assertion "He speaks in your voice, American" (*U*, 11) as "the naked Americanisation of your voice and of my voice, the levelling of the unguessable singularities and flaws and nuances that make up the sonic and graphic texture of accent, of signature, of character." Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 177.

⁵³⁸ I share David Cowart's view that *Underworld* recycles several elements of DeLillo's earlier fiction, which of course does not diminish the enormous artistic and creative value of the novel. See Cowart, *Physics of Language*, 197-199.

⁵³⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 177.

⁵⁴⁰ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 88-89.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁴² *Idem.*

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 188, 303.

For DeLillo, the passage from the 1990s to the new century is therefore marked by “the surge of capital markets” as the “vital and influential” force of global “discourse and ...consciousness [which] summoned us all to live permanently in the future”(RoF, 33), in the unboundaried, limitless, and amnesiac space of cyber, financial capital.

The “socialization of finance”, that is the massive “diversion of [at least 60% of American families’] savings from household economies to stock and securities markets [directly or indirectly through pension funds or mutual funds]”⁵⁴⁴ has led more and more people to place their expectation in the future performance of financial markets, where value creation emerges not from actual values realised in the present, but in fact from values which will be realised in the future. The cramped temporality of financial markets collapses past, present and future into an endless continuum, and produces the dramatic disarticulation of the notion of time which constitutes one DeLillo’s central preoccupations in the 21st century.

However, as both *The Body Artist* (2001) and *Cosmopolis* (2003) testify, DeLillo seems to have presciently perceived, that “something will happen soon, maybe today”(C, 79), that something will bring an end to such an apparent cyber-capital-produced timelessness, and that such momentous change will originate within the very financial system which created such timelessness. Already in 2000 and 2001 a wave of protests swept the globe, voicing a growing dissatisfaction with the notion of a future prescribed for by the logic of global financial markets:

The protesters in Genoa, Prague, Seattle and other cities want to decelerate the global momentum that seemed to be driving unthinkingly toward a landscape of consumer-robots and social instability, with the chance of self-determination probably 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 (RoF, 33-34).

DeLillo endorses the protesters’ need to restore the flow of time, and with it “a flow of consciousness and possibility”(BA,99) where human agency still plays a central role in the shaping and making of economic, social and political history. However, in order to retrieve a notion of human, teleological time, DeLillo suggests that we should recognise that we have been living in an age where “time is out of joint”, in a “in a kind of evacuated time which has lost its

⁵⁴⁴ Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language*, trans. by Gregory Conti, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 21, 15.

narrative quality, which can neither inherit the legacy of the past, nor move towards the possibility of a new and undiscovered future.”⁵⁴⁵

While for Boxall, this out-of joint time is the product of mourning, I have contended that the time of finance capital is the time of the illness of mourning, melancholia. The time of melancholic incorporation has undoubtedly lost a “narrative quality” (*C*, 77), and yet, because of the disavowal it produces, is able to sustain the perception that, as DeLillo writes, “time *seems* to pass [and] the world happens, unrolling into moments” (*BA*, 7). In his early fiction, DeLillo has pinned down and described the emergence of a haunted time where “spectres of value, as Derrida might put it, v[ie] against each other in a vast, worldwide, disembodied phantasmagoria.”⁵⁴⁶ However, if on the one hand the ghost haunting this time is the free-floating disembodied ghost of finance capital as Jameson argues,⁵⁴⁷ other ghosts are ready to appear in order to participate such phantasmagoria. These ghosts do not appear as reflections of the bright, glowing future promised by cyber-capital; on the contrary they are the ghosts of the lost, buried object which is *C*, a spectre of the past history of capital and of social relationships which seek to resist their erasure.

The new century, however, inaugurates a new stage within DeLillo’s oeuvre. *The Body Artist*, the story of Lauren Hartke’s successful attempt to deal with her personal loss thanks to the help of the mysterious Mr Tuttle, is a narrative of recovery from the illness of mourning, a recovery which, Freud affirms, can occur in an elusive, inexplicable fashion.⁵⁴⁸ In describing this harrowing, deeply moving and personal tale of introjection, the novel yields a visionary moment whereby one can glimpse that something will happen that will help supersede the melancholia and refusal to mourn of the finance-dominated age.

With *The Body Artist*, DeLillo seeks to recuperate both the body and a notion of temporality which escapes the constant acceleration of financial markets, an experience of time not as anticipation, but rather as belatedness. Paradoxically, only a total immersion in the timelessness and bodilessness proper of both mourning and melancholia attending a loss can help to recover both the body and a linear progression of time. Spared, by the intervention of Tuttle, from suffering inexpressible mourning, Lauren can recuperate time and body and

⁵⁴⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 216.

⁵⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Culture and Finance Capital”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24 n°1 (Autumn 1997), 251.

⁵⁴⁷ Idem.

⁵⁴⁸ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, 252.

represent, in her “Body Time” piece, the condition of those who instead inhabit the time of melancholia, who refuse the transformative experience of introjection

Nicholas Royle suggests that “*The Body Artist* is concerned with ghosts in a relatively traditional sense, in other words with the ways in which a loved one doesn’t die when he (or she) dies: ghosts are about mourning, refused or impossible.”⁵⁴⁹ At the same time, however, he posits that the novel tries to address spectrality, to capture it and translate it into a language that may explain it. I would argue that *The Body Artist* engages in “decompos[ing] in analysis this thing –specter– by highlighting its constitutive features: mourning, language and work.”⁵⁵⁰ According to Derrida, engaging with spectrality entails “attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localising the dead”; talking to and about the spectre “on condition of language– and the voice”. Finally it entails acknowledging that “the spirit of the spirit is work, a certain power of transformation.”⁵⁵¹ Indeed, the strange Mr Tuttle is a ghostly presence who engages Lauren both through “the materialisation of his body...but also by his continuous returning voice. Simulated, repeated, recorded, doubled, Mr Tuttle’s voice insistently addresses Lauren”⁵⁵² and his presence and voice both *work* towards enabling Lauren to confront and accept his husband’s death.

The breakfast scene which opens *The Body Artist* constitutes a miniature novel within the novel, where DeLillo introduces (recalling *Players*) two yet unnamed characters and the themes and concerns that will animate the remaining six chapters. It is an ominous introduction, where we see Rey and Lauren, at this stage still anonymous, going about their daily morning activities unaware of what is going to befall them. Yet the reader knows, care of the narrator, that something “happened this final morning”(7). One perceives the scene to be climaxing toward an event that will uproot the existence of both characters. The extremely, slowed down temporality of the action (a time where it’s impossible to distinguish between Thursday and Friday [21]) not only becomes painful to the reader awaiting for a momentous occurrence, but also anticipates the kind of timelessness that will characterise mourning. The introduction also

⁵⁴⁹ Nicholas Royle, “Clipping”, *Forum*, Issue 7, Autumn 2008, 4-5.

⁵⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 9.

⁵⁵¹ Idem.

⁵⁵² Laura DiPrete, “Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*: Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma”, *Contemporary Literature* 46.3 (2005), 485.

focuses on the dichotomy between embodiedness and disembodiedness. The texture of cereals and fruit that Lauren notices contrasts with the sight of the birds that she glimpses through the window: “[t]he birds...were consumed by light, disembodied, turned into something sheer and fleet and scatter bright”(21). By pitting the materiality of the cereals and soya granules against the fleetness and evanescence of the birds, DeLillo not only recalls the contrast between the world of material production and the bodilessness of cyber-capital, but he also points to the disembodiedness that death produces. The image of the birds deprived of their bodies in the glowing light may be read as an anticipation of Rey’s dematerialised body in death.

Initially Lauren appears “estranged from her surroundings...alienated from the fullest implications of [the materiality of] this domestic world and...absent from its fullest experience.”⁵⁵³ Her attention, drifting from the soya granules to a kettle, to the birds, to Rey’s toast, and so on and so forth, effectively suggests that “a sense of anxiety, absence, dislocation, even repulsion”⁵⁵⁴ invests her when confronting the material world, evoking Pammy’s similar discomfort over the materiality of fruit and its perishability (*P*, 35).

The image of the running water “silvery and clear but then turning opaque”(8) may be taken as symptomatic of a more general opaqueness characterising the life of these two characters. Indeed, the whole introduction alternates between moments of clarity and opaqueness, an alternation which suggests that both Lauren and Rey may be seeking to escape a “difficult negotiation [with] the real world.”⁵⁵⁵

Lauren’s inability to recall whether she has ever noticed the water changing from clarity to murk, or possibly her noticing and forgetting, may exemplify her inhabiting a medium which prevents her from fully acknowledging the reality surrounding her. Lauren’s failure to grasp the enormous disquiet behind Rey’s apparently off-hand remarks: “[you don’t know yet] the terror of another ordinary day”(15) and his explaining his having shaved that morning because “I want God to see my face”(14) ⁵⁵⁶, may further signal her refusal to come to terms, that is her choice to disavow, the problematic content of lived experience. At one point, Lauren “let[s] out a groan...that resembled a life lament” admitting that she “was only echoing Rey, identifyingly groaning his groan, but in a manner so seamless and deep it was her discomfort too”(9). Although she is able to recognise some discomfort within Rey’s groan (discomfort she has

⁵⁵³ Dewey, *Beyond Grief*, 134.

⁵⁵⁴ *Idem*.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134 for a similar point.

interiorised), she does not pause to investigate the causes of such disquiet and, in fact, she decides to disregard it, continuing her daily breakfast routine.

Significantly, Lauren's actions in the introduction are characterised by the verb "seem", as if DeLillo wished to stress her initial unwillingness to look beyond the surface of things in order to discover their real essence. The sudden arrival of a blue jay momentarily allows Lauren to overcome what she perceives as her blindness towards the material world, symbolised by the bird's majestic body and multicoloured plumage (22). The blue jay comes as a "clean shock", an "apparition set off from time": "[s]he watched it, black-barred across the wings and tail...its mineral blue...and broad neck band...and she thought she'd somehow only now learned to look"(22). The intrusion of the blue jay (as it will later occur with Tuttle) produces an epiphany, in that, through the jay's apparition, Lauren becomes "stabbed with self-awareness"(7) and understands "what it means to see if you've been near blind all your life"(22). Such epiphanic moment urges Lauren "to work past the details to the bird itself", to probe "the fixed interest in those eyes, a kind of inquisitive chill" which leads her to believe that "the bird was seeing her"(22). Even as Lauren fails to expand and elaborate on the episode, falling back into a state of "daydream"(14), she briefly recognises her disavowal vis-à-vis the material world surrounding her, and appears willing to analyse "the latent implications"(9) of events.

The episode takes on a greater significance particularly if compared to other similar moments in DeLillo's works: recall Lyle watching vagrants teeming the Wall Street area or Pammy watching the sign "Transients" in *Players* (P, 27, 28, 207), Gary Harkness confronting a heap of excrements in *End Zone* (EZ, 260-265), Bucky Wunderlick walking the streets of New York beholding the social and material transformations affecting the city in *Great Jones Street* (GJS, 259-264), or James Axton coping with the sight of the Acropolis at the beginning of *The Names* (N, 3-7). Each of these episodes presents characters who refuse to look through the opacity and murk of a dematerialised world, to acknowledge fully the actualities of new social relations finance capital produces. On the contrary, the episode of the blue jay hints at Lauren's initiation into "the business of seeing"(N, 3) following her acceptance of mourning, an acceptance which will help her supersede an existence generally "puddled in dream melt"(7).

The house "[a]lone by the sea"(48) in which Rey and Lauren live (whose isolation will eventually mirror Lauren's inner condition of remoteness and loneliness produced by her mourning) becomes the architectural manifestation of their willingness to abstract themselves

from the external world. The Sunday newspaper violently brings in the chaos and horror of everyday life within their apparently safe retreat, and intrudes upon Lauren's life with "lines of print with people living somewhere in the words and the strange contained reality"(19). While reading, Lauren feels drawn into the lives of people "being tortured halfway around the world"(18) and starts having mental conversations with them until she stops for fear that undertaking a dialogue with these ghostly essences may have a destabilising effect on her. Although Lauren dismisses the disturbing reality that the paper brings into the house by refusing to read it, she will eventually be forced to engage with death and with the ghostly presence of Mr Tuttle.

The hair that materialises into Lauren's mouth (10) has an uncanny, unsettling effect on her, for the presence of such hair seems to confirm both Lauren and Rey's tacit knowledge that someone might be hiding in the house. The attempt to shy away the thought of an unwelcome guest, and intruder (which emerges from both Rey and Lauren's refusal to voice such thought) manifests an effort to conjure away a ghostly presence that seems to spy upon them without being seen. Such ghostly, immaterial presence nonetheless possesses a body, as the hair testifies, and possibly an "unknown life [which seems to take place in] a reality far stranger and more meandering", a bodily reality characterised by "diseases, unclean food and many baleful body fluids"(12).

The obituary which follows the introduction discards the uneventful ordinariness of the breakfast scene, revealing the nature of the event that loomed gloomily over that "final" morning. The terse, pared down prose of the obituary not only provides an identity to, and a brief biography of, the anonymous married couple, but more importantly discloses the news of Rey's suicide in New York. Crucially, the obituary offers readers some fundamental information that allows them to interpret the subsequent chapter as the beginning of Lauren's dramatic confrontation with the "devastating emotional consequences [of] the traumatic [and] violent loss of [her] partner."⁵⁵⁷ Without the obituary, I am inclined to think, we would be at pains to recognise DeLillo's descriptions of Lauren's emotional state as resulting from a loss. We would possibly sense that a loss has occurred, but we would be clueless as to what may have determined its origin. I would suggest that initially, and until the appearance of Mr Tuttle,

⁵⁵⁷ N. Rand in Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 99.

Lauren acts as if she were on the verge of incorporating her loss, refusing to acknowledge it and its impact on her life.

Following the obituary, we see Lauren engaged in maintaining a pretence of normalcy, performing quotidian gestures she was used to carrying out on any other ordinary day. We encounter Lauren driving, inhabiting a temporal continuum which does not differ much from that of the introduction: “everything is slow and hazy and drained and it happens around the word *seem*. All the cars including your seem to flow in dissociated motion, giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of” (31). The italicised word “seem” bears witness to an attempt to sustain a façade of normality, façade which hides from view the problematic internal trauma that loss produces within the subject.

Rey’s death produces a disarticulation of body and time, which causes the hard materiality to be thinned, things to be shorn of their hard, weighty bodies, and causes a lack of weight which enables them to lift and float in the air, flow unbound by space. Lauren’s car appears disassociated because it reflects a disassociation between the apparent flimsiness which makes cars able to flow, a flimsiness which hardly accommodates with the cars’ bulk and weight. A similar disarticulation affects Lauren who experiences a disassociation between her mind and body, disassociation which functions as a defense mechanism to avoid “feeling the painful weight in [her] chest” (31) originating in Rey’s death. Furthermore, as a response to the loss of her husband, Lauren experiences a diminishment of herself which derives from the void left by Rey’s disappearance. Having lost with her husband part of herself, her body “felt different. Slightly foreign and unfamiliar. Different, thinner...[She was] Lauren but less and less” (33, 117). Lauren experiences a partial vaporization of her body akin to the vaporisation that affects Rey after his death: “now he was the smoke, Rey was, the thing in the air, vaporous, drifting...unshaped” (33).

Pulled by her husband’s death into “days that moved so slow they ached” (32), Lauren, attempts to preserve the normal flow of time “thinking into tomorrow...plan[ning] the days in advance” (34). Nonetheless, she is thrown in “the non-time of bereavement in which [she] refuses...to cast off her ‘nighted colour’”⁵⁵⁸ unable to accept her loss and seeking her dead husband “alive in the stalled time of a refusal to relinquish a loved one.”⁵⁵⁹ As a consequence,

⁵⁵⁸ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 216.

⁵⁵⁹ Idem.

Lauren experiences a split so that “a smaller hovering her in the air somewhere”(34) spies on the other part of herself trapped in her grieving body. Lauren perversely cleans the bathroom and the house spraying the tiles and tub with detergent, the bottle equipped with a trigger that “was hard to stop pressing”(34). The act is both an unconsciously reviving of the gesture that put paid to Rey’s life and at the same time an act of sanitation: by cleaning, cleansing, sterilising the house, Lauren may be attempting to clean and cancel every trace of the trauma of her loss. In addition, the “amoebic murk”(85) surrounding the house after Rey’s suicide may reflect the murkiness arising from death and loss, particularly unacknowledged loss.

Lauren’s split self, the actions she performs could effectively signal Lauren’s refusal to accept both the loss and the fact that, because of her husband’s death, part of her “world was lost inside her”(37). In order to introject her loss, Lauren will have to “agre[e] to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say submi[t] to a transformation) the full effect of which one cannot know in advance.”⁵⁶⁰ Such transformation effectively takes place with encounter with Tuttle and will involve her own entire body and mind. But in order to do so Lauren will have to experience, via loss and grief, “a mode of being dispossessed [a mode of being] outside oneself” which, according to Judith Butler, displays “the thrall in which our relations with others holds us...in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves...in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves.”⁵⁶¹ In this particular novel, the experience of grief helps defy the very notion of disarticulated time and body that fictitious capital produces. Such an act of defiance, I would suggest, can effectively occur because the experience of melancholic incorporation is transformed into the experience of mourning proper leading to introjection.

A significant passage, which anticipates Lauren’s ability to apprehend Rey’s death, occurs after her return to the house by the sea following Rey’s funeral, when Lauren meditates on a pack of breadcrumbs:

[h]ow completely strange it suddenly seemed that major corporations mass-produced bread crumbs and packaged and sold them everywhere in the world and she looked at the bread-crumb carton for the first true time, really seeing it and understanding what was in it, and it was bread crumbs (34-35).

Her act of seeing for the first time, which does recall her encounter with the bluejay, is an act which lifts the veil that shrouds the bread crumbs, mystifying and transforming the crumbs into a commodity. Seeing beyond the package, or in Haug’s terms, beyond the crumbs “second

⁵⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 21.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid*, 24.

skin”,⁵⁶² denotes Lauren’s ability to restore an embodied materiality to the commodity, piercing the veil of fetishism which attaches to its second skin, and anticipates her ability to accept the transformative experience of death.

The Body Artist articulates the necessity of developing a new insight into the world, insight which can only be gained by a painful loss of our sense-perceptions: in order to see the world for the first time, DeLillo intimates, we must first be blind, become consciously blind in order to learn how to see again. DeLillo’s preoccupation with learning how to use our senses again invests not just the eyes (an appropriate site in a context where refusal to see as marked by disavowal seems to condition the experiential existence), but the body as a whole. The recuperation of the body entails recovering the time of the body which, to paraphrase DeLillo, has memory attached to it, a time where “past present and future are not amenities of the language: time unfolds into the seams of being. It passes through you, making and shaping”(99).

At this point, Tuttle appears seemingly out of nowhere, an apparition for which both Lauren and the readers have been waiting since the novel’s inception. Tuttle’s traits are effectively spectral: “his face [had] an unfinished look....There was something elusive in his aspect, moment to moment, a thinness of physical address”(45,46) which nonetheless possesses the consistency of “a body shedding space”(40). Unsurprisingly, I would argue, Lauren starts to think that “he had come from cyberspace, a man who had emerged from her computer screen in the dead of the night. He was from Kotka Finland”(45).

Kotka is a small village whose live video-stream Lauren discovers on the Internet. The feed displays the image of “a two-lane road...twenty four hours a day, facelessly, cars entering and leaving Kotka, or just the empty road in the dead time”(38). The image of Kotka best exemplifies the time and space of virtual capital, with its “road that approaches and recedes, both realities occurring at once”(39) symbolising the endless circulation of capital that has no geographical boundary, a reality which as Boxall also suggests, produces a “kind of melting of spatial and temporal distinctions that is [as much] a consequence and a condition of mourning [or melancholia]”⁵⁶³ as it is a structural component of global capital. In the simultaneity of such

⁵⁶² Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics*, 50.

⁵⁶³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 222.

realities Lauren discovers a “place contained in an unyielding time” which seems to be suspended in “the dead times”(38). The video stream of Kotka constitutes an adequate representation of the contemporary age, “an act of floating poetry”(38). However, as the little digital display in a corner of the screen testifies, Kotka is made out of time: arguably such contradiction, its being suspended in virtual static time of the internet while at the same time existing in a space marked by the flow of time, its being virtual as much as tangible, makes Kotka “another world [one which Lauren] could see in its realness”(38). Tuttle, both in his comings and goings, which Lauren can’t control (60), and in his lacking “a reference to get him placed”(45) is effectively the product of such space.

Laura DiPrete posits that Tuttle represents a version of Nicolas Abraham’s phantom, “a metapsychological construct meant to objectify, even under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object’s life...what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.”⁵⁶⁴ According to DiPrete, Abraham’s concept of the phantom helps us frame Mr Tuttle as a “ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography”⁵⁶⁵, who manifests itself through “secret words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression, [the phantom’s language is marked by] endless repetition [and lack of] rationalisation.”⁵⁶⁶ Within DiPrete’s purview, by reading Tuttle as a phantasm, one can gloss his ability to reproduce both Lauren’s voice, “the clipped delivery, the slight buzz deep in the throat, her pitch, her sound”(50) and Rey’s “accents [and] dragged vowels...Rey’s voice...the bell-clap report of Rey’s laughter, clear and spaced”(60-61). For DiPrete:

Mr. Tuttle’s ventriloquism objectifies a profound split in Lauren, a division directly linked to the traumatic loss of her husband....Mr. Tuttle, as it mimics a dead man’s words, renews and compulsively repeats in Lauren’s psyche the trauma of an intolerable loss. But the vocal fluidity of the text, the shifting from Rey’s voice to Lauren’s, places emphasis especially on the internal nature of this conflict, on the presence in Lauren’s psyche of a foreclosed knowledge, internal yet unassimilated. Put repeatedly in a position of witnessing herself from without, Lauren faces her internal divisions, struggling to confront the insistently ungraspable fact that Mr. Tuttle/ Rey is a psychic formation within her own unconscious—is, indeed, herself speaking what she cannot know.⁵⁶⁷

I agree with DiPrete that Lauren experiences a split deriving from her initial inability to acknowledge her loss and that Tuttle may in fact work as a projection of her psyche (which by

⁵⁶⁴ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 171.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁶⁷ DiPrete, “Performing the Body”, 488.

repeating bits of conversations between Lauren and Rey enables her finally to confront the actuality of Rey's death). However, I disagree with her reading of Tuttle as an instantiation of Abraham's phantom because according to Abraham "the phantom is not related to the loss of an object of love [which those who are invested with inexpressible mourning] carry within a tomb in themselves....What comes back to haunt are the tombs of others."⁵⁶⁸ By reading Tuttle as a phantasm, then Tuttle would *only* represent Rey's unassimilated trauma, the one that DeLillo speaks of in Rey's obituary.

In effect, Tuttle recalls Rey in several ways: "[l]ike Mr. Tuttle, Rey too was abandoned—or at least orphaned— and he too took on another name, an adopted name, as we learn from his obituary, from 'a minor character he played in an obscure film noir'"⁵⁶⁹ Like Rey, Tuttle is dispossessed, deracinated, only identifiable through a name which renders his real origins ultimately unretrievable. Within such perspective, one may argue that Rey has suffered an unspeakable trauma: the loss of his mother and that of his home country following his exile to the USSR as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War (28). Through Tuttle's voice we learn that Rey felt a profound split within himself, a split which Lauren's presence seemed temporarily to recompose "I regain possession of myself through you: I think like myself now, not like the man I became"(62). I would argue, then, that his inability to face his traumatic loss has led him to pursue a fetishised existence through film. As we learn from his obituary, Rey's films focussed on "people in landscape of estrangement [giving rise to a] poetry of alien places"(29). Like the characters in his films, Rey too inhabits an alien place until the moment of his suicide, a place where he has ceased to be Alejandro Alquezar and has taken on the role of Rey Robles. His art however does not seem to lead him towards "life-defining moments"(29) and cannot assuage his discomfort. Within such purview one may gloss Mr Tuttle's very first words "It is not able", as Rey's words, words which indicate Rey's inability to introject the loss of his mother and country.⁵⁷⁰ But these same words may also describe Lauren's initial refusal to mourn.

Therefore, I would rather define Mr Tuttle a psychic projection of Lauren's unconscious which allows her "to witness herself from without"⁵⁷¹ *and at the same time* the projection of Rey

⁵⁶⁸ Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 172.

⁵⁶⁹ Michael Naas, "House Organs: The Strange Case of the Body Artist and Mr. Tuttle", *Oxford Literary Review*, Volume 30.1, June 2008, 101.

⁵⁷⁰ Di Prete too posits that the secrets and traumas of Rey's early years may be "made audible as it were, in the complex vocal articulation of Tuttle." DiPrete, "Performing the Body", 489.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 488.

as Lauren's lost love-object whose presence in fact prevents her from incorporating her loss. Again, Abraham and Torok may help gloss Lauren's condition.

Specifically I am reminded of their discussing the case of a man who, despite his being alone at a table restaurant, kept ordering two meals as if he were accompanied by someone else. According to Abraham and Torok, the man hallucinated the presence of a departed love one, a hallucination which prevented him from experiencing incorporation: "we can surmise that the shared meal allowed him to keep the dear departed outside his bodily limits and that, even as he was filling his mouth vacancy, he did not actually have to "absorb" the deceased...[t]he imaginary meal, eaten in the company of the deceased, may be seen as a protection against the danger of incorporation."⁵⁷²

Following Abraham and Torok, I would affirm that Tuttle protects Lauren from "absorbing" and encrypting the trauma of her loss, thus preserving her from incorporation and instead guiding her towards introjection. The fact that Lauren starts to tape her conversations with Tuttle and to listen repeatedly to both his and her taped voice constitutes a further means to protect herself from swallowing the words that speak of the loss she has suffered, thus preventing her from experiencing demetaphorisation as the linguistic counterpart of incorporation. The tape recorder thus complements Mr Tuttle, in that he too prevents, by speaking bits of Lauren and Rey's conversations, to encrypt those utterances that point to the traumatic loss.

In one of his last appearances, Tuttle reproduces the conversation Lauren had with Rey shortly before he departed for his final trip to New York, conversation which DeLillo omits from the introduction. Lauren immediately recognises these as "the last thing[s] [she] said, among the last things, to someone [she] love[d] and would never see again"(87). Via Tuttle, Lauren recuperates the words that she had removed from her consciousness, words which refer to the moment of Rey's double departure (that is from the house and from life).

The temporal condition that informs Mr Tuttle is a hollowed time, "a kind of time that it's simply and overwhelmingly there, laid out, unoccurring [emptied of] names and dates and distinctions"(77), where the future is "simultaneous with the present"(77). Perhaps Paul Ricoeur's analysis of temporality, as he formulates it via St. Augustine, is the best way to gloss the difference between Mr Tuttle's temporality and Lauren's original temporal experience, the

⁵⁷² Abraham and Torok, *Shell*, 129.

latter's being "the standard sun-kissed chronology of events" (83). Ricoeur points out, care of St. Augustine, that we can only apprehend time as it is passing, in the very fugacity of a present which is constantly on the verge of becoming a past, or as an expectation of the future to be. The experience of human time becomes knowledgeable as the distension of the soul. The soul extends towards the past (as memory) and towards the future (as expectation).⁵⁷³ Following Ricoeur, one may argue that when experiencing a loss, a perceptual cramp occurs whereby time no longer appears to possess a distensive mode. Deprived of its ability to stretch, recollect, expect, the soul is stuck into an eternal present which fails to bestow meaning onto existence because the soul has lost the organizational power to construct life as a narrative characterised by a past, a present and a future. Ricoeur affirms that "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."⁵⁷⁴

Initially, Lauren is not able to dilate time so as to extend herself in order to recollect the past, to locate the moment of Rey's death within a temporal framework whereby she can experience it as memory and not like a looped present constantly repeating itself. Lauren's only way to apprehend the present consists in remembering it the moment it has become past, to see things "mostly in retrospect...to recreate this ghostly moment, write it like a line in a piece of fiction" (91). Only in the emplotted time characterising fiction can we make sense of things, reconstruct them so as to produce "concordance out of the discordance"⁵⁷⁵ and out of the apparent randomness of events.

Experiencing an event "belatedly" is central to the passage about the paperclip falling that DeLillo inserts towards the end of the novel, a passage addressed to a 'you' which is both Lauren and the reader at the same time. DeLillo describes the fall of a paperclip as an experience which the mind "takes a second or two [to register]. But once you know you've dropped something, you hear it hit the floor belatedly. The sound makes its way through an immense web of distances" (89). One becomes aware of the event belatedly, nonetheless belatedness brings about both awareness and memory of the experience: "[n]ow that you know you've dropped it, you remember how it happened" (89). "The retrieved memory" (89) of the fall, even though blurred, even if it carries within itself the impossibility to experience the fall of the

⁵⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. I*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 10.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

paperclip as it occurs, nonetheless enables to reconstruct the occurrence, the “overlapping realities”(82) of the present as it becomes past. Via memory, the event of the fall becomes a narrative subject to the temporal linearity that constitutes, as Ricoeur would have it, human time.

In order to rediscover human time Lauren has to project herself within the timelessness of Mr Tuttle’s existence, for Tuttle allows Lauren “to tune herself to the disjointed time of mourning, to *conceive* of it and live it.”⁵⁷⁶ Only by removing herself from “the flow of time” can Lauren effectively rediscover temporality since, as Boxall posits, “Tuttle’s eviction from the now affords him a contact with time itself.”⁵⁷⁷

Lack of temporality explains Tuttle’s impaired faculty of speech: his sentences, devoid as they are of any syntactical and temporal coherence, escape comprehension and yet offer DeLillo a means to give linguistic form to the experience of mournful time. Arguably, the chant that, at some point, Tuttle seems to sing compounds the vision of Kotka as “an act of floating poetry”(38) in that it may aptly be read as the chant of a ghostly experience of time, the poetry of the ghost who “always pass quickly, with the infinite speed of a furtive apparition, in an instant without duration, presence without present of a present.”⁵⁷⁸

Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left, am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment. Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. We all, shall all, be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me (74).

In his singing about “being here and where” Tuttle sings about the simultaneity of the ghost, the simultaneity of his comings and goings, a simultaneity which is also that of the virtual space that marks Kotka and the space of global capitalism. In chanting that “I have seen what I will see”, Tuttle describes the collapse of temporality which discounts the future into the present. As such, the chant describes the reduction of time to a static point, which Tuttle calls “the moment”, a time that has imploded and cannot stretch: “in its antinarrative quality, language altogether refuses the logic of linear time, the movement from past to present to future.”⁵⁷⁹

Indeed, Tuttle’s chant, compounding his ventriloquism, “bare[s Lauren] to things that were outside her experience, but desperately central”(63) namely the atemporal condition of

⁵⁷⁶ Boxall, 219.

⁵⁷⁷ Idem.

⁵⁷⁸ Derrida, quoted in Royle, “Clipping”, 2.

⁵⁷⁹ DiPrete, “Performing the Body”, 496.

mourning which absorbs Lauren and speaks of her condition at the same time. Mourning, like finance capital, revolves around a time that has erased the past and has collapsed the distinction between future and present and therefore produces the perception that there is no longer a future that we can stretch into, for anticipation also determines the present. As a consequence, we no longer perceive the future as “expectation”, as a sign in the present of “the event that does not yet exist”⁵⁸⁰, but as something which is already given to us, consigned to us in a pre-determined way. The future as “the time of hope”⁵⁸¹ ceases thus to exist, and as Lauren eventually recognizes about Mr Tuttle “his future is not under construction. It’s already there, susceptible to entry...a state already shaped to her outline”(98). Precisely such notion of temporality informs both Lauren and Tuttle’s ability to foresee the future and to experience it as having already occurred, and anticipates financier Eric Packer’s similar ability in *Cosmopolis*.

However, by plunging herself deep into such timelessness, in experiencing it via Tuttle, Lauren manages to “suffer and come out of it and see death happen and come out of it”(92). Paradoxically, the nontime of mourning, when experienced, faced and apprehended, enables her to understand that “you are made out of time: this is the force that tells you who you are...that defines your existence”(92). Through *The Body Artist*, DeLillo shows that the time of finance capital lacks a sense of belatedness, which enables to retrieve memory and time as the linear, rather than cramped experience of emplotted time. By contrast, emplottedness characterises the flow of time within productive capital. Marx’s formula M-C-M¹ could effectively be compared to a narrative, in whose emplotted time, M represents the past, C the present and M¹ the future of capital resulting from the commodity form.

For Lauren, and for DeLillo, the future must give rise to “the flow of consciousness and possibility”(99) and both the work of fiction and Lauren’s body art offer the opportunity to recover the future as possibility and a sense of human time in opposition to the temporality of finance capital. DeLillo advocates the recuperation of the time of the body. This project, however, is laden with contradiction: on the one hand Lauren’s bodywork “her regimen of cat stretch and methodical contortion [can only be regulated by a] tightly timed sequence, internally timed, an exactitude she knew in her bones”(37). Such bodywork “made everything transparent. She saw and thought clearly...feeling what it means to be alive”(57). Therefore, only by

⁵⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. I*, 28.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 30.

immersing herself in her body profoundly can Lauren experience awareness and grasp a vision of the world which she can pin down and interpret. On the other hand, such bodywork can only be attained and completed by taking the body to an “endurable extreme”(55) which entails submitting the same body to an excruciating work of “sanding” “razing”, “filing” “clipping” “paring away”: “the verbs of abridgement and excision”(76). In her shedding her dead skin, death cells, body secretions, depigmentation, bleaching and peeling, Lauren manages to inhabit her body again, but it is an inhabitation that leads her to resemble the body of Tuttle:

This was her work, to disappear from her former venues of aspect and bearing and to become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance....It was crude work that became nearly brutal....In the mirror she wanted to see someone who is classically unseen, the person you are trained to look through, bled of familiar effect, a spook (84).

This passage foregrounds one of the seminal concerns within Don DeLillo’s fiction, notably the difficulty in representing the immaterial mask under which social relations are subsumed within the medium of speculative capital. The processes to which she submits her body transform Lauren into a “spook”, a ghost which nonetheless possesses a body, a body however that we cannot locate as it has become “blank”, devoid of any past reference that might help us frame it within a familiar context. Only by becoming herself a ghost can she effectively manage to represent “the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible”⁵⁸² of which Tuttle is an instance: the ghost that haunts and transfigures, disembodies our social materiality, a ghost however that sees us but that refuses to be seen or perhaps that we refuse to see, the ghost of capital which renders things “doubtful...everchanging, plunged into metamorphosis, something that [like the ghost] is also something else”(36). Who else after all, DeLillo seems to imply, could best give authentic representation to the protean, morphing, ineffable ghostly body of speculative capital than an artist whose artwork can only materialise through her ability to “shake off [her] body”, as Mariella Chapman notes in her review of her piece “Body Time” (104)?

Yet, even as it speaks of the vaporization of the body of the commodity and labour within finance capital, Lauren’s double exercise in both erasing her body and preserving it, speaks of a desire to recuperate that body of the commodity which speculative capital obliterates, even though such body would still experience spectralization in exchange, where “not an atom of matter enters”⁵⁸³ the process.

⁵⁸² Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 6.

⁵⁸³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol I, 55.

Lauren's performance "frames trauma within the intersubjective domain of artistic production and reception...[r]epresenting a distillation of all that has passed between herself and Mr. Tuttle (that bizarre corporealization of inarticulate grief)."⁵⁸⁴ Indeed, Lauren appears in her looks as if emerging from the realm of death itself: "wasted...colorless, bloodless and ageless"(103), her hair "chopped" and "ash white" bears witness to the transformative process which has rendered Lauren akin to the ghostly Mr Tuttle, a transformation which enables her to stage, in part, her traumatic encounter with death and loss. However, as the reviewer of the performance notes, the piece, as its title suggests, has been designed to make the "audience feel time go by, viscerally, even painfully"(104). I would posit that the performance that Lauren stages, while undoubtedly being inspired by the experience of grief, also tells the audience something about the condition originated by global capital.

The piece starts with "an ancient Japanese woman on a bare stage, gesturing in the stylized manner of Noh drama", then moves on to a "woman in executive attire, carrying a briefcase, who checks the time on her wristwatch and tries to hail a taxi...many times, countless times"(106). The first of these representations, inspired by the sight of a Japanese woman during the time of Lauren's bereavement, points in the direction of a form of temporality which is extremely archaic, ancient, a notion of temporality that Lauren wishes the audience to apprehend. Arguably, Noh shares with Lauren's aesthetic project "a spatial embodiment of anachronous sense of time", an interpenetration of past and present.⁵⁸⁵ As Peter Nicholls argues in his analysis of Pound's relation to Noh drama, the peculiar structure of Noh, particularly *mugen-noh* or Noh of the spirits ⁵⁸⁶ revolves around a temporality in which "two times are grafted together, each somehow supplementing each other". Noh's temporality, is "belatedness": "[a complex temporality] by which a traumatic experience takes on its full meaning at a later stage."⁵⁸⁷

Within my purview, the temporal dimension of the executive woman (although experienced slowly through Hartke's performance) signals a break away from the time experienced belatedly in Noh. As I argued before (and as it will emerge more clearly in

⁵⁸⁴ DiPrete, "Performing the Body, 505.

⁵⁸⁵ Peter Nicholls, *Modernism. A Literary Guide*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 172.

⁵⁸⁶ Peter Nicholls, "An Experiment with Time: Ezra Pound and the Example of Japanese Noh", *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (Jan., 1995), 13. The Noh of the spirits revolves around a dream or memory of a secondary character, whose dream stages the return of a legendary figure who has appeared to him or her already in the form of an old man or woman.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13, 11.

Cosmopolis), the delocalised time horizon of market movements is only projected forward towards a future that inhabits a present, but lacks any past, a time that moves in constant anticipation of the events. As we see the woman through Lauren's performance, one may sense that the artist is trying to reappropriate the time of the business executive woman, to stretch it out, to re-consign it to a temporality which is not cramped. Possibly, this is what Lauren is trying to suggest via her projecting the video from Kotka, with the digital display, marking the passing of time, well in sight. In fact, while the image of the two lane road signifies the collapse of temporality, the digital display reminds viewers of the unfolding of time in the "real world", even as they experience the road by means of the eternal present of the Internet feed. From, the kind of non-timelessness which dominates the internet feed, a third figure in Hartke's performance emerges. This figure is a "naked man...stripped of recognisable language and culture....He wants to tell us something. His voice is audible, intermittently on tape, and Hartke lip-syncs the words...His words amount to a monologue without a context"(107-108). Clearly modelled on Tuttle, the figure embodies "another reality [whose] truth...would be too devastating to absorb"(114): the reality of a traumatic loss which uproots all our perceptions, which destroys the temporal and spatial dimensions upon which we construct our existence. Yet, as Lauren herself admits to Mariella, the performance wishes to recount more than "the drama of men and women versus death"(109), and although she does not voice what more the piece wishes to say, I would suggest that the performance depicts the immersion within the melancholic incorporation of finance capital.

In the concluding chapter, Lauren returns to the house on the beach, just as Mr Tuttle had predicted (49). Her experience has left her somehow different:"I am Lauren, but less and less" and she is slowly "fitting herself to a body in the process of becoming hers"(117, 121). Of course, the Lauren that emerges from such an experience is a different person, transformed, waiting to inhabit a new body that has lived through the spectralising disincarnation of death. Entering what had been her marital bedroom, she knows finally that there will be no Rey "in his real body, smoke in his hair and clothes"(121). As she opens the door, she can finally notice "the true colors" of the wall and she opens the window to "feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body to tell"(124). To further signal that she has finally overcome her husband's death, Lauren re-enacts consciously the moment of Rey's suicide with the disinfectant spray gun pointed to her head ready to press the trigger (114). Whatever discomfort Lauren felt at the

beginning of the novel is now, through the painful process of introjection, cured. Yet, for an instant, she still questions whether she should give in to death, acknowledge it: should she “give death its sway” (116) and come out of it, or should she simply “surrender to it in thin-lipped bereavement? Why give him [Rey, but also Tuttle] up if you can walk along the hall and find a way to place him within its reach?” (116)

Lauren has chosen to face death and accept its transformative process. She is therefore able to live on the gap opened by the death of her husband, but then eventually to fill that gap. Through her story, DeLillo, who had previously turned to film and language as the privileged aesthetic media that could best render visible the disarticulation between form and content within finance capital, returns to the body as the appropriate medium through which he can visualise the obliteration of the commodity form within financial markets. At the same time, DeLillo, through Lauren, presciently perceives the necessity (so stringent in the aftermath of the current financial crisis) of recuperating forms of capital different from the financial one, forms rooted in the “locatedness and contingency”⁵⁸⁸ of the body of the commodity and labour and in a different capitalist spatial and temporal dimension, one which inhabits a temporality which stretches out in the future but which also looks back on the past.

DeLillo voices in aesthetic terms the need to restore the cohabitation of what Peter Gowan defined as “the tempos and rhythms of two kinds of financial flows linked to different kinds of circuits”: on the one hand, the circuit of money capitalists who favour liquidity and seek quick returns and, on the other hand, those of the employers of capital seeking to set up much longer-term investments in fixed capital or commodities.⁵⁸⁹ Through *The Body Artist*, DeLillo wishes to convey that “th[e condition] of mourning [can] supply a perspective by which to begin to apprehend the contemporary global situation”⁵⁹⁰ under the aegis of finance capital.

⁵⁸⁸ Di Prete, “Performing the Body”, 504.

⁵⁸⁹ Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, 14.

⁵⁹⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 28.

CHAPTER 7

COSMOPOLIS: THE END OF A WORLD “IN THE SMOKE OF RUMBLING MARKETS”

Lauren Hartke's reappropriation of her body as a referent, her re-immersion within the temporal linearity of lived time resulting from her full acceptance of mourning constitute a rejection of the melancholic condition proper of finance capital.

By contrast, *Cosmopolis* (2003) protagonist, financier Eric Packer, unlike Lauren, is incapable of overcoming the illness of mourning and refuses to acknowledge the growing evidence of the dangers of global financial crises and the limitations and “structural and systemic vulnerability [of] the socio-economic world system”⁵⁹¹ relying predominantly on financial markets.

Packer not only lives upon the gap opened by the vaporisation of the commodity economy, but, as the embodiment of American finance capital, he fosters such vaporization. His absolute immersion within the speculative medium results in his total denial of the loss of the commodity form and in his unquestioned belief that speculative capital is the only form of capital available. His self-destructive journey across New York, originating in his doomed speculation against the Yen, allows DeLillo to engage directly with the structure of feeling proper of finance capital and to meditate on money, time and space as transformed by an overriding financial logic. As he crosses the city, Packer has to come to terms with the material

⁵⁹¹ Paul Crosthwaite, “Fiction in the Age of the Global Accident”, *Static*, Issue 07: Catastrophe, (July 2008), 2,3.

consequences of local financial collapses as they propagate worldwide given the interconnectedness of global markets. He must also face manifest, or metaphorical, forms of resistance which contest the financialisation of the world economy and its impact on everyday life. In *Cosmopolis*, therefore, DeLillo provides an explicit framework against which one can finally situate the anxieties and dreads that had animated his earlier novels and can also reflect on the condition of US hegemony constructed upon Neoliberalism and financial deregulation.

Set in New York, the world city whence powerful financial forces exert their “paramount influence worldwide,”⁵⁹² *Cosmopolis* takes place “[i]n the year 2000. A day in April”(1), mimicking the febrility and acceleration of the financial markets, where fortunes are made or lost within twenty-four hours. Indeed, Packer’s limousine journey through the city becomes a metaphor for the volatile “movements of [finance] capital seeking to exploit evanescent differences in interest rates, currency values and stock prices”⁵⁹³ on the global markets.

The date is significant given that stock markets “peaked in early 2000, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average reaching its all-time record in January”⁵⁹⁴ and then crashed bursting the Dot Com bubble. The market’s initial positive trend well explains “[a]ll this optimism, all this booming and soaring”(14) which at first pervades Packer’s activities. Eric’s fortune has been built via currency trading and speculation all over the world (75). Quite unsurprisingly, as we first meet Packer, we learn that “[s]leep failed him more often now, not once or twice a week, but four times, five”(1). As the embodiment of finance capital, Packer operates within a 24-hour economy: “Currency markets never close. And the Nikkei runs all day and night now. All the major exchanges. Seven days a week”(29).

As Packer sleeplessly wanders in his triplex situated at the top of “the tallest tower in the world”(8), he appears slightly disturbed by a nameless anxiety manifesting in “silences, not words”(5). The news that the yen has unexpectedly appreciated overnight (8) eventually qualifies as the source of Packer’s unnamed concerns, and projects a faint sense of gloom over the day that is about to begin. Such an anxiety, albeit tenuously, hints at the encrypted loss of C that Eric carries inside, a signal from his own buried crypt that briefly makes him falter, doubt.

⁵⁹² M.Serena Palieri. “Don DeLillo. La Solitudine del Potere”, *L’Unità*, 3 June 2003, 23. My translation.

⁵⁹³ W. Bello, K. Malhotra, N.Bullard and M. Mezzera, “Notes on the Ascendancy and Regulation of Speculative Capital” in Bello, Bullard and Malhotra (eds), *Global Finance: New Thinking on Regulating Capital Markets*, (London: Zed Books, 2000), 10.

⁵⁹⁴ Jerry Varsava, “The ‘Saturated Self’: Don DeLillo on the Problem of Rogue Capitalism.” *Contemporary Literature* 46.1 (2005), 85.

Unable to locate the source of his anxiety within such loss, Eric is “self-haunted”(6): “given the narcissism of the central consciousness— a narcissism entirely in keeping with the monetary endogeneity of its speculative means (credit financed by further credit)— [Packer’s] anxiety discovers no exit, having nowhere to go save into the ramifying conviction that its source lies in itself.”⁵⁹⁵

Packer has been borrowing heavily depreciated yens at low interest rates “to buy stocks that would yield potentially high returns”(84), and the currency’s appreciation implies that “the stronger the yen became, the more money he needed to pay back the loan”(84). His currency arbitrage exemplifies speculative vulture capitalism and is loosely modelled on those predatory market operations which triggered the Asian meltdown (1996-7), pulverising the then burgeoning economies of Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁵⁹⁶ Despite the high risk, Packer “[b]et[s] [his entire fortune] against the yen”(29) and in playing against the market qualifies as “a dangerous person”(19).

Indifferent to the lessons of previous financial meltdowns, Packer’s speculative arbitrage may definitively collapse the already precarious Japanese economy, which in 2000 still suffered from an economic stagnation, originating within a financial crisis which had pulverised stocks, banks and other types of assets. Packer ignores, or pretends to ignore, the potentially deleterious consequences such a collapse may have for the US economy, given the US reliance on Japanese exports to fuel its internal markets’ demand, and on Japanese authorities’ heavy financing of US public debt via government bonds and currency acquisition.⁵⁹⁷ Packer’s speculation could trigger a financial crisis in Japan, which would cause the US to suffer a catastrophic payment crisis, and a subsequent fall in consumption, with severe worldwide economic and financial consequences.⁵⁹⁸

Whatever the causes of the rise of the yen, Packer foolhardily refuses to pull out, even though his chief of finance, Jane Melman, advises him to do so. She suggests that, since Eric has already profited enormously, drawing back would be the soundest move (53). Packer instead is confident that “the yen could not go any higher....There were oscillations and shocks that the

⁵⁹⁵ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

⁵⁹⁶ In 1996, arbitrageurs and hedge funds, relying on the expectation that governments would devalue the currency to relieve the exports, launched a global attack on the baht worth US\$10 billion. A global crisis ensued, which pulverised entire economies. The echo of the Asian meltdown reverberated the subsequent year to Russia and Brazil. It is worth noting that the Mexican crisis of 1994 originated from the same predatory financial practices. Bello, Bullard and Malhotra, “Notes on the Ascendancy and Regulation of Speculative Capital”, 12-15.

⁵⁹⁷ Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*, 141.

⁵⁹⁸ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 189.

market tolerated to a certain point but not beyond”(84). Eric perceives the market “as an environment obeying natural laws,”⁵⁹⁹ which can autonomously restore its balance when endangered. He in fact presupposes the existence of “a pattern that wants to be seen”, a “hereditary script available to those who could decode it”(63) which leaves no place for doubt. Eric in effect does not believe in doubt (86). Consequently, he is convinced that the yen fluctuation is regulated by a market behavioural law no one has yet detected: “a pattern latent in nature itself, a leap of pictorial language that went beyond the standard models of technical analysis...There had to be a way to explain the yen”(63). Packer is attempting to fix such pattern and to articulate it in terms of the numerical symbols and diagrams which codify the market’s inner functioning.

Eric’s overconfidence in the yen blinds him to the fact that “speculative movements and expectations in financial markets do not necessarily rely on hard facts.”⁶⁰⁰ By contrast, Packer is convinced that “[a]ll along there’d seemed to be a scheme, a destination”(91). Vija Kinski, Packer’s chief of theory, questions such belief affirming that the market, while resembling “[a] sensible text that wants you to believe there are plausible realities...foreseeable trends and forces [is] in fact...all random phenomena”(85).

As a consequence of his refusal to pull back , his speculation, and the constant increase of the yen (106), result in “currencies...tumbling everywhere. Bank failures were spreading....His actions regarding the yen were causing storms of disorder...to the affairs of so many key institutions, all reciprocally vulnerable, that the whole system was in danger”(115-116). Via Packer’s actions one witnesses how a “local perturbation being rapidly transmitted throughout the world”⁶⁰¹ brings havoc to the world financial system.

For Packer “all civilizations [and all human activities are] perceived principally through the prism of economics [and t]he inherent discipline of unfettered [financial] markets.”⁶⁰² Eric in fact portrays and explains human reality as an extension (in linearity and predictability) of the reality of the market. Although he claims that “[a] common surface, [an] affinity [exists] between the market movements and the natural world”(86), he sees such an affinity as a result of a reduction of reality to “lucid units in the financial markets...*the zero-oneness of the world*,

⁵⁹⁹ Randy Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 104.

⁶⁰⁰ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 94.

⁶⁰¹ Adam Tickell, “Unstable Futures: Controlling and Creating Risks in International Money”, in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys eds., *Socialist Register*, 1999, 255.

⁶⁰² Saul, *Globalism*, 17-19.

the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions"(24, emphasis added). Reality, for Packer, amounts to the virtual space contained in the computer screens, upon which he observes "flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing"(13), where the electronic impulses, representing money moving worldwide, possess a life of their own.

Eric's stretched limousine, and the screens he constantly watches in order to anticipate the market trends, function as natural extensions of his body; they allow Packer to instantiate the fiction of his own phenomenological dispersal through the system and to avoid any engagement with the materiality of the world. As an embodiment of finance capital, Packer, aided by the machines, extends his body into the market's cyber-space, gaining new power and mastery over the outside world. The screens heighten his optic powers, multiplying towards foresight. Necessarily, Eric's corklined limo excludes the noise of the street, since cyber-capital (once liberated from human interaction) is without sound. The assimilation to the machine involves travel at speeds that almost reaches the "edge of no control"(L, 13). This definition aptly describes not only the world of finance capital (which runs so fast that is constantly running the risk of collapsing onto itself), but also the pace it has imposed on the outside world.

For Packer there is, no other significant logic beyond that of finance capital, where "the art of money-making" or "*Chrimatistikos*"(77) predominates.⁶⁰³ As Vija Kinski claims: "[a]ll wealth has become wealth for its own sake. There's no other kind of enormous wealth. Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself"(77). She goes on theorizing that, as a result, property "no longer has weight or shape. The only thing that matters is the price you pay....You paid the money for the number itself...the number justifies itself"(78). Packer admits having spent "one hundred and four million dollars"(78) only, as Kinski points out, for the sake of the number.

Kinsky offers the most appropriate description of fetish capital and of the self-referential nature of financial markets. Money, traded in the place of the commodity, detached from the creation of real assets, is now a fetish of itself. Not only does interest appear, as Marx described,

⁶⁰³ The term is drawn from Aristotle's *Politics* who opposes *chrematistike* to *oikonomia*, or the science of household-governing, to which the art of money-making should be subordinated. For Aristotle the accumulation of wealth deriving from money growing out of interest constitutes the most hateful and most unnatural form. Unlike Aristotle, Packer considers interest-bearing money the only form of wealth acquisition and the endless accumulation of money as the only aim and end of *oikonomia*. For a similar argument see Aaron Chandler, " 'An Unsettling Alternative Self': Benno Levin, Emmanuel Levinas and Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*", *Critique* 50.3 (Spring 2009), 246-247. Marx also considers Aristotle's distinction in Chapter 4, note 6 of *Capital Vol I*, 170.

“the primary matter”⁶⁰⁴ of capital; but the prices of assets listed and exchanged on the stock markets are disassociated from their underlying economic value.⁶⁰⁵ Numbers, once only a formal expression of “economic value, [masking] societal value”⁶⁰⁶, no longer bear a trace of their origin in the commodity world. Money now lives “a new ghostly electronic life”⁶⁰⁷ in “the de-materialised cyber-space in which financial and speculative [transactions] occur.”⁶⁰⁸

Cyber-capital endlessly replicates itself through time and space, almost instantaneously: “One of the screens showed a column of rusty sludge geysering high from a hole in the ground. [Packer] felt good about this. The other screen showed money moving. There were numbers gliding horizontally and bar charts pumping up and down”(63). Both the pace of the passage (evoking *Players*’ “dizzying billions being propelled through machines, computers scanned and coded, filed, cleared, wrapped and trucked, all in high-speed din [P, 109]) and words like ‘geysering’, “pumping up and down” forcefully represent the volatility and febrility inherent in unfixed electronic capital. Cyber-space actuates what Harvey calls time-space compression, and makes it possible for capital, in its cyber form, to travel from one place to another in a fraction of a second.

The fetishistic nature of money within finance capital, where debt creation substitutes for money creation, completely contrasts with the concept of money people have outside the financial elite. Packer’s lover and art dealer, Didi Fancher clearly expresses her disorientation in the face of such new meaning of money:

I had to learn how to understand money,” she said. “I grew up comfortably. Took me a while to think about money and actually looked at it. I began to look at it. Look closely at bills and coins. I learned how it felt to make money and spend it. It felt intensely satisfying. It helped me be a person. But I don’t know what money is anymore” (29).

Fancher’s sensory experience of money (marked by the verbs ‘look’, and ‘feel’) contrasts with the immateriality of cyber-capital. To Fancher, money is not its own fetish, but the tangible representation of the value of the commodity and “a compression of one’s worth”(P, 110). Fancher’s sense of displacement originates in both the obliteration of C and in the reduction of all money to its fictitious form, what Lyle aptly defined the “paring away of money’s accidental properties, of money’s touch”(P, 110). Packer as a cyber-capitalist is instead “lost in a second or

⁶⁰⁴ Marx, *Capital Vol. 3*, 392.

⁶⁰⁵ Marazzi, *Capital and Language*, 27.

⁶⁰⁶ Saul, *Globalism*, 22.

⁶⁰⁷ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 38.

⁶⁰⁸ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 62.

third-order fetishism, unable to decode the real relations of power behind the apparently disembodied ecstasies of computerised trading.”⁶⁰⁹

The notion of time within the realm of cyber-capital is profoundly transformed. As Kinsky suggests, “[t]he idea is time. Living in the future. Look at those numbers running. Money makes time”(79). Financial operations, running against time for short-term profits, bring “the future into the present instantaneously and relentlessly.”⁶¹⁰ As a result, “cyber-capital creates the future”: time has become “a corporate asset.... The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential”(79). Through Kinsky’s theoretical account of time, the non-narrative time of Mr Tuttle, with his future already prescribed for him, the dead time of his spectral existence, becomes “the little hollow of nontime”(76) of ghostly money.

As in *The Body Artist*, Ricoeur’s notion of temporality provides a useful gloss on the future-orientation of financial markets in that the distensive experience of time appears cramped, deprived of memory and totally bent towards the future as expectation. Expectation is for Ricoeur, “a ‘sign’ and a ‘cause’ of future things which are in this way anticipated, foreseen, foretold, predicted, proclaimed, beforehand.”⁶¹¹ Finance’s reduction of a distensive present to an act of expectation may explain why Packer seeks “always [to be] ahead, thinking past what is new. He wants to be one civilisation ahead of this one”(152). Packer’s refusal of the past is deeply grounded in the conviction that the past cannot disclose any useful indicators of those things inscribed in the future. Eric’s distension toward the future seems to deliver its own promise of eternity to capitalism. Eric displays a wilful act of structural amnesia: that act carries within itself the hope of distension towards the future— a distension that bids himself and his system for something close to immortality. Foregrounded in the Ricoeurian notion of temporality, Packer’s ability to foresee his movements before they actually occur is symbolic of his capacity to counter the market trends: “[h]e realised queerly that he’d just placed his thumb on his chinline a second or two after he’d seen it on screen”(22).

Packer’s gift of foresight makes him a “visionary”(19). Eric has become a successful financier because he is “*Chrimatistikos*”(78). The ancient Greek word with which DeLillo describes the process of money making, used as a qualifier assumes the meaning of “prophetic”,

⁶⁰⁹ Henwood, *Wall Street*, 2

⁶¹⁰ Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*, 105.

⁶¹¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. I.*, 11.

“foreseeing money.” Packer is endowed with the gift coming from the gods, the capacity to “*Chrematizo*”, that is “to accumulate”, but also “to anticipate or to announce in the name of the gods.” As cyber-capital’s oracle, Packer knows the future because he can see it before it happens and his visions enable him to realize the future in the present. Packer’s distension towards the future, his capacity to foresee bestows on his activities a religious aura and financial markets constitute “an occult theology of money, a system and rite to outshadow the evidence of men’s senses”(P, 132).

Technology and capital are made inseparable (23) and create a new delocalized time and space horizon for the market movements. But on the social level, the enforced necessity of speed and volatility disrupts any sense of past-present and future continuum, impinging on our capacity to discern what is happening around us, on how we relate to the outside world and on how we can act into the world. By causing an endless change, the interaction of capital and technology may actually cause no change at all. The cyber-time of global security markets is “the kind of time that is simply and overwhelmingly there, laid out, unoccurring ...simultaneous, somehow, with the present”(BA, 77).

The combination of computers and financial capital becomes the “secret power” (as DeLillo calls it in *Players*) of the market which can grant capitalism its “way of continuing on through the *rotting flesh*...its taste of immortality”(P, 107). Indeed, consistently with his medium which has evacuated the rotting body of the commodity, Packer seeks to evaporate human bodies in order to make them functional to the technological markets, and to render the “zero- oneness of the world” definitive. Kinsky speculates that “the force of the cyber-capital will send people into the gutter to retch and die”(90). People, Kinsky seems to argue, are becoming waste product and she hypothesises that soon people will be de-corporealized, “absorbed in streams of information [as] a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment”(104, 207). Packer himself aspires to be reduced to “quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat: the idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin”(207) in order to fully become part of weightless and dimensionless medium of cyber-capital.

The logic of the financial capitalist system extends obsolescence, particularly market-created obsolescence, to human interaction. Packer is obsessed by obsolescence. He sees it

operating in linguistic form: to him names defining even quite contemporary things, such as skyscraper (9), hand-held organiser (9), airport (22), ATM (54) are surpassed; an idea which reinforces the sense that the future is already here. Packer sees himself forced to operate in a decadent and obsolescent society that needs to be surpassed. The Diamond District, which he happens to drive through, constitutes “an offence to the truth of the future”(65). The District, teeming “with commerce” represents a world “Eric didn’t know how to think about”: with its “cash...gold and diamonds”, the district is “hard, shiny, faceted...intensely three-dimensional....It was everything he’d left behind or never encountered”, a world to him “dead and buried”(64). The major offence to the future comes most prominently from a world of exchange based on what Marx considered “real money”: gold, precious stones. The district rejects the “the glow of the screens...the glow of the cyber-capital”(78), fraught with risky claims on future gains. On the contrary, it is based on extremely physical and tangible forms of money, which are a safe source of immediate revenues. For the merchants, three-dimensional forms of money, whose meaning eludes Eric, are an “indemnity against some unspecifiable future loss”(P, 110). Diamonds, unlike volatile currencies, are not subject to extreme forms of devaluation or inflation, as currencies are. Jewels seem to convey a more stable sense of value, value that increases the more diamonds are cut and gold is moulded. The District testifies to the persistence of other forms of capital and exchange beyond electronic exchange and outside the restricted world of financiers. Packer, however, seeing his medium as “self-contained”(60) can only account for a world in which liquidity (in the form of stock and shares) substitutes for money, serving as both a means of exchange, payment or as reserve asset.⁶¹² For this reason, he is convinced that devices which exist to dispense money as cash (ATMs) are vestiges of a past age, a burdensome residual “historical memory” which recalls “the inference of fuddled human personnel and jerky moving parts”(54): the world that finance capital has obliterated, the world that Eric has encrypted within himself. In *Players*, the image of the financial district devoid of all human interaction has a nightmarish quality in it, amounting to a vision of destruction and decay (P, 49); for Packer, instead, the truth of the future can only contain a society reduced to cyber-life, liberated from human interaction, appropriately symbolised by the financial towers “made empty, designed to hasten the future. They were the end of the outside world....They were in the future, *a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it*” (36, emphasis added).

⁶¹² Marazzi, *Capital and Language*, 62.

As the embodiment of capital, Packer uses his body as capital: the synonym is by no means contradictory. Elaine Scarry argues that the capitalist is constantly disembodied by his own capital, which substitutes for that body:

not because [capital] has come into being through the solitary projection of his own bodily labor, but rather because it bestows its reciprocating power on him, relieving his sentence, acting as his surrogate. He 'owns' it— which is to say he exists in such a relation for himself in his interactions with the wider world of persons.⁶¹³

For Scarry, the capitalist's "expressions of personhood, (what might be termed his 'soul', 'consciousness' or 'will', his 'historical existence') derive from capital and only come to belong to the capitalist insofar as he is the 'personification' or "incarnation of capital."⁶¹⁴ By contrast, within cyber-capitalism, the object (capital) which is the surrogate form of the capitalist's body is substituted by a virtual object (cyber-capital), which projected within a delocalised virtual space, makes the body virtually superfluous. Human relationships are reduced to an "electronically-mediated [that is, reality extricated] interaction [severed] from the contextuality of historical time and space."⁶¹⁵ Consequently, Packer is caught in a double-bind where he must try to reconcile the physical materiality of his body with the limits that such physicality poses to his full assimilation to, or as, virtual capital. The screens in his car help him temporarily to overcome such dichotomy.

His bodily functions are, likewise, regulated by the logic of capital accumulation. Packer continuously feeds his body and takes long work-out sessions. Nonetheless, he must keep his body circulating and the interruptions that he takes during his journey might be interpreted as temporary fixes (as in Harvey's notion of the spatial fix) to an overaccumulation of sexual and bodily energies. Such energies are assimilable to a surplus capital accumulated within his body. Packer has sex with his art dealer and his bodyguard. Both women, via their professions, service Packer's wealth accumulation. Didi Fancher invests Packer's capital in art, Kendra Hayes, the body guard provides Packer with the security that allows him to circulate. In the sexual act, the bodies of both women are fetishised and used as sites providing a spatial fix to Packer's glut of bodily energies.

The episode of virtual sex he imagines having with his chief of finance (Jane Melman), further signals Packer's efforts to reach a kind of pure "fleshlessness"(139). Eric's sexual desire,

⁶¹³ Scarry, *Pain*, 264.

⁶¹⁴ Marx, quoted in Scarry, *Pain*, 265.

⁶¹⁵ Micheal Ian Borer, "The Cyborgian Self: Toward a Critical Social Theory of Cyberspace", *Reconstruction*, Summer 2002, Vol. 2 N.3, pp.4-5. Available at <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/023/borer.htm>. Last accessed 14 March, 2010.

(that sex between the two may take place simply by speaking the desired act) is subsumed within his broader fantasy of a cyber-capital world where the sexual act is necessarily virtualised.

Nonetheless, even those like Packer no longer seem able to control the acceleration and the volatility of the markets. The market system is exposed to resistance and an unpredictable, irreducible asymmetry. If the rise of the yen testifies to the intrinsic irrationality of financial markets, resistance from outside the world of cyber-capital seeks to subvert the linearity of cyber-capital and its linear teleology.

The death of two prominent members of the financial community instantiate resistance to the finance capitalist system. These deaths, occurring outside the U.S., provide an outlook on financial operations on a world scale, contextualising Packer's speculative arbitrage within a broader international frame. Such representations fully disclose how finance serves the sinister side of Harvey's "spatial fix" through the perpetuation of the process of "accumulation by dispossession", which, subsuming local realities within a global "capitalist logic of unconstrained relocation"⁶¹⁶, generates forms of resistance to the process of accumulation.

The first death concerns the murder of IMF managing director Arthur Rapp, which takes place live on the Money Channel during a press conference in Pyongyang following, from DeLillo's descriptions, the ratification of a series of important agreements for the North-American financial community (33). The second murder occurs in Russia, where finance tycoon Nikolai Kaganovitch, is shot dead in front of "his dacha near Moscow just after returning from a trip to Albania online, where he he'd set up a cable TV network and signed agreements for a theme park in Tirana" (81).

Both assassinations bring to the fore the relations between finance capital and accumulation by dispossession and point to the role that the IMF played in facilitating such process for the benefit of US capital by means of Structural Adjustment Programs. Via SAP, the IMF helped "to project US financial power outwards (in alliance with others whenever possible), to force open markets, particularly for capital and financial flows (now a US imposed requirement for state membership in the IMF system) and impose other neo-liberal practices...upon much of the rest of the world."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling I", *New Left Review* 32, (March-April 2005), 42

⁶¹⁷ Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 129.

Rapp's murder appears an act of opposition to the unconstrained power of the "Wall Street/US treasury/IMF complex", or in Gowan's phrasing "Dollar/Wall Street regime", ⁶¹⁸ and its hegemonic economic model. His killing occurs in North Korea, a country which refuses to comply with US politics of accumulation by dispossession. DeLillo's reference to North Korea alludes to the complex East Asian political and economic situation, with the emergence of China as America's biggest competitor in its bid for global power. Pyongyang's resistance to the United States implies resistance to a projected unification of Korea on IMF terms. Ergo, North Korea effectively hampers the U.S. project for the creation of a economic Japanese-Korean bloc around China.⁶¹⁹ It would follow that DeLillo's decision to "televis[e]" Rapp's death in Packer's stretch limo begs questions as to what occurs when the financial logic fails to enforce its own global hegemony.

Kaganovich's wealth exemplifies the "anarcho-capitalism [which emerged] in post-communist Russia" in the absence of state frameworks regulating private property.⁶²⁰ The Russian government, aided by the IMF and pundits from the Harvard Institute for International Development, implemented a "shock therapy" policy "transplant[ing] an American-style [free] market economy in Russia", a policy which allowed "the nomenklatura, often in conjunction with criminal gangs, to expropriate state assets and make them their personal property."⁶²¹ The "shock therapy" freed prices (which increased by 250%), favoured the rise of monopoly practices and instituted savage privatisation of state industries. In addition, the IMF pressed for low-inflation policy through a strong monetary squeeze. Out of the reforms emerges Kaganovich – a combination of Western capitalist (he deals with Eric and is a Russian Packer) and local business realist (a "shady reputation" hints at his collusion with the local Mafia). Having acted as an "agent" of Western accumulation in Russia, Kaganovich deploys his financial fortune elsewhere to pursue his own global interests, producing, as it has already occurred in Russia, the destruction of "the values fixed in [that specific] place but not yet realized."⁶²²

Indeed, Kaganovich's murder contrasts with his global activities: his assassination is "something Russian," (82) and the local quality of the crime emerges via the reiteration of the

⁶¹⁸ See Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, particularly chapter 3, 19-39, and Robert Wade and Frank Veneroso "The Asian Crisis: The High Debt Model Versus the Wall Street-Treasury-IMF Complex", *New Left Review* 228, (March-April 1998), 3-23.

⁶¹⁹ Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling I", 78.

⁶²⁰ John Gray, *False Dawn. The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, (London: Granta Books, 1998), 133.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 134, 155.

⁶²² Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 116.

word “dacha.” Kaganovich dies in the mud: a local death, representing the revenge of the local, its imagery a pointed rejection of those “Western ideals and values” involved in the IMF-led attempts to construct “a peculiarly Russian model of democracy and market-oriented economy.”⁶²³ Packer fails to read these deaths abroad as an opposition to the power he also embodies. Packer takes pleasure from the killings: he hates Rapp and considers Kaganovich a rival. Kinski implies that, with the Russian dead, Packer may easily take the Russian financier’s place and extend his business to Russia. However Packer is unaware that these deaths abroad anticipate his death at home (particularly Rapp’s, which comes at the hands of a lone and solitary killer).

In contradistinction, Packer perceives the President of the United States (whose motorcade causes Packer several unwarranted halts and detours) to constitute a far more serious threat to his power. As in the case of the murders of Rapp and Kaganovich, Packer does not directly confront the president, but he is forced to measure up with his televised image. To Packer, President Midwood resembles an “undead. He lived in a state of occult repose, waiting to be reanimated”(76) and his being the President is the cause of Packer’s hate (76). Midwood’s position allows him to be “accessible worldwide...omnipresent”(66-67), while Packer had to shut down his website where he was online, videostreamed “nearly all the time”(15) for security reasons. President Midwood’s omnipresence clashes with the immobility of his televised image (76). Midwood’s stasis counterpoints Packer’s fluidity, and metaphorically represents the dichotomy between state and capital, whereby finance operates in continuous space and time, whereas the politician operates within a territorialized space.⁶²⁴

For Packer, fully adhering to a neoliberal logic, “[i]n a global free market the movement of goods, services and capital are unfettered by political control”⁶²⁵ and state intervention limits itself to providing those “institutional structures of law private property, contract and security of money which make capital accumulation possible.”⁶²⁶ Practically, however, the state moves the strings of the economy through monetary, fiscal, and redistributive policies, and via financial regulation or liberalisation. DeLillo affirmed that “[Packer] hates the President because he realises he will never have his power.”⁶²⁷ Midwood reminds Packer that his power is not entirely

⁶²³ Gray, *False Dawn*, 162.

⁶²⁴ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 27.

⁶²⁵ Gray, *False Dawn*, 140.

⁶²⁶ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 89.

⁶²⁷ DeLillo in Palieri, “Interview”, 23.

autonomous, but that it relies on the state which has so far sustained and promoted it, but which could eventually restrain it (regulate it) to safeguard the national interests, particularly when excessive financial speculation threatens to collapse the national economy.

Resistance, as anticipated by the televised murders, climaxes in the anti-global protest scene. Protesters direct their violence against the Financial District towers, “break[ing] into control rooms, attack[ing] the video wall and logo ticker”, chain stores and Packer’s limousine (87). The protesters (whose actions Packer follows on screen), are attired in rat suits and carry around a gigantic Styrofoam rat. Varsava tends to explain rats as a metaphor for the parasitical class of rentiers and for “global capitalists as exploitative, ratlike figures, feeding off of others”⁶²⁸, as Packer’s “ratty hair” (160) exemplifies. While agreeing to a certain extent, I would suggest that the rat suits the protesters don offer an aesthetic representation of Packer’s vision of people in the gutter, people who are reduced to rats, but who, even though thrown in the gutter, manage nonetheless to resist obliteration (rats are notoriously gutter-efficient creatures).

The protesters’ assault against the financial headquarters constitutes a revolt not only against the advance of global finance capital, and the dematerialization it produces, but also against the imposition of its own time conception to every category of human existence. As Vija Kinski readily notes a few pages before Eric’s limo encounters the protest, resistance to the system and its own values of dehumanised, robotised social practices is already at work: “something will happen soon, maybe today...to correct the acceleration of time. Bring nature back to normal” (79). Kinski subsequently argues that the protesters contest the call of futurity that Eric seeks so fervidly to realize into the present: “[t]his is a protest against the future. They want to hold off the future. They want to normalize it, keep it from overwhelming the present” (91).

As opposed to Eric, who prefigures a time-horizon which accommodates all forms of capital interaction and human relations within itself, protesters (as theorised by Kinski) know that there are other forms of temporality at work, forms which clash against the homogenising time-horizon of Wall Street, which according to Harvey “can create an unwelcome temporal compression that is deeply stressful to other factions of capital [and] simply cannot accommodate to temporalities of social and ecological reproduction systems in a responsive

⁶²⁸ Varsava, “Saturated Self”, 101.

way.”⁶²⁹ Market futurity, “always a wholeness, a sameness”(91) erases all the significant local and regional realities, whether economic or cultural. A market-dominated future cancels all possibilities of change contained in the future, change which might be necessary to the survival of capitalism itself.

Protesters, by taking hold of the information rooms which control the electronic tickers outside the investment bank and tower buildings, substitute the flow of data and currency symbols with an apt variation of “The Communist Manifesto”: “A SPECTER IS HAUNTING THE WORLD– THE SPECTER OF CAPITALISM”(96). For the protesters, the spectre of capitalism symbolises the negation of the distensive possibilities contained in the future, erased by a future-determined present. However, as opposed to Marx, who envisaged Socialism as the alternative to capitalist society, protesters are not able to give their protest a clear ideological stance. The mixture of anarchist and communist elements seem to work independently of one another, thereby failing to communicate a real alternative to the capitalist system they contest: instead they substitute violence for violence. When projected on the screen of Packer’s limousine, the protest, with its confused use of symbols and references, becomes “something theatrical”(92).

Such confusion works only to inhibit Eric’s ability to conceive of the protest as a real resistance to the system. He cannot imagine forms of resistance outside the system. He endorses the totality of the market culture and its capacity to absorb everything around it. Likewise for Vija Kinski the protesters are “a fantasy generated by the market. They don’t exist outside the market....There’s no outside...the market culture is total”(90). From such a perspective, as part of the system, the protesters are the system’s agents, whose “urge to destroy is a creative urge...the hallmark of capitalist thought”(92). Kinsky refers obviously to the logic of ‘creative destruction’, which, in Joseph Shumpeter’s formulation constitutes: “[the] process of industrial mutation [which] incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of creative destruction is the essential fact about capitalism.”⁶³⁰ By positing the protesters as part of the system, Kinski sees them actuate the creation of a new capitalist system, the one envisaged by Packer, as contained within capitalism itself. The force of Kinski’s lucid argumentation, combined with Packer’s market-

⁶²⁹ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 58-59.

⁶³⁰ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, (New York: Harper, 1975), 82-83.

shaped interpretation of reality, reduces the protest to “a form of systemic hygiene, purging and lubricating” which attests to the “market’s ability to shape itself to its own flexible end”(99).

Such distorted vision of the forces animating the protest, is also cause for Packer’s misunderstanding of the protesters’ use of poetry. The line “A RAT BECAME THE UNIT OF CURRENCY”(96) reminds Eric of the poem he had been reading early that morning. The quote is from Zbigniew Herbert’s poem, “Report from a Besieged City” and serves as the novel’s epigraph. Indeed, New York, as depicted in *Cosmopolis*, is a city under siege. The line reprises the rats motif recurring throughout the pages of the novel, with the protesters releasing hordes of them “in restaurants and hotel lobbies”(89).

“Report From A Besieged City” is a poem about Warsaw under Nazi occupation during World War II. The poet, reduced to “the inferior role of the chronicler,” recounts “facts /only they it seems are appreciated on the foreign markets”⁶³¹: facts, data, units as on the tickers of the world Exchanges. As a result of war, death plunges its inhabitants within the endless temporality of mourning and “everyone here suffers from a loss of the sense of time.”⁶³² By imposing the non-time of bereavement, totalitarian forces seek to eradicate the past and the specific local character and culture, to create a prescribed, unchanging future in the name of Nazi ideology. Against the claim of such future, the poet says “all we have left is the place the attachment to the place we still rule over the ruins of temples spectres of gardens and houses/ if we lose the ruins nothing will be left.”⁶³³ The ruins constitute a precious embodiment of the social and cultural materiality which is under threat of extinction. Although spectralised, the ruins help preserve the memory of what has been lost, testify to the persistence of the past and of local identity, and work against the process of erasure and obliteration that war-administered death attempts to produce.

Like the inhabitants of the besieged city, the protesters stand up against the obliteration of human interaction and against the dematerialization proper of finance capital that seeks to reduce everything to data and numbers within the delocalised and depersonalised space of cyber-capital. Packer however remembers the poem only for its market metaphors. As a result of the process of incorporation he has been suffering from, he can only read the market metaphor used by the poet literally. Caught in the fiction of cyber-markets where symbols represent the doubly

⁶³¹ Zbigniew Herbert, “Report from a Besieged City” (1982), in *Report from a Besieged City and Other Poems*. Translated by John Carpenter and Bogdana Carpenter, (New York: Ecco Press,1985), 76-78.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶³³ *Idem.*

fetishistic nature of money, he can easily imagine the word 'rat' severed from its connotative meanings (particularly those pertaining to a living, three-dimensional entity) as just another symbol for money's "ghostly electronic life": "[t]he rat closed lower today against the euro...US establishes rat standard...[e]very U.S. dollar redeemable for rat" (23-24).

The protest climaxes in a self-immolation. As Eric's limousine is driving out of the protest Eric glimpses the conflagration: "A man sat on the sidewalk with legs crossed, trembling in a length of braided flame" (97). The man, recalling Quan Duc's self-immolation and evoking Jack burning himself to death in a similar fashion in *Players*, exposes the body and its perishability, thus rendering visible, in its destruction, the persistence of embodied materiality outside Packer's medium. As a result, his gesture contests the disembodiedness that Packer seeks to render definitive. Eric observes the burning man without fully grasping the meaning of his gesture. Kinsky explains that the act is "not original", but rather an "appropriation" (100) of past modes of protests. Yet, although only momentarily, Eric by observing the man, realises that "[t]he market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate its act. Not such starkness and horror. This was a thing outside its reach" (100). Like Pammy or Gary Harkness, Packer must face the existence of a material world, but, given the pervading fetishism that characterises his existence, he retrenches into his refusal of death, of embodiedness and of the non-totality of the financial world.

The protest marks a shift in the narrative in that, from this moment on, Packer wilfully embraces his self-destruction by losing all his fortune and by heading towards death. I would claim that both gestures can be glossed as Packer's quest for the means to grant himself endless survival. Early on, Kinsky suggests that Packer's death can only occur "because you permit it...as a way to re-emphasise the idea we all live under...enforced destruction [so that] new markets [can be] claimed" (92). Indeed, Packer, by seeking death, enacts a form of "creative destruction" which, since it can only come from within capital, must be self-willed. Packer does not avow the fictionality of finance capital, but rather sees the markets collapse as an affirmation of finance's obsolescence. Marx posited that "[c]irculation does not carry within itself the principle of self-renewal...[c]ommodities [for Packer substituted by M] constantly have to be thrown into [circulation] from the outside."⁶³⁴ As a result he must find an outside which allows capital to reproduce itself elsewhere and by other means, a definitive form of 'spatial fix' where capital, and

⁶³⁴ Karl Marx. *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 121.

Packer as its incarnation, can thrive again. But his search must be coterminous with the destruction of what Packer has so far created: in economic terms, his search must realize a capital stasis. In the novel such a solution requires the destruction of Packer himself.

In order to pursue his death, Eric first appropriates his wife's fortune by hacking into her bank account, then moves on to rid himself of his security guard, since Torval's bulky mass (146) no longer serves to protect the fluid circulation of Packer's capital. Torval's survival becomes a hindrance to the process of creative destruction Packer wishes to enact. Similarly, the appropriation of Shrifrin's fortune, and its destruction, are consistent with the idea that Packer's evolution as a capitalist necessarily entails the destruction of all he has.

Significantly, Packer's terminal journey towards stasis leads him away from the glow of the Financial District towards geographical locales which, in their desolation and gloominess, bear the mark of the processes of space destruction and reconfiguration lying at the heart of the spatial fix. Packer enters "the old brawl, the old seethe of Hell's Kitchen, the rake of fire escapes on old brick buildings"(129). The barbershop in front of which Eric stops to finally have a haircut is located in his father's old neighbourhood (159). Within the barber's shop, Eric continues to notice signs of incipient ruins: "[t]here was a hole in the linoleum...[p]aint was coming off the walls, exposing splotches of pinkish white plaster, and the ceiling was cracked in places"(169).

The barber's episode allows DeLillo to place Packer outside the "largely anonymous interactions [of] online stock trading."⁶³⁵ For Varsava, Packer's interaction with the barber and his own driver reverses the process (inherent in the delocalised context of cyber-space) that Anthony Giddens calls "disembedding...the 'lifting out' of social relations from local context of interaction and their restructuring across infinite spans of space-time."⁶³⁶ More importantly, Hell's Kitchen represents an American version of the ruins in Herbert's poem, with the barber's attachment to the place, although in ruins, its small talk, shared meals and shared houses offering a sense of history and community uncolonised by the abstractive logic of speculative capital. The sense of permanence emanating from both the neighbourhood and Aduato's shop contrast sharply with the volatility of markets and their temporality; in contradistinction, the place possesses a kind of narrative time: "elapsed time hangs in the air...suffusing solid objects and men's faces"(166).

⁶³⁵ Varsava, "Saturated Self", 99.

⁶³⁶ Idem.

Although the barbershop testifies to a reality that is lost to Packer's world and which, in effect belonged to his presumably working-class father, Packer does not experience a full distension in the past, and with it, the avowal of residual forms of capitalism alternative to the logic of speculative capital or, in any way, coterminous with it. Rather, the "associations"(15) that Packer expects to find in the barber's shop are "the same words nearly every time, with topical variations"(161), a serial repetition of sentences which, recalling the seriality of Packer's medium, offer him comfort and safety. Nonetheless, "fixed" in the barber's chair, Packer can briefly see his driver as a person whose mutilated eye is a product of "the horror and despair"(16) characterising a specific and localised environment. Eric presumes that Hamadou may have been "beaten and tortured. An army or a coup. Or the secret police. Fired a shot into your face"(168). However, such "list of stock phrases that merge the specific suffering of his driver into the background hubbub of war and atrocity purveyed to western viewers by the 24-hour news media [evidence that Eric] conceives of him as little more than a composite of news reports beamed from distant war zones."⁶³⁷ Arguably, the driver's mutilated eye materialises Packer's failure to see "the complex realities behind [the fictions of finance capitalism]."⁶³⁸ Hamadou, as Packer's driver, embodies the "blindness" driving the market. At the same time, Ibrahim's scar evidences "the market's incapability to allocate its resources to eradicate poverty and to assure security of livelihood"⁶³⁹ to the vast majority of people.

Packer, unable to reconcile his logic with the values manifest in the barber's shop, quits the barber's chair. The driver, however, understands why Packer leaves with half a haircut: he, as a financier, is unable to function in a place outside the market's logic. On leaving the barbershop, Eric inadvertently becomes an extra in a film shooting. Given that Packer's role is to lie still, and naked on the street, among other naked bodies (174), his positioning further anticipates his death. The film shoot supplements the process of localisation already experienced by Packer in the barber's shop, and forces him to share his body with others: "He felt the presence of the bodies, all of them the body breath, the heat and running, blood, people unlike each other who were now alike, amassed, heaped in a way alive and dead together"(174). The "stunned flesh"(172) of the massed body reveals, as Boxall points out, "the body...returned to its 'unprotected' prelapsarian nudity, stripped, like Mr Tuttle, of epidermic layers bodies" and

⁶³⁷ Crosthwaite, "Fiction in the Age of the Global Accident", 4.

⁶³⁸ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 167.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

constitutes an aesthetic denunciation of the dead materiality produced by Packer's "bodiless [financial] economy."⁶⁴⁰ The shooting forces Packer to experience immobility, which situates Eric in a sensorial experience unmediated by technology, and bodily sentience as a counterpoint to the immateriality of cyber-capital. As one of "amassed" bodies, Packer is assimilable to fixed capital. Compelled into idleness, he exits the process of capital circulation, particularly since the shoot is the last in a project whose "financing has collapsed"(175): the film will never be marketed.

Packer's experience of sentience accentuates his problematic relationship with his own body. Severed from the circulation process, Packer must again come to term with physical materiality. Even as, in the first part of the novel, pain characterised release from market logic, so pain proves to be paramount in Packer's confrontation with Benno Levin. In the novel's first half, Packer pains by way of his asymmetrical prostate. Every two days, the financier submits himself to a medical check-up, involving anal inspection, during which he experiences his body through discomfort rather than as an embodiment of capital. Other interiorities are likewise "screened" and the vision of his heart pulsing inside his body (44) has on Eric a disorienting effect. The body, as observed on the monitor, operates a split between the subject and the object observed. Eric perceives his body as something other than himself, not in the space his body occupies but in the space occupied by the monitor. Such screening of Packer is consistent with other "screened" descriptions DeLillo gives of his character elsewhere in the novel. The body perceived as impulses, (bits and data), convertible into and image becomes "knowable and whole"(44). Eric's body is temporarily virtualised precisely because it is reducible to zero and one or to bits (in accordance with Eric's more general habits of perception). Pain enters the narrative as an experiential alternative, one which, in Eric's case, proves particularly significant in that it escapes objectification as data or images. As his doctor probes his prostate, Eric experiences pain: "There was pain, probably just muscles tensing....But it hurt. It was pain. It travelled the circuitry of nerve cells"(47). The experience of pain, which escapes representation, strikes him in its uniqueness and intensity. Packer, puzzled by the sensation of pain, tries to instantiate an abstracted concept of pain in the form of "arrays of information"(48). More significantly, pain forces Eric to confront "his body, the structure he wanted to dismiss in theory even when he was shaping it under the measured effect of barbells and weights"(48). In contradistinction with

⁶⁴⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 225.

Eddie Fenig or Bucky Wunderlick in *Great Jones Street* who, when in pain, could experience the workings of a medium as profoundly immaterial as finance capital, in *Cosmopolis* pain causes Packer to perceive his body, that which within his medium is virtualised, and therefore rendered immaterial.

Pain forces Eric to confront the irreducible mortality of his body, as that which comes from within: "The pain was local but seemed to absorb everything around it....He could think and speak of other things but only within the pain. He was living in the gland, in the scalding fact of his biology" (50). Although only momentarily, Eric experiences what Scarry calls "the unmaking of the world through pain," pain sufficiently intense to destroy the "created world of thoughts and feelings."⁶⁴¹ Eric is at loss of language in describing the exact nature of his pain. The words "hellish" or "steady-state" (30) only remotely manage to convey the intensity of his sufferance. All-absorbing pain substitutes for his consciousness, operating as something different from and alien to Eric, as if he were being possessed by something other than himself, but through which the external world is felt. The painful body prompts recognition of an "overwhelming discrepancy between an increasingly palpable body and [the] increasingly substanceless world"⁶⁴² of cyber-capital. Intense pain temporarily destroys Eric's construct of the self and of the external world, only to rework that construct through the all-encompassing body "swelling to fill the entire universe."⁶⁴³ Packer thus comes to acknowledge "the scalding fact of his biology" (50), that is the existence of a body susceptible to pain, and also to death. With the death threat he has received, complementing his pain, Eric begins to "experience the body that will end his life, the body that can be killed."⁶⁴⁴ The renewed knowledge of his body through pain and death has a revelatory quality for him. "It was the threat of death at the brink of the night that spoke to him most surely about some principle of fate he had always known would come clear in time. Now he could begin the business of living" (107). Having acknowledged his body as a hindrance to his own digital survival, Packer can move on to destroy it, since "to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension into the world; conversely to have a body...is to have one's sphere of extension contracted down to a small circle of one's immediate physical presence."⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴¹ Scarry, *Pain*, 30.

⁶⁴² *Idem.*

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

Eric's gesture becomes a metaphor for the effort of finance capitalism itself to overcome the limitations of space in order to eliminate all threats to its own survival.

The recovery of bodily sentience as experienced in the film shooting, combined with his immobility, drive Packer in utter helplessness and deprive him of any "urgency and purpose"(180). With his limousine gone, Packer comes to a standstill. To Packer no viable options seem to open outside the logic of the market: "[t]here was nowhere he wanted to go, nothing to think about, no one waiting"(180). However, Packer immediately regains a sense of purpose when a shot resonates into the air, "followed by a man's voice shouting his name...a cracked pitch that was more chilling than a gunfire"(181). The threat that had hovered around him throughout the novel finally materialises as Benno Levin.

Levin, Eric's murderer and nemesis, enters the narrative quite early in the novel as an anonymous man drawing money from a cash machine (53). His story emerges through "The Confessions of Benno Levin" which, overtly recalling "The Confessions of Saint Augustine," open with Benno staring at the inanimate body of Eric. "The Confessions" advance in reverse, from end to beginning (from "night" to "morning"), inverting the temporal process of the novel (from "morning" to "night"). The structural device allows DeLillo to mark the contrast between Eric and Benno by underlining their differing temporalities. Benno's "Confessions" pertain, in Ricoeur's words, to the mode of retelling, reversing "the well-known metaphor of the 'arrow of time'" where "the representation of time [emerges] as flowing from the past into the future."⁶⁴⁶ Levin "rereads" his story by "reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending."⁶⁴⁷ His reversal foregrounds the importance of the past, discloses motives within his gesture, and locates his need to kill Packer as the direct consequence of a series of actions, events, goals which the future (in effect the "present" of the novel) failed to realise. Yet, neither of the two characters appreciates the full distension of the Ricoeurian temporal experience. While Packer's temporality is future-oriented, Benno's fails to extend into the future. Consequently, Benno's temporality emerges as the inversion of Packer's. Levin exists only to kill Packer, since Levin sees Packer as the person responsible for Benno's failure to become a finance capitalist. Benno's failed narrative is the product of a greater failure which cannot emerge unless we take into account the relationship that ties him to Packer.

⁶⁴⁶ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. I*, 67.

⁶⁴⁷ Idem.

Levin's "Confessions" lodge him firmly within the specific class fragment which promotes the material and the cultural advancement of finance capital: "I was assistant professor of computer application in a community college....I was teaching and lecturing....I left teaching to make my million. It was the right time to do this"(57, 150, 153). Joining Packer Capital constitutes for Levin an opportunity for class advancement by means of his education, which allows him to enter the computer-dependent circuits of financial capital. Levin, like Lyle Wynants or James Axton before him, therefore lives of the gap between M and M¹, experiencing a split within himself which originates within the medium's obliteration of the commodity economy. Unlike Wynant or Axton, however, his immersion within such medium is pushed to the extreme. Levin in fact nurtures the illusion of becoming a second Packer. DeLillo scatters clues concerning Eric's past and reveals that at first he was a hacker, hired by financial companies to test their security systems, after which he became an analyst who turned investment capitalist. Levin attempts to transform himself into another Packer by imitating the latter's gestures. Levin confuses the power to control Packer's capital via his technological expertise with the power deriving from owning that capital. Levin considers the transient and immaterial capital he manages as his own capital. In attempting to become another Packer, Levin forgets that he is not a possessor of capital.

Benno seeks "virtually" to emulate his employer who, as a finance capitalist is always absent in bodily form, but present in the virtual space of his website, from which Benno watches Packer in search of a sense of order and identity (151). Levin never actually manages to become part of the virtual world Packer inhabits. He only experiences it as a watcher. In his "Confessions", Levin affirms that he is "living offline now"(149), in accordance with Packer. Actually, if Levin ever was online, he was "there" only as a currency analyst transferring Packer's capital. Benno tries to mimic Eric's global financial activity, keeping accounts in five major banks in the city, going "from branch to branch well into the night, moving money between accounts or just checking my balances"(150). While Eric operates on a global scale, through the virtual omnipresent space of cyber-capital, Benno's space is limited by the border of the city. While Eric uses other people to move capital from one space to another, Benno does it himself. Where Eric can use his virtual self to hack into his wife's bank account and to transfer all her wealth to serve his own purposes, Benno moves only his own money and does so through ATM machines which Eric sees as obsolete. Benno's dependence on the machine to accomplish his operations signals

the absence of those 'foreseeing' qualities which instead guide Packer's activities. Fixity marks Levin in contrast to Packer's mobility: if Packer capital travels through the world, Benno's money remains confined to the city. To further highlight his fixity, Benno is now reduced to riding "a stationary bike with one pedal missing"(61,149). Indeed, because of his immobility, Levin recognises that the definition of "erratic" ill suits him. He defines Packer "erratic"(55) precisely because the latter is an embodiment of finance capital. While Packer's speculation influences the economies of the world, Levin is himself influenced by global illnesses, whose descriptions proliferate in the cyber space of the internet: "I suffer spells of hwabyung (Korea). This is cultural panic mainly which I caught on the Internet"(56). As the Korean name seems to imply, the cultural panic Levin suffers from recalls (and is perhaps a consequence of) the financial panic which characterised the 1996 Asian meltdown and also the panic caused by Packer's reckless speculation on the yen. As a currency analyst, Levin used to work on the Thai baht. In fact, Levin does not really suffer from such illnesses, rather (as he admits) his suffering is the product of his own imagination, and "[t]he things I imagine become facts"(57). The products of Levin's imagination materialise to alter his own condition: such a capacity (somehow recalling Packer's gift of foresight) does not suffice to change Levin's status from PMC member to finance capitalist. When the collapse of the Thai baht causes first his demotion and, subsequently, his layoff, the precarious balance, upon which his split of consciousness rested, collapses giving rise to problematic figure torn between his former self, identified as Richard Sheets, and Benno Levin. His failure as a financial analyst turns him into "generic labor"(60) and causes him to experience directly the consequences of the vaporisation of labour that he sought to perpetrate by becoming a finance capitalist. Levin becomes one of the castoffs that populate DeLillo's novels, an emblem of the body of labour that finance capital seeks to evaporate, spectralised and inhabiting an old and derelict tenement which functions as an architectural manifestation of his condition.

Arguably, Levin, continuously shifting between his split selves as both Levin and Sheets, is barred from experiencing a rebirth of the sort Axton goes through. Axton is able to overcome his dislocation by fully acknowledging the structural fetishism characterising the medium he originally inhabited and to be reborn as a writer. On the contrary, Levin can only shift between his new and former self. Nor can he enact any fantasy of incorporation (of the sort Lyle pursues by joining the terrorist group) for he no longer situates himself within Lyle's class fragment.

Levin perpetrates small gestures proper to his former existence as Sheets, such as visiting ATMs, or continues to pursue an interest in money”(57), money however which, in conformity with the new medium he inhabits, possesses none of the virtual properties of the funds he used to manage as a currency analyst (money, that is, in the tangible form of bills that can be touched, felt, looked at). For Benno, there is no exit outside his two selves. Like Packer, he is too “self-haunted”, finding no alternative to either a financial-driven existence or the murder of Packer. In fact, he cannot envisage what will become of him after Packer is dead. Neither can writing offer him an exit outside his selves: Benno’s narrative is marred by repetitions and confusion, confusion which, originating in his split consciousness, prevents the “Confessions” from giving (both the reader and their writer) a clear and full account of the motives beyond Levin’s hatred for Packer and a future prospect.

Overall, the confrontation between Packer and Levin reproduces the relationship of subordination between the capitalist and the member of the PMC. Packer, although at gunpoint, retains his capacity to shoot first and never acknowledges Levin to hold power over him— his refusal manifests Packer’s inability to recognise his opponent either as Levin or as his former employee, Richard Sheets. Packer also refuses to be questioned. He actually orders Levin to sit and talk. The confrontation transforms into a reciprocal admission of both Packer and Levin’s failures. Packer admits his having failed to predict the yen, while Levin, speaking in the first person plural as a result of his spilt, talks of the profound dislocation he used to experience while part of Packer Capital. Levin has gained awareness of the solitude and the dehumanising time-compression of virtual capital (191), but such an awareness does not offer any closure for him.

Packer recognises that Levin’s condition as “unemployable” is the product of Levin’s confused identity. But at the same time he fails to acknowledge the role of market ideology in generating and endorsing such confusion: “You’re unsettled because you feel you have no role, you have no place. But you have to ask yourself whose fault this is. Your crime has no conscience. You haven’t been driven to do it by some oppressive social force. You’re not against the rich. Nobody’s against the rich. Everybody’s ten seconds from being rich. Or so everybody thought”(196). Within Packer’s view, Levin’s failure to materialise enormous wealth is simply his own, neither can the market be held responsible for a lopsided wealth redistribution. Packer tags Benno’s crime a “cheap imitation...a stale fantasy”(193), because, in his own view, “[v]iolence needs a cause, a truth”(194). Yet he fails to see the violence the market exerted on Benno.

Therefore, while Levin recognises, by experiencing them, the most predatory aspects of finance capitalism embodied by Packer, and the profound aversion for social and human oriented experiences, his lack of alternatives cannot render him “a messiah-like figure bent on the salvation of others.”⁶⁴⁸ Rather, his gesture reproduces, in both violence and lack of scope, those of the protesters whose actions against the symbols of financial capitalism fail to provide a model for a different socio-economic order constructed upon more humane and social practices. For Benno, unlike the suggestion offered by Lauren’s body art, there exists no recuperation of embodied forms of capital as an alternative to the dematerialised experience of cyber-capital.

Packer shooting himself in the hand at this point is not the product of some masochistic paroxysm.⁶⁴⁹ Arguably, such a gesture reinforces Packer’s recognition that although Levin, like the protesters, can threaten capitalism, he lacks the means to take its destruction into his own hands. By shooting himself, Packer takes one step further towards the destruction of his body as the route to “the perpetuity Packer seeks...that belongs to bodiless value in the form of digital capital.”⁶⁵⁰ The shot naturally delivers enormous pain (197), which becomes all-absorbing and Eric’s world consequently collapses. Yet, in the act of trying to wish away the pain, he magnifies his body and leaves himself initially at a loss for words. Nonetheless, Eric discovers through half-muttered words, that pain verbalised opens up a new consciousness. By muttering in utter pain, the words “My prostate is asymmetrical”, Packer discovers that Benno too suffers from the same condition (199). For a moment, through their respective asymmetrical prostates, Benno and Eric seem to establish a connection which links their two separate systems.

Asymmetry, mirrored by both Packer’s asymmetrical prostate and his aborted and asymmetrical haircut, is of course symbolic of the asymmetry proper of the financial system, asymmetry which contrasts with the perceived perfect balance of financial markets. But while Packer recognises that the “single additional letter” actually constitutes a “counterforce to balance and calm”(52) which characterises the markets, he cannot fully grasp the meaning of “the idea of asymmetry”(52) beyond a literal analysis of the word. While his asymmetric prostate, as Levin suggests, does not constitute a threat to Eric’s health, Levin underlines that “the little quirk. The misshape”(200) could have gained him access to understanding the limitations of his medium and of his interpretative paradigm of the world. The notion of asymmetry testifies to the

⁶⁴⁸ Varsava, “Saturated Self”, 102.

⁶⁴⁹ *Idem.*

⁶⁵⁰ Chandler, “An Unsettling, Alternative Self”, 254.

irrationality which is proper of financial markets, of which the unexpected rise of the yen, which Eric failed to foresee, is an example. It also explains the financial system's lopsidedness in its reliance on liquidity rather than on other functions of money. Furthermore, asymmetry defines the unequal distribution of wealth that finance capital produces and the attendant production of human suffering and waste which originates market resistance.

Packer's power to foresee, to anticipate the market is reduced to an anticipation of his own death, and more particularly to the image of his tagged corpse in a morgue which he glimpses in his video-watch. The tag reads "Male Z" (208). The vision of his death however offers no redemption to Packer. Rather he sees his pain as an interference to his "immortality" (207), since it signals to him that his powers are limited by the nature of his body. However, death, which in the case of the man burning himself represented the only space unappropriated by capital's logic, becomes for Packer the means through which he can extend himself within the spatial and temporal infinity of cyber-capital. Packer envisions himself crashing with his fighter plane over the desert and, by doing so, he imagines his body "fireballed", transformed into "a work of land art, scorched earth art" that his dealer Didi Fancher will manage "for the respectful contemplation of preapproved groups and enlightened individuals" (209). Packer's vision realizes, in fantasy, the Schumpeterian notion of creative destruction. Unified by the blast with the desert, Eric will find his own immortality as a work of art, outside the volatility of the markets.

The death of Packer does not, of course, signal the end of the financial markets. While towards the end he might recognise that deregulated markets do not provide "a viable theoretical guide to ensuring the future of capital accumulation,"⁶⁵¹ he does not question its teleology or interpretative paradigm.

Rather, Packer's final fantasy ultimately envisions a total market. Such fantasy combines Schumpeter's creative destruction with Marx and Hegel's notion of an outside which renews capital's accumulation. The fireball which envelops him, rather than a symbol of finance capital's destruction as devised by *Players'* terrorists, becomes instrumental to Packer's terminal 'fix'. Similarly, his desire to subsume the work of art within the market logic (to transform it into capital's 'other', an 'outside' which delivers Packer immortality) derives from his perceiving that possibly art remains the ultimate form of resistance, the expressions of a humanity which seeks

⁶⁵¹ Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, 188.

to escape inclusion within the market. While observing the Rothko canvases in his triplex, Eric feels “danger” emanating from the “white paintings”(8), danger which derives from their “not being new”(8). The empty canvasses, in offering a vision of a blank space, an emptiness, in fact testify to the vacuum produced by the financial medium, and render visible within the absence they represent, the loss that gave rise to Packer’s world. The recognition that a loss has occurred would work against the melancholic incorporation proper of the speculative medium that Packer embodies, producing a recuperation of the past history of capital which may lead to an alternative vision of the future of capital which neither Packer, nor the protesters’ nor Benno’s violence can envisage.

CHAPTER 8

FALLING MAN: AMERICA IN THE AFTER-DAYS OF 9/11.

As Eric Packer waits “for the shot to sound”(C, 209), his final fantasy reveals his inability to supersede the structural disavowal underpinning the realm of speculative capital, his willingness to further inhabit the vacuum finance produces and his desire to render it total. Yet, while Packer remains deeply entrenched within his melancholic incorporation and “self-contained”(C, 192) world, *Cosmopolis* registers the growing dissent against the “era of neoliberal globalisation and the role of New York financial markets in particular, and the U.S. in general, in forcing a certain pattern of political-economic development.”⁶⁵² According to DeLillo, such pattern of development has “diminish[ed] most people’s chance at self-determination”(RoF, 33), and both *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis* advocate (either directly or through the metaphor of mourning as a path towards self-awareness and transformation) the need to avow the material and social consequences of the neoliberal “shift in internal social relationships within the state in favour of creditor and rentier interests [and the] subordination of productive sectors to financial sectors.”⁶⁵³

In *Falling Man* (2007) death and loss, and the profound grief they produce, cease to work as metaphor for the specific emergence and functioning of a financial structure of feeling, and become, following the events of September 11 2001, the structuring principle of America’s

⁶⁵² David Harvey, “Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State” in M. Sorkin and S. Zukin eds., *After The World Trade Center. Rethinking New York*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 58.

⁶⁵³ Gowan, *Global Gamble*, vi.

daily life. *Falling Man* cannot be read as a metaphorical account of the workings of finance capital, for the very event that produced the narrative “has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile. We have to take the shock and horror as it is” (*RoF*, 39). Yet, the desire to write a narrative that attempts to explain what led to such a “horror” forces *Falling Man*’s protagonists to reconsider the recent history of US capitalism and of US global politics. The painful experience of mourning they must undergo can work as an opportunity to acknowledge, to avow, the asymmetries and inequalities the that “[m]arkets hide...very effectively”⁶⁵⁴ insulating those who live in the abundance produced by financial markets from the “social dislocations entailed by financial expansions”⁶⁵⁵ affecting the most vulnerable territories and people.

According to DeLillo, on September 11 the “world narrative [shaped by] capital markets...end[ed] in the rubble” of the Twin Towers (*RoF*, 33, 34):

[I]t was not a street anymore, but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night....The roar was still in the air, the buckling rumble of the fall. This was the world now. Smoke and ash came rolling down streets and turning corners, busting around corners, seismic tides of smoke, with office paper flashing past, standards sheets with cutting edge, skimming, whipping past, otherworldly things in the morning pall (3).

Falling Man starts mid-action as the “seismic tides”(3) of the falling towers invest lower Manhattan, producing a landscape whose ash grey colour contrasts sharply with the brilliant “glow” of cyber capital. As opposed to the anaechoic world of cyber-capital (metonymically represented by Eric Packer’s soundproof limousine in *Cosmopolis*) the new world arising from the attacks resonates with the sounds of destruction and writhing pain, with “fitful cries of disbelief, curses and loud shouts”(4) coming from witnesses and survivors, as much as from the Towers in their death throes. The fall of the paper compounds the image of the “figures in the windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space...all those writhing lives back there, and things kept falling, scorched objects trailing lines of fire”(4).

Reduced to “the residue of smashed matter, [to] the ash ruins of what was various and human”(246) within them, the Twin Towers no longer appear “sheer, abstract...empty”(C, 36) as Eric Packer envisioned them, as if emanating from the immaterial purview of the global financial capital conglomerates they hosted. On the contrary, in their fall, the towers reveal all their

⁶⁵⁴ Harvey, “Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State”, 59.

⁶⁵⁵ Arrighi, “Global Turbulence”, 68.

physicality and vulnerability, countering Pammy Wynant's perception that "they remained concepts, no less transient for all their bulk than some routine distortion of light" (*P*, 19). "[I]nto the shroud of sand and ash" (24), the Towers effectively appear to have been "made to accommodate levels of national grief" (*P*, 19), as Pammy ominously posited. While back in 1977 the grief and sorrow resulted from the de-industrialisation, workers relocation, urban poverty both in the US and abroad as a consequence of financial investments and capital movements planned and directed from the Towers, in 2001 grief and sorrow take on a different valence, as the towers become the epitome of the human loss suffered by the US and an attack on American values and freedom.

Undoubtedly, the abstractedness emanating from the towers used to reflect the abstract nature of speculative capital and markets; the Towers' impermanence and sheer weightlessness were a mirror for the ghostly essence of speculative capital. In their doubling, in their reflecting of each other, they aptly replicated the self-referential power of speculative capital. However, for DeLillo, the terrorists did not seek to target so much the global economy as rather "the high gloss of our modernity...the thrust of our technology...our perceived godlessness...the blunt force of our foreign policy...the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind" (*RoF*, 33). Indeed, the terrorist attack was aimed at the World Trade Center as "the branded icon of New York's, and by extension, of America's...power" and culture.⁶⁵⁶ As an icon, as a brand, the WTC was laden with an affective power aimed at eliciting images of New York and of the US as the irradiating centres of wealth and affluence deriving from an economic "disinvestment [from] the world of things."⁶⁵⁷ Thus, while on the one hand the Towers' images elicited freedom and prosperity associated with the Western world, on the other hand the Towers became a symbol of "the insensitivity of U.S.-led globalisation practices to local cultures, interests and traditions."⁶⁵⁸

In focussing on the symbolic valence of the Towers, DeLillo's interpretation of the attacks parallels that of the intellectuals forming the RETORT group, who contend that the attacks meant to disrupt "the social imaginary" and were thus a "form of symbolic action within the symbolic economy called spectacle."⁶⁵⁹ Drawing from Guy Debord's notion that "spectacle is

⁶⁵⁶ Greenberg, "Limits of Branding", 387.

⁶⁵⁷ Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (New York: Picador, 2002), 4.

⁶⁵⁸ Harvey, "Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State", 60.

⁶⁵⁹ RETORT, *Afflicted Powers*, 26, 25.

capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image”,⁶⁶⁰ RETORT argues that the spectacular side of 30 years of the US neoliberal regime has been the hiding of “the violence and suppression of social energies”⁶⁶¹ resulting from unrestricted capital flows, the dismantling of networks of social security and IMF-administered adjustment programs. Images of wealth were deployed to mask and conjure away “hard and disagreeable materialities”: these images have deleted from “memory item after item of evidence of just what [the market’s obsession become state necessity has produced] in terms of human fear and agony”. The systematic dissemination of appearances worked to submit “more and more facets of human sociability...to the deadly solicitations (the lifeless, bright sameness) of the market.”⁶⁶²

The positions of DeLillo and RETORT converge in defining the event of September 11 not as a direct assault on the circuits of capital but as an assault on “circuits of sociability—patterns of belief and desire, levels of confidence, degrees of identification”⁶⁶³ that the WTC encapsulated: for DeLillo, “the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind” (*RoF*, 33). RETORT posits that “the terrorists followed the logic of the spectacle”⁶⁶⁴ insofar as they created an event whose spectacularity and violence cannot be exorcised. Such an event for DeLillo “changes the way we think and act, moment to moment, week to week, for unknown weeks and months to come, and steely years. Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs, which means we are living in a place of danger and rage” (*RoF*, 33).

Falling Man constructs a narrative which tries to represent the moment in which these two worlds have fused. At the same time, however, the novel is also a narrative of the aftermath, an aftermath which hovers between the need to remember and the will to suppress memories. The images of the jumpers, from which the novel takes its title, are haunting images that no matter how horrific, the mind cannot, and must not, erase. In stark contrast with the previous decade dominated by capital markets and their lack of memory, the attack on the WTC inaugurated a new era. As survivor Keith Neudecker affirms: “These are the days after. Everything now is measured by after”(138). The kind of “after” which emerges in both *Falling Man*, “In the Ruins of the Future”, and in “Baader- Meinhof” (a short story published in 2002) should prompt us to escape, as Linda Kauffman suggests, amnesia over history which is both

⁶⁶⁰ Guy Debord quoted in RETORT, *Afflicted Powers*, 27.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 15, 19.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

wilful and convenient, for not only does it hide the displacements of global capitalism, but it also tends to place the event of September 11 in a historical vacuum.⁶⁶⁵

Amnesia, blindness, denial, disavowal over the events of 9/11 compound the structural amnesia informing financial capital as to what concerns a multiplicity of values, productive forces and materialities. However, the fall of the Towers prompted recognition that “there was never a time when the confident capital-producing West, subsequently symbolised by the World Trade Center, wasn’t propped by all that it marginalised and forgot (that we were flying because others were falling).”⁶⁶⁶ DeLillo claims that the melding of the terrorists’ and American worlds renews a terrible dislocation, that which splits the world into “Us and Them” (*RoF*, 34), a dislocation which, as DeLillo himself portrayed in *Underworld*, appeared to have ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the close of the Cold War. DeLillo states that the narrative of the “after” characterises itself as a clash of civilizations, Islam versus the West, a clash between one side, the West, that wants “to live permanently in the future” and the terrorists “who want to bring back the past” (*RoF*, 33). While DeLillo may sound to echo Samuel Huntington and Jean Baudrillard in his analysis of the event in both his essay and novel (as Peter Boxall indicates in his reading of *Falling Man*),⁶⁶⁷ I would like to argue that DeLillo registers these interpretations as shaping the feelings of the majority of people, and perceives that precisely the rhetoric of “You are with us or against us” (promoted by the Bush administration) may in fact thwart the attempt to write a “counternarrative” (*RoF*, 34) shorn of anger. Such a counternarrative might seek to overcome the antagonism that pits America as the incarnation of globalization against Islam as the personification of terror.⁶⁶⁸ DeLillo senses that the composition of an alternative story might be tremendously difficult, as is suggested by the impossibility of reconciling Nina Bartos and Martin Ridnour’s positions in relations to the event. In the aftermath of 9/11, some of the characters in the novel run the risk of living in the same “narrower format” (*RoF*, 34) as the terrorists, in the sense that each constructs his or her own plot, his or her own closed narrative, a plot whose end is already shaped and which leaves no room for a broader, more balanced judgement of history. DeLillo’s point of view resembles Judith Butler’s, who argues

⁶⁶⁵ Linda S. Kauffman, “The Wake Of Terror: Don DeLillo’s ‘In The Ruins Of The Future,’ ‘Baader-Meinhof,’ and *Falling Man*”, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 54 number 2 (Summer 2008), 357.

⁶⁶⁶ Pamela Thurschwell, “Forecasting Falls: Icarus from Freud to Auden to 9/11”, *Oxford Literary Review*, 30:1 (2008), 219.

⁶⁶⁷ Peter Boxall, “Slow Man, Dangling Man, Falling Man: Beckett in The Ruins of the Future” in *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing In The Wake Of Modernism*, (London: Continuum, 2009), 169.

⁶⁶⁸ Jean Baudrillard, “L’Esprit du Terrorisme”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101:2 (2002), 406.

that “a narrative form emerges to compensate for the enormous narcissistic wound opened by the public display of our physical vulnerability [which precludes any other voice except the first-person point of view of the US].”⁶⁶⁹ Like DeLillo, Butler however posits that we “should emerge from the narrative perspective of US unilateralism...to consider the ways in which our lives are profoundly implicated in the lives of others.”⁶⁷⁰ DeLillo suggests that we should “stand apart and think about the elements [that produced the event] coldly, clearly” (42) even as the memory of the individual lives that were destroyed in the collapse of the Twin Towers (which plead from the photographs and memorials not to be forgotten) seems to preclude the possibility that we might see the world as a plurality of lives deeply imbricated into each other, as Butler suggests.

The need to occupy a space of suspended judgement complements the need to fully inhabit the temporal suspension attending mourning. The collapse of the towers produces a physical vacuum, a spatial correlative of the psychic emptiness generated by the loss of thousands of lives. Death opens a gap upon which characters are suspended, caught between the need to “wal[k] away from it and into it at the same time” (4). DeLillo suggests we should inhabit such vacuum, and live in a “state of abeyance” (4), since out of abeyance both successful mourning (rather than its repudiation) and a conternarrative may emerge.

Abeyance, to borrow from art historian T.J Clark, marks “the momentary suspension of the future tense...[the passage from death to life] the moment...preceding connectedness—preceding discourse— at which the relations between things are still in the process of being made up.”⁶⁷¹ Such a moment, as DeLillo showed in *The Body Artist*, causes those who experience a loss to live “on the threshold of life and death, [in an] interim state. Not balance, but not imbalance either; neither vitality nor rigor mortis...a body stirring into death, or hanging on for grim life.”⁶⁷² As a result of a loss, those grieving are split, or to use Butler’s term, “dispossessed” of something within themselves which initially cannot be fathomed.⁶⁷³ For DeLillo, by being held in a state of abeyance one accepts loss and the changes loss produces in both oneself and the outer world. Because 9/11 raises mourning to a national level, DeLillo may wish to communicate that the collective process of mourning towards introjection over the attacks

⁶⁶⁹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 6.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷¹ T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death. An Experiment in Art Writing*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 106, 118.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁷³ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 22.

might constitute a training ground for subverting the melancholic incorporation dominating the financial era.⁶⁷⁴

Most prominently, the need to be held in abeyance in order to escape the refusal to mourn informs DeLillo's depiction of Keith Neudecker, the survivor of the attacks who must make sense of the event he was part of and witnessed. Through his eyes readers see the escape from the steel and glass inferno and the towers' collapse. Keith's story investigates the effects of the attacks on the individual as the events cause the death of Keith's colleague, friend and poker companion, Rumsey. As in *The Body Artist*, where Lauren Hartke plunges into loss and mourning following the suicide of her husband, Keith here inhabits the "time and space of falling ash and near night" in which "things inside were distant and still, where he was supposed to be"(3): "[t]here was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means: they were unseen, whatever that means"(5). Like Lauren, "the world is lost inside [him]"(BA, 37), his own world which revolved around the twin towers. "Whatever that means", a sentence which Keith constantly repeats throughout the novel (5, 67, 203, 205), signals his inability to make sense of the "spatial void, or visual gap"(95) opened by the fall of the towers and, by extension, of the psychological vacuum upon which he hovers as a result of his friend's death. However, Keith's remark also testifies to the danger that he might seek a "denial of truth"(137), that he might fall prey to traumatic incorporation.

Keith appears "like he was dead"(104), living "outside time"(157), split between the man "back in other life"(131) and the one inhabiting the "after-days"(137). Keith's attempt to close the rift inside him emerges primarily through his endeavour to reconstruct "the moment of impact and the spiralling down the stairs towards salvation"(91).

For Keith (as much as for his wife Lianne and their son Justin) repositioning the events according to a temporal line entails overcoming the experience of dislocated time, a time of mourning from which temporal coordinates have been withdrawn, coordinates which might provide a teleological unfolding of events whereby human time is constructed. Justin's claim that Bin Laden (or Bill Lawton as he calls him) will come back and that "this time coming, he

⁶⁷⁴ For a similar point of view see Benjamin Bird, "History, Emotion and the Body", *Literature Compass*, Vol. 4, N°3 (2007), 561-575. Bird reads several texts written in the aftermath of 9/11 (among which *Cosmopolis*), and although he does not refer to a peculiarly financial melancholia, he nonetheless suggests that the national process of mourning following 9/11 could lead to "consider the close connection between American corporations and violence, both that between individuals within corporate culture and that which is provoked or abetted by corporations"(562).

says, [the Towers will] really come down”(102) testifies to the difficulty to acknowledge and admit that the towers have fallen. Justin’s vision of “the towers standing...this time reversal [amounts to] a failed fairy tale...without coherence”(102) and constitutes a fantasy that the world is still in order,⁶⁷⁵ a fantasy evidencing that melancholia, and the disavowal it produces, constantly threatens to forestall these characters’ efforts at successful mourning.

As Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn posit, literature after 9/11 seeks to restore a chronology to the disrupted time of the event, by recuperating, even though retrospectively, the fragile memories of that morning so as to fill the gap between witnessing and memory. Walking through the park, Keith muses over what surrounds him:

It was something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring that resembled for the briefest second some half-seen image, only half-believed in seeing, when the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash(103).

Keith experiences an inability to distinguish between the actual landscape produced by the collapse of the towers and his own memories of that same landscape prior to the event. One might recall that beautiful moment of a paperclip falling in *The Body Artist*, a fall which produces “a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body”(BA 89). Only in registering the fall of the clip belatedly “the retrieved memory of the drop itself” helps to recall the fall of the thing itself, “the sound [of the fall that] makes its way through an enormous web of distance”(BA, 89). Only in acknowledging the drop, can one “remember how it happened”(BA, 89), and thus make sense of the “overlapping realities”(BA, 82) of the two landscapes Keith sees, even though the blurred memory of what occurs is constantly threatened by being only “half-believed” rather than having been really experienced.

Keith’s brief affair with Florence, whose briefcase he has saved from the destruction of the towers, will in fact aid him to reconstruct the event. Remembering how a stranger’s briefcase ended up in his hands on the way down and out from the Tower symbolises his entire process of reconstituting a linear narrative of the event which will help him understand how he managed to survive. Like Keith, Florence too inhabits the timeless vacuum produced by the towers: “she was dazed and had no sense of time”(55). As they go over what happened to them, Keith notices that Florence is unable to place her memories into the correct order, and they are both forced to

⁶⁷⁵ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 30.

relive them in a perpetual present. But their talks are a necessity since Keith “needed to hear what he’d lost in the tracing of memories...the dazed reality they’d shared in the stairwell”(91).

Inhabiting the time of mourning leads Keith to experience a kind of disembodiedness arising from death. After the event Keith is “a hovering presence...he was not returned to his body yet”(59). Like Lauren Hartke, Keith can only recuperate “what he’d lost in the tracing of memories” by inhabiting this ghostly, disembodied, life born out of mourning in order to plunge back into his body, a reinhabiting of his body which occurs through his home rehab sessions. Suffering from a torn cartilage as a result of the attacks, Keith finds in the wrist extensions “the true countermeasures to the damage suffered in the tower, in the descending chaos”(40). In the “counting of repetition, the counting of seconds”(40) his body recuperates an extremely slowed down time, which in the long run will allow him to recompose the disarticulation between his body and mind: “he finds himself drifting into spells of reflection...drawing things out of time and memory and into some dim space that bears his collected experience”(66).

The physical and mental exercise to which Keith submits should keep him from “shambling into the house hating everybody”(143) and signals his intention to escape the ambient feelings of rage, anger and hate pervading the nation. In addition, Keith reads his having survived as an opportunity to change his lifestyle radically. A cardplayer, liar and womaniser, Keith attempts to reject the element of risk in his life in order to live “seriously and responsibly”(137), a rejection seemingly born out of his sticking with his wife and son.

Arguably, Keith’s endeavour to embrace a responsible and safe life after the attacks, as opposed to a life governed by risk in the days before them, suggests that by agreeing to mourn in the wake of 9/11, Keith may overcome the peculiar financial logic which has informed his life prior to the attacks.

As a lawyer in a real estate investment firm, Keith has led an existence founded on “centering his life, content with the narrowest of purviews, that of not noticing”(26). Keith’s self-absorption and his refusal to see what occurs around him indicate that he conformed to the structural disavowal and self-referentiality proper of the financial medium. Keith hints that before 9/11 his life had been mired in transience, that he had led an existence “snatched in clumsy fistfuls”(137). Indeed, the numerous affairs that brought his marriage to an end may exemplify an inability on Keith’s part to accept responsibilities, and to fix himself within the

solid and rooted medium of familial ties, an inability which strongly recalls James Axton's in *The Names*.

Keith's passion for gambling and poker places risk at the core of his existence, a passion which further exemplifies Keith's preference for the realm of uncertainty and of the promissory underlying financial activities. His poker sessions used to bring together an adman, a business writer, a mortgage broker and a bond trader: all the poker players reflect, through their occupations, those "financial services and ancillary activities (legal services, information processing, the media)"⁶⁷⁶ which constitute the fulcrum of US current economy. Keith recalls that playing poker was "the funnelled essence, the clear and intimate extract of their daytime activities"(97). By finding in their poker session an extension of their daytime activities, Keith, and his fellow players, epitomise the market players and the world of US financial and finance-capital related activities that came under attack on September 11.

Reading one extended recollection of the poker sessions, I sense that DeLillo may have wished to recall the "irrational exuberance" characterising these games as a brief metaphorical interlude in which he recalls the "irrational exuberance" of financial markets. The games start with a series of regulations, which are at first enforced, then modified, to be ultimately and totally abandoned. Keith affirms that they cherished the kind of structure arising from wilful trivia (99), particularly enjoying those sessions where the kind of poker game played augmented the risk of loss, thus raising the stakes (97) with an ensuing rise in the volume of money circulating among the players. The games were a mixture of intuition, cold-war game analysis, cunning and blind luck that, Keith recalls, players used in the effort to manage the risk of losing and outsmart the opponents.

While on the one hand Keith's recollections of his poker sessions may indicate that he is undergoing the process of mourning, on the other hand, Keith's decision to turn poker professional, devoting himself to poker tournaments at the end of the novel, symbolises his refusal to abandon a certain lifestyle guided by transience and risk. The poker tournaments, much like the games he used to play, provide "structure, guiding principles"(211); they offer Keith the opportunity to live transiently, to continue existing in a vacuum with "no flash of history or memory"(225) attached. The poker tournaments arguably provide Keith with a structure that resembles that of the medium he used to occupy prior to the attacks and enable

⁶⁷⁶ Harvey, "Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State", 58.

him to live in a time where “there [are] no days or times except for the tournament schedule”(230).

Unlike his wife Lianne, Keith does not want to live in a safe world (216), where “what is solid does not melt”(127). Indeed, the spectre of the towers seems to haunt Keith. Although absent, the towers appear to be present, evoked in the sentence which describes the curtains in one of the hotel rooms he occupies. The fixture reads “SHEER and BULK”, terms with which both Eric (*C*, 36) and Pammy (*P*, 19) used to describe the towers, marking both the towers’ flimsiness and their gigantism. Furthermore, Keith’s habit of stacking chips reads as a wish to reconstruct symbolically the Towers. I would argue that although Keith effectively accepts the death of Rumsey, he refuses to undergo a total transformation which entails questioning the principles of transience, risk and disavowal upon which his life has been founded. On the contrary, I would affirm that, by devoting himself to poker playing, Keith reveals his inability to embrace mourning as an alternative to the melancholic incorporation proper of finance capitalism.

Indeed, Keith is the only character in the novel who does not interrogate himself over the motives and causes that have led to the attacks, an occurrence which may symbolise a refusal, on the part of the financial class, to avow the most predatory and gloomiest side of financial practices. In effect, while hitting a severe blow to the confidence of investors and markets, 9/11 did not produce any significant change in the economic and financial policy of US-led capitalism.⁶⁷⁷ On the contrary, even though shaken by the bust of the Dot Com economy in 1999-2000, financial markets continued to carry out their risky activities, launching themselves in the even more riskier terrain of sub-prime mortgages which produced the severe financial crisis we are currently experiencing. Furthermore, Keith’s decision to live in an ‘unsafe’ world, in a world marked by risk, may also evoke “the high-risk approach to sustaining US domination” the Bush administration endorsed by shifting towards unilateralism, pre-emptive war and towards a more overtly imperial vision by waging war in Afghanistan and, particularly, Iraq.⁶⁷⁸

According to Randy Martin, a certain financial logic underlies the current US militarism. Pre-emptive war, he argues, “is prosecuted through the protocols of risk management” through

⁶⁷⁷ A. Chen and T.F. Siems point out that, although global financial markets suffered severe losses within the first six to eleven days after the attacks, they returned to pre 9/11 levels within 13-19 days from their reopening on September 16, 2001, after having lost only 0.459% vs -14.14% in London and 12.18% in Tokyo. See A. Chen and T.F. Siems, “The Effects Of Terrorism On Global Capital Markets”, *European Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 20, Issue 2, (June 2004), 349-365.

⁶⁷⁸ Harvey, *New Imperialism*, 75.

which finance strives to “harvest market volatility for gain.”⁶⁷⁹ By adopting a strategy of forward deterrence and pre-emption, the US seeks to anticipate future anti-systemic threats in the present.⁶⁸⁰ Moreover, he contends that the short-lived occupation, which should have followed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, reflects financial practices of dispossessions: after destroying facilities, job networks and sources of social wealth by means of war, occupiers fly from commitment to reconstruction, leaving those populations to fend for themselves on the principle of self-management undergirding the financial mentality.⁶⁸¹

Like Keith, Lianne also experiences dislocation, disorientation in the face of the destruction of the Towers. Through her, DeLillo voices the resentment, rage, helplessness of all Americans who try to comprehend what has befallen them. Lianne perceives that both her own life, that of her husband, and of all Americans “were in transition and she look[s] for signs” (67) that might disclose what would happen next. More importantly, she looks for an explanation that might alleviate her disorientation. The world around her, and inside her, has become blurred, smudged, grey like the Morandi still lives that dominate her mother’s living room: “these were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something in the brushstrokes...human and obscure....*Natura Morta*. The Italian term for still life seemed stronger than it had to be, somewhat ominous” (12). Later on, both she and Martin Ridnour, her mother’s lover, pausing to observe the painting, note “two of the taller items...dark and sombre, with smoky marks and smudges” (49), items in which they both recognise the towers. Morandi’s painting becomes an objective correlative of the ordinary world turned upside down by the attacks, a world which is both a “still life” and a “*natura morta*.” The world emerging from the attacks is a world haunted by the image of the smoky, wounded towers, a world that, like the objects in the painting, is now blurred, undefined, suspended. The attacks have altered the everyday reality of America, throwing the nation into a state of stillness, paralysis. By looking at the canvas, Lianne sees her mother’s living room emanating from the painting (111). However, the painting (for Nina an intimation of “mortality” which renders Americans equal to all other human beings) symbolises the state of suspension, abeyance that DeLillo hopes will produce a counternarrative.

⁶⁷⁹ Randy Martin, “War, by All Means”, *Social Text* 91, Vol.25, N° 2 (Summer 2007), 13, 16.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

Arguably, Lianne differs in two ways from her husband, her mother and her lover. In ways that remind of Lauren Hartke, Lianne is “the girl who [had always] wanted to be other people” (236), to penetrate their histories and minds. Her ability to empathise, to inhabit the minds of others, will allow her to experience, “in her body” the suffering, grief and rage of her husband, while also feeling the “human terror in those streaking aircraft[s]...the force of men’s intent...[every] helpless desperation set against the sky” (134). Watching the videotape of the planes, she senses the event “ente[r] the body...run beneath her skin...carr[ying] lives and histories, their and hers, everyone’s, into some other distance, out beyond the towers” (134).⁶⁸² And yet, while acknowledging grief and wrath, at the same time Lianne attempts to “[s]tand apart. See things clinically, unemotionally...[I]earn something from the event” (140). Possibly, Lianne is the character who embodies the spirit of the novel for, through her, DeLillo depicts the endeavour to reconcile opposite positions: the necessity of preserving the memory of the thousands who died and the need to do justice for their death, but also the obligation to listen to the event “because listening is what would save them from...keep them from falling into distortion and rancor” (104).

Given her willingness to live in abeyance, to suspend any judgement, Lianne constitutes the ideal audience for the performance artist called Falling Man, whose unannounced apparitions across the city punctuate the narrative of the “after” “br[inging] back those stark moments in the burning towers where people fell or were forced to jump” (33). Falling Man wears a suit and tie, appears suspended through a barely visible harness in “stationary fall” (34), with “one leg bent up, arms at his side” (33). His pose evokes that of one of the jumpers captured in a photograph by Richard Drew which circulated on the Internet on the very first day after the attack and was immediately censored. Haunted by the absent, real, falling man, Lianne cannot refrain from looking at Falling Man’s performance, despite being “outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation” (33). No matter how disturbing, the performance “held the gaze of the world, she thought...the awful openness of it, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread” (33). Undoubtedly, the performance revives the most disturbing and horrific images of the attacks: those people who in the face of certain death (either by fire or by crumbling ceilings) chose to jump out of windows. Falling Man’s performance becomes

⁶⁸² This moment in the narrative reprises Beryl Parmenter’s reaction to watching Oswald’s televised death in *Libra* (L, 445-447).

meaningful precisely because of his “dangling”, since in dangling in the void, the artist produces an objective correlative of the condition of mourning that New Yorkers, Americans and all the world inhabit post 9/11. Like the Morandi still life, his performance objectifies the experience of living in a state of abeyance, of hovering in a vacuum between life and death. His unexpected apparitions also force to revive the event, to renew the memory of the jumpers which the collective imagination tries to suppress, as censorship of the photograph of the real falling man exemplifies. In the artist’s “lost gaze” (167) “Lianne sees...the absence from self that Keith feels in the opening page of the novel, the absence from self that Lianne finds in the line she adapts from Basho, ‘Even in New York/I long for New York’.”⁶⁸³ As Boxall suggests, the moment the man falls, Lianne and the spectators “all enter into a kind of shared stillness”⁶⁸⁴ even as she experiences the fall and the jolt of the harness in her body. Only by entering the body and mind of the artist can Lianne understand the message the performance seeks to convey. Such message emerges from reading “the puppetry” of his gesture not as “heartless exhibition” (220), but as a performance animated by a Kleistian spirit. In his essay “Über Das Marionettentheater”, Kleist argues that the puppet’s aesthetic, and ethical, grace and balance emerge from his moving without being constricted by a consciousness of the self. Kleist’s argument attempts to analyse the ways in which humanity can return to the unity of being with God that the fall from Heaven has denied.⁶⁸⁵ Read against Kleist, one might argue with Boxall, Falling Man’s performance seeks to achieve the kind of suspension of the self, the kind of abeyance that can help to keep the West, and particularly the US “from falling into distortion and rancour” (104). The man’s dangling thus evokes “the kind of still movement that is glimpsed in the heart of Morandi’s still lives”, but at the same time “opens onto the opposite experience of continuation,”⁶⁸⁶ of a new future that emerges from the “strands of bent filigree...the last things standing” (25) that constitute DeLillo’s “ruins of the future”, the ruins upon which to construct the counternarrative.

Precisely the impossibility of coexisting in a space and time of suspended judgement causes Lianne’s mother, Nina Bartos, and her lover Martin Ridnour to fall apart. Nina, with an anger to which Lianne can only defer, can only see the terrorists as a “virus”, as members of a

⁶⁸³ Boxall, “Falling Man”, 195.

⁶⁸⁴ Idem.

⁶⁸⁵ Heinrich Von Kleist, “On the Marionette Theatre” in Idris Parry, *Hand to Mouth and Other Essays*, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), 13-18.

⁶⁸⁶ Boxall, “Falling Man”, 190, 189.

society that “lives in a closed world, of choice, of necessity. They haven’t advanced because they haven’t wanted or tried to”(47). For Nina, who voices the feelings of most Americans in the wake of the event, the terrorists are hopeless, backward people, who blame the West for all their failures, killing innocent people without a purpose. Her allegiance is to the nation’s dead, to a nation which now stands wounded and threatened by a religion “that justifies these feelings and killings”(112). Martin, on the contrary, sees the political and historical implications that might have provoked the attacks. He argues that they were aimed at “a great power...a power that interferes, that dominates”(46). For Martin, 9/11 was the consequence of the US (and its allies’) continuous politics of appropriation and dispossession, as those politics “shape[d] lives, millions of people, dispossessed, their lives, their consciousness”(47). Martin argues that one should step back and refrain from associating Islam with terrorism and that, in contrast to Nina, one should not “deny all human grievance against others”(112). Martin attacks precisely the denial and disavowal that lies at the heart of market relations: such relations hide from view the social implications and consequences of US-dominated capitalism on the most vulnerable populations. Furthermore, he posits that one day “America is going to become irrelevant”(191), although when asked, he cannot answer to the question “[w]hat comes after America?”(192). Martin, therefore, as a critic of US hegemony, recognises that 9/11 constitutes a further step in the decline of US’s ascendancy as a nation which “leads a system of states in a desired direction and in so doing is perceived to pursue a general interest.”⁶⁸⁷

Nina’s denial of forms of “human grievance”(112) other than that suffered by Americans compounds other forms of denial, or disavowal (as I prefer to call it) which DeLillo represents in his fiction as affective extensions of America’s economic and military hegemony. “Nina’s conflict with Hechinger thus highlights the contradictions between America’s self-image and its image in the eyes of the world. Where she sees civilization, he sees brute force—police, prisons, and the military.”⁶⁸⁸ Such inability to see, to avow, has deeper implications within the novel, particularly when analysing Nina’s decision not to remember, to deny the real identity of her lover.

In Lianne’s words, Martin Ridnour is “shapeless”, always figured as “coming from a distant city on [his] way to another distant city and neither place has shape or form”(42). Lianne’s description fits a man whose business activities revolve around buying and selling art

⁶⁸⁷ Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*, 29.

⁶⁸⁸ Kaufmann, “The Wake of Terror”, 362.

“for large profits” (42) and investments of unknown kinds. Although sketchy, Martin’s portrayal places him next to several other DeLillo’s characters who operate within the realm of immobile capital, a “transient” who, like the capital he mobilises to buy and sell art as investment, finds it hard to rest within the geographical constraints of a single place. Martin’s position vis-à-vis 9/11 however leads Lianne to ask Nina more about the man. Pressed by her daughter, Nina, in spite of her unwillingness to remember, reveals that Martin is in fact Ernst Hechinger, a German, who was involved in his youth with the Kommune One (and possibly with the Italian Red Brigades), “demonstrating against the German state, the fascist state. That’s how they saw it. First they threw eggs. Then they set off bombs. After that I’m not sure what he did” (146). Nina also implies that he may have been part of the Baader-Meinhof gang, or a member of one of their sleeper cells. Martin’s past as a dissenter explains his stance towards the attacks, but his double identity takes on a deeper meaning within the economy of the novel. While at first tagging him as responsible of “guilt by association” (191) with the terrorists, Lianne subsequently realises that Martin/Ernst “maybe was a terrorist, but he was one of ours...and the thought chilled her, shamed her— one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white” (195). Lianne must acknowledge that Islamic terrorism is not the sole form of terror, but that the recent history of the West has seen many Western terrorist groups acting against presumed totalitarian Western governments. However, the chill and shame pervading Lianne arise from her recognising that “terrorism”, which one usually associates with acts which target innocent victims in the West, might in fact be a term used as an “ideological instrument of propaganda and control [pushed to the fore by the West and Western interests].”⁶⁸⁹ Lianne reflects over Martin’s claim that God or religion have nothing to do with terrorism, but more significantly she seem to understand, although she does not voice it, that the white Western world, with the US in the forefront, might have been employing “intimidation on a very large scale in order to maintain access, control and privileged positions in the Third World [by using] far more extensive killings and other forms of coercion”⁶⁹⁰ than those generally associated with terrorism. Therefore, Lianne seems to imply, Westerners and Americans, may all be “guilty by association” in refusing to recognise what the

⁶⁸⁹ Edward S. Herman and Gerry O’ Sullivan, “‘Terrorism’ as an Ideology and Cultural Industry” in Alexander George (ed.), *Western State Terrorism*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 39.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

Western, white, godless world has accomplished to “preserve [its] privileges and structures from the threat of encroachment and control by popular organisations and mass movements.”⁶⁹¹

Consequently, through Lianne, DeLillo stresses the need to revise our language regarding the concept of terrorism, indicating that we should acknowledge, as Lianne does, the ambivalent nature of our civilization and culture, by perceiving its dark side. The three main sections which constitute the novel do reflect such need to revise our knowledge of the world in order to realise that finance capital may, and does, give rise to predatory forms of domination and coercion, that a Martin Ridnour might in fact hide the ‘terrorist’ “Ernst Heichinger” and that Bin Laden may in fact also be “Bill Lawton”, given the role that US played in funding the sheik to fight the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, DeLillo also posits that one should look beyond the outrageous spectacle provided by Falling Man, in order to discover “David Janiak”, the man beyond the artist, as Lianne does in her google search. Similarly, he suggests one should try to inhabit those flats “On Marienstrasse”(77) in Germany, or “In Nokomis”(171), Florida, where the terrorists plotted the attack, or that one should attempt to place oneself “In the Hudson corridor”(237) to enter the mind and body of the terrorists since, from that September morning in 2001, “our world, part of our world, has crumbled into theirs”(RoF, 33).

In the wake of 9/11, the western world, and particularly America, has become like the Alzheimer patients, whose writing sessions Lianne coordinates. Alzheimer patients see their “world as receding...[losing] sense of clarity and distinctness”(94) much as the falling of the Towers symbolised the disintegration of the world they epitomised. Such disintegration involves both the language that helped to represent the pre 9/11 world, but also, for the US, a difficulty over holding its dominant place in the world. As the clinical term for Alzheimer implies, the attacks caused the Americans to experience a “retrogenesis”(188), a fall back in time.⁶⁹² Nevertheless, such a fall back in time and history can be slowed down, at least for Lianne (who seems to speak for DeLillo himself) by finding a balance between “insight and memory”(30). For Lianne, DeLillo and Alzheimer patients, writing provides such balance in aesthetic form. Yet, as Nina and Martin’s failure to reconcile their positions suggests, the aesthetic balance must find a correspondent form within the political, ethical and economic theories and practices in order to

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁹² Both Peter Boxall and Linda S. Kauffman offer similar readings of “Alzheimer as a metaphor for the post 9/11 condition.” See Kauffman, “The Wake of Terror”, 368 and Boxall, “Falling Man”, 193-94.

re-equilibrate the asymmetrical distribution of privileges, power and wealth which have come under attack on 9/11.

The asymmetrical relations of power and exchange which mark the process of capital accumulation, which the attacks on the Towers should render visible, shape the means of resistance to the power of global capital. Martin argues "one side has the capital, the labour, the technology, the armies, the cities, the laws, the police and the prisons. The other side has a few men willing to die" (46-47). Martin (whose words reprise DeLillo's in his essay)⁶⁹³ seems to echo Jean Baudrillard, who affirms that the politics and ideology do not provide an explanation for attacks. For Baudrillard, the destruction of the towers goes "far beyond ideology and politics": the fight against the terror of global capital is asymmetrical, but the "asymmetrical terror...this very asymmetry that leaves global power disarmed" emerges out of the symbolic field. The Western system which "has erased death from its own culture" is defeated by another system which turns "death into an absolute weapon...everything is played out on death...[s]uch is the spirit of terrorism."⁶⁹⁴

However, as I have attempted to demonstrate through my reading, that even as he "brushes against the positions adopted by Baudrillard and by Huntington", so DeLillo points towards the possibility of another kind of response to 9/11, "a response that is missing from the somewhat gleeful fatalism of Baudrillard and from the retrenched jingoism of Huntington."⁶⁹⁵ Like Boxall, I would argue that DeLillo differs from Baudrillard in that he attempts "to preserve [the] emptiness"⁶⁹⁶ produced by the fall, to occupy that state of abeyance, to create a counternarrative which safeguards the memory of the terrorists as well. Hammad is the terrorist whose photograph Lianne sees on the paper, "the only one who seemed to have a face" (19). The juxtaposition of the photographs of the terrorists, of the Baader-Meinhof gang in Martin's closet, of the passport photographs in Nina's room and of the photos of the victims of 9/11 signifies the need of the writer to construct an alternative story. Such a story, while it accounts for the fact that "our world has crumbled into theirs" (*RoF*, 34), nonetheless retains "the poetic capacity to suspend judgement."⁶⁹⁷ It tries to grasp the human essence, to describe the individualities, and

⁶⁹³ Cft. DeLillo: "We are rich, privileged and strong but they are willing to die" (*RoF*, 34).

⁶⁹⁴ Baudrillard, "Esprit du Terrorisme", 408.

⁶⁹⁵ Boxall "Falling Man", 171.

⁶⁹⁶ *Idem*.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 186.

to penetrate the mind of the perpetrators of that horrific attack on innocent victims in order to glimpse a residue of humanity. DeLillo tries to go beyond names, dates of birth and places which, together with those passport photographs, are the only traces of these people's existence in this world.

The disproportionate distribution of the narrative dedicated to Hammad (16 pages out of 246) and the "formulaic and static quality"⁶⁹⁸ of his portrait for many reviewers constitutes the central weakness of *Falling Man*. Boxall argues that such "failure" results directly from the moment of impact; that is from the moment when Hammad, turned into fire and fuel, impacted the world of Keith. In effect, the collapse of the partitions of both plane and office walls marks the "failure to imagine or understand the perspective of the other– to let the subaltern speak."⁶⁹⁹ However, I agree with Boxall that this same moment "engenders also a peculiar kind of unity that is forged in the heat of that violent impact, but that does not have a language in which it might speak."⁷⁰⁰ Possibly, DeLillo's portrait of Hammad attempts to fill the absence of such language. Such endeavour is constantly threatened by what he perceives around him as the failure to listen to any voice other than the first-person voice of the wounded West, as Judith Butler underlines, and by the threat of being accused of "guilt by association" which surrounds anyone who tries to speak for the subaltern. Therefore what reviewers have cast as the novel's failure and weakness, might in fact be recast as DeLillo's registering a failure within the actual responses to 9/11. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq signal an American willingness to perpetrate and reinforce already existent political asymmetries by means of a renewed militarist imperialism. Moreover, for Judith Butler, pre-emptive war and occupation, to which the US have resorted in order to counteract "the shock into awareness to loss of hegemony"⁷⁰¹, represented by September 11, constitute a rejection of mourning in that they reflect the "impulse to...banish grief [and grieving], to return the world to a former order" and a refusal to learn something "about the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition."⁷⁰²

Such a failure also marks the end of the relations between Nina and Martin, a failure to construct the counternarrative which DeLillo, no matter how constantly of the verge of failing,

⁶⁹⁸ Idem.

⁶⁹⁹ Idem.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid, 187.

⁷⁰¹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power. The US in a Chaotic World*, (New York: The New Press, 2003), 1.

⁷⁰² Butler, *Precarious Life*, 29-30.

seeks to write. One should read the brief sections dedicated to Hammad with the same detached look with which the protagonist of “Baader-Meinhof” observes Richter’s painting of the dead members of the terrorist gang whose attacks hit Germany in the 1970s. As the unnamed woman studies the installation, moving from the paintings of Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Esslin’s dead bodies, she pauses over the one picture representing their funeral, an “ashy blur” (*B-M*, 27) in which she discerns the crowd accompanying the coffins. Two undistinguished lines in the background hold her attention. Unable to determine the nature of the image in front of her, the woman “saw it as a cross, and it made her feel, right or wrong, that there was an element of forgiveness in the picture, that the two men and the woman, terrorists, and Ulrike before them, terrorist, were not beyond forgiveness” (*B-M*, 27). The reiteration of the word “terrorists” and “terrorist” points to the undeniable criminal nature of the actions these people committed. Yet, as Linda Kauffmann argues, no matter how “unassimilable” the horrors these people perpetrated appear, committing to memory these people’s names, actions and faces, and attempting to understand what led the terrorists to carry out the attack on the Twin Towers, are both acts of moral and political responsibility. Such is the aim and the spirit that animates DeLillo’s counternarrative: to “rescue the dead from abstraction and oblivion—including the dead terrorists.”⁷⁰³

In the sections “On Marienstrasse” and “In Nokomis”, DeLillo follows Hammad in his becoming a member of Amir’s, that is Mohammed Atta’s, cell. Hammad will emerge as a half-hearted, reluctant terrorist, questioning (like the baker who opens the first section) that notion of Islamic brotherhood which “vault[s] the smoking bodies of its brothers”(78). Through Hammad’s eyes and ears the reader becomes acquainted with Amir, a figure which in many ways emerges from the pages of *MAO II* (1992), DeLillo’s analysis of terrorism and the relations between Islam and the West. Like Abu Rashid, Amir is a man in a room, reducing the world to a plot (both in the sense of conspiracy and narrative), a plot which “close[s] the world to the slenderest line of sight, where everything converges to a point”(174). Such a plot, Amir argues, does not limit itself to the prayer room, but must find an outlet in the real world. For Amir, “Islam is the world outside the prayer room...as well as the struggle against the enemy, near and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans”(80). Amir’s single-mindedness leaves “no spatial distinctions between thinking and acting” (*M*, 132), his is the

⁷⁰³ Kauffmann, “The Wake of Terror”, 367.

thought of a man who envisions a world change, a “thought which bleeds out into the world” (*M*, 132) following its own predetermined logic. Thus the jihad, which constitutes a spiritual route aimed at erasing “all things unjust and hateful” (80), takes on a political dimension and becomes a struggle against Americans and Israel which, in RETORT’s analysis, represents the mirror image of the American state in the Middle East: simultaneously “the realization of...a market-enriched democratic future [and] hyper-militarized crudely colonising Western power.”⁷⁰⁴ Amir posits that both America and Israel crowd out Islam, imposing their cultures, “other futures, the all-enfolding will of capital markets and foreign policies” (80). Theoretically, Amir’s critique bears a strong similarity to other, Western, voices who criticise specifically predatory forms of capitalism undertaken by the US. Through financial crises and IMF’s imposed adjustment programs, the US have attacked those social-economic formations which fail to accommodate its endless accumulation of capital, thereby producing “an implacable future not just for poor rural migrants, but also for millions of traditional urbanites displaced or immiserated by the violence of the ‘adjustment’.”⁷⁰⁵ For Hammad (possibly belonging to that immiserated immigrant population feeding Germany’s informal economy) the pull of Amir’s plot, its “magnetic effect” (174), derives from the plot’s provision of a structure, a unity, which designs a clearly defined path for those who are displaced by both the current social-economic Western world order, and those non-western socio-economic systems which fail to provide an alternative to the former. For Hammad, the plot realises “a yearning for order of the downtrodden, the spat-upon” (*M*, 158). Hammad’s response recalls that of Abu Rashid, whose Maoist form of terror (in which “all men [are] one man” [*M*, 233]) tries to offer his followers “identity, a sense of purpose. We teach our children [to] belong to something strong and self-reliant. They are not an invention of Europe” (*M*, 233). For Rashid “terror is the way we use to give our people their place in the world”, a place where his people do not have to “mimic the West” (*M*, 235).

However, the kind of brotherhood in the name of religion and jihad that Atta and Al Qaeda construct not only feeds on the technology of the very system it seeks to destroy but also produces a “global theocratic state, unboundaried and floating” (*RoF*, 40) which mirrors the global, unboundaried, floating system of liquid capital, with the exception that in Atta’s world the flow of blood substitutes for that of capital. DeLillo posits that such brotherhood wants to

⁷⁰⁴ RETORT, *Afflicted Powers*, 110.

⁷⁰⁵ Mike Davies, *Planets of Slums*, (London: Verso, 2006), 152.

bring back the past, but the ways in which unity in the brotherhood excoriates all singularities appears as a lapse into those spectacular forms productive of the “lifeless brightless sameness” of the market-led West.⁷⁰⁶ For Amir, accomplishing the plot will give rise to a world where “each man becomes the other, and the other still another, and then there is no separation”(80). Such lack of separation finds its material realization in the moment the plane fuse with the towers; the instant Hammad’s narrative melds with Keith’s and consummates their unity within the visual spectacle of the explosion. However, I would argue, the unity in the brotherhood also reflects a serial unity which (not differing much from the seriality of capital markets) excoriates the cultural differences, the multiple social facets characterising the Islamist world in its entirety. Amir’s “global theocratic state”(RoF, 40) writes off different values and currents which compose the Islamist world by merging them into the undistinguished whole of the brotherhood. Furthermore, the unity that Amir foresees precludes any “allegiance of the living to those who were dead and defeated”(78). Rather it produces a historical vacuum which (as the reduction of the attacks to an endless reproducible image attests) recalls that originating within “the utopian glow of cyber capital”(RoF, 33). In addition, part of the power of Amir’s plot derives from rendering invisible those who will become the victims of the attack, much as Hammad is “invisible to these people”(171). Abu Rashid points out that terrorists “put up the pretense, the terrible veneer” and resort to forms of disavowal in order to forget “the way we tried to mimic the West”(M, 235). For Amir “simply there are no others. The others exist only to the degree that they fill the role we have designed for them”(176). Perhaps again in both Rashid and Hammad’s statements, we find a mirror-image of the spectralization which invests those rendered invisible by the fetishism of capital. However, the terrorists fail to draw the line between those who effectively impose the capitalist world-system they so fervently want to destroy and those who, even in the West, succumb to the process of capital accumulation.

For Hammad, joining Amir in the fight “against the injustice that haunted their lives” becomes “a struggle against himself”(83), a definition of self which, in DeLillo’s description, should include universal human activities like eating, loving and engaging a dialogue with other cultures (as Hammad’s German-Syrian-Turkish girlfriend testifies). Yet, even as he succumbs to the effacing of the self that Amir’s plot requires, Hammad pauses to question whether the people in Florida are really aware of their being the “world dominat[ors]”(173), and wonders what such

⁷⁰⁶ RETORT, *Afflicted Powers*, 19.

awareness might produce. He also questions the validity of the theoretical framework underpinning the jihad he has joined. Hammad asks himself: “does a man have to kill to accomplish something in the world?”(174), or: “does a man have to kill himself in order to count for something, be someone, find the way?”(175). While one might think that such questions do not inform the terrorist’s mind, whose sole purpose is “shock and death”(177), yet they posit that, even if only momentarily, a terrorist can actually realise that “terror and martyrdom [offer only] *the illusion of political effectiveness*”⁷⁰⁷ which is required to counteract the inequalities and asymmetries produced by the global workings of capital.

Hammad accepts his duty, yielding to the “blood trust to kill Americans”(172). But in the manner of Oswald in *Libra*, Hammad submits to the thought of watching himself on TV as CCTV tapes show him boarding the plane (173). On the one hand, one might read this fantasy as an anticipation of Hammad’s forever inhabiting the mind of Americans, like Lianne, which will find its realisation in the impact. On the other hand, this passage further reinforces the idea that the kind of terrorist self that Hammad seeks to construct is, from the beginning, shaped by the logic of the spectacle, that terror’s existence, as DeLillo posited in *MAO II* and partly in *Players*, is indissolubly linked to the media.

In the final section “In the Hudson Corridor”, DeLillo follows Hammad in the moments preceding the impact, as he feels death approaching, the moment when the world is about to end and the unity with his brothers is about to be accomplished. As Hammad watches a bottle “roll this way and that”(239), the novel comes full circle, reaching “the critical moment at which the plane strikes the tower, [creating] a seam in the narrative”⁷⁰⁸:

A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter 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. He found himself walking into a wall. He didn't drop the telephone until he hit the wall. The floor began to slide beneath him and he lost his balance and eased along the wall to the floor (239).

The paragraph visualises the moment when the world of Hammad crumbles into Keith’s, but it also registers the moment when such folding of these two worlds gives birth to “a new and violent disarticulation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ [disarticulation which causes us to] suffer and

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., 189, italics in the original.

⁷⁰⁸ Boxall, “Falling Man”, 185.

perpetrate the intellectual and poetic violence of adopting a position.”⁷⁰⁹ Such is also the passage through which Keith’s narrative falls back into place, where the temporal sequence of the events he experiences finally come to a linear closure, where he can finally recall and understand how he came to survive, how Florence’s briefcase ended up in his hand, how he had to abandon Rumsey dead in his office. The novel leads us back to the tower falling, the people running: “the only light was vestigial now, the light of what comes after, carried in the residue of smashed matter, in the ash ruins of what was various and human, hovering in the air above”(246). Set against the vestigial light, against the emptiness produced by the fall, Keith glimpses the shirt (the falling man) “come down out of the sky...arms waving like nothing in this world”(246).

The violence of the “smashed matter” here takes precedence over the fall of the towers, enhancing the sense of human loss and destruction, a residue which meshes together the “ash ruins” of both terrorists and victims. The image of the falling shirt, now in free fall, seems to point to the failure of that moment of suspension that DeLillo deems necessary for the writing of a counternarrative. In part such failure may derive from the actuality of history that seems to deny, at least in 2007, the opportunity to pause and reflect over a possible change in the global political order that the attacks challenged. Nonetheless, with *Falling Man* DeLillo attempts to keep alive the sense of the novel as “a democratic shout” as the imaginative space where “[a]mbiguities, contradictions, whisper, hints”(M, 159) over the nature of US hegemonic power can be heard, and where the terrorists’ voice can in part coexist with the voice of the hegemon.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid, 186.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of DeLillo's fiction has attempted to demonstrate that the workings of finance capital constitute a kind of invisible prop which has been holding DeLillo's writing, an interpretative framework for understanding DeLillo's preoccupation with a "sense of historical completion...and cultural exhaustion"⁷¹⁰ characterising our age. Yet, in depicting the self-destruction of Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo has shown that the "static uniformity, the kind of spatial and temporal sameness"⁷¹¹, the evacuation of history and of material referentiality that finance capital brought about has only produced the appearance of the end of history and of the historical progression of culture and thought. Via Packer's exploits, DeLillo evidences how finance capital constitutes "the fountainhead of all manners of insane forms"⁷¹² of accumulation and that the excessive fictitiousness which drives a pre-eminently financial capitalist system forward is also the source of its own self-destruction.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the possibility of restarting the progress of history and the flow of time, extricating them from the colonising force of global finance capital, may arise solely because the financial system eventually reaches his own terminal point and, therefore, to deduce that DeLillo's fiction, even as it records the limits and structural

⁷¹⁰ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 3, 9.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷¹² Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 3, 465.

contradictions of speculative capital, registers the impossibility of sustaining a critical or oppositional stance to capitalist logic.

On the contrary, DeLillo's writing testifies to the persistence of a "negative potential"⁷¹³ which has laid dormant within the grain of American and Western culture. The euphoric well-being arising from financial affluence and from expanding stock markets produced the perception that an enormous wealth was within everyone's reach and that any ordinary individual could not only dream of such riches but that, with the right combination of intuition and luck, he or she could effectively achieve it.⁷¹⁴ The opposition to a sense of the "future which brings even unlive time under the jurisdiction of the global market"⁷¹⁵ which protesters in *Cosmopolis* endorse (reflecting in their opposition, if not in their means, "the waves of protests in Genoa, Seattle, Prague and other cities" [*RoF*, 33]) reveals that the lure of finance capital's endless accumulation and prosperity has only numbed the spirit of contradiction, of dialectical struggle which seeks to "decelerate the global momentum...hold off the white-hot future" (*RoF*, 33-34).

DeLillo's perceiving, in 2001, of a "moderating influence" (*RoF*, 34) within society, working to normalise the distortions arising from the subjection of almost every facet of human experience to the organising principles of speculative capital, suggests that although "capital [appears to] bur[n] off every nuance in a culture" (*U*, 785), a "possibility [for culture] to explore or to develop"⁷¹⁶ alternatives to the dominant financial structure of feeling still exists.

The attacks on the World Trade Center seem to have temporarily diverted DeLillo's attention away from his investigation of the US finance capital and of Neoliberalism. As DeLillo points out, since that morning on September 11, 2001, "*our* lives and minds...are occupied [by the narrative that terror has been developing over years]" (*RoF*, 33), a narrative which absorbs all the energies and the resources of a country and of writers altogether, so that *Falling Man* may appear as a detour from DeLillo's previous novelistic concerns, even if Martin Ridnour sees the process of US accumulation by dispossession by financial means as one of the primary causes for terror's response to the "world narrative" written by speculative, "cyber-capital" (*RoF*, 33).

⁷¹³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 1

⁷¹⁴ See DeLillo: "ordinary individuals had dreams of enormous wealth and sometimes achieved it." DeLillo, "Interview", *The Times*, 17.

⁷¹⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 4.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

In *Falling Man*, DeLillo focuses on the effects that the wound opened within “the narcissistic heart” (*FM*, 113) of America and capitalist West has had on the individual consciences and on the American political and cultural body. DeLillo, I have argued, engages with “grief [now] nationally recognised and amplified”⁷¹⁷ and seeks to preserve the experience of bereavement against the threat arising from the spectre of “national melancholia, understood as disavowed mourning”⁷¹⁸ which, according to Judith Butler, has informed US political and military response to the events of 9/11. On the contrary, with *Falling Man*, DeLillo attempts to write a counternarrative which can bestow “meaning to all that howling space” (*RoF*, 39) created by the collapse of the Twin Towers. The effort to preserve the empty space left by the Towers, to occupy such space in order to endow it with meaning, to avow and inhabit mourning and to discover the potential for transformation and change immanent in the work of bereavement, should provide an alternative to the story of “danger and rage” (*RoF*, 33) that terrorism, and the US equally violent response to terrorism, wishes to impose.

DeLillo’s attempt to write a counternarrative which emerges from experiencing fully death and mourning in the wake of September 11 complements another endeavour which informs the works of DeLillo I have analysed: that of finding, in the words of Peter Boxall, “something” which allows us to maintain an “ongoing struggle to discover the counternarrative”⁷¹⁹ to the story imposed by speculative capital markets. This something which offers an exit from the unboundaried, timeless, and profoundly dehumanising, but at the same time fascinating, world of speculative capital is, as I have come to conclude sharing Peter Boxall’s viewpoint, death ⁷²⁰ (understood as both the loss of a loved person or as a loss of an ideal kind), and the transformative work of mourning in opposition to melancholia.

My reading of DeLillo’s works as “fictions of fictitious capital”⁷²¹ has attempted to evidence DeLillo’s response to the never-ending search for capital accumulation in the late twentieth century which has radically, and at times violently, transformed the material, social and cultural texture of American society. Such transformations can be best glossed when read “in the refracted light” (*N*, 20) of melancholia and mourning.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁷¹⁸ *Idem.*

⁷¹⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 7, 9, 2.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷²¹ Godden, “Fictions of Fictitious Capital”, np.

From *End Zone* to *The Names*, melancholia offers a hermeneutic paradigm through which one can appreciate DeLillo's insights into the world of finance capital and his understanding of the ways in which the alleged vaporisation, dematerialisation or virtualisation of reality characterising the world of speculative capital surreptitiously seeps into everyday practices and modifies our perception of reality. The shift towards finance capital as the dominant form of capital effectively generates a form of "national melancholia", to use Butler's definition, melancholia which informs the lives of DeLillo's characters. The obliteration of the commodity form within the circuits of credit has produced a disengagement from the world of material production, and thus from embodied forms of materiality, whose effects share a remarkable similarity with those arising from refused mourning. The loss of the commodity form and of labour within the realm of speculative capital constitutes, when read against the theories of Abraham and Torok, a trauma which cannot be acknowledged and is therefore consigned to psychic entombment within the subject's consciousness. Such loss produces a gap and, as a result, those who experience such loss are held in a state of suspension or abeyance (*FM*, 4). DeLillo's protagonists float, unmoored and transient over such gap, refusing to recognise that they have effectively suffered from a loss.

The disavowal resulting from the process of melancholic incorporation has allowed me to gloss a similar form of disavowal which pertains to the financial system, whereby the circuits of credit appear to function autonomously and "independent of the general movements of business cycles in production, following [their] own rhythms."⁷²² Through disavowal, I have brought together the Freudian and Marxian concepts of fetishism in order to demonstrate that, by interiorising the workings of speculative capital, DeLillo's characters are effectively subject to forms of fetishistic disavowal through which they strategically attempt to counteract the workings of mourning proper and to defuse the endeavours of the lost object buried within their consciousness to resurface and to haunt them. These characters' immersion within the medium of speculative capital causes them to experience the pleasures of disembodiedness, to inhabit a temporality which has ceased to flow according to a linear and teleological succession of past, present and future, but also to experience anxieties and fears when confronting the problematic content of the material world and of social relations emerging from a different economic medium.

⁷²² DeBrunhoff, *Marx on Money*, 116.

When read against the history of US capital from the 1970s to the 1980s, the individual experiences of disavowed mourning of Gary Harkness in *End Zone*, of Bucky Wunderlick in *Great Jones Street*, of the Wynants in *Players*, of Moll Robbins, Glen Selvy, Earl Mudger and Lightborne in *Running Dog* and finally of James Axton and Owen Brademas in *The Names* form a mosaic through which DeLillo metaphorically represents national fears and anxieties resulting, initially, from the crisis of US military and economic hegemony in the early 1970s and, subsequently, from the US economy's excessive reliance on the fetish of liquidity.

DeLillo's novels, particularly when glossed via the work of materialist geographer David Harvey, evidence the specific monetary concern for liquidity animating the US economy in the late 1970s, the subjection of the tempos of the US economy at large to the rhythms of financial markets, and the gradual melting of spatial boundaries and distances produced by the virtualisation of the economy via cyber-capital. In addition, read against Harvey's theories and the sociological analyses of Giovanni Arrighi, DeLillo's works register the transformation of material and social relations, once revolving around networks of material production and distribution, as they become subsumed within the particular logic and needs of finance capital.

DeLillo's aesthetic representation of US finance capital brings to the fore the relations existing between the restoration of US capital accumulation in the 1970s and the reconstruction of US hegemony. In particular, DeLillo tracks the shift from a principally American military supremacy to a predominantly economic and financial one via the expansion of multinational corporations and of financial markets and the enforcement of practices of accumulation by dispossession over thirty years. DeLillo's novels pose interesting questions on the issue of US global dominance and on the ways such dominance is pursued, challenged or resisted.

The separation of form from content which, according to Marx, occurs when capital becomes "pregnant" with itself, when it ceases to "bear the birth-mark of its origins"⁷²³ in the actual process of production represented by capital's formula $M-C-M^1$, effectively originates the perception that the world, which now revolves around "money [that talks] to itself" (*C*, 79) has become "self-referring" (*N*, 297). The analysis of the structural mechanisms informing the circuits of credit and of financial markets offers an interesting and, possibly new, perspective through which DeLillo's investigation of the postmodern condition and aesthetics, with its preference for flatness and depthlessness, can be addressed. In particular, the hiatus between

⁷²³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 392.

form and content proper of finance capital provides new insights into DeLillo's "conceptualisation of language [and highlights how DeLillo] constantly probe[s] language for evidence of an epistemological depth largely denied by poststructuralist theory."⁷²⁴ Abraham and Torok's theory of demetaphorisation has helped me establish a link between the specific obliteration of the material referent within finance capital and the destruction of language's ability to signify (which has usually been read alongside poststructuralist paradigms) so that the flotation of signifiers deprived of their referents emerges as the linguistic counterpart of a melancholic refusal to mourn originating within the shift towards immaterial forms of capital.

DeLillo's endeavour to find evidence of what Cowart calls "epistemological depth" in language is only one aspect of a much broader effort to restore content to the form within the realm of economics. Unlike his characters, particularly financier Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo perceives the limitations of an economic mode which relies pre-eminently on the creation of fictitious values unbacked by the production of actual values within the 'real' economy. Such perception gives the writer critical purchase over the material he investigates and allows him to register the persistence of a socio-economic mode arising from the world of material production which, from the viewpoint of the dominant socio-economic formation, appears only residual or archaic (to use Raymond Williams terminology) or is spectralised.

DeLillo's insistence on the recuperation of labour and of embodied forms of materiality throughout his oeuvre testifies to the need to recover human agency and with it "the possibility of duration, of spatial and temporal diversity, of a continual becoming over time"⁷²⁵ which the limitless and amnesiac space of cyber, financial capital denies. Within such perspective, the acceptance of loss and mourning as a transformative process which DeLillo describes in *The Body Artist* reveals that death, throughout DeLillo's fiction, opens up a space where one can envision a different reality from the one prescribed by financial markets where everything is reduced to "lucid units...[to] the zero-oneness of the world [and where] the digital imperative define[s] every breath of the planet's living billions" (C, 24).

As I have argued in my reading of *The Body Artist*, and also of *Falling Man*, death, once acknowledged and accepted, enables to inhabit both disembodiedness and timelessness, and to

⁷²⁴ Cowart, *Physics of Language*, 12.

⁷²⁵ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, 11.

come out of them regaining perception of the body and of a temporality which has recuperated its “narrative quality”(C, 77).

My selective reading of DeLillo's oeuvre wished to stress the relevant place that the crisis of US capitalism in the 1970s and the subsequent financialization of the economy and of everyday life occupies within DeLillo's fiction, beyond the specific depiction of the workings of finance capital DeLillo has offered in *Players* and *Cosmopolis*.

By pitting his early fiction against his late production, I have analysed the ways in which DeLillo presciently perceives the historic, economic, political, social and cultural transformations within the United States as a result of the overaccumulation crisis within the US capitalist regime.

DeLillo's prophetic impulse, that is his ability to “fin[d] some ‘deeper’ stratum, [to] gai[n] some kind of access to the hidden underlying forces that continue to produce history”⁷²⁶, emerges very distinctively in his early works which are set at the historical conjunction between one fading phase of capitalist accumulation and an emergent one. I would suggest, however, that DeLillo's ability to excavate the inmost recesses of a culture arising from a specific financial economic mode and to see beyond the “immediate reach of ...the mental horizon”⁷²⁷ produced by finance capital, manifests very effectively within his recent novels *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis*. In these works, DeLillo not only exposes the limitations and failure of finance capital to provide an endless solution to the process of US capital accumulation in the twentieth and twenty-first century, but he also seems to precognise the explosion of the “Great Financial Crisis [and its global ramifications] in the context of the waning political, economic and military hegemony of the United States”⁷²⁸, a crisis whose effects DeLillo may wish to investigate in a not too distant future.

Although selective, my work has hopefully offered a persuasive and original analysis of DeLillo's works and has contributed to emphasising the richness and depth with which Don DeLillo depicts, and comments on, contemporary US culture as “the internal and superstructural expression”⁷²⁹ of US finance capitalism.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁷²⁷ Shapiro, “Dracula”, 33.

⁷²⁸ Bellamy Foster and Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis*, 22.

⁷²⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 5.

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