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The Motel in the Heart of Every Man: The Transitional Spaces of Don DeLillo

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The Motel in the Heart of Every Man: The Transitional Spaces of Don DeLillo

This work illustrates the spatial nature of Don DeLillo's writing. Through a reading of his work a network of societal spaces repeatedly occur and are utilised as locations within which to raise questions of the relationship between identity and mass society. The spaces that predominate produce the topography of his work. A network begins to develop, a series of nodal points joined by a connective tissue of pathways through which the discussion of society and identity pass. By focusing on both the nodal points themselves and the pathways that connect them the roles of motion, control and a potential counter-narrative appear. The individual spaces that DeLillo chooses as locations in his novels are relevant. Their placing in society, their means of construction and the materials of which they are constituted all illustrate the form of society which created them. In turn these spaces are observed to shape the characters that pass through them, in the process further expanding the network of societal associations.

The particular spatial forms that DeLillo focuses on reflect a transitional impulse, a desire for motion and speed rooted in anti-historicism. The suburb, the motel, and the highway are all born of the period which followed the Second World War which had a profound sociological, psychological and technological impact on society. The need to face the future, reject the past and repress the traumatic experiences of war led an experience of space and society which is transitional. The spaces are selected for their association with anxiety, trauma, nostalgia and consumption. The duality of these spaces epitomises the complexities of modern social identity. Due to the reflexive nature of transitionality cultural shifts impact upon its form, altering the way in which it appears and functions. The alleyway influences the development of the highway, the motel influences the development of the suburb, and the railway station affects the airport. The airport is an example of the manner in which technological advance change the appearance of these spaces but the themes and issues that are explored in them reflect consistent interests. Similarly, moments of great social import such as the Kennedy assassination and the attacks of 9/11 leave traces on these transitional spaces.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This work illustrates the spatial nature of Don DeLillo's writing. Through a reading of his work a network of societal spaces repeatedly occurs which are utilised as locations within which to raise questions of the relationship between identity and mass society. If one considers the spaces that predominate one begins to understand the topography of his work and the relevance of these particular spatial forms. A network begins to develop, a series of nodal points joined by a connective tissue of pathways through which the discussion of society and identity pass. By focusing on both the nodal points themselves and the pathways that connect them the roles of motion, control and a potential counter-narrative appear. The individual spaces that DeLillo chooses as locations in his novels are relevant. Their placing in society, their means of construction and the materials of which they are constituted all illustrate the form of society which created them. In turn these spaces are observed to shape the characters that pass through them, in the process further expanding the network of societal associations.

The particular spatial forms that DeLillo focuses on reflect a transitional impulse, a desire for motion and speed rooted in anti-historicism. The suburb, the motel, and the highway are all born of the period which followed the Second World War which had a profound sociological, psychological and technological impact on society. It altered the cultural landscape at a fundamental level¹. The trauma caused by prolonged warfare and the void left by the dropping of the nuclear bomb², the aerial bombing of Dresden³ and the liberation of

¹ "The damage the war visited upon bodies and buildings, planes and tanks and ships, is obvious. Less obvious is the damage it did to intellect, discrimination, honesty, individuality, complexity, ambiguity, and irony, not to mention privacy and wit." Fussell, P., *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990).

² As far as is possible John Hersey's book *Hiroshima* (Hersey, J. *Hiroshima* (London, Penguin, 1946)) attempts to depict not only the physical devastation suffered by the Japanese in Hiroshima on August 6th 1945, he also places it in the context of its effects on the national consciousness of the country. The impact it had on America is less apparent. Hugh Brogan provides some statistics regarding that day. "The war had not ended with a whimper. On 6 August 1945 an atomic bomb had been dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima killing 70,000 people, injuring 51,000 and destroying more than 70,000 buildings. Three days later another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, killing nearly 40,000 people and injuring 25,000. On 14 August the Japanese government surrendered." (Brogan, H. *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 603) In his *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938* Stephen Ambrose considers its role in the post-war economic and social development. "Then came the successful test of the first atomic bomb. It inaugurated a new era in the world's history and in the tools of American foreign policy...The Americans immediately began

Auschwitz⁴ provided fertile ground within which the germ of a new socio-spatial impetus was able to take root. The need to face the future, reject the past and repress the traumatic experiences of war led an experience of space and society which is transitional. The nascent form of transitionality that develops in this period achieves a greater degree of cultural importance in American society of the 1950s. In that milieu the technological advances alongside the spatial and economic expansion of society provided the perfect environment for transitionality to come to fruition.⁵ Within this period lies the kernel of all that transitionality became.

The form which this new spatiality took and the sociological issues that it contained all make these transitional spaces exemplary sites for DeLillo to explore issues of identity and society. The spaces are selected for their association with anxiety, trauma, nostalgia and consumption. They are emblematic of both the positivity of the post-war period and the counter-narrative which was composed of all of the rejected and aberrant figures and activities which would disrupt mass society. The duality of these spaces epitomises the complexities of modern social identity. Due to the reflexive nature of transitionality cultural shifts impact upon its form, altering the way in which it appears and functions. The airport is an example of the manner in which technological advance change the appearance of these spaces but the themes and issues that are explored in them reflect consistent interests. Similarly, moments of great

to use the bomb as an instrument of diplomacy.” (Ambrose, S., *The Rise to Globalism* (New York, Penguin, 1971) p. 46.

³ “It is true that the strategic bombing surveys published by the Allies, together with the records of the Federal German Statistics Office and other official sources, shows that the Royal Air Force alone dropped 1 million tons of bombs on enemy territory; it is true that of 131 towns and cities attacked, some only once and some repeatedly, many were almost entirely flattened, that about 600,000 German civilians fell victim to the air raids and 3.5 million homes were destroyed, while at the end of the war 7.5 million people were left homeless, and there were 31.1 cubic metres of rubble for everyone in Cologne and 42.8 cubic metres for every inhabitant of Dresden.” Sebald, W.G., *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London, Penguin, 2004) p. 3.

⁴ “The Holocaust was indeed a *Jewish tragedy*. Though Jews were not the only population subjected to a ‘special treatment’ by the Nazi regime (six million Jews were among more than 20 million people annihilated at Hitler’s behest), only the Jews had been marked out for total destruction, and allotted no place in the New order that Hitler intended to install. Even so, the Holocaust was not simply a *Jewish problem*, and not an event in *Jewish history* alone. *The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilization and at the peak of human cultural achievement, and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture.*” Bauman, Z., *Modernity and the Holocaust* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1989) p. x.

⁵ “My analysis of the other-directed character is thus at once an analysis of the American and of contemporary man. Much of the time I find it hard or impossible to say where one ends and the other begins. Tentatively, I am inclined to think that the other-directed type does find itself most at home in America, due to certain unique elements in American society, such as its recruitment from Europe and its lack of any feudal past. As against this, I am also inclined to put more weight on capitalism, industrialism and urbanization – these being international tendencies – than on any character-forming peculiarities of the American scene.” Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001 p. 20) The very elements which Riesman states as being more international factors of other-direction, capitalism, industrialisation and urbanization were themselves to become central to the development of America as this work will show.

social import which become touchstones in the framework of contemporary mythology such as the Kennedy assassination and the attacks of 9/11 leave traces on transitionality.⁶ Indeed by exploring the ways in which these events and their cultural impact both shape and are shaped by transitional space the centrality of the concept to the network of cultural references that constitutes contemporary society becomes apparent.

By exploring these spaces, both the connections and points of difference they hold to one another, it becomes clear that the spatial element of society is vital to an understanding of its meaning. It is the spatial element of transitionality which leads to its amorphous, reflexive and shifting nature and as such it is particularly difficult to draw an all encompassing picture of it. Focussing on one particular space which reflects the larger concept of spatiality provides a fragment of the larger network of meaning. As such this work will focus on a particular spatial form which exemplifies a facet of transitionality within DeLillo's writing a form of dialogue develops between these spatial sites, societal development and cultural change, a dialogue which informs ones understanding of transitionality. The structure highlights the way in which these spaces become the focus of multitudinous connections. The alleyway influences the development of the highway, the motel influences the development of the suburb, and the railway station affects the airport. It is this vertiginous level of interconnectedness that highlights the necessity of understanding the transitional as being at the heart of the contemporary society and DeLillo's writing. His work is profoundly spatial, focusing on concepts and social developments in which spatiality, and particularly transitionality, is central to their meaning. The fluctuating nature of contemporary society, the manner in which it progresses, and its potential final state are essential to DeLillo's writing.

Chapter 2: Intersection: Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*

Although the end of the Second World War provides a useful beginning for this work, the elements of transitionality existed in proto forms before that period. In order to fully understand the importance of the 1950s to the development of the transitional role at the heart of society it is useful to consider that which it stemmed from. This section of the work will

⁶ The impact of the Kennedy assassination has been discussed explicitly by DeLillo as seen in Chapter 5: The Highway "It had a strong impact, as it obviously did for everyone. As the years have flowed away from that point, I think we've all come to feel that what's been missing over the past twenty-five years is a sense of manageable reality. Much of that can be traced to that one moment in Dallas. We seem much more aware of elements like randomness and ambiguity and chaos since then." DeLillo, D., taken from DeCurtis, A., *An Outsider in This Society: and Interview with Don DeLillo* in Lentricchia, F. (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) p. 48.

focus on the novel *Dangling Man*⁷ by Saul Bellow and will function as précis to the ideas and works that follow. The novel, written in 1944, follows a man of transitional sensibilities as he attempts to navigate a society which is itself in transition. Set during the Second World War the novel focuses on Joseph, a character who becomes emblematic of the society around him. He is the dangling man of the title, trapped between the tradition oriented and European focused world of the 1940s and the period of American expansion the 1950s proved to be⁸. An analogy for the time, Joseph is driven by societal and technological upheaval to desire change yet is held back from it by personal and sociological connections to traditional forms. He is left inactive, alienated and dangling. The dissection of this novel will reveal the underlying factors, both historic and spatial, that underpin the 1950s, factors which form the basis of transitionality and continue to appear at various stages throughout this work. By tracing the progress of the *Dangling Man* in Bellow's work to the state of the *Falling Man*⁹ in DeLillo's novel, the impact that the growth of transitionality had on those that dwelt within it becomes apparent.

Chapter 3: The Motel

Following the exposure of the origins of transitionality in the discussion of *Dangling Man*, this chapter focuses on the movement and change which stem from those societal shifts as they are depicted by DeLillo through the space of the motel. The social concerns that followed the end of the Second World War produced a combination of the transitional impetus and the spatial. This pairing created transitional space and with it a visual lexicon and network of meaning. Individuals began to look to their contemporaries rather than authority figures or historical relations to guide their sense of identity and it is within the transient site of the motel that they are able to explore the balance between individuality and the mass of society. The motel is emblematic of these shifts in societal direction. Its location in society, both physically and in terms of the role it came to play, are all intricately connected to the

⁷ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 1996).

⁸“Many Americans feared that the end of World War II and the subsequent drop in military spending might bring back the hard times of the Great Depression. But instead, pent-up consumer demand fuelled exceptionally strong economic growth in the postwar period. The automobile industry successfully converted back to producing cars, and new industries such as aviation and electronics grew by leaps and bounds. A housing boom, stimulated in part by easily affordable mortgages for returning members of the military, added to the expansion. The nation's gross national product rose from about \$200,000 million in 1940 to \$300,000 million in 1950 and to more than \$500,000 million in 1960. At the same time, the jump in postwar births, known as the "baby boom," increased the number of consumers. More and more Americans joined the middle class”. Taken from Conte, C. and Karr, A., *An Outline of the U.S Economy*, Conte, C. and Karr, A., Chapter 3
<http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/oecon/chap3.htm>.

⁹ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007).

shifts in mobility, affluence and self image that were the hallmarks of the transitional impulse. Through its combination of technology, architecture, visual culture and speed the motel is an idealised transitional space, existing outside of the predefined concepts of societal spatiality which had been dominant in previous eras such as the home or the city. Rather it was a site upon which definitions could be overlaid, a gap or void allowing possibilities and freedoms which would have been taboo or impossible in previous spatial forms. The implications of this form of space and the societal impact that it has are explored in depictions of the site in DeLillo. The motel encapsulated both the burgeoning ideals of the American Dream and laid the foundations for a new sense of American identity based upon transitionality, creating a spatial form of understanding that would allow sites such as the suburb and the motorway to yield vital information about the development of the transitional society.

These positivist interpretations of the motel are called into question throughout DeLillo's writing. The uncanny nature of the motel space, both a facsimile of home and a rootless location, connected it to more negative elements of transitional space. The nostalgic recollection of the space is shown to mask a more troubling reality both in discussion of its original societal role and DeLillo's contemporary depictions of it. The anti-historicism of transitionality which leads to the rootless unstable spaces it creates is clear in the manner in which the motel space is utilised as a location for the investigation of repressed and aberrant behaviour. Both historically and throughout its existence the motel is shown to be a focal point for figures that are located outside of the accepted societal narrative who are to varying degrees associated with the counter-narrative. They become spaces that echo with anxiety, uncanny duplicates and instability¹⁰ its location, on the periphery of understood societal space beyond the confines of codified spatial relationships allows the possibility of the investigation of those troubling concepts. The optimistic intentions of creating such open, visible and transient spaces are clear from the materials and architectural techniques used in their construction.¹¹ However the other societal outcome of these spatial practices is the greater visibility of the more troubling aspects of transitional space and the society which it was connected to. The network of associations transitionality is composed of and the spaces it is found within are open to misuse, re-appropriation and the exploitation of the counter-narrative.

¹⁰ The uncanny nature of transitional spaces as seen in postmodern architecture is seen in Vidler, A., *Architectural Uncanny, The* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999) whilst it's connection to the rise and decline of American transient society is discussed in Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993).

¹¹ See the discussion of Frank Lloyd Wright's work and its connection to transient architectural forms particularly connected to the motel in chapter 3.

Chapter 4: The Suburbs

The cultural and spatial shifts observed in the motel are manifested on a wider societal level in the space of the suburb. The movement away from fixed sites of dwelling such as the urban center to more transient and decentralised spaces is apparent in its expansion. Throughout his work DeLillo depicts the suburb as a space within which the transitional society investigates the balance between personal identity and the shaping forces of mass society. The importance of motion and speed to the development of transitional space seen in the last chapter are further emphasised here as are the roles of consumption and societal visibility. In *Underworld*¹² the suburb is depicted in both the period at which the transitional impulse was at its most positive, the 1950s, and the contemporary period looking back. The nostalgia for this period discussed in relation to the motel is even more prominent in the discussion of the suburb as it is firmly connected to the visual lexicon of consumer products and spatial referents that suggest a period of positivity and societal naivety. However as the investigation of that space in that period and with contemporary hindsight illustrates, that nostalgia is focused on the image of the period rather than its reality.¹³

The relationship between the counter-narrative of hidden sources and societal drives which the instability of the transitional space allows is also present in the suburb. The depiction of that space in *Underworld* both undermines the nostalgic view of it and suggests its duality. It is less uncanny than the motel but it does contain a troubling dialogue between the hidden and the seen. The importance of societal visibility as it connects to individual identity and social role is illustrated in connection to Foucault's discussion of Bentham's Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*.¹⁴ The visibility of the actions of those in suburban space is a major factor in their sense of societal belonging, a means of controlling their actions and movement which is shown to be intimately connected to consumption and production.¹⁵ The theoretical work of the 1950s and 1960s utilised to produce a sense of the economic and cultural drives of the period supports the view that even from its inception the suburb was a space within which issues of identity were associated with consumption and observation. As such the space

¹² DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998).

¹³ A discussion of nostalgia as it relates to postmodern visual culture is seen in Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) and the disconnection between the image and the object is discussed in Baudrillard, J., *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983). These concepts appear throughout this work.

¹⁴ Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

¹⁵ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

provides an exemplary location for DeLillo to investigate socio-spatial issues that are prevalent throughout the spaces in his work.

Chapter 5: The Highway

The connective tissue between the transitional spaces DeLillo portrays is the highway which is itself a transient spatial form. Unlike previous transitional spaces the highway does not provide reference to nostalgic dwelling places as the motel and suburb do. It is a space of speed and movement, the society that passes through it not stopping to consider their identity but rather doing so whilst in motion. The combination of a number of forces connected to the counter-narrative shape the highway and its depiction in DeLillo. The relationship between technology and this space in the form of the car that allows motion along it also provides its connection to speed. These elements are rooted in the growth of the car culture that flourished alongside transitionality and allowed access to the peripheral spaces within which the motel, suburb and eventually airport would be found. They pass through this space whilst they skirt the urban centers, a conduit for the meaning of the transient society. However as with the other transitional spaces in this work, their connection to the counter-narrative and the opportunity to exist beyond the confines of mass society is at least partially illusory. It is both a means of escape and a space within which speed and direction is firmly monitored and controlled.¹⁶

The highway is a palimpsest created of numerous layers of connections to the network of connections. The materials which constitute its physicality and its structure both suggest associations with its spatial predecessors, the alley and the track, whilst illustrating the need for their destruction to allow it to exist.¹⁷ Death and destruction are firmly rooted in its many layers of meaning, historically, personally and socially. DeLillo repeatedly uses the highway as a space for the contemplation and execution of death. The Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld* and the assassination of Kennedy in *Libra* are the most obvious examples of visible societal death in his work but there are numerous others. The visibility of this space and the speed of its motion make it a prime site for counter-narrative figures to carry out violent acts and to have them be seen, indeed to have them recorded and repeatedly shown.

¹⁶ See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) on the dromology. Used throughout this work with particular focus in Chapter 5: The Highway.

¹⁷ The anti-historicism of transitional society is discussed in numerous works but of particular interest are Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001) and Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991).

The highway is the space within which the expanding connectivity of transitionality and its proximity to the counter-narrative becomes visible to mass society.

Chapter 6: Interstices – Stairs, Escalators and Elevators

As transitionality expanded throughout society and became an internalised and normalised spatial impetus it appears in smaller spaces. The movement from the motel to the suburb and ultimately the highway illustrates one manner in which transitionality has progressed, by forging more societal connections and enlarging the network of associations.¹⁸ However, as DeLillo illustrates, that impulse is also observable on a smaller scale. His depiction of the stairwell, the escalator and the elevator show that transitionality has been accepted both socially and on an individual basis. The shaping of societal space to reflect the transitional drive which occurred after the Second World War has successfully shaped those within that society into transients.¹⁹ The questions of identity and individuality that are observable in the larger spaces have been brought into these smaller spaces.

Much like the highway, these spaces function as means of societal motion, allowing the passage between other more fixed social spaces. They are in this respect all of the same class of transitional space. There are major differences in the manner in which DeLillo portrays them which suggest various differing connections to elements of the counter-narrative and mass society. The spatial form that differs most from the others is the staircase. Within DeLillo's work the staircase is utilised as a forgotten form of transitional space which has more in common with the alleyway than the technologically advanced elevator. The stairwell is a space occupied by societal outcasts, those who either by choice or because they have been rejected by society, do not have access to the technological means of societal motion.²⁰ They are found in forgotten buildings and decrepit apartments and as such are frequently a space for the usurpation of the narrative of mass society.²¹ The escalator and the elevator are more related to the smooth running of that society. They provide a means of motionless motion, an

¹⁸ See chapter 5: The Highway.

¹⁹ See the discussion of Chuckie Jr, Eric Deming and Lee Harvey Oswald as exemplars of figures raised in the period at which transitionality flourished in Chapter 4: The Suburb.

²⁰ Virilio's discussion of the control of society through the control of its motion in Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) is of interest here. It should also be considered in relation to the discussion of the staircase in Chapter 6: Interstices and the underpass in Chapter 5: The Highway.

²¹ See in particular the depiction of the tenement building in DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) and the decrepit building at the end of DeLillo, D., *Cosmopolis* (London, Picador, 2003).

illusion of social mobility which is, in reality, entirely controlled.²² Whilst the escalator is the purest example of that form of repetitious and thoughtless motion, the elevator is connected to more complex spatial questions. It is related to questions of space and place, its enclosed nature making it an uncanny facsimile of a room and as such a complex space for the transient figure to understand. Social interaction which takes place in the elevator reflects this, appearing unreal and unsettling.²³ The question of what is taking place inside the space is in conflict with the unknown activity outside. In this respect the elevator reflects the dialogue between the narrative and the counter-narrative, a dialogue which is suggested when DeLillo illustrates the importance of the elevator in connection to the World Trade Center in *Players*²⁴. What the elevator and to varying degrees these other mobile transient spaces illustrates on the small scale is further investigated in the larger forms of technological and consumer focused transitional spaces the airport and the World Trade Center.

Chapter 7: Airport

The airport differs from the other transitional spaces of DeLillo's writing. It is not solely a location which is associated with the transitional impulse or a location for motion. It is to some degree both of those things but primarily the airport is a portal for societal motion. The spatial form with which it has most in common is the railway station. In its role as a gateway between differing forms of societal space the railway station provides a template for the investigation of the spatial functions of the airport. Both spaces act as a preparatory space for an individual becoming spatially unfettered from their life on the ground. They also function as a shield to prevent the anxiety and uncertainty this process creates from entering more stable society.²⁵ This anxiety, is born of the technological means of transport which stems from that space, be that plane or train, and its association with death.

The ability to leave one's life on the ground is, as has been discussed in relation to other spaces which offer a similar reprieve, at least partially illusory. The airport is depicted in both *End Zone*²⁶ and *Mao II*²⁷ as a space of intense scrutiny and spatial observation. Much like the

²² The control of motion and speed. See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006).

²³ The unsettling nature of transitional spaces is rooted in a discussion of Freud's concept of the Uncanny, see Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

²⁴ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991).

²⁵ Wolfgang Schivelbusch discusses the role of the railway station as a societal stimulus shield. This concept influences the discussion of the airport in Chapter 7. See Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986).

²⁶ DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004).

²⁷ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992).

suburb the panoptic gaze of authority keeps the transient individual within sight at all points. The figure is required to locate themselves fully in society within this space, their identity fully codified, despite the associations with movement and freedom the space suggests.²⁸ The airport is thus an anxious and unreal space, supported by technological means of motion and images of the visual realm of consumption.

Just as the motel and suburb reflect the transitional and social functions found in the highway, so the socio-spatial role of the airport is seen in the space surrounding it and, more interestingly, the airplane itself. The period of preparation for becoming un-tethered from a semblance of stable life is anxiously manifested on the plane. It is the closest of the transitional spaces considered in this work to an isolated space. Spatially it is entirely disconnected from the narrative of daily life. Despite this it is still connected to the network of association that supports transitional society. It is still a site of technology, speed and motion which is associated to the counter-narrative. DeLillo depicts the plane as a means of escaping to the counter-narrative, both through flight in *Great Jones Street*²⁹ and as a product to offer to buy entry to an alternate life in *Libra*.³⁰ The relationship between the plane and the counter-narrative is at its most apparent during the events of 9/11. In that moment the plane is shown to have been misappropriated by figures of the counter-narrative and used to destroy the narrative of mass society. In that moment the depiction of the plane, and to some degree all other transitional spaces, changes in DeLillo's writing.

Chapter 8: The World Trade Center

The World Trade Center features prominently throughout DeLillo's writing. It is impossible to discuss them without making reference to the events of 9/11, as becomes clear in his first novel after that date, *Falling Man*.³¹ Even before that period though the socio-spatial role of the towers was a major focal point in his novels. They exemplify the spatial manifestation of mass consumer society and as such become space which the discussion of the narrative and the counter-narrative revolves around. Their scale and the shadow they cast over society embody the degree to which the consumption driven form of mass society transitionality is

²⁸ The control of societal motion through observation is more fully discussed in both Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

²⁹ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992).

³⁰ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989).

³¹ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007).

related to have become the globally dominant narrative. This provides DeLillo to illustrate the dialogue that takes place between such a space, and society, and those that are in contact with it. This can take the form of those within it, those outside it and those in opposition to it. The thematic duality of the space this dialogue suggests is physically apparent in the space of the towers, they are at once dual and individual. In *Underworld* and *Mao II* the concept of a dialogue taking place between the towers is suggested.

The balance between internal and external illustrated by the duality of the towers reflects the complex division between self and other that is seen throughout DeLillo. The angle from which characters view the towers comes to represent their relationship with mass society. Those within the tower are intricately connected to the network of consumption and technology and struggle to understand their role as an individual amongst that mass. Conversely those viewing the tower from the outside are those that are connected to the counter-narrative. These figures assume the role of the societal outsider. They have either placed themselves outside of the network of associations that meet in the tower to observe and comment on it³² or they are rejected by mass society due to their aberrant views or actions. These counter-narrative figures view the tower as the primary physical manifestation of the societal form that both rejects them and attempts to monitor and control their actions. It is these counter-narrative figures that seek to destroy such a space as a means of challenging the accepted social narrative. After the attacks of 9/11 DeLillo's depictions of transitional space changed. Much like the end of the Second World War or the assassination of Kennedy the transitional space becomes the site within which the counter-narrative becomes observable to mass society. In the void that was left after the attacks on the towers, the spatial network of associations that had created and supported that space was rendered both visible and untenable. From this point DeLillo seeks to utilise transitional spatial forms to question what new socio-spatial form may develop from this counter-narrative and how it is connected to the questions of identity and society which have been so related to transitionality from its beginnings.

³² The character Brita Nilsson in *Mao II* (DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992)) fulfils this role as a photographer.

Chapter 2: Interstices: Dangling Man

Saul Bellow's 1944 novel *Dangling Man*³³ centres around an increasingly isolated individual named Joseph whose military conscription and its continual postponement leads to an existence of inaction. Through an exploration of the impact such dangling has on Joseph's psyche and social interactions the wider ramifications of that state become apparent. The roles of Europe and America alongside the nature of culture and society dangle along with this one man, existing between a dilapidated past and an unrealised future. The connotations of the word 'dangling' bear closer inspection; particularly it's psychological and literary connections to hanging and the potential of movement through falling inherent in the act of dangling.³⁴ This transitional state between inaction and motion is central to an understanding of the novel. *Dangling Man* explores themes and concepts which manifest themselves in transitional spaces which appear throughout the work, its dirt tracks and alleyways foreshadowing the motels and highways which provide the spatial framework of this work.³⁵

The novel's spatial content is presented within a rigid and intricate time structure, the epistolary nature of the novel imprinting a date stamp on the work and rooting it in time.³⁶ The rigidity of the diary construct makes it all the more apparent when said framework begins to collapse. The novel takes place in 1942 when America has been directly involved in the Second World War for a year, its vitality and wealth a stark contrast to its worn down European allies after four years of heavy fighting³⁷. In the wider thematic context which informs the novel Joseph is witnessing a shift in societal influence with European cultural hegemony on the verge of implosion and something new and unknown emerging from the United States "due to certain unique elements in American society, such as recruitment from

³³ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London: Penguin, 1996).

³⁴ For further reading on the connection between Bellow's dangling and DeLillo's falling men see Boxall, P., *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London, Continuum, 2009), particularly Chapter 9 'Slow Man, Dangling Man, Falling Man: Beckett in the Ruins of the Future' P. 166-199. See also the discussion of the elevator in Chapter 6: Interstices.

³⁵ The relationship between the alleyway and the staircase is explored in Chapter 6: Interstices whilst it's connection to the highway is explored in Chapter 5: The Highway.

³⁶ Compare the locating function of the epistolary style to the manner in which the date stamp on the footage from Kotka in DeLillo's *The Body Artist* (DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002)) locates and stabilises the image of that space.

³⁷ "Britain was still far from secure. The Battle of Britain might have been won, but the Battle of the Atlantic was intensifying. Vessels were being sunk far faster than British Shipyards could replace them. Just as bad, money was running out: very soon Britain would be unable to pay for the supplies she needed. Roosevelt's response was threefold. He educated the American public in some of his most dramatic speeches. At stake in this war, he said, were the four essential freedoms, of speech, of religion, from want and from fear; America must become the arsenal of democracy." Brogan, H., *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (London, Penguin, 1985) p. 577.

Europe and its lack of any feudal past.”³⁸ Joseph is clearly troubled by the ethical implications of America’s cultural and financial development following the war, repeatedly expressing his view that they are “climbing upon the backs of the dead.”³⁹ What they are climbing toward is unclear, yet this nascent desire for progress and motion despite the lack of a defined goal is clearly of little concern.⁴⁰ The stagnation of Europe and the excision of its cultural forms become emblematic of progress, of forward momentum valorised at the expense of tradition and history.⁴¹ Joseph finds himself living within a society desperate to progress and free itself from the confines of European influence which had reached its nadir and was “approaching the nether curve of a cycle.”⁴²

The Hanged Man and the Network of Mythic Allusion

The complex interaction between European influence and American progress becomes clear when one considers the structure of mythic allusion which exists within the novel and run concurrent to developing social and spatial structures. America as symbolised by Joseph is struggling to incorporate its European social, artistic and mythological heritage whilst also moving forward. Joseph makes direct reference to the European Classical tradition throughout the novel showing that he is well versed in its role in his own heritage. The Servatius’ party is a key scene in the development of Joseph’s character and the novel’s myth structure. Joseph observes the actions of his friends during the party and feels distanced from them to the extent of disgust.

The party blared on inside, and I began to think what a gathering of this sort meant. And it came to me all at once that the human purpose of these occasions had always been to free the charge of feeling in the pent heart; and that, as animals instinctively sought salt or lime, we, too, flew together at this need as we had at Eleusis, with rites and dances, and at other high festivals and corroborees to witness pains and tortures, to give our scorn, hatred, and desire temporary liberty and play. Only we did these things without grace or mystery, lacking the forms for them and, relying on

³⁸Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven: Yale, 1961) p. 20.

³⁹ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, (1996) P. 64. The concept of building on the backs of the dead is explored in a different manner through the discussion of the highway as a palimpsest in Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁴⁰ The anti-historical nature of the transitional society in connection to this desire to progress is explored in the following chapters on the 1950s.

⁴¹ Compare the relegation of history and tradition to the anti-historicism of transitional society. See Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991)

⁴² Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, (1996) p. 25.

drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked vengefulness and hurt. I frowned at this dreadful picture.⁴³

The acts which take place at the party are compared unfavourably with the rites that occurred at Eleusius⁴⁴ which Joseph asserts took place to ensure fertility and resurrection but also to fulfil a human desire for release from the strictures of everyday life⁴⁵. Such rites were a means to unleash repressed elements of the self in a safe and accepting environment however at the Servatius' party Joseph notes that those present "[lack] the forms" to carry out these rites as they were intended.⁴⁶ Any connection to tradition and history have been lost, the performances are simply representations without any grounding in tradition, actions and movements disconnected from meaning.⁴⁷ Any significance and relevance they would once have had to those that carried them out has been lost, they are now merely mimetic representations of what were once profound socio-spatial acts.⁴⁸ The re-enactment of these misunderstood acts are fuelled by alcohol and longing for a sense of release, community or hope. The section in which Minna Servatius is hypnotised, a ritualistic and mystical act, is here carried out as a parlour trick for a party that needs to be "livened up."⁴⁹ The replication of past actions for the sake of entertainment renders it meaningless, achieving nothing, and yet even the suggestion of past social gestures which once held meaning is enough to unsettle.

Bring her out of it, Morris, we've all had enough," I said.

He did not seem to hear me. "Now I'm beginning," he said. He struck her lightly four times. Minna's lips began to form the first "f" but dropped away, and the next instant she was sitting up, open-eyed, exclaiming, "Harry! Oh Harry!" Then she began to cry, her face fixed and bewildered.

"I told you you were going too far," I said. Abt reached his hand out to her in surprise.

⁴³Ibid p. 46.

⁴⁴ For a full description of the varying accounts of the Eleusian rites see Frazer, J., *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1932) pp. 393 - 399

⁴⁵ "...the human purpose of these occasions had always been to free the charge of feeling in the pent heart;" Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007); p. 46 The transitional space is repeatedly utilised in DeLillo's work as a space within which characters attempt to free themselves from socially defined roles.

⁴⁶ Repressed societal and personal traumas and desires are often manifested in transitional spaces. This is explored in all of the transitional spaces of this work but in particular see Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁴⁷ Both Baudrillard's discussion of the Simulacra (Baudrillard, J., *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983)) and Lefebvre's investigation of the visual element of the production of space (Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991)) discuss the societal emphasis on the visual over the physical.

⁴⁸ The creation of homogenous spaces through repetitive actions is discussed in Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991). See particularly p. 75.

⁴⁹ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007) p. 44.

“Let her alone!” someone shouted.

“Oh Harry, Harry, Harry!”

“Do something, Morris!” Robbie Stillman shouted. “Slap her, she’s having a fit!”⁵⁰

Terror and incomprehension overcomes both the hypnotised and the gathered onlookers as their rootless existence is exposed.⁵¹ It is never explained what Minna sees in her trance yet its impact on her and those around her is clear. The desire to silence Minna is the instant response, to stop her speaking and exposing them to concepts and truths which they know they are incapable of understanding.⁵² Despite appearing to seek connection to a historical and cultural form, the European tradition, in reality their desire for that culture is exposed as a sham. When a real connection to that form is made available the gathered onlookers close their eyes to the past, preferring their disconnected existence. Conversely this scene opens Joseph’s eyes to that which is around him, to the shallow rut that his life has become. It highlights the wider connotations of a society’s disconnection from tradition and history.⁵³ As both Joseph and the society he represents move further away from their European heritage they loose connection with not only its rites, stories and mythology but also to a context within which to understand the past upon which to form a basis for the future⁵⁴. The isolated self is left to drift, glimpsing possible futures and half felt connections to others. The Servatius party uncovers these issues, exploring an American society on the verge of a new beginning built on the ashes of European cultural hegemony.⁵⁵ Joseph states that he and this group set out to establish a society more connected to past forms with worthy intentions.

What he wanted was a “colony of the spirit”, or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness, and cruelty. To hack, to tear, to murder was for those in whom the sense of the temporariness of life had shrunk.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Ibid p. 53.

⁵¹ The rootlessness of transitional society, its disconnection from history, was what allowed it to function yet it is clearly also a negative factor in its existence.

⁵² The desire to silence aberrant social elements to protect mass society is reflected in Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon. See Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991)

⁵³ Consider the discussion of the anti-historicism of transitional society in Lefebvre. (Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

⁵⁴ For a full account of the rise of the United States and its correlation to the rise of globalism as an economic and political force see Ambrose, S., *The Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938* (New York, New York, Penguin, 1993). “At the conclusion of World War II, America was on a high. In all the world only the United States had a healthy economy, an intact physical plant capable of mass production of goods, and excess capital. American troops occupied Japan, the only important industrial power in the Pacific, While American influence was dominant in France, Britain, and West Germany, the industrial heart of Europe.” p. XIII.

⁵⁵ “American domination of the Alliance reflected, in turn, a new era in world history. The United States had replaced Great Britain as the dominant world power.” Ibid p. 27.

⁵⁶ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 39 – 40.

However it becomes apparent that this attempt at a new form of society is incapable of succeeding with such disregard for the realities of the past.

Only we did these things without grace or mystery, lacking the forms for them and, relying on drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked in vengefulness and hurt.⁵⁷

Joseph and his friends attempt to create a collaborative society using mythic and artistic forms from a European tradition only to find it has no place. Joseph states that the experiment's failure was partly due to those within its "sense of the temporariness of life [having] shrunk."⁵⁸ The phrase "temporariness of life"⁵⁹ is suggestive of the transitional state which is central to both the narrative and Joseph's understanding of the world. By viewing the world as temporary and transitional one is capable of understanding the past and future as influences upon the present and therefore essential to its existence. The societal landscape which is on the verge of fruition in this period is transitional, it's porous nature meaning it is capable of incorporating elements of the spatial, the mythic, the psychological and the social.⁶⁰ By representing those at the party as unable to experience rites of the past in anything but facsimile forms it becomes clear that they have lost sight of the "temporariness of life", its transitional nature, and are therefore incapable of conceptualising or viewing a future. Joseph, from his position on the outside of this society, the dangling man between states, is set apart.⁶¹ He understands the temporality of life and comprehends the relationship between past and present even if he is incapable of fully embracing it.

The rites of Eleusias mentioned in this scene are an element of a larger network of mythology and allusion within *Dangling Man*. This mythic framework provides a nuanced context to the transitionality which is prevalent in the novel. The myth of Demeter and Persephone and its associated mystical rites discussed in the Servatius' party scene may also be read as retellings of other classical myths. Indeed mythology itself is an essentially porous and transitional form with stories absorbing elements of other tales as they are told throughout history. James Frazer points to this when he notes that,

⁵⁷ Ibid p. 46.

⁵⁸ Ibid p. 39.

⁵⁹ Consider the temporariness of life to the description of transitional spaces as "Indefinite locations." In DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 24.

⁶⁰ The porous boundaries of transitional spaces is explored in Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁶¹ The dangling man reflects the many societal outsiders of DeLillo's work that observe society.

Dionysius was not the only Greek deity whose tragic story and ritual appear to reflect the decay and revival of vegetation. In another form and with a different application the old tale reappears in the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Substantially their myth is identical with the Syrian one of Aphrodite (Astarte) and Adonis, the Phrygian one of Cybele and Attis, and the Egyptian one of Isis and Osiris. In the Greek fable, as in the Asiatic and Egyptian counterparts, a goddess mourns the loss of a loved one, who personifies the vegetation, more especially the corn, which dies in winter to revive in spring;⁶²

The concept of fertility and rebirth achieved through ritual suggested by the Eleusian rites is prevalent throughout mythology. Frazer's mention of Attis and Cybele is particularly interesting with regard to its connections to the myth structure surrounding *Dangling Man*. Literary references to Attis, particularly those taken from works that explore periods of societal upheaval,⁶³ highlight the importance and emblematic nature of transition. One text which shares *Dangling Man*'s interest in the concepts of societal decay and cultural resurrection within the context of myth and its connection to modern forms is T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.⁶⁴ Written in 1922 the poem explores the uncertainty created by attempting to rebuild a society after the death, destruction and societal upheaval which the First World War had created.⁶⁵ Fear of the potential impossibility of social resurrection is keenly felt throughout the poem, a trait it shares with *Dangling Man*. The figures that traverse the poem are taken from throughout myth and literature, their forms shifting but their meanings essential. These emblematic figures function as transitional symbols representing eternal concerns. Key amongst these is Attis. Although not found in name the attributes which confer Attis with his mythic resonance are embodied by multiple figures that appear within the transitional spaces of *The Waste Land*, *Dangling Man*, and later in DeLillo's *Falling Man*.⁶⁶ In Eliot he is the hanged man, in Bellow he is the fallen man, in DeLillo he is the falling man.⁶⁷ If one first considers the connotations of the hanged man in Eliot then his symbolic relevance in both *The Waste Land* and *Dangling Man* becomes clear. Eliot writes that:

⁶²Frazer, J., *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1932) p. 393.

⁶³ Periods at which the counter-narrative of the hidden and darker elements of society are more visible

⁶⁴ Eliot, T.S., 'The Waste Land', in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1954).

⁶⁵ Although he makes no direct reference to The First World War in *The Waste Land* itself, he does mention "the present decay of Eastern Europe." as an influence on the thematic structure of the poem in his notes. Eliot, T.S., 'Notes on the Waste Land' *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1954) p. 72.

⁶⁶DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007)

⁶⁷ Again, for more on this connection see Boxall, P., *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London, Continuum, 2009), particularly Chapter 9 'Slow Man, Dangling Man, Falling Man: Beckett in the Ruins of the Future' pp. 166-199.

I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose... because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer⁶⁸

In James Frazer's encyclopaedic work on folklore and mythology *The Golden Bough*⁶⁹ the chapter entitled 'The Hanged God'⁷⁰ deals with symbolism connected to hanged gods and their use in rituals to ensure fertility. It is the mythological associations which surround the figure of the hanged man as they relate to the figure of Attis which are important to Eliot rather than specific elements of the myth itself. The concept of hanging and resurrection through death is central to the symbolism of the hanged god in mythology and explains the figures resurrection as Eliot's Hanged Man and Bellow's fallen man. The symbolic sacrifice of the hanged god in both Eliot and Bellow is used to evoke connections to the concepts of renewal and rebirth. Whilst in *The Waste Land* Eliot writes "I do not find The Hanged Man."⁷¹, suggesting that after the horrors of the First World War the possibility of rebirth is uncertain, in *Dangling Man* the figure of the hanged man is central to the thematic structure of the novel. It is clear throughout the novel that in many respects the figure of Joseph is himself the hanged man, symbolic of a society that is in transition and dangling between states.⁷² He is a figure that must be sacrificed if his society is to be redeemed, reborn afresh at the start of a new era of American cultural and economic growth. The connection between dangling and hanging is made very early on when Joseph asserts that;

...the seven months' delay is only one of the sources of my harassment. Again, I sometimes think of it as the backdrop against which I can be seen swinging. It is still more. Before I can properly estimate the damage it has done me I shall have to be cut down.⁷³

The connection between hanging and dangling is visually clarified here. The figure of the hanged; be it a hanged god in mythology, a hanged man in the Tarot deck or a hanged effigy in ritual; is an important symbol of rebirth and renewal. As such Joseph's role in the novel as the hanged man is important to understanding the figures relevance and the emblematic role he plays in social commentary. When one considers the figure in Eliot, Bellow and DeLillo's

⁶⁸Eliot, T.S., 'Notes on the Waste Land', *Selected Poems* p. 68.

⁶⁹ Frazer, J., *The Golden Bough*, 1932.

⁷⁰ Frazer, J., *The Golden Bough*, 1932, Chapter 10.

⁷¹ Eliot, T.S., 'The Waste Land' *Selected Poems*, 1954 p. 52.

⁷² Consider this state in connection to the elevator. See Chapter 6: Interstices.

⁷³ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 12.

performance artist ‘the falling man’⁷⁴ the differences in this figure’s depiction and the shifting meaning of falling, being fallen, hanged and hanging become apparent. The relationship between the spatial and the kinetic, the inherent sense of transition in these acts and the boundaries between each state is shown to be so thin as to be permeable.

Dangling and Hanged, Fallen and Falling

Joseph’s role in the novel’s symbolic structure as the hanged man central to the possibility of societal rebirth is mirrored by the figure of “the fallen man”⁷⁵. The impact this figure has on Joseph’s outlook and opinions is vital to beginning the process which culminates in his decision to submit at the end of the novel. The fallen man is central to the developing concept of transition found in the novel as he highlights the potential for movement inherent in the state of dangling.⁷⁶ The spatial context exposed by this kinetic possibility makes the transitional sites at which the fallen man appears to Joseph, and the fact it is never fully explained where this figure has fallen from, interesting. The first appearance of the fallen man comes outside of an El station.⁷⁷

I walked along East Randolph Street, stopping to look at the rich cakes and the tropical fruits. When I came to a smoky alley alongside the library where the southbound cars emerge, I saw a man sprawl out in front of me, and at once I was in the center of a large crowd and, from a distance that could not have been as great as it seemed, a mounted policeman standing before a cottage grove car was gazing down.

The fallen man was well dressed and above middle age. His hat lay crushed under his large bald head, his tongue had come forward between his lips, his lips seemed swollen. I stooped and tore at his collar. A Button sprang away. By this time the policeman had pushed his way forward. I drew back, wiping my hands on a piece of paper. Together, we stared at the fallen man’s face... Other uniformed men were coming towards us. The first to arrive was elderly himself. He bent and reached into the fallen man’s pockets and produced an old-fashioned strap-fastened wallet like my father’s. He held up a card and spelled the name. The victim’s broad coat was hitched up behind, his chest and belly rose hugely as he labored, snoring, for breath. A path was cleared for the approaching ambulance. Its bell beat rapidly; the onlooker moved

⁷⁴ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man*, 2007.

⁷⁵ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 114.

⁷⁶ The uncanny nature of the halted motion of a transitional object or figure is explored in the discussion of the escalator in Chapter 6: Interstices.

⁷⁷ One may also connect the appearance of the fallen man in this scene with the first appearance of the performance artist “The Dangling Man” in DeLillo’s novel outside of Grand Central Station. DeLillo, D., *Falling Man*, 2007 p. 33.

away, reluctant to disengage themselves. Would the red face go gray, the dabbled hands stop their rowing, the jaw drop? Perhaps it was only an epileptic fit.⁷⁸

If one considers the depiction of time and space in this section the appearance of this figure becomes more complicated than it first appears. Joseph states that:

At once I was in the center of a large crowd and, from a distance that could not have been as great as it seemed.⁷⁹

The linear time structure so firmly established by the novel's epistolary form breaks down in this section, time and space colliding and becoming disjointed. Events occur with impossible rapidity, distances become distressingly foreshortened and the vertiginous sense of time and space losing stability becomes all the more troubling when from this collapse emerges a figure. The figure of the fallen man comes to stand as a symbol, a memory and a premonition. That the man is not given a name (a name is read out and yet is not recorded by Joseph) is telling, highlighting the emblematic nature of the figure and hinting at larger themes. That the card bearing the man's unspoken name comes from "an old-fashioned strap-fastened wallet like my father's" places this figure more firmly in the nexus of historical and psychological signification. He is the unnamed soldier of the First World War, those men that Joseph seeks to join, fallen in battle, the cut down figure of a hanged god and a vision of Joseph's own future and cultural past.

The spatial elements of this encounter feed into the wider spatial concerns of the novel.⁸⁰ If one compares the site within which this scene takes place, outside of a railway station,⁸¹ to other sites of revelation the novel's network of spaces and their attendant meanings become apparent. The inner workings of Joseph's mind are mapped out and traversed in the novel and the paths which hold the most significance for him are those dark alleys and out of the way tracks which appear in shadows and nightmares, interstitial sites of nascent transition.⁸² These alleys appear throughout the novel and even foreshadow the appearance of the fallen man. "When I came to a smoky alley alongside the library where the southbound cars emerge, I

⁷⁸Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 114 – 115.

⁷⁹Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 114.

⁸⁰They also connect to the wider spatial discussion of DeLillo's work.

⁸¹The role of the railway station and its societal spatiality is fully explored in Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986).

⁸² The relationship between the alleyway and other interstitial spaces such as the stairwell is discussed in Chapter 6: Interstices.

saw a man sprawl out in front of me”⁸³. This alley is connected to all alleys in the novel as sites which mark a point of awakening or realisation, a heightened awareness of the connection to a larger network of themes and ideas. The alley appears in Joseph’s dreams as well as his waking wanderings and through it the novels relationship to transitionality is explored.⁸⁴

I recognize in the guide of the first dream an ancient figure, temporarily disguised only to make my dread greater when he revealed himself.

Our first encounter was in a muddy back lane. By day it was a wagon thoroughfare, but at this evening hour only a goat wandered over the cold ruts that had become as hard as the steel rims that made them. Suddenly I heard another set of footsteps added to mine, heavier and grittier, and my premonitions leaped into one fear even before I felt a touch on my back and turned. Then that swollen face that came rapidly towards mine, until I felt its bristles and the cold pressure of its nose; the lips kissed me on the temple with a laugh and a groan. Blindly I ran, hearing again the gritting boots. The roused dogs behind the snagged boards of the fences abandoned themselves to the wildest rage of the barking. I ran, stumbling through drifts of ashes, into the street.

Could the fallen man of last week have seen, had he chanced to open his eyes, his death in the face of that policeman who bent over him?⁸⁵

Thematically and psychologically the fallen man is linked to the space of the alley. This is a site in which symbolic images of the past and the future combine in the present, where the boundaries of time and space collapse in on themselves. It is this space, a precursor to the transitional spaces of the motel⁸⁶ or the highway,⁸⁷ within which the novels greater significance becomes clear. Symbolism and meaning play out in these primordial transition sites, leaching into the daily world through Joseph, his understanding of the barriers between states breaking down.⁸⁸ One could read this nightmare scene as Joseph facing the spectre of both his societal past and possible personal future as a response to his enforced dangling. Psychoanalysis can play a part alongside myth and spatiality in a reading of this scene and

⁸³Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 114.

⁸⁴ The relationship between walking as an act of shaping space is discussed later in this work focussing on the role of the flâneur and the walker as discussed in DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

⁸⁵Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 121 – 122.

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁸⁷ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁸⁸ The spread of the transitional impulse through the figure of Joseph is comparable to the panoptic gaze through the released delinquent in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) Particularly the discussion of the carceral network pp. 293 – 308.

what these spaces represent. It has already been stated that the symbol of the dangling man is connected to the hanged man and in turn they are connected to the stories of Attis, Persephone and Demeter. The fallen man, the hanged man and the dangling man are all interconnected and coalesce to form a network of associations and symbolic meanings, a mythic lexicon rooted in the cultural hegemony of Europe.⁸⁹ They present archetypal images of fears and desires that are not directly expressible. That these symbols are found in Joseph's dreams is not surprising, the thematic tropes which they reveal recurring throughout the psychological elements of the novel. Joseph shows an awareness of psychoanalysis as a concept early on in the novel. In his first diary entry he states that;

If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of the commandments. To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice.⁹⁰

This quote asserts Joseph's affinity with therapy and its language of mythic symbolism, an affinity which sets him at odds with a culture seeking to forget the past. The symbolic lexicon of psychoanalysis has traditionally asserted itself in dreams but Joseph's visions are not isolated to the realm of mythic symbolism nor singularly connected to the past and its traditions. His dreams are spatial in nature, taking place in an alley, a pathway, a track, transitional sites which are precursors to the railway station and highway just as the rooming house Joseph inhabits predates and predicts the transitional space of the motel.⁹¹ In these spaces Joseph is connected not only to the physical embodiment of the fallen man, but to his mythic antecedents Attis and Odin which are inherently bound to the falling man of DeLillo.⁹² His connection to those figures allows him to understand his place in society and what the act of cutting himself down may achieve. In these spaces he is able to see the possibility of movement as well as the allusions to death that both hanging and falling imply; the potential for progress buried in its opposite state of stagnation. The possibilities offered by accepting ones transitionality become clear in the proto-transitional site of the alley.⁹³ This is further highlighted when Joseph finally does make his decision to act, a decision which also takes place in an alley;

⁸⁹ The role of visual symbolism and a lexicon of cultural images as a support to abstract space is discussed in Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) particularly p. 75.

⁹⁰ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 9.

⁹¹ See also the tenement in DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992).

⁹² See the Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁹³ The internalisation of the transitional impulse is a continuing factor in the investigation of transitionality.

I walked over the cinders of a schoolyard and came into an alley approaching our windows. I looked for Iva's shadow on the blind. She was not there. I had halted near a fence against which a tree leaned, freshly budding and seething under the rain. I made an effort to dry my face. Then it occurred to me that the reason I could not see her was that she was lying on the bed again. My skin was suddenly as wet with perspiration as it had been a moment ago with rain. I turned and started back along the schoolyard fence. A steel ring on a rope whipped loudly against the flagpole. Then, for a moment, a car caught me in its lights. I stood aside for it and followed its red blur. It was gone. Something ran among the cans and papers. A rat, I thought and, sickened, I went even more quickly, skirting a pool at the foot of the street where a torn umbrella lay stogged in water and ashes. I took a deep breath of warm air.

I believe I had known for some time that the moment I had been waiting for had come, and that it was impossible to resist any longer. I must give myself up. And I recognized that the breath of warm air was simultaneously a breath of relief at my decision to surrender. I was done.⁹⁴

The symbolic relevance of the many alleys that traverse the space of the novel in either dreams or uncanny reality start to become clear in this quote. Joseph breaks into a sweat at the thought of Iva lying on the bed as it exposes him to the reality of his dangling, an existence of inaction and living off of others be they his wife, his brother or the dead in Europe. As this awareness dawns on him he hears the sound of a swinging rope. This rope suggests the noose from which Joseph has been dangling, now gone slack with the removal of his weight. In that moment he has made the decision to act, he has chosen to fall. The desire for movement, for action, overtakes the desire for safety.⁹⁵ The spectre of his past inaction scuttles off through cans whilst a possible future of motion, as symbolised by the car, enters his view.⁹⁶ All the possibilities that are open to Joseph are symbolically present in the proto-transitional space of the alley. When one considers what the alley prefigures; a spatial network in which the visual lexicon develops and expands, that this is the birthplace of a new form of understanding regarding transitional society is clear. The corpses of Europe that weighed Joseph down have been jettisoned, action embraced and inaction denied. When Joseph leaves the alley it is empty of any symbolic referents to previous forms of

⁹⁴Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 182 – 183.

⁹⁵ This desire for societal motion in the face of the negative associations of ant-historicism produces the spaces of transitionality.

⁹⁶See Chapter 5: The Highway for more discussion of the connection between that space, technology and death.

mythological structure. The figures of death represented by the policeman and the guard⁹⁷ in this space have gone along with the fallen man and all of his historical references. Joseph turns his back on that which they symbolised. He is searching for new forms, a new symbolic structure with which to express the possibilities of what the transitional can become. Joseph symbolises an American society struggling as the waning hegemony of European culture which had prevailed in previous eras through classical tradition and myth left a gap which America would proceed to fill with its own cultural forms.⁹⁸ In the sections which follow it becomes clear that within the transitional spaces of the developing cultural and economic system the symbolic visual forms gradually, then rapidly, developed.

From Transitional Site to Transitional Society

The transitional space of the alley is one of many interconnected sites which form the topography of Bellow's novel. The depiction of Chicago as experienced by Joseph is integral to *Dangling Man*'s spatial construction as through his exploration of the city Bellow is able to consider the spatio-social structure of America as a whole via Joseph.

There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks, houses ugly and blind, were related to the interior life, and yet, I told myself, there had to be a doubt. There were human lives organized around these ways and houses, and that they, the houses, say, were the analogue, that what men created they also were, through some transcendent means, I could not bring myself to concede. There must be a difference, a quality that eluded me, somehow, a difference between things and persons and even between acts and persons. Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among. I had always striven to avoid blaming them. Was that not in effect behind my daily reading of the paper? In their businesses and politics, their taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders, I tried continually to find clear signs of their common humanity.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ The policeman and the guard here reflect the panoptic guard in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991). See Chapter 4: The Suburb for more on panopticism and societal visibility.

⁹⁸ See Ambrose, S., *The Rise to Globalism* (New York, Penguin, 1971) Particularly the quotes used in footnotes 12 and 13 of this chapter which highlight the manner in which the events and ending of the Second World War created a space within which an economic and cultural system developed which, as this work progresses, proves itself to be intrinsically connected, yet not limited, to the American experience.

⁹⁹ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 24-25.

This quote highlights those elements of society which Joseph feels most distanced from, the negative connotations of connection within a society in a state of societal flux.¹⁰⁰ Joseph clearly focuses on the decline of one societal form rather than the prospective ascendancy of another and interestingly he describes these social changes in architectural and spatial terms. Implicit in his description of these houses, tracks and ugliness is the fact that they were built by those they house and therefore reflect the society that creates them.¹⁰¹ These buildings and the forms of society that exist within are emblematic of a decaying society and Bellow further highlights the link between the social and the spatial through the limited interactions that Joseph has with others throughout the novel. The Servatius party provides one example of a societal form in terminal decline as does Joseph's meal with his brother Amos.¹⁰² The Servatius party is emblematic of a society that, having been built on the customs and myths of European cultural history, flounders when those symbolic systems are no longer capable of fulfilling their former societal roles. Joseph's meal with his brother and family explores what societal factors and attitudes are fulfilling the roles once reserved for tradition and culture. If one looks at the discussion that takes place at the start of that section regarding the war, money and the outlook of those taking part in the conversation it is clear that Joseph and Amos locate themselves differently in the structure of the society.

At dinner the talk, in which I scarcely took part at first, was of the hardship of rationing. Dolly and Amos are coffee drinkers but, as patriots, they tempered their complaints with resignation. They turned next to shoes and clothing. Dolly's brother, Loren, who represents a large eastern shoe firm, had warned them that the government intended to limit the sale of leather goods.

"We couldn't get along on four pairs a year," said Dolly.

But that was unpatriotic, wasn't it? The contradiction was too plain to be unnoticed.

"You have to take into account what people are accustomed to," said Amos; "their standard of living. The government overlooks that. Why, even charities don't give the same amounts to any two families. It would cause too much hardship."

"Yes, that's what I meant," said Dolly. "You couldn't call it hoarding."

"No," I replied. She had addressed herself to me.

¹⁰⁰ The figure distanced from society is repeatedly depicted in DeLillo as associated with the counter-narrative. There are numerous characters of this sort, Lee Harvey Oswald in DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) being perhaps one of the most obvious.

¹⁰¹ The shaping of society by those that inhabit it is later discussed in relation to De Certeau's walker. See DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁰² Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 pp. 57-74.

“Later on there’ll be a run on clothes, too,” asserted Amos. “That’s the way the consumer market is when people are earning.”¹⁰³

Unlike the Servatius group, who play at having European sensibilities, looking to the ancient forms of art and social interaction to attempt to create a “colony of the spirit”¹⁰⁴, Amos presents a different sensibility, modern, level headed, totally driven and focussed on the economics of consumption.¹⁰⁵ This is connected to the greater theme of the decline of Europe and the financial and influential ascendancy of America, “climbing on the backs of the dead.”¹⁰⁶ Joseph is as uncomfortable with this status quo, the financial aspects of the change that America is going through, with its connection to the isolationist policies of America’s recent past¹⁰⁷ and their connection to social change, leave Joseph feeling disconnected and dispirited by the society which surrounds him.

From Tradition Directed to Other Directed

The changes taking place in American society at this point in terms of its international standing, both culturally and economically, was explored in theoretical texts at the time. Those in the Servatius group are harking back to a form of cultural interaction that they have little understanding of due their loss of connection with tradition. Mirroring this social deficiency, Amos represents the development of American economic standing, the expansion of business models and structures which focus on profit with little interest in social consequences. In his book *The Lonely Crowd* (1961)¹⁰⁸ David Riesman explores the development of social forms he describes as tradition-directed and inner-directed, before going on to consider a new form, the other-directed. This definition provides a useful framework through which to explore the social ramifications represented by the Servatius group, Amos and ultimately Joseph himself. Riesman describes the tradition-directed society and the way it manifests itself in its citizen’s behaviour as follows.

A definition of tradition-directed. ... The important relationships of life may be controlled by careful and rigid etiquette, learned by the young during the years of

¹⁰³ Ibid pp. 62-63.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid p. 39.

¹⁰⁵ The role of consumption to transitional spaces and DeLillo’s writing is focused on in Chapter 4: The Suburb.

¹⁰⁶ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 64.

¹⁰⁷ “The United States in 1938 saw no pressing need to play any great role in the world. Isolationism reigned in the Congress, reflecting a national mood.” Ambrose, S., *The Rise to Globalism* (New York, Penguin, 1971) p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001).

intensive socialization that end with initiation into full adult membership. Moreover, the culture, in addition to its economic tasks, or as part of them, provides ritual, routine, and religion to occupy and to orient everyone. Little energy is directed toward finding new solutions to the age-old problems...¹⁰⁹

When one considers this quote in relation to the description of the desire for a “colony of the spirit” as expressed by the Servatius group its relevance becomes clear. The suggestion of harking back to a previous form of societal meaning alongside a reliance on ritual and culture fittingly describes the Servatius group with their high minded ideals connected to classical European cultural forms. The emphasis on ritual and routine in this quote highlights the shallow connection those at the Servatius party have to any true form of cultural connection; they simply emulate classical European traditions and rituals in the hope that this will enable them to emulate its social forms. In comparison to this, the ‘inner-directed’ is a more fitting a social model to bear in mind in relation to Amos as becomes apparent in the family dinner scene.

A definition of inner-direction.... the source of direction for the individual is “inner” in the sense that it is implied that it is implanted early in life by the elders and directed toward generalized but nonetheless inescapably destined goals... This rigidity is a complex matter. While any society dependant on inner-direction seems to present people with a wide choice of aims – such as money, possessions, power, knowledge, fame, goodness – these aims are ideologically interrelated, and the selection made by any one individual remains relatively unalterable throughout his life.¹¹⁰

The drive to achieve an individual goal represents not only Amos’ business sense but also relates to Joseph’s statements regarding American society’s single-minded progress towards financial and cultural ascendancy over the corpse of Europe.¹¹¹ Joseph is not alone in his distaste for this form of inner-directed society, indeed the Servatius group and their experiments with tradition-directed activities are one attempt at a different societal form, albeit a fruitless one. Joseph’s dalliances with artists and the communist party¹¹² expose his distaste with the inner-directed American society and his desire for a more communal form of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid p. 11.

¹¹⁰ Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd*, 2001 p. 15.

¹¹¹ The manner in which capitalist consumption took root in the transient space of America.

¹¹² One may compare Joseph’s interaction with the communist part with Oswald’s contact with them as a means to connect to the counter-narrative in DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989).

living¹¹³. However it is clear from Joseph's outburst at the Servatius party that they are unable to produce change at this point in the decade, its "nether curve".¹¹⁴ These alternative societal forms offer no feasible alternative to inner-direction's focus on consumption and wealth. This inability to create a working alternative, to produce nothing but discussion and further inaction, is almost as disgusting to Joseph as the drive of the inner-directed. Joseph is left with no option but to "submit" and join the army, noting as he does so that:

... I would rather die in the war than consume its benefits. When I am called I shall go and make no protest. And, of course, I hope to survive. But I would rather be a victim than a beneficiary...as between their imperialism and ours, if a full choice were possible, I would take ours. Alternatives, and particularly desirable alternatives, grow only on imaginary trees.¹¹⁵

Joseph recognises grudgingly that the society based around the classical European concepts of knowledge, culture and art he sought is no longer a valid societal option. At the point when he was informed of his conscription he began dangling and the possibility to define his own course was stripped from him. This moment of societal interference left him without options or valid possibilities for self-fulfilment. That his decision to submit and embrace his conscription causes him pain is clear throughout the novel as is his desire for a third option, a means of escape. Such an alternative path is suggested by the uncanny transitional space of the alley.¹¹⁶ This space exists beyond both the tradition-directed and inner-directed society, manifesting in moments of trauma and dreams. Riesman explores this alternative societal form, defining it as other-direction. Joseph's dissection of his own drives makes it clear that he is dangling both on the edge of the societal and cultural power shift between America and Europe as well as between the past and a future just out of his grasp. This potential future becomes almost tangible within the proto-transitional space of the alley.

A definition of the other-directed... Tentatively, I am inclined to think that the other-directed type does find itself more at home in America, due to certain unique

¹¹³ Joseph's interactions with his friends and disillusionment with their attempt to found a "colony of the spirit" has been previously discussed in this chapter. At other points in the book Joseph is particularly candid about his mixed feelings about the Communist party from which he is a lapsed member. His argument with Jimmy Burns between pp. 21 – 38 provide a great deal of insight into his ambiguous connections to the party and its aims whilst his internal dialogues with "The Spirit of Alternatives" on pp. 134 – 141 and pp. 164 – 169 tease out the intricacies of his mental and philosophical anguish by proposing other potential lives.

¹¹⁴ Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd*, 2001 p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 2007 p. 84.

¹¹⁶ The transitional space as a location for confronting the Freudian uncanny double. See Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

elements in American society, such as its recruitment from Europe and its lack of any feudal past...it seems appropriate to treat contemporary metropolitan America as our illustration of a society – so far, perhaps the only illustration – in which other-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity...What is common to all other directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual – either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and through the mass media. This source is of course “internalized” in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early. The goals toward which the other-directed person strives shift with that guidance: it is only the process of striving itself and the process of paying close attention to the signals from others that remain unaltered throughout life.¹¹⁷

Other-direction reflects many personality traits exhibited by Joseph which make it difficult for him to exist within an inner-directed society. The description of the other-directed individual looking to their contemporaries for approval brings elements of Joseph’s personality into focus.¹¹⁸ His desire to be heard and seen, to express that which is within him, would be acceptable in an other-directed society yet marks him out as a danger to the inner-directed norm. This drive to talk about his troubles as “...if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time”¹¹⁹ expresses a need to be heard and, more importantly, understood by his contemporaries. His affinity with the processes of psychoanalysis suggests an understanding of his own subconscious desires yet his need to have these desires acknowledged by contemporaries whom he disagrees with on a fundamental level places him in a traumatic situation.¹²⁰ Joseph wishes to hold a mirror up to society to expose its deficiencies to promote rebuilding and restructuring yet society is not ready to accept these other-directed thoughts; it does not have the structures to encompass them. Joseph’s contemporaries are still shaped by societal structures of the past, be they inner-directed or tradition directed. When Joseph states that “what men created they also were,”¹²¹ he is referring to both the confines these structures place on his individual actions and the limits it places upon societal progression in general.¹²² The physical buildings a society creates come to represent the boundaries and limitations it imposes upon itself. The one space where these

¹¹⁷ Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd*, 2001 pp. 19 – 21.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 4: The Suburb.

¹¹⁹ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 2007 p. 9.

¹²⁰ The desire to forge a balance between personal identity and societal role is prevalent in DeLillo’s work and is a major focus of this work.

¹²¹ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 2007 p. 24.

¹²² The limitation of societal motion as a means of control is a defining concept of both Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

limits are not to be found is the interstitial site of the alley, the interconnected and fluctuating zone in which the possibilities of time, space, past and future are able to intermingle as the sites meaning has yet to be defined within a societal structure¹²³.

The concept of the other-directed society Riesman introduces offers the possibility of a new societal form that stems from the changes explored in *Dangling Man*. It is clear from Riesman that America's social and historical background allows the possibility of its becoming other-directed, a process that would be supported by the combination of capitalism and the mass media. However these forms are not sufficiently developed to support American society's acceptance of the larger possibilities other-directedness offers. The mass media is present in the novel only in the form of Joseph's newspapers and the possibility of the other-directed society is suggested only by the emblematic figure of Joseph. In the act of cutting himself free, choosing to make the decision to stop dangling and to fall, Joseph embraces action over inaction. This choice suggests the cultural shift that took place in this period and allowed the inner-directed society of the 1940s to progress towards the more other-directed 1950s. In order to understand the importance of this change it is essential to revisit Riesman's quote regarding the other-directed, particularly his clarification that an other-directed society is possible due to the internalization of the desire for acceptance from others to validate the self¹²⁴. Neither Joseph nor the society he lives within have achieved the level of self reliance necessary for this process of internalization to take place. Whilst the inner-directed individual views himself as master of his own actions and desires the other-directed self interacts with others to aid progress and increase an awareness of the self. The act of immersing oneself entirely within the other-directed society and basing one's sense of self on interaction with others is inherent in the development of the other-directed society yet it is a process which elicits a great deal of anxiety.¹²⁵ Once again the alley is the site in which this anxiety is manifested. A site of transition, uncertainty and fear; it represents the possibility of movement away from the understood and towards the more vertiginous sense of an unknowable future. It is here that the concept of internalization Riesman states is essential to the development of the other-directed society becomes important. The transitional nature of these spaces means they offer no concrete societal grounding on which to anchor ones progress, there is nothing within

¹²³ The manner in which the interstitial nature of these spaces lends itself to transitionality and are bonded to it is a major thread of this work and can be traced throughout each of the following chapters.

¹²⁴ "What is common to all other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual – either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and the mass media. This source is of course "internalized" in the sense that dependence on it for guidance in life is implanted early." Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd*, 2001 p. 21. See the suburbs and visibility.

¹²⁵ Once again, the difficulty of dividing an individual sense of self from mass society is present in this concept.

the alley that Joseph can hold onto in order to lessen his anxiety. All that moored him to a sense of self has been taken and all of the symbolic connections he made with culture, literature, tradition, ritual and myth have lost the meanings they once held. With nothing solid to guide and comfort him Joseph is forced to internalize the concept of transition, an act he symbolically carries out in the alley, submitting to the possibilities of the future. Joseph steps through this anxious space into a future disconnected from the past and its meanings where self is defined by others and space is transitional. Joseph's submission and symbolic fall marks the first step of the society he represents away from the figures of myth and history yet carrying their memory in a symbolic system of images and associations. They fall together, accepting the state of transition and other-direction, moving from an untenable situation to one that is uncertain.

Chapter 3: The Motel

The themes explored in Bellow's *Dangling Man*¹²⁶ highlight that the period directly following the Second World War represented an era of growing unease regarding America's social and economic role in the world. The desire to escape the tethers of tradition and inner-direction led to the creation of socially uncoded sites into which society expanded throughout the 1950s.¹²⁷ It is this impetus to dwell outside of the previously understood social hierarchy, to create a space within which one could explore individual identity in relation to a society which was permanently in a state of motion, which informs the spaces investigated throughout the DeLillo's work.¹²⁸ Individuals in this period began to turn to contemporaries rather than a societal figurehead for societal guidance whilst spatial development increasingly took the form of building and dwelling within interstitial sites.¹²⁹ The motel is one of the prime spatial exemplars of a transitional society and is returned to throughout DeLillo's writing. It is central to his investigation of spatiality's role in understanding identity and society and as a space which functions as a locus of the counter-narrative. Through a reading of DeLillo's fiction supported by theoretical research on those sites it becomes apparent that the motel is part of a complex cultural network of association and influence relating to nostalgia, identity, visibility and paranoia.¹³⁰ The development of these spatial forms in the 1950s and the dialogue they expose between society and the individual provides a basis for understanding DeLillo's use of spaces throughout his writing.

The motel, with its uncanny connection to the home, becomes emblematic of a transient society and a nexus for the development of a counter-narrative. In DeLillo's writing the nostalgic associations that space and the period within which it flourished conjure of simple, positive times is repeatedly undermined. Instead it is depicted as a space of duplicity, self-doubt and socially unacceptable actions. The transitional impulse which instigated the growth of transient spaces such as the motel and the suburb stemmed from fear and anxiety and this emotional register still resonates in these spaces, undermining the desire for progress and

¹²⁶ Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007).

¹²⁷ See previous chapter, particularly with regard to the discussion of the socio-economic forces which shaped the transitional impulse.

¹²⁸ The relationship between individual identity and the mass of society underpins DeLillo's depiction of counter-narrative figures and their use of these spaces.

¹²⁹ Consider this with regard to the location of the suburb and the airport. See Chapter 4: The Suburb and Chapter 7: The Airport.

¹³⁰ The suburb reflects many of the spatial concerns discussed in relation to the motel as it is rooted in the same period of socio-spatial change. However the other spaces investigated in this work which originate from different periods are also part of this network.

positivity they were intended to encapsulate.¹³¹ The location of these sites beyond the confines of societal observation and the structural and spatial techniques employed in their construction¹³² make them prime sites to investigate the darker recesses of society and one's own psyche. Interest in these facets of the transient spaces at the heart of the culture that stemmed from this period is not limited to DeLillo. The spatial form of the motel as it occurs in these works is connected to a wider discussion of societal spatiality that reflects the theories and works produced by Frank Lloyd Wright. His desire to bring motion and space into architecture has implications for the depiction of the motel as a site within which to investigate the socially unacceptable elements of identity as seen in those works. This reflects DeLillo's interest in the societal implications of this space and other transitional spaces like it.

The Motel as a site of Self-Investigation

There is a motel in the heart of every man. Where the highway begins to dominate the landscape, beyond the limits of a large and reduplicating city, near a major point of arrival and departure: this is most likely where it stands. Postcards of itself at the desk. One hundred hermetic rooms... Repeated endlessly on the way to your room, you can easily forget who you are here... Despite its great size, the motel seems temporary. This feeling may rise simply from the knowledge that no one lives here for more than one or two days at a time. Then, too, it may be explained by the motel's location, that windy hint of mystery encircling a lone building fixed in what was once a swamp... It embodies a repetition so insistent and irresistible that, if not freedom, liberation is possible, deliverance; possessed by chaos you move into thinner realms, refinements, mathematical integrity, and become, if you choose, the man on the bed the next room...¹³³

The motel in DeLillo's work is connected to both individual identity and the mythology and symbolism of American society. The relationship between the visual, spatial and identity is explored through the "reduplicating" of the space that occurs from having "Postcards of itself at the desk." These transitional forms complicate perceptions of spatial and personal

¹³¹ See Kunstler on this "Thirty years ago, Lewis Mumford said of post-World II development, "the end product is an encapsulated life, spent more and more in the motor car or within the cabin of darkness before a television set." The whole wicked, sprawling, megalopolitan mess, he gloomily predicted, would completely demoralize mankind and lead to nuclear holocaust." Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere*, The (New York, Touchstone, 1993) p. 10

¹³² See discussion of Frank Lloyd Wright later in this chapter.

¹³³ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 257.

individuality through repetition and duplication.¹³⁴ Henri Lefebvre discusses the production of repetitious spaces and the form of societal spatial interactions they encourage.

Are these spaces interchangeable because they are homologous? Or are they homogenous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold...At all events, repetition reigns supreme. Can a space of this kind really still be described as a 'work'? There is an overwhelming case for saying that it is a product *strictu sensu*: it is reproducible and it is the result of repetitive actions. Thus space is undoubtedly produced even when the scale is not that of major highways, airports or public works.¹³⁵

The proliferation of repetitious spaces is here shown to connect the motel to other spaces such as the highway and the airport suggesting that repetitious space is firmly connected to transitional spaces. The relationship between the production of the space and the consumable nature of this repetitive space is reflected in the manner in which the space is used and those that inhabit it experience it. The similarities of the construction and appearance of motels spread along many indiscernible stretches of highway¹³⁶ is repeated not only between each site but also within the motel, with each of the "hundred hermetic rooms" being seemingly identical to every other. This sense of replication, multiplied experience and duplication of the self has the effect of breaking down a sense of individual identity and destabilising the relationship between the inhabitant and the space. The image of "*man sitting on bed*" is at once an abstract representation of the self and that of other men sitting on other beds.¹³⁷ Repetitious space as a form of abstract space reduce the differences between individual spaces and inhabitants which has the effect of homogenising space. "...abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities."¹³⁸ Within this space the self and other and the societal forms they come to represent, the narrative and counter-narrative, coexist. The barriers which are reinforced socially to differentiate between

¹³⁴ The concept of repetition as it relates to uncertainty over sources is discussed in relation to the suburbs in the next chapter.

¹³⁵ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75

¹³⁶ The role of the highway is full explored in Chapter 5: The Highway but the depiction of Kotka in *The Body Artist* illustrates a particularly interesting interaction between the individual and stretches of road. See DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) pp. 37 – 39.

¹³⁷ The repetition of identity in the motel space suggests Freud's discussion of the double as it relates to an understanding of the uncanny. See Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003) pp. 154 – 167.

¹³⁸ This section of *The Production of Space* goes on to explore the potential inherent in abstract space for a new form of space which unifies the points of historical connection which abstract space destroys and distinguishes between elements. "I shall call that new space 'differential space'... a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements and moments of social practice." Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 52. Consider this quote in relation to the discussion of the socio-spatial shift which occurs after 9/11 as investigated in chapters 7 and 8.

self and other are semi-permeable in the motel. Its location beyond the authoritarian control of social space as it exists in more traditional spatial forms such as the city, allows greater freedom of motion, be that spatial or mental. The location of the motel in a void beyond the codified space of the city, particularly at a point near “highways” and points of “arrival and departure” is essential to its role and meaning. The importance of motion and technology to the development of these spatial forms is rooted in the technological and societal developments of the 1950s.¹³⁹ The transitionality of these spaces renders them both “homely” and “unhomely” as they are at once a point of dwelling and a point of motion on a journey. They are neither home nor away yet may be understood as both, either or neither. Freud’s discussion of the uncanny is firmly rooted in both the sense of the double the motel raises and this question of the unhomely.

...among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* [homely] exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich* [unhomely]... on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and out of sight.¹⁴⁰

Freud’s investigation of the homely/unhomely illuminates the manner in which the motel is experienced and the role it comes to play in DeLillo’s spatial network. The motel hosts a complex dialogue between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*. It is both a simulation of a dwelling space with its furniture and facsimiles of home comforts whilst also suggestive of motion and societal dislocation. Again, the location of the motel on a deserted road, beyond the bounds of societal observation is an important factor in understanding the motel space. As the *Americana* quote suggests, the location of the motel is only partially responsible for its uncanny impact on those that dwell within it. The “One hundred hermetic rooms... Repeated endlessly” illustrate that the spatial construction of the motel itself creates a complex reaction. The physical space of the motel balances enclosure and openness. Each of the rooms is isolated¹⁴¹ from the others yet the motel as a whole is constructed to accommodate the motion

¹³⁹ “By the early 1950s, the government’s strategy of subsidizing the building trades and promoting the auto industry and its dependencies as a way to drive the economy seemed to be paying off. The creation of a suburban culture and all its trappings, along with our fortunate position vis-à-vis other nations, augured an era of boundless prosperity, security, comfort and ease.” Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) p. 105. The concept of suburban here reflects the developments discussed in the next chapter and the concept of the spatial forms constructed after the Second World War as Sub-Urban, outside the scope of urban understanding.

¹⁴⁰ Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003) p. 156.

¹⁴¹ The isolated room relates to DeLillo’s interest in the figure shaping society from within a monastic cell. This figure appears throughout his writing and is discussed in Discuss the monastic cell as it connects to DeLillo later in this chapter.

of the car¹⁴² and the attendant freeways and highways which it is connected to.¹⁴³ The origins of the motel in this form¹⁴⁴ stem from the post war period and much like the other societal and spatial forms that appear in that era, it is focused on motion and spatiality. Frank Lloyd Wright expresses the positive intentions which lay behind the process of allowing space, and with it motion and visibility, to enter the built form. The societal importance of mobility and openness so connected to the role of the motel is visible in the architecture of this period and its attempts to incorporate movement and space into the built form was not limited to transitional spaces. In his essay *The Destruction of the Box*¹⁴⁵ Lloyd Wright proposes the breaking down of the traditional architectural forms before exploring some of the structural alterations that this change requires. He not only considers these changes necessary in architectural terms but also connects them to sociological factors.

A penetration of the inner depths of space in spaciousness becomes architectural... a new structural integrity; outside coming in; and the space within, to be lived in, going out. Space outside becomes a natural part of space *within* the building... Walls are now apparent more as humanized screens. They do define and differentiate, but never confine or obliterate space.¹⁴⁶

Lloyd Wright explores architectural form as it relates to individuality and societal space. The breaking down of the box and the introduction of movement and space into architectural forms highlights the movement away from a sense of the self as an isolated societal element and toward the individual as part of the production, advancement and meaning of society. This is reflective of the theories suggested by Whyte, Galbraith and Riesman and provides a

¹⁴² The importance of the automobile to the spaces of this period is clear. "Lloyd Wright clearly had been aware of the possibilities of the developing car-oriented city since he had moved to Los Angeles in 1919; recognizing the impact of the car on tourism, he designed the Oasis, the first Modern desert resort hotel, in 1923 in Palm Springs.) Hess, A., *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2004) p. 34.

¹⁴³ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

¹⁴⁴ The development of a spatial style of roadside architecture is explored *Googie Redux* and reflects the relationship between space, consumption and the visual such spaces contained. The commercial strip began evolving its own unconventional urban rhythms and cadences. The White Towers back East had pioneered the strategy of repetition, which influenced the look of the strip: their buildings all repeated the common castle image that identified the chain in the public mind. McDonald's would use the same technique, as would Holiday Inns, which began in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1952. The original inns were single-storey and mostly sign: the architecture consisted almost entirely of a six-foot-wide yellow fascia sign, with "Holiday Inn" spelled out in the familiar script. The roadside sign on even the earliest inns featured a great boomerang arrow and a radiating star; like McDonalds arches, the sign attracted customers off the highway by its unmistakable physical presence." Hess, A., *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2004) p. 62.

¹⁴⁵ Lloyd Wright, F., 'The Destruction of the Box' from an address to the Junior Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, New York City, 1952, in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, 1960 p. 284 – 287.

¹⁴⁶ Lloyd Wright, F., *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings* (New York, Meridian Books, 1960) p. 313.

basis upon which to consider DeLillo's discussion of the impact of social space on a sense of individual identity.¹⁴⁷ By locating space at the heart of his architecture Lloyd Wright introduces movement into static forms, shifting away from isolation and towards interaction. He aims to produce locations for dwelling that reflect the transitional society and are flexible enough for its use. This opening up of space was rapidly adopted and developed by those architects that were working in more commercial forms of architecture particularly the Googie style¹⁴⁸ which became associated with the motels and drive-thru's that appeared to meet the needs of America's increasingly transient population.¹⁴⁹ The same architectural and socio-economic theories were being explored at both the forefront of modern design and its more commercial counterpart.¹⁵⁰ The openness of the new built forms that appear in the 1950s and stem from the architectural and societal desire for motion and transitionality allows both a greater freedom of movement and a greater degree of visibility. However as the discussion of the *heimlich / unheimlich* illustrates, the motel is not the idealised open dwelling space Lloyd Wright sought to create, rather it calls to mind Foucault's assertion that "visibility is a trap".¹⁵¹ Concepts of visibility and observation connect to their opposite, the hidden, within the motel space. The question of societal visibility is another aspect of transitionality which recurs throughout depictions of transitional sites in DeLillo¹⁵² and is particularly relevant to his discussion of the motel. Lefebvre's discussion of repetitive space relates to both the motels appearance and its connection to visibility.

A further important aspect of [repetitious] spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: The visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained within them. The

¹⁴⁷ See Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001); Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) and Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society* (London, Penguin, 1958) for a comprehensive view of the economic and social forces that helped shape the transitional society.

¹⁴⁸ The term Googie architecture stems from the growth in 1950s America of diners and coffee shops that catered to the burgeoning car culture. These Ships, Goodies and Googies Diners exhibited cheap and yet functional architectural principles that focused on the transient population that was taking to America's roads. The name Googie became synonymous with this architectural style. For a full description of this style and the role it plays in transitionality see Hess, A., *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2004). For further on roadside architecture see Jakle, J.; Skule, K., *Remembering Roadside America: Preserving the Recent Past as Landscape and Place* (Chicago, University of Tennessee Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Mobility and rootlessness was recognized in this period as a facet of society "... the problem of 'rootlessness'. It is a term that needs re-examination. Are the transients a rootless people? If by roots we mean the complex of geographical and family ties that has historically knitted Americans to local society, these young transients are almost entirely rootless. They are very much aware of the fact" Whyte, W. H., *Organization Man, The* (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1956) p. 265.

¹⁵⁰ See the previous discussion of the development of roadside commercial architecture and its connection to consumption.

¹⁵¹ Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 200 The role of the panoptic in transitional space is more fully explored in Chapter 5: The Highway.

¹⁵² See Chapter 4: The Suburb and Chapter 7: The Airport for more on social visibility.

predominance of visualization... serves to conceal repetitiveness. People *look*, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself.¹⁵³

The impact on the individual of dwelling in this space is either anxiety created by its societal instability or a sense of freedom to explore identity and social roles.¹⁵⁴ The motel is a space within which “you can easily forget who you are”.¹⁵⁵ The isolated rooms and the location of the motel beyond the boundaries of the space of the city leave the individual without the societal guidance to define their own identity.¹⁵⁶ The motel provides a site which suggests a degree of freedom in identity and role, yet this is an anxious proposition. The definition of self as defined by a relationship to ones contemporaries as defined in Riesman’s discussion of other-direction¹⁵⁷ illustrates both fear and desire regarding the connection between visibility and observation. The concept of societal visibility and the role it plays in the development of identity, both individual and as codified by society, is connected to DeLillo’s discussion of the motel and the other transitional spaces which constitute the topography of his work. Frequently this element of transitional spatiality refers to the panoptic. Foucault’s discussion of panopticism in *Discipline and Punish*¹⁵⁸ provides a description of the panopticon but more importantly illustrates the manner in which the panoptic gaze is internalised into the observed party. This process is similar in both process and outcome to the internalisation of guidance from contemporaries which the other-directed individual experiences as a form of “gyroscope.”

...The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action... in short, that the inmates should be caught up in the power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.¹⁵⁹

The motel is a space of anxiety and uncertainty yet it suggests potential freedom, motion and progress. As in all of the transitional spaces that DeLillo discusses the motel contains

¹⁵³ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

¹⁵⁴ The homely/unhomely concept is also useful to a discussion of the seeming division between the narrative and the counter-narrative.

¹⁵⁵ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 257.

¹⁵⁶ Riesman’s definition of the other-directed individual reflects the experience of the motel dweller that fears losing a grip on his identity. “As against guilt-and-shame-controls, though of course these survive, one prime psychological lever of the other-directed person is a diffuse *anxiety*. This control equipment, instead of being like a gyroscope, is like a radar.” Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001) p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid pp. 19 – 26.

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid p. 201.

elements of the panoptic, the unhomely and the nostalgic. Its construction, location and associations all shape this space and the impact that it has on those that dwell within it. Throughout his writing DeLillo explores these concepts as they relate to a sense of identity and the balance between the individual and the mass of society.

Towards and Isolated Identity

The negative connotations of transitionality come to the fore in DeLillo's depiction of motels as they appeared from the 1970s onwards. In *Americana*¹⁶⁰ DeLillo draws connections between the visual lexicon of transitionality, the ability to understand personal history and the role of the motel. The sense of a disconnection from history is understood as an inherent facet of transitionality as it is considered essential to destroy historical connections in order to facilitate forward societal progression. Black Knife's speech in the novel provides a perspective on this concept, exposing the societal and cultural drives which have contributed to this societal form.

He was a hundred years old... I asked him if things had changed much since he was a boy. He said that was the most intelligent question anyone had ever asked him. Things had changed hardly at all. Only materials had changed, technologies; we were still the same nation of ascetics, efficiency experts, haters of waste... We plan the destruction of everything which does not serve the cause of efficiency... We wish to blast all the fine old things to oblivion and replace them with tasteless identical structures. Boxes of cancer cells. Neat gray chambers for meditation and the reading of advertisements. Imagine the fantastic prairie motels we could build if only we would give in completely to the demons of our true nature; imagine the automobiles that might take us from motel to motel.¹⁶¹

This quote expands upon Riesman's discussion in *The Lonely Crowd* where he asserts that the success of the other-directed society in America is due in part to "...certain unique elements in American Society, such as the recruitment from Europe and its lack of any feudal past."¹⁶² That the transitional society comes to fruition in America is due to not only the 'materials' available after the Second World War¹⁶³ but also the way in which these materials were used

¹⁶⁰ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990).

¹⁶¹ Ibid pp. 117 – 118

¹⁶² Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001) p. 19.

¹⁶³ "Many Americans feared that the end of World War II and the subsequent drop in military spending might bring back the hard times of the Great Depression. But instead, pent-up consumer demand fuelled exceptionally strong economic growth in the postwar period. The automobile industry

due to peculiarities of the American psyche.¹⁶⁴ The American 'ascetic' Black Knife describes who destroys history in order to progress is apparent in the pseudo mythic figures of the pioneer and the pilgrim whose lives came to represent a counter-narrative to that of the old world.¹⁶⁵ The desire for transition, for movement and progress both in terms of space and time, is an aspect of the American psyche and as such it was America that provided fertile ground for transitionality.¹⁶⁶

The use of the term 'materials' in Black Knife's speech is relevant to a discussion of the motel. The concept of "Neat gray chambers for meditation and the reading of advertisements." connects American transitional spatiality with the space of the motel with its "One hundred hermetic rooms".¹⁶⁷ Those spaces as sites of 'meditation' reflect the function of other transitional spaces in DeLillo's work. In *End Zone*¹⁶⁸ the room is stripped down to the extent that it comes to resemble a cell, an isolated and almost monastic space removed from the influences of society within which to exile oneself from the network of meaning. Within this space the complexities so enmeshed in ones understanding of self and society are stripped back to their barest form, planes, faces and angles bereft of adornment.

In his austerity he blended with the shadowless room... Everywhere it was possible to perceive varieties of silence, small pauses in corners, rectangular planes of stillness, the insides of desks and closets (where shoes curl in dust), the spaces between things, the endless silence of surfaces, time swallowed by methodically silent clocks,

successfully converted back to producing cars, and new industries such as aviation and electronics grew by leaps and bounds. A housing boom, stimulated in part by easily affordable mortgages for returning members of the military, added to the expansion. The nation's gross national product rose from about \$200,000 million in 1940 to \$300,000 million in 1950 and to more than \$500,000 million in 1960. At the same time, the jump in postwar births, known as the "baby boom," increased the number of consumers. More and more Americans joined the middle class". Taken from Conte, C. and Karr, A., *An Outline of the U.S Economy*, Conte, C. and Karr, A., Chapter 3 <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/oecon/chap3.htm>.

¹⁶⁴ "My analysis of the other-directed character is thus at once an analysis of the American and of contemporary man. Much of the time I find it hard or impossible to say where one ends and the other begins. Tentatively, I am inclined to think that the other-directed type does find itself most at home in America, due to certain unique elements in American society, such as its recruitment from Europe and its lack of any feudal past. As against this, I am also inclined to put more weight on capitalism, industrialism and urbanization – these being international tendencies – than on any character-forming peculiarities of the American scene." Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001) p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ The role of the pilgrim experience to a sense of American spatiality is discussed in Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) pp. 17 – 27.

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter 2: Interstices: Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* for further on the link between tradition directed society and America in the post-war period.

¹⁶⁷ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 257.

¹⁶⁸ DeLillo, D., *Endzone* (London, Picador, 2004).

whispering air and the speechlessness of sentient beings, all these broken codes contained in the surrounding calm,¹⁶⁹

Meditation on identity within the cell allows the characters within these spaces to gain insight into their lives whilst contemplating the possibility of other lives and narratives.¹⁷⁰ This is seen in discussion of the ability to become another in the motel room. The transitional space provides a location which is geographically disconnected from the confines of societal identity whilst maintaining connections and associations to other space and social forms. Within *Americana*¹⁷¹ David Bell works for “the network”. He is a figure so involved in the production of images and depthless symbols that he has become completely incapable of connecting with society or a sense of his own personal history beyond a surface level. In this respect the site that David chooses to make a film and its subject matter are particularly telling. His attempts at depicting his past take place in a hotel, yet a hotel so far from the strictures of the urban society that it fulfils the functions of the “prairie motels” Black Knife imagines dotted across the land. Bell says that he is:

...thinking of making a long messy autobiographical-type film... a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that’s part of my life, maybe ultimately taking two or three or more full days to screen and only a minutely small part of which I’d like to do out here. Pick out some sleepy town and shoot some film.¹⁷²

The fact that the film is to be biographical and fragmentary reflects the life that we have seen Bell leading, fragmented and lacking a larger narrative beyond his role in the “network”. This unfixed societal meaning exposes the possibility of alternate lives, other possible means of existence and self-understanding which exist as a counter-narrative to that which has previously been understood as fixed. The possibility of other realities, of some deeper unseen level of connectivity which exists beneath the visible, is a recurrent theme in DeLillo’s work. The motel provides a locus for its investigation but as transitionality has become an accepted means of understanding spatiality it has become an internalised drive in figures such as

¹⁶⁹ DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) pp. 186 – 187.

¹⁷⁰ Compare this concept of the stripping down of identity to the “Bodywork” carried out by Lauren Hartke in *The Body Artist*. There was bodywork to resume, her regimen of cat stretch and methodical contortion. She worked from the spine outward, moving along the floor on all fours, and she felt her aorta recoil to every blood surge... She stuck out her tongue and panted in tightly timed sequence, internally timed... But the world was lost inside her.” DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) p. 37.

¹⁷¹ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990).

¹⁷² *Ibid* p. 205.

Bell.¹⁷³ His film in *Americana* is a meditation on the fragmentary nature of a society which has embraced transitionality.

There were many visions in the land, all fragments of the exploded dream... Something else was left over for the rest of us, or some of the rest of us, and it was the dream of the good life, innocent enough, simple enough on the surface,...It encompassed all those things which all people are said to want, materials and objects and the shadows they cast, and yet the dream had its complexities, its edges of illusion and self-deception, an implication of serio-comic death... The dream made no allowance for the truth beneath the symbols, for the interlinear notes, the presence of something black (and somehow very funny) at the mirror rim of ones awareness. This was difficult at times... One thinks of echoes. One thinks of an image made in the image and likeness of images. It was that complex.¹⁷⁴

Bell is a product of the period at which transitional spaces such as the motel began to flourish in America, the 1950s, and as such he is fully enmeshed within the visual lexicon and societal grammar which supported that change. Being so imbued with this symbolic understanding of consumption and the visual influences both the form his film takes and the spaces in which he attempts to make it. Bell's only means of exploring his personal and societal past are cinematic and he attempts to utilise the visual symbolism of film to solidify his sense of individuality. This is exactly what Bell does, meditating on the symbols of his past in an attempt to unpick the strands of his identity and therefore his role in the network of transitional society. It is fitting that these attempts take place in the hotel/motel as Bell is attempting to access a counter-narrative. Within the space of the motel the divisions between self and other are weak, free of the buttressing effect of societal observation. He is able to play out his fantasies and memories in a space which suggests the possibility of other selves on the "mirror rim of ones awareness."

In *Mao II*¹⁷⁵ the extent to which the permeable membrane separating the motel from society can be traversed from either direction is investigated. The space has been depicted as a site for

¹⁷³ The internalisation of the transitional drive is related to the internalisation of the panoptic gaze discussed in *Discipline and Punish*. "...the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power...this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers." Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 201.

¹⁷⁴ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 129.

¹⁷⁵ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992).

the escaping of the narrative of society and the roles it assigns.¹⁷⁶ However in *Mao II* it is suggested that this use of the space as a portal to shift between societal roles may be inverted, manipulated to act as a site to reintegrate those that have slipped beyond the boundaries of societal norms. In the novel Karen, whose membership of the Moonies¹⁷⁷ marks her as a figure that has located herself outside the understood societal narrative. She is abducted by her family and taken from motel to motel within which she is deprogrammed.¹⁷⁸ This process forces her to return to her former life and the socially acceptable role she had been assigned. Just as in Bentham's panopticon the interplay between shown and hidden in the motel makes it possible to rehabilitate a societal delinquent and reintegrate them into the accepted societal narrative.¹⁷⁹

They stuffed her in a car and took her to a motel room, where her father sat in a fire-retardant chair, oddly in his stocking feet. There was a lot of emotional talk, tabloid type reassurances about love and mother and home, and she listened craftily, moved and bored more or less together, and Daddy cried a little and kissed her and put on his shoes and then left with Rick, who'd put his hands in her panties when they were ten, a memory that hung between them like the musky scent of a sniffed finger.¹⁸⁰

The imagery in this scene regarding Karen's father in particular is deeply traditional to the extent that it is almost nostalgic. Primarily comforting images such as the father in stocking feet in a chair displaying love and concern for his daughter suggest the comfort, support and connection to a sense of self connected to others which mass society offers. This cosy picture of familial concern is undermined by phrases such as "tabloid type assurances" which highlights the constructed nature of these images as depthless visual representations.¹⁸¹ The space of the motel both acts as a location for the solidification of the accepted social narrative and simultaneously undermines that narrative. The permeability of the boundaries between

¹⁷⁶ The use of the space by David Bell in *Americana* to attempt to piece together an identity free of his life within the network illustrates this.

¹⁷⁷ A common nickname for The Unification Church.

¹⁷⁸ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) pp. 79 – 84.

¹⁷⁹ Foucault fully discusses the role of the delinquent and the way in which he is related to wider society. "The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside. It takes back with one hand what it seems to exclude with the other. It saves everything, including what it punishes... In this panoptic society of which incarceration it is the omnipresent armature, the delinquent is not outside the law; he is, from the very outset, in the law, at the very heart of the law, or at least in the midst of those mechanisms that transfer the individual imperceptibly from discipline to the law, from deviation to offence" Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 301

¹⁸⁰ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 79.

¹⁸¹ The relationship between the image and the production of space is found throughout Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

the transitional space and all other elements of the network of mass society make it capable of fulfilling these multiple roles

The Dangers of Transitional Dwelling

Themes of conspiracy, consumerism and death are prevalent throughout DeLillo's investigation of transitional spaces.¹⁸² In the final scene of *White Noise*¹⁸³ all these factors collide within a motel room. Academic Jack Gladney confronts the man that has been sleeping with his wife and selling her a drug, Dylar, which she takes to combat the fear of death she shares with Gladney. The drug's unusual side effects come to the fore in this encounter, side effects Gladney's wife Babette describes earlier in the novel.

I could die. I could live but my brain could die. The left side of my brain could die but the right side could live. This would mean that the left side of my body would live but the right side would die. There were many grim spectres. I could walk sideways but not forward. I could not distinguish words from things,¹⁸⁴

The side effects described in the first half of the quote are concerned with a breakdown of the spatial. The victim / patient's basic spatial understanding could be caused to collapse producing a disorientating effect similar to the foreshortening of space and time discussed in *Dangling Man* when that figure first appeared.¹⁸⁵ The erosion of a concrete sense of personal and social spatiality is a side effect of both the drug and the motel. The potential for multiple identities and spatial understandings the motel allows has been shown to have a similarly disorienting and anxiety inducing effect on those within it. The transitionality of the motel as the site in which DeLillo's characters retreat to escape their lives and explore their fantasies and memories comes to the fore in *White Noise*'s motel scene. Two characters that have both taken Dylar experience the motel in a disjointed and fragmentary manner. This experience of the motel reflects the fragmentary awareness of identity generally experienced in the motel and the cinematic reconstruction of personal history seen in *Americana*.

It took a while to find the motel, a one-storey building set against the concrete pier of an elevated roadway. It was called the Roadway Motel.

¹⁸² These themes are particularly prevalent in Chapter 5: The Highway.

¹⁸³ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1985).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid p. 193.

¹⁸⁵ Compare this disorientating time / space effect with the seeming collapse of time within the site of the alleyway and during the appearance of the fallen man in Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007).

Transient pleasures, drastic measures.

... I sensed I was part of a network of structures and channels. I knew the precise nature of events. I was moving closer to things in their actual state as I approached a violence, a smashing intensity...¹⁸⁶

Just as the quote from *Americana* regarding the motel 'at the heart of every man' is essential to understanding DeLillo's use of that space, this quote further explores its spatial placement and larger thematic importance. As with all motels it is placed near to the network of roads that make up the "Roadway".¹⁸⁷ It is a place of both concrete and movement which exists on the outskirts of society, connected to it and yet separate. The term "Transient Pleasures, drastic measures" suggests a great number of the spatial connotations of the site as it is depicted by DeLillo. It is the transient nature of that space that propagates its existence.¹⁸⁸ It exists on the periphery of society, along highways through which all societal elements pass. This explains Gladney's sense on entering the motel of feeling "part of a network of structures and channels." The motel is a node within the wider transitional society through which information passes and as such it plays a part in defining the meaning of the transitional society just as the city focussed the meaning of the traditional and inner-directed societies.¹⁸⁹ The breakdown of spatial certainty caused by both Dylar and the motel frees the user from the bounds of societal space. The drug has placed Gladney outside of the confines of time and space and exposed the reality of the motel to him. He sees that it is a transitional site made up of fragmentary information regarding society, self and space in which structures and boundaries break down. Within this room Gladney comes face to face with Mink, the man that has been sleeping with his wife, who fears death and is addicted to the unreality Dylar offers. In short Gladney comes face to face with his alternate self.¹⁹⁰ Mink represents the danger of existing solely in transitional space devoid of connections to more solid forms such as history and tradition. He is unable to distinguish anymore between time or space, reality or unreality, image or object. Mink is a warning against allowing the transitional form

¹⁸⁶ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 304 – 305.

¹⁸⁷ The Roadway is clearly a concept connected to the highway. See Chapter 5.

¹⁸⁸ In *The Organization Man* William H Whyte studies the growth of the organization in America in the 1950s and highlights its embrace of transience and rootlessness. In doing so he shows the growth of the individual as an entity whilst also highlighting the standardised form of society this can create. "And is this not the whole drift of our society? We are not interchangeable in the sense of being without differences but in the externals of existence we are united by a culture of increasing mobility. The more people move about, the more similar the American environments become and the more similar they become, the easier it is to move about." Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1960) p. 255.

¹⁸⁹ See the earlier discussion of other-direction and for a full description of inner and tradition direction see Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁹⁰ Compare this encounter with the earlier discussion of losing a sense of individual identity "you can easily forget who you are here; you can sit on your bed and become *man sitting on bed*" DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 257.

manifested by the motel to overtake one's self, letting it shape one's perception and interaction with others. By accepting the transitional state as the norm, internalising it, the relationships between self and other, the image and the object, the narrative and the counter-narrative become confused. This understanding of transitionality and the warning it brings may already be too late as Mink is only an extreme example of the process of internalisation that both Gladney and the society he exists within have already begun. Transitionality is being rapidly internalised, shaping social forms and structures in such a manner that they become self-perpetuating¹⁹¹. The proliferation of these homogenised repetitive spaces is a recurrent theme in the discussion of transitional spaces. The suburbs, the highway, the airport, all of these spaces are connected thematically and spatially. They are all forms of this repetitive space born of the desire for motion and progress and all act as a site for the investigation of the disconnection between personal and social identity.

¹⁹¹ The self-perpetuating nature of transitional spaces connected to the Lefebvre's discussion of repetitious space. Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of workers) associated with instruments which are duplicatable and designed to duplicate: machines, bulldozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on. Are these spaces interchangeable because they are homologous? Or are they homogenous so that they can be exchanged, bought and sold, with the only difference between them being those assessable in money – i.e. quantifiable – terms (as volumes, distances, etc)? At all events, repetition reigns supreme." Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

Chapter 4: The Suburbs

One of the most prominent physical manifestations of the transitional spatial impulse in DeLillo's writing is the suburb. That space becomes emblematic of a shift away from the traditional fixed urban site towards a more mobile and decentralised societal spatiality. DeLillo uses the suburb throughout his work to illustrate the development of the consumer driven, rootless society which originated in the 1950s and raised questions of identity and cultural guidance. His examination of this space in *Underworld*¹⁹² provides both an insight into the socio-spatial realities of suburban living in the 1950s and undermines the nostalgic connotations of that space as clean, new and modern. His depiction of a seemingly exemplary scene of 1950s suburban life is mirrored by a recollection of the same space in a contemporary setting which exposes the troubling duality at the heart of suburban life between the hidden and the seen. Foucault's discussion of the panopticon provides a useful analogy for this facet of suburban space, the complexity of societal visibility it illustrates informing the discussion of the suburb and other transitional social spaces. The space of the suburb as it was delineated in both the theoretical work of the 1950s and depicted in *Underworld* complicates questions of identity and spatial control. These concepts become further confused by the expanded role of technology and consumerism

The Suburban Transient

Mobility, consumption, new materials and speed are all key elements of the transitional space of the suburbs, a space which flourished in the post World War Two period. Its impetus toward progress and motion at the expense of the past made it the most desirable residence for the forward facing 1950s individual¹⁹³. Whyte explores the sense of the transitional at the heart of the other-directed individuals which form the adaptive and shifting society of the suburb.

... the problem of 'rootlessness'. It is a term that needs re-examination. Are the transients a rootless people? If by roots we mean the complex of geographical and family ties that has historically knitted Americans to local society, these young transients are almost entirely rootless. They are very much aware of the fact.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998).

¹⁹³ See Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) p. 105 on the creation of suburban culture.

¹⁹⁴ Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man*, 1956 p. 265.

The use of the term “transients” to describe those that live in the suburbs highlights the rootlessness of this societal space. The suburb exemplifies a space in which identity and societal roles are connected not to history and tradition but to peer observation and the visual realm of advertising and the mass media. Societal meaning and guidance are disseminated throughout the group structure via a complex network of symbols and associations. To be able to exist within this society one must embrace one’s own personal transience, as Whyte notes, “They must, in short, make a home of the home away from home, and to accomplish this feat they must act in the present.”¹⁹⁵ The suburb as a locus of this form of transience provides DeLillo a space within which to explore questions of societal and personal identity within the context of the wider network of symbols and meanings that informs the societal narrative whilst suggesting the potential of a counter-narrative.

Underworld’s depiction of 1950s suburbia illustrates the experience of dwelling¹⁹⁶ within that space in that period and provides a basis for its further investigation. In the chapter “Better things for better living through Chemistry”¹⁹⁷ DeLillo suggests multiple facets of suburban life in the 1950s. The section “October 8, 1957”¹⁹⁸ examines an evening in the life of the Deming family, Erica, Rick and their son Eric. Eric Deming has previously been introduced in the novel as an adult and as such he is able to provide a retrospective opinion on his childhood in the 1950s.

The placid nineteen-fifties. Everybody dressed and spoke the same way. It was all kitchens and cars and TV sets. Where’s the Pepsodent mom? ...Dad’s in the Breezeway washing the car. Meanwhile way out here they were putting troops in trenches for nuclear war games. Fireballs roaring right above them.¹⁹⁹

This quote provides a seemingly nostalgic view of the 1950s. Like all forms of nostalgia it misremembers, replacing the reality of that period with a simulation created from a combination of positivist memories and cultural associations. The anti-historical nature of the suburb and its connection to consumption and its visual element advertising make it a ripe site

¹⁹⁵ Ibid p. 274.

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger tackles the question of “What is it to dwell?” and suggests that “We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal. Still, not every building is a dwelling. Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations are buildings but not dwellings; railway stations and highways, dams and market halls are built, but they are not dwelling places. Even so, these buildings are in the domain of our dwelling.” Heidegger, M., ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ (1951), in *Poetry Language Thought* (New York, Harper Colophon, 1971) p. 145.

¹⁹⁷ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 499.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid p. 513.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid p. 410.

for exploring nostalgia. In his *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism*²⁰⁰ Fredric Jameson explores the connection between nostalgia and the anti-historic nature of American society as exemplified by the suburb. He also considers the manner in which those spaces are codified as nostalgic sites in contemporary society.²⁰¹ Through a discussion of nostalgia cinema²⁰² Jameson provides a means of thinking critically about the nostalgic interpretation of 1950s spatiality. The relationship between the visual culture of transitional space²⁰³ and the cinematic focus on the visual makes this particularly apt.

Faced with these ultimate objects – our social, historical and existential present, and the past as “referent” – the incompatibility of a postmodernist “nostalgia” art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. The contradiction propels this mode, however, into complex and interesting new formal inventiveness; it being understood that the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned “representation” of historical content, but instead approached the “past” through stylistic connotation, conveying “pastness” by the glossy qualities of the image, and “1930s-ness” or “1950s-ness”...²⁰⁴

Eric Deming’s seemingly positive recollection of the suburb and motel must be questioned. It is both nostalgic and yet undermines its own nostalgia by going on to highlight the period’s more troubling aspects such as the development of nuclear technology²⁰⁵ and the paranoia it created. Jameson’s discussion of the nature of nostalgia and an awareness of the relationship between transitional spaces and the counter-narrative suggest the suggestion of positivity in Eric’s recollection are a self-perpetuating falsehood. His firsthand experience of 1950s

²⁰⁰ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991).

²⁰¹ Consider in relation to the decline of the motel and other roadside architecture. “So much has been lost; only some have been saved. These structures were the history of suburbia, and we need to understand them.” Hess, A., *Google Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2004) p. 14.

²⁰² Nostalgia cinema is explored by DeLillo in *Americana* as a means of investigating the ability of an individual to understand their personal history through the creation of a biographical film. Questions of the authenticity of memory and the impossibility of recreating or fully capturing any element of the past fully is raised there in a manner which supports Jameson’s discussion of nostalgia here. See the previous chapter for more on the nostalgic film in that novel.

²⁰³ The role of the consumable image to supporting the disconnected nostalgic view as a means to mask reality is discussed by Lefebvre “Take images, for example: photographs, advertisements, films. Can images of this kind really be expected to expose errors concerning space? Hardly. Where there is error or illusion, the image is more likely to secrete it and reinforce it than reveal it.” Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 96.

²⁰⁴ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 19.

²⁰⁵ The connections between technology and fear in *Underworld* are frequently connected to military hardware and the threat of nuclear war. See the discussion of the planes in Klara Sax art piece (p. 62 – 84); The work of Matty Shay in “The Pocket” (p. 401); Lenny Bruce’s joke (p. 508) and Charles Wainwright Jr’s connection to the B52 Bomber (pp. 641 – 656) .

suburbia is manifested as a recitation of brand names and spaces which reflected the socio-spatial structure of the period such as the breezeway. These recollections of spatial connections and consumer products influence his description of the suburb in later life. By juxtaposing his experience with those of his mother and father DeLillo produces a counterpoint to Eric's memories. This variety of opinions and connections provides a sense of the complexity of socio-spatial reality of the 1950s.

From the kitchen window she could see the lawn, neat and trimmed, low hedged, open and approachable. The trees at the edge of the lawn were new, like everything else in the area. All up and down the curving streets there were young trees and small new box shrubs and a sense of openness, a sense of seeing everything there is to see at a single glance with nothing shrouded or walled or protected from the glare.

Nothing shrouded or kept secret except for young Eric, who sat in his room behind drawn fibreglass curtains jerking off into a condom. He liked using a condom because it had a sleek metallic shimmer, like his favourite weapons system, the Honest John, a surface-to-surface missile with a warhead that carried yields of up to forty kilotons.²⁰⁶

Eric's mother's observations of the suburban life of the 1950s provide a viewpoint that is wholeheartedly invested in suburban life. Her description of openness and the new, of complete societal visibility²⁰⁷ is suggestive of a positivist approach to transitionality. The focus on everything in the suburb being "new" and "like everything else in the area", whilst being comforting to Erica Deming, is also suggestive of the rootless nature of the suburb which reflects 1950s anti-historical nature.²⁰⁸ It is depicted in this quote as a site which focuses upon the present in terms of materials and attitudes²⁰⁹. This focus on the present and the "more of same"²¹⁰ attitude it encourages is reflective of the manner in which these spaces

²⁰⁶ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 514.

²⁰⁷ The question of societal visibility suggests Foucault's "Visibility is a trap" as will be explored later in this chapter. Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 200.

²⁰⁸ Consider this in relation to Lefebvre's discussion of repetitious space. Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

²⁰⁹ If one considers Lefebvre's division between a work and a product the suburb clearly falls into the later bracket. "Can a space of this kind really still be described as a "work"? There is an overwhelming case for saying that it is a product *strictu sensu*: it is reproducible and it is the result of repetitive actions." Ibid p. 75.

²¹⁰ Whyte uses the term "more of same" to denote an approach to society and space that is happy with things as they are and wants them to continue in that manner. "Perhaps contemporaryism would be a better word than conservatism to describe this posture. The present, more than the past, is their model; while they share the characteristic American faith in the future also, they see it as more of same." Whyte, W. H., *Organization Man, The* (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1956) p. 65.

revel in their homogeneity.²¹¹ This may be understood in relation to what Henri Lefebvre describes as “abstract space”.

...the architectural and urbanistic space of modernity tends precisely towards this homogenous state of affairs, towards a place of confusion and fusion... Everything is alike. Localization – and lateralization – are no more. Signifier and signified, marks and markers, are added after the fact – as decorations, so to speak. This reinforces, if possible, the feeling of desertedness, and adds to the malaise²¹²

The malaise described by Lefebvre in relation to living within the homogenous space of the suburb becomes more apparent as DeLillo’s depiction of that space moves beyond the 1950s and the nostalgic view of that period is undermined. The suburb as a site of failed potential and confused identity is repeatedly found in DeLillo’s writing. This socio-spatial homogeneity is enabled and encouraged by the repetitive nature of both the suburbs’ architectural design and use of materials²¹³. DeLillo depicts the questioning of the nostalgic emphasis on this form of space and society as taking place both retrospectively and during that period. In Erica Deming’s description of her suburban existence her seemingly positive interpretation of societal openness and visibility is negated by its juxtaposition with activities which are hidden and invisible taking place in society, indeed in her own home²¹⁴. The description of the suburb by Erica as a space where one is capable of “seeing everything there is to see at a single glance with nothing shrouded or walled or protected from the glare” suggests a connection to the motel space and with it Foucault’s “visibility is a trap²¹⁵” Her assertion that nothing is hidden is instantly undermined by the description of her son. Eric’s activities are deeply suggestive of the counter-narrative, taking place in the secrecy of his bedroom behind the “fibreglass curtains” and combine sex, violence, technology and consumption. The development of the new materials such as fibreglass and latex which so fascinate Eric facilitated new spatial forms and encouraged new societal models. Concrete, fibreglass and sheet glass allow the production of spatial forms that facilitate movement and

²¹¹ As the rest of this work will show, Lefebvre’s concept of abstract space with its tendency toward homogeneity correlates with the numerous transitional spaces that DeLillo considers. The motel, the suburb, the highway and the airport all tend toward homogeneity.

²¹² Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (1991) p. 200.

²¹³ The materials that are used to construct transitional space refers to both the societal factors and the more physical. Frank Lloyd Wright discusses how this allowed architectural space to be more open. “Instead of post and beam construction, the usual box building, you now have a new sense of building construction by way of the cantilever and continuity.” Lloyd Wright, F., ‘The Destruction of the Box’ from an address to the Junior Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, New York City, 1952 in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings* (New York, Meridian Books, 1960) p. 285.

²¹⁴ The question of visibility and invisibility is intimately connected to Foucault’s discussion of the panopticon in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

²¹⁵ Ibid p. 200.

openness²¹⁶. The negative outcome of this openness and movement is the fear of both what is being shown and what is hidden. The mention of these new materials in such close proximity to the discussion of military hardware²¹⁷ is interesting as they both illustrate the importance of scientific advancement to socio-spatial progression. Just as the invention of the motor car led to the development of the highway system, the motel and other roadside architecture, advances in military hardware and materials influenced the forms of cultural space and the culture of anxiety and fear. The depiction of military hardware in *Underworld* traces a descent from positivity through paranoia and fear to neglect and malaise, only to be resurrected using ““nostalgia” art language”²¹⁸. One is able to trace the path of the plane Long Tall Sally²¹⁹ throughout *Underworld*.²²⁰ The plane first appears in the novel as part of an art piece being constructed in the desert.²²¹ It has been stripped of its meaning as a military vehicle, all its tools of warfare having been removed, and is now part of a large art piece. It is a referent in a larger language of art created by the postmodern artist Klara Sax.

She said, “Some of the planes had markings painted on the nose. Emblems, unit insignia, some with figures, an animal mascot snarling and dripping juices from its mouth and jowls... And some with women. Because it’s all about luck, isn’t it? The sexy woman painted on the nose is a charm against death. We may want to place this whole business in some bottom pit of nostalgia but in fact the men who flew these planes, and we are talking about high alert and distant early warning, we are talking about the edge of everything – well, I think they lived in a closed world with its particular omens and symbols...”²²²

²¹⁶ As the discussion of Google architecture and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright suggest the introduction of new materials allowed new architectural forms to encourage the break down of the division between internal and external.

²¹⁷ The role of military hardware in *Underworld* reflects an interest in that topic found throughout DeLillo’s writing. In *Libra* Lee Harvey Oswald’s military training and his rifle in the context of the Cold War; The mystery of the Airborne Toxic event in *White Noise*; Terrorism and paramilitary action in *Players*; *Running Dogs* interest in the Military Industrial complex and Hitler; Football and Nuclear War in *Endzone*; the planning of Iraq War in *Point Omega*.

²¹⁸ See Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 19 for more on nostalgic art language.

²¹⁹ The plane “Long Tall Sally first appears in DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) on p. 66. The discussion of the planes used in Klara Sax’ art piece will be further discussed in Chapter 7: The Airport.

²²⁰ This aircraft’s movement through the space and time of the novel mirrors the trajectory of the totemic baseball, both illustrating the shifting focus of society and its meaning throughout the novel.

²²¹ The desert is a complex space in DeLillo’s writing, semi-mystic. It is the location for a mysterious language cult in *The Names* and is a site to retreat to in *Point Omega*. “The desert was clairvoyant, this is what he’d always believed, that the landscape unravels and reveals, it knows the future as well as the past.” DeLillo, D., *Point Omega* (London, Picador, 2010) p. 87.

²²² DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 77 – 78.

Klara Sax understands art as a tool which may be used to excavate personal and social history.²²³ Her understanding of the plane and its former use is relatively accurate, as the later depiction of the plane during its intended use shows²²⁴, yet that aspect of the plane only presents one facet of its role in her larger art language. The plane and the crew that flew within it are connected to the wider concept of the loss of positivity and the increasing malaise of this period. One of the crew of the plane is Charles Wainwright Jr.; also known as Chuckie, who also appears as a child whose father negotiates the sale of the novel's central object, the baseball.²²⁵ The potential that Chuckie's father sees in his son in those scenes is shown to have been unfounded. To Charles Sr. the ball was symbolic of family, history and heritage and its loss is suggestive of the loss of connection to those identity shaping factors. The loss of heritage and the connection to a rooted identity it provides leads to the unfocused and directionless adult that Chuckie becomes:

No, he didn't blame his parents for everything that had gone wrong. Chuckie was misery enough on his own recognizance. But he couldn't think of his father without regretting the loss of the one thing he'd wanted to maintain between them. That was the baseball his dad had given him as a trust, a gift, a peace offering, a form of desperate love and spiritual hand-me-down.

The ball he'd more or less lost."²²⁶

The questions of identity, societal connectivity and materials raised by Klara Sax' art piece are seen throughout DeLillo's exploration of the suburb. Erica Deming's self deception to facilitate a positive interpretation of the suburb is indicative of the pliant acceptance of the transitional nature of self and society which became a hallmark of this societal spatiality in this period. However, she undermines her own societal view by acknowledging the hidden relationship between fear and technology. Consumption and commercial branding provide a framework within which she is able to maintain stability and comfort in order to stave off this underlying knowledge of the instability of a transitional, mobile and open society.²²⁷

All the things around her were important. Things and words. Words to believe in and live by.

²²³ Compare this use of art to the use of Lauren Hartke's "bodyworks" in *The Body Artist*. DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) p. 37.

²²⁴ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 606 – 616.

²²⁵ Ibid pp. 641 – 656.

²²⁶ Ibid p. 611.

²²⁷ The use of consumption and the structure of the consumer society to comfort and ameliorate the fear over the unseen counter narrative is also apparent in DeLillo's discussion of the supermarkets role in the contemporary suburban space in *White Noise* as discussed later in this chapter.

Breezeway

Car Pools

Crisper

Bridge Parties

Sectional

Broadloom

When she finished up in the kitchen she decided to vacuum the living room rug but then realized this would make her bad mood worse. She'd recently bought a new satellite-shaped vacuum cleaner that she loved to push across the room because it hummed softly and seemed futuristic and hopeful but she was forced to regard it ruefully now, after Sputnik, a clunky object filled with self-remorse.²²⁸

The unseen threat of the counter-narrative with its technology connected to sex and death looms over her suburban life. It is a presence she attempt to ignore through focussing on the advancements of consumerism and technology as they benefit her. However the technology and materials she consumes and utilises to further the transitional existence are implicitly connected to this unseen threat. Whilst she is aware of this only on the edge of her perception, her son is actively considering the connections between death, sex and technology in the room above her. He is a precursor to those figures in DeLillo that question the nature of consumer driven society and its impact on personal identity.

Consumption in the Suburb

The relationship between the consumer, consumption and the space of society is a major factor in DeLillo's depiction of suburban spaces. The consumer shapes society by utilising the existing languages, be they nostalgic art language²²⁹ or the symbolic language of advertising. The suburban dweller of the 1950s is the progenitor of this form of consumer / producer. This is made apparent in Eric Deming's troubled understanding of his home, the society it represents and his place within it. He is aware of this background hum of societal connections even as his mother closes her ears to it. Whilst she focuses on the surface meaning of images and symbols he is beginning to become aware of their potential hidden meanings.

He went into the Kitchen and opened the fridge, just to see what was going on in there. The bright colors, the product names and logos, the array of familiar shapes... But there was something else as well, faintly unnerving. The throb perhaps. Maybe it was the informational flow contained in that endless motorized throb.²³⁰

²²⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 520.

²²⁹ See Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991).

²³⁰ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 517 – 518.

This background throb is the white noise of the suburbs, the stream of information regarding products, societal connections and cultural direction. Eric has grown up enmeshed in the consumer driven suburban society and as such his understanding of it differs from that of his mother or father. He makes no differentiation between positive or negative associations in this section, he simply accepts the connections between elements of society and utilises them as he wishes.²³¹ In many respects Eric is an exemplar of a consumer / producer,²³² he consumes that which the culture provides him with and in doing so he forges further connections and associations, thus producing the society in which he exists. De Certeau illustrates the manner in which this form of societal production continues to function as the rootless, non-linear structure of the suburb provided a means of understanding contemporary spatiality as a whole.

The “making” in question is a production, a *poiesis* – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of “production” (television, urban development, commerce, etc.), and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves “consumers” any *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous and spectacular production corresponds *another* production called “consumption.” The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order.²³³

Eric’s awareness of the factors that drive his desire to consume or the manner in which his consumption shapes his society is limited. Despite this, as a figure that has grown-up within the space of consumption he is instinctively able to interact with it and utilise it for his own means. The connections between sex, technology and consumption present in this scene are

²³¹ In *The Practice of Everyday Life* De Certeau uses the term *bricolage* in relation to various spatial practices, a good example being reading. “In order to characterize this activity of reading, one can resort to several models. It can be considered as a form of the *bricolage* Lévi-Strauss analyzes as a feature of “the savage mind”, that is, an arrangement made with “the materials at hand,” a production “that has no relationship to the project” and which readjusts “the residues of previous construction and destruction.”” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

²³² Galbraith discusses the manner in which consumption and production became part of the same self-reflexive process in the transitional society. “That wants are, in fact, the fruit of production will now be denied by few serious scholars ... One man’s consumption becomes his neighbour’s wish. This already means that the process by which wants are satisfied is also the process by which wants are created. The more wants that are satisfied the more new ones are born.” Galbraith, J. K., *Affluent Society*, *The* (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1958) p. 132.

²³³ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) pp. xii – xiii. This concept is also connected to DeCerteau’s discussion of *bricolage* earlier in this section.

all utilised by Eric with no hesitation, the unease they elicit in his mother is not an issue for him; he inherently understands the covert connections that exist beneath surface associations. The hidden meaning of consumption and its ability to permeate societal space reflects the manner in which the counter-narrative takes root in this period, that society is a façade hiding a more complex and troubling truth. Eric's feelings about this dual level of meaning is complex, he finds both the falsity of surface meanings and potential secret meanings appealing, indeed the element of falsehood in this dynamic provides him with great pleasure. The masking of a hidden truth with a created facade is something he relishes as becomes apparent in his experiments with the connection between society, façade, materials and sex.

The face in the picture was all painted mouth and smudgy lashes and at a certain point in the furtherance of his business Eric deflected his attention from the swooping breasts and focused on the facial Jayne, on her eyebrows and lashes and puckered lips. The breasts were real, the face was put together out of a thousand thermoplastic things. And in the evolving scan of his eros, it was the masking waxes, liners, glosses and creams that became the soft moist mechanism of release.²³⁴

He does not experience the anxiety his mother feels; the real and the unreal, the hidden and the seen, are all interchangeable elements that Eric is able to utilise and understand implicitly. He is aware that unseen systems and networks exert a level of control over his life yet he is comfortable with this knowledge, accepting it as the norm. He exemplifies Riesman's other-directed individual with his radar sense guiding him through a network of associations and connections that are implicit rather than explicit²³⁵. However even a transitional adept such as Eric sometimes experiences a level of discomfort in his inability to control the direction of these forces or to understand completely where they lie.

The Academic Suburb

Consumerism as a means of masking the potential awareness of a counter-narrative is central to the suburban experience of the 1950s as depicted in *Underworld*²³⁶. This connection is

²³⁴ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 515.

²³⁵ Riesman's discussion of the "psychological gyroscope" which assisted the other-directed individual in navigating society has already been discussed. See Riesman, D., *Lonely Crowd, The* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001) p. 16.

²³⁶ Erica Deming is the character perhaps guiltiest of using consumerism to facilitate a comfortable existence although she is far from alone.

further explored in *White Noise*²³⁷ wherein the role of consumption to societal cohesion is explored as it relates to the supermarket and wider society. The novel is set in the small town of Blacksmith which has grown up around a university and is a form of educational suburb. Blacksmith is described as being unlike a city as it is somewhere that one goes “to avoid situations. Cities are full of situations.”²³⁸ In this respect it is like the suburb, a space outside of the confines of the understood grammar of the city. DeLillo’s depiction of this campus town illustrates the socio-spatial similarities it shares with the suburb as opposed to the more fixed, historically rooted city space. Whyte illustrates that a major factor of the transitional nature of the suburb as it originated in the 1950s was the shared transient lifestyle of those that dwelt there.

They are communities made in his image...for many a resident the curving super-blocks of suburbia are the end of a long road from the city wards to middle-class respectability. But it is the young organization man who is dominant.²³⁹

The figures that have embraced transitionality as a means of progress are those that shape the transitional space. They reflect the socio-spatial drives that promote anti-historicism and progress and in turn they shape the suburbs around them. Similarly there is shown to be a shared group which is shaped by and, in turn shapes, the academic suburb of Blacksmith. Just as the mobile lifestyle of the young executives of the 1950s influenced the form of the space they dwelt in, the transient nature of the student population produces a sense of transience in the space which they inhabit.

The station wagons arrived at noon, a long shining line that coursed through the west campus... As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; the stereo sets, radios, personal computers; small refrigerators and table ranges; the cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags –onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut crème patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints.

²³⁷ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986).

²³⁸ Ibid p. 11.

²³⁹ Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) p. 246.

I've witnessed this spectacle every September for twenty-one years. It is a brilliant event, invariably... The parents stand sun-dazed near their automobiles, seeing images of themselves in every direction...²⁴⁰

If one compares this description of the educational town to the description of the suburb many similarities become apparent.²⁴¹ The duplication of interests being interpreted as a duplication of the self which is supported by the shared knowledge and ownership of products reflects the consumer driven, peer guided nature of the suburb. They judge one another through their consumption and their willingness / ability to display this consumption.²⁴² Connections of heritage, history and tradition are secondary to outwardly appearing to be of this new consumer class. Both the parents and students in this scene reflect and enforce each others views and tastes in a manner which solidifies the society which they inhabit. As such it is not the individuals themselves that are important in this equation. The figures themselves are interchangeable. It is expected and desired that those in the suburb will move on to just as it is expected that the departure and arrival of new students will be an annual event.²⁴³

Consumerism is an essential element in cementing the spatial and social network of this suburban setting. Consumption and visible societal production through consumption is a continuous process and as such the space of the supermarket is a vital element of understanding suburban experience. The motion of figures through this space and the impact it has on them makes them aware of their socio-spatial existence as rootless. It is within the

²⁴⁰ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 3 – 4.

²⁴¹ The manner in which the interactions of both the students and the parents are described is reminiscent of Whyte's description of the manner in which the suburbanites of the 1950s interacted with one another. "The groups are temporary, in a sense, for the cast of characters is always shifting. Their patterns of behaviour, however, have an extraordinary permanence, and these patterns have an influence on the individual quite as powerful as the traditional group, and in many respects more so." Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) p. 304.

²⁴² To be seen to be consumer as part of the transient society is connected to production. The visibility of this consumption is a vital element of that process. "Consumer wants can have bizarre, frivolous, or even immoral origins... However, the argument has been carried farther... Professor Duesenberry, has stated explicitly that 'ours is a society in which one of the principal social goals is a higher standard of living... [This] has... great significance for the theory of consumption... the desire to get superior goods takes on a life of its own. It provides a drive to higher expenditure which may even be stronger than that arising out of the needs which are supposed to be satisfied by that expenditure.'²⁴² The implications of this view are impressive. The notion of independently established need now sinks into the background... The more that is produced the more that must be owned in order to maintain the appropriate prestige... the production of goods creates the wants that the goods are presumed to satisfy." Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society* (London, Penguin, 1958) pp. 132 – 133.

²⁴³ Galbraith considers this in relation to consumption and the suburban society. "And is not this the whole drift of our society? We are not interchangeable in the sense of being people without differences, but in the externals of existence we are united by a culture increasingly national. And this is part of the momentum of mobility. The more people move about, the more similar the American environments become and the more similar they become, the easier it is to move about." Ibid p. 255. This quote both illustrates the strength of the transitional society, the reason it is able to expand so successfully and also suggests the tendency toward homogeneity discussed by Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*.

space of the supermarket that an awareness of the language which these transient individuals are using comes to the fore.

He helped Babette push her loaded cart. I heard him say to her, “Tibetans believe there is a transitional state between death and rebirth. Death is a waiting period, basically... “That’s what I think of whenever I come in here. This place recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, its a gateway or pathway. Look how bright. It’s full of psychic data.”

My wife smiled at him

“Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material. But it is psychic data, absolutely. The large doors slide open, they close unbidden. Energy waves, incident radiation. All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability. Not that we would want to, not that any useful purpose would be served.²⁴⁴

The importance of the supermarket to the experience of the characters in *White Noise* illustrates the necessity of the observable consumption of products and symbols to the transitional society. It is within this space that individuals are most aware of the background hum of the cultural language of symbols and advertising that Eric is first dimly aware of as the throb of his refrigerator.²⁴⁵ Whereas in the 1950s the refrigerator was in the home and the throb was small, by the 1970s in the supermarket the throb has become vast.

I realized the place was awash in noise. The toneless systems, the jangle and skid of carts, the loudspeaker and coffee-making machines, the cries of children. And over it all, or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension.²⁴⁶

The scale which this cultural white noise has reached illustrates the extent to which consumption and the transitional culture which it supports has become enmeshed in society. As the transitional nature of the suburb has become commonplace and its societal connections to other transitional spaces have expanded²⁴⁷, so the scale of consumption has increased. The

²⁴⁴ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 37 – 38.

²⁴⁵ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 518.

²⁴⁶ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 36.

²⁴⁷ The concept of the world growing larger is discussed in Chapter: 7: The Airport regarding the technology of air travel.

description of the suburb in *Underworld*²⁴⁸ illustrates consumption's role as both a societal drive and a means of understanding oneself and one's societal function. The depiction of the supermarket in *White Noise* highlights the degree to which the societal importance of consumption has expanded as the scale of consumption has increased.

It seemed to me that Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plenitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well-being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls – it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening.²⁴⁹

Consumption's impact on an individual's understanding of their own identity and relationship to those around them is shown to be intricately connected to the visibility and scale of that consumption. It is both a drive and a comfort, entirely enmeshed in daily existence at a scale far beyond that seen in the 1950s suburb. Just as the expansion of transitional forms of space is observable in the proliferation of repetitious space the form of consumption which developed alongside those spaces is ever present. The network of associations which connect the transitional spaces DeLillo discusses is also firmly ensconced in large scale, visible consumption. The elements of the American psyche and history which is said to make it the perfect location for the transient space²⁵⁰ also make it the ideal ground for this particular form of consumption based society²⁵¹. It is this form of consumption which Lefebvre states is integral to the creation of abstract space,

Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the 'world of commodities', its 'logic' and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power

²⁴⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 513 – 521.

²⁴⁹ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 20.

²⁵⁰ "My analysis of the other-directed character is thus at once an analysis of the American and of contemporary man. Much of the time I find it hard or impossible to say where one ends and the other begins. Tentatively, I am inclined to think that the other-directed type does find itself most at home in America, due to certain unique elements in American society, such as its recruitment from Europe and its lack of any feudal past. As against this, I am also inclined to put more weight on capitalism, industrialism and urbanization – these being international tendencies – than on any character-forming peculiarities of the American scene." Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000) p. 20.

²⁵¹ "So it is that if production creates the wants it seeks to satisfy, or if the wants emerge *pari passu* with the production, then the urgency of the wants can no longer be used to defend the urgency of production. Production only fills a void that it has itself created." Galbraith, J. K., *Affluent Society*, *The* (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1958) p. 132.

of money and that of the political state. This space is founded on the vast network of banks, business centres and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices. Within this space the town – once the forcing-house of accumulation, fountainhead of wealth and centre of historical space – has disintegrated.²⁵²

As the transitional, consumer drive manifested in the suburbs of the 1950s expanded beyond those confines into the wider network of society it altered the socio-spatial understanding of sites such as the city and the town. An understanding of Lefebvre's abstract space, particularly the factors which led to its creation, the form it takes and the manner in which it relates to contemporary understanding of societal space illuminates the relationship between transitional space and consumption as they become more complex.²⁵³ That abstract space is related to "motorways, airports and information lattices" locates it in the transitional sites which are of such interest in DeLillo's writing.²⁵⁴ As he explores the expansion and complication of the spatial form of the suburb from the 1950s in *Underworld* to the 1970s in *White Noise* the connection to the information lattice becomes more apparent. The connectivity of meaning and allusion seen repeatedly in the discussion of the suburb along with the background white noise of society are all related to this concept of the information lattice. The suburb, the supermarket and the small town have all become nodes in the network of spatial understanding which developed in the 1950s.²⁵⁵

The Repetition of Images and Spaces

²⁵² Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 53.

²⁵³ Lefebvre's Abstract Space is a concept which is too complex to explain here but as a basis he offers. "Its abstraction has nothing simple about it: it is not transparent and cannot be reduced either to logic or to strategy. Coinciding neither with the logic of the sign, nor with that of the concept, it operates *negatively*... It has nothing of a 'subject' about it yet it acts like a subject in that it transports and maintains specific social relations, dissolves others and stands opposed to yet others... Abstract Space may even be described as at once, and inseparably, the locus, medium and tool of 'positivity'" Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 50.

²⁵⁴ See Chapter 5: The Highway and Chapter 7: The Airport.

²⁵⁵ The use of the term 'nodes' in a socio-spatial context merits some elucidation. "Giddens... comes closer than any other influential social theorist to uncovering what, in my view, is the most fundamental contextual generalization about the spatiality of social life: that the intelligible lifeworld of being is always and everywhere comprised of a multi-layered system of socially created nodal regions, a configuration of differentiated and hierarchically organized locales. The specific forms and functions of this existential spatial structure vary significantly over time and place, but once being is situated in-the-world the world it is in becomes social within a spatial matrix of nested locales. The topological structure is mutable and permutable, but it is always there to envelop and comprise, to situate and constitute all human action, to concretize the making of both history and geography." Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) p. 148. This concept of nodality and the manner in which it is related to peripheralness is useful to consider in relation to the manner in which transitional spaces come to function, as focal points of shifting meaning within a disparate network of associations.

The suggestion of the negative elements of a connection to the information lattice and its relationship to potential counter-narratives suggested in *Underworld* is fully realised in *White Noise*. Disconnected from history and tradition it becomes a space within which either to explore those concepts in the abstract or ignore them entirely²⁵⁶. The city is rooted in connections to history and tradition, associations which the suburb is free of. It is, however, a point within the information lattice and as such is, like other transitional spaces, connected to multitudinous potential narratives. Just as identity is called into question as the spatial divisions of society are shown to be permeable in the space of the motel²⁵⁷ the loss of distinction between reality and unreality makes the suburb a troubling space. Blacksmith in *White Noise* becomes a focal point for a great deal of confusion regarding repetition and authenticity as it connects to a stable sense of reality. The use of consumption has been illustrated to have provided a degree of comfort to those in the suburbs, particularly those who, like Erica Deming, have a positive view of the suburban experience. Within the supermarket the repetition and scale of the act of consumption suggest negative societal connotations. Lefebvre describes the manner in which repetition leads to homogeneity²⁵⁸ which in turn leads to a sense of the inauthentic. Two particular sections in *White Noise* illustrate the troubling societal and personal impact of the proliferation of the inauthentic in this consumer driven form of abstract space. The discussion of the most photographed barn in America raises the question of whether an authentic interaction is possible in this form of space or whether the nature of transience, repetition and a focus on the visual and consumable make it an impossibility.

“Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.”
He fell silent once more. People with cameras left the elevated site, replaced at once by others.

“We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies.”

“...We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We’ve agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism.”

Another silence ensued.

²⁵⁶ The manner in which repressed social and personal trauma influences development repeatedly in DeLillo’s work makes it questionable to what degree anything repressed remains hidden.

²⁵⁷ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

²⁵⁸ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (1991) p. 200.

“They are taking pictures of taking pictures,” he said.²⁵⁹

Repetition and the visual image’s relationship to the reality of an object have been explored throughout DeLillo’s depiction of both the motel and the suburb. Within these spaces it is possible to explore alternate identities, experimenting with space and identity. The description of a booth selling “postcards and slides” of the barn is reminiscent of the discussion of the motel in *Americana* with “postcards of itself at the desk.”²⁶⁰ These are sites that illustrate the connection between repetition and consumption, the consumption of the image being more important than a connection with the site itself.²⁶¹ The motel, the suburb and the supermarket are all sites in which this placating of society and directing of societal roles through visible consumption have been explored.²⁶² With this discussion of the barn DeLillo illustrates the expansion of that societal impetus. The barn is understood as a tourist site and as such it is intrinsically connected to concepts of both transience and the image of history and tradition.²⁶³ However it is now connected to those concepts in a purely nostalgic fashion. The image of this space is desired by the transient tourist more than any authentic claim to have connected with or understood that space and its associations to history or tradition.²⁶⁴ DeLillo’s exploration of the suburb, supermarket and tourist site illustrates the socio-spatial traits that they share as part of the same “collective perception.” The second element of *White Noise* that calls into question the relationship between reality and unreality is the discussion of the airborne toxic event. The event, a train crash and chemical spill on the outskirts of Blacksmith, calls into question the authenticity of the repetitive suburban space and the identities that have been formed within it. The “collective perception” discussed in relation to the “most photographed barn in America” is related to the way in which the airborne toxic event is understood and discussed as reality and certainty are undermined.

²⁵⁹ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 12 – 13.

²⁶⁰ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 257

²⁶¹ The relationship between the visual and the real is discussed in Lefebvre “It is signs and images – the world of signs and images – that tend to fill the interstices in question...This world of images of signs, this tombstone of the ‘world’ (Mundus est immundus)’ is situated at the edges of what exists, between the shadow and the light, between the conceived (abstraction) and the perceived (the readable/visible). Between the real and the unreal. Always in the interstices, in the cracks. Between directly lived experience and thought.” Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 389.

²⁶² See earlier in this chapter and Chapter 3: The Motel.

²⁶³ DeLillo exposes a similar concept in the deprogramming of a member of the Moonies in a motel room, talking about the “tabloid-type reassurances” used to bring her back into accepted society. Clichéd, hackneyed and sentimentalised images of safety, comfort and home. DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 79.

²⁶⁴ Consider this in relation to Jameson’s discussion of nostalgia cinema. Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 19.

Maybe we should be more concerned about the billowing cloud,” she said. “It’s because of the kids we keep saying nothing’s going to happen. We don’t want to scare them.”

“Nothing *is* going to happen.”

“I know nothing’s going to happen, you know nothing’s going to happen. But at some level we ought to think about it anyway, just in case.”

“These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it’s the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters, the hurricanes and tornados. I’m a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We lived in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don’t happen in places like Blacksmith.²⁶⁵

The sense of entitled stability and comfort that the consumer driven suburban life has instilled in Jack Gladney is clear. Having grown up in the transitional society Jack represents an adult version of Eric Deming, a figure adept at utilising and traversing the network of associations.²⁶⁶ His comfort with this form of existence and his grasp of the language of symbols and associations has been passed onto his family who also possess a level of comfort. Their identity and understanding of their role in society is intimately connected to consumption and the collective-perception which they are a part of. However the Airborne Toxic Event undermines this comfort and exposes the unreality which exists beneath the façade of their socio-spatial existence, calling into question their understanding of their own identities and societal roles.²⁶⁷ They are betrayed by the very things which provide them stability; mass communication, materials and consumption. These things are connected to the event and the counter-narrative it suggests and as such are no longer the soothing balm they once were.

Steffie read a coupon of Baby Lux, crying softly. This brought Denise to life. She went upstairs to pack some things for all of us. Heinrich raced two steps at a time to

²⁶⁵ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 143.

²⁶⁶ Consider this in relation to DeCerteau’s walker that shapes the narrative of the city through his motion. “In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers.” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 117.

²⁶⁷ The manner in which a traumatic social event exposes the counter-narrative is discussed in relation to the assassination of Kennedy in Chapter 5: The Highway and in relation to 9/11 in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

the attic for his binoculars, highway map and radio. Babette went to the pantry and began gathering tins and jars with familiar life-enhancing labels.²⁶⁸

The uncertainty over the validity and stability of their lives that the Airborne Toxic Event introduces exposes the level to which their existence is based upon these unfounded assumptions and connections. The network of associations from which they draw support for their identity and guidance for their role is exposed as much larger and more connected to the counter-narrative than they previously believed. This connection is implicit in the transitional site of the suburb, and by extension Blacksmith, and has been since its inception²⁶⁹. The manner in which Gladney and his family deal with this is complex and confused; they attempt to resort to their old familiar associations only to be confronted by replicas and facsimiles which offer no comfort. The society which they are exposed to is both *heimlich* and *unheimlich*²⁷⁰. The instinct to accept this, to continue to utilise the vocabulary of the transitional space of society is so strong that they do so in forced and seemingly disconnected ways. Their inability to hold onto any facts with certainty, as facts are always shifting and exposing their falsity and rootlessness, means that the family's awareness of the events of the accident and the nature of the symptoms, literally how they should feel, are always elsewhere.

"I saw all this before," Steffie said.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"This happened once before. Just like this..."

It was Heinrich who'd told me that exposure to the chemical waste could cause a person to experience a sense of déjà vu. Steffie wasn't there when he said it, but she could have heard it on the kitchen radio... I didn't think Steffie knew what déjà vu meant... If Steffie had learned about déjà vu on the radio but then missed the subsequent upgrading to more deadly conditions, it could mean she was in a position to be tricked by her own apparatus of suggestibility. She and Denise had been lagging all evening... What did it all mean? Did Steffie truly imagine she'd seen the wreck before or did she only imagine she'd imagined it? Is it possible to have a false perception of an illusion? Is there a true déjà vu and a false déjà vu?²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 119.

²⁶⁹ The concept of a counter-narrative, of truths hidden behind the façade of society, is present throughout this work and DeLillo's writing.

²⁷⁰ For more on the uncanny see Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

²⁷¹ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 125 – 126.

The relationship between *déjà vu* and repetition suggests that one's experience of space and time is as unstable as one's identity.²⁷² In many ways the *déjà vu* experienced here is reminiscent of the experience of the fallen man in *Dangling Man* and the *Falling Man*, seemingly disjointed, taking place outside of time and space and connected to both images of the past and the future. The repetition of events to create an uncanny replica is found throughout the novel in ways which distort and undermine any sense of certainty and exacerbate feelings of anxiety. Authoritarian forces carry out recreations of the event, run practice activities to plan for future incidents and create reproductions of moments to such a degree that it becomes increasingly unclear which of the events is real and which is not. This connection between unreality / reality and the instigation of dubious authority figures is the foundation of a great deal of the anxiety and paranoia that combines to the understanding of the counter-narrative which DeLillo considers in his work²⁷³. The increasing awareness of its existence undermines not only the understanding of one's identity and role but also the relationship between consumption and the nostalgic viewpoint of suburbia, showing all to be based on unstable foundations and shifting associations. It is this experience of transient space, shaped by an awareness of the motel and the suburb, which provides a basis for the understanding of the more socially complex spaces such as the airport and the highway. The concerns over authenticity, repetition, identity and mass society as exposed by investigation of the suburb are recurrent throughout the rest of the spaces DeLillo explores.

²⁷² Consider the concept of an unstable identity and the sense of *déjà vu* as it relates to a visual double in both Freud and DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007).

²⁷³ The actions of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra* illustrate a desire to undermine and destroy authoritarian society in a manner which is connected to the wider discussion about terrorism in DeLillo. See DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) and DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) in particular.

Chapter 5: The Highway

If one were to draw the map of the spaces which DeLillo repeatedly portrays such as the motel and suburb the connective tissue which joins those interstitial spaces is the highway. It is a complex task to locate the highway as a space. It is a network of built structures yet it is always experienced by society in motion. Whereas the transitional spaces discussed in previous chapters provide an uncanny facsimile of home, it is impossible to experience the highway at rest as its meaning is inherently connected to motion and speed. It is the space within which the spectre of the counter-narrative is forever present in the combination of technology, speed, and death. The highway cleaves societal space, being both connected to all other points of the network yet intrinsically not a part of any²⁷⁴. The highway system flourished alongside the growth of car culture in America of the 1950s²⁷⁵ and provided the ability for the increasingly transient society to investigate the interstitial spaces between cities. These vast expanses of land be they deserts or plains²⁷⁶, in turn allowed the roadside architecture of motels and service stations to flourish²⁷⁷. As such it is the fibrous tissue which connects and supports this new form of societal growth to exist. The construction and materials of the highway also provide a means for investigating how it relates to the societal forms which predate it. The highway in DeLillo becomes a form of palimpsest²⁷⁸, both spatially representing the nature of the transitional society and calling attention to that which

²⁷⁴ “The cities, of course, went completely to hell. The superhighways not only drained them of their few remaining taxpaying residents, but in many cases the new beltways became physical barriers, “Chinese walls” sealing off the disintegrating cities from their dynamic outlands.” Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) p. 107.

²⁷⁵ See the discussion of *Googie Redux* and Frank Lloyd Wright in Chapter 3: The Motel for more on the role of car culture in the development of transitional space.

²⁷⁶ The role of the desert in DeLillo as a mysterious space has already been discussed, but it is also an empty space. “I can’t get the Empty quarter out of my mind. We flew right over the dunes, man, nothing but sand, a quarter of a million square miles. A planet of sand. Sand mountains, sand plains and valleys. Sad weather, a hundred and thirty, a hundred and forty degrees, and I can’t imagine what it’s like when the wind’s blowing. I tried to convince myself it’s beautiful. The desert, you know. The vast sweep. But it scared me.” DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 70.

²⁷⁷ “The new superhighways created tremendous opportunities for land development in the remote hinterlands of big cities. An unthinkable long commute on old country roads now seemed reasonable on the freeway. So up went more raised ranches and new split-levels. Each of the thousands of new highway interchanges begged for commercial exploitation. Up went shopping strips and the new “convenience” stores. Businesses of all descriptions fled the decaying urban cores and relocated on the fringe, as close to the on/off ramps as they could get.” Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) p. 107.

²⁷⁸ DeCerteau provides a discussion of the palimpsest in spatial terms relating to *Robinson Crusoe* which is of use to our understanding of the concept. “...The island is not a palimpsest in which it is possible to reveal, decode and decipher a system covered up by an order that is superimposed on it but of the same type.” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 155. This description of what the island in that novel is not illustrates many of the things that the highway is.

predates it.²⁷⁹ The space highlights the necessity of the destruction of previous societal forms to allow transitional progress to be successful²⁸⁰. In this respect it is an exemplar of the anti-historical impetus which is apparent in Lefebvre's abstract space and Riesman's other-directed society which are so influential in an understanding of transitionality.

The highway in DeLillo is strongly associated with death, particularly public death, whether that be random acts of violence or assassination. The Kennedy assassination figures heavily in the depiction of the overpass in his work. The events of the assassination and the materials associated with it; the highways, the car, the gun, the camera, all elicit the counter-narrative with its connection to death and conspiracy. These concepts also reverberate through DeLillo's description of the Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld*.²⁸¹ The highway is also utilised in that novel as a space for the contemplation of destruction and death on both a global and societal level related to both the killer and nuclear warfare.²⁸² This element of the highway is also seen in *White Noise*, in which the main character teaches courses in both assassination and the "cinema of the car crash."²⁸³ Following the "airborne toxic event"²⁸⁴ the highway provides a location for the contemplation of society, death and identity for the family of Jack Gladney. The highway functions as a space within which many connections to societal forms and spaces are observable. It is a palimpsest, with multiple levels of meaning and interpretation being both visible and unseen.

Connecting the Highway to Other Transitional Spaces

The highway is both a space of connection between transitional sites and a transitional space in its own right. It is a physical manifestation of the network of connections and associations that has been seen throughout DeLillo's work. Whilst the motel and the suburb function as conduits through which the meaning of that network may be understood, their fixed spatiality

²⁷⁹ The underpass comes to represent the forgotten space which predates the highway later in this chapter.

²⁸⁰ The connection between American space and history is no longer tenable. The concept of the anti-historicism of transitional space is further explored in Jameson's discussion of any connection to American History. "The authenticity of the gesture, however, may be measured by the evident existential fact of life that there no longer does seem to be any organic relationship between the American history we learn in schoolbooks and the lived experience of the current multinational, high rise, stagflated city of the newspapers and of our own everyday life." Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 22.

²⁸¹ The primary discussion of the Texas Highway Killer is DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 155 – 160.

²⁸² The connection between military technology, particular nuclear materials, and the counter-narrative was discussed in the previous chapter and is further explored in Chapter 7: The Airport.

²⁸³ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 40.

²⁸⁴ Ibid p. 107 and throughout the novel.

conflicts with their transient nature suggesting duality.²⁸⁵ The highway is the most extreme form of this duality, it is made of concrete and steel, and yet it is impossible to locate as a singular space. As a solidification of speed and motion it is largely uninhabitable. Those that do attempt to live in this level of perpetual motion are firmly ensconced in a counter-narrative.²⁸⁶ Whilst the motel and suburb are nodal points within a network of associations, the highway represents the lines of motion that connect them.²⁸⁷ Within DeLillo's novels this space is representative of both the advancement of technology and the passage of information through the system²⁸⁸. The movement of people throughout the spatial network informs an understanding of the manner in which society functions.²⁸⁹ The highway provides a location for the contemplation of societal power; be that hidden or seen, destructive or creative.

Throughout DeLillo's writing the highway allows temporary existence beyond the understood boundaries of society. As is seen in Bellow's *Dangling Man* the antecedents of the highway are the mud track and the alleyway, interstitial sites of uncertainty which existed within the framework of the understood societal space, the city. They are spaces that are walked by outsiders, their walking creating a narrative based in the forbidden or the hidden. De Certeau discusses the manner in which the walker utilises such forbidden and forgotten spaces as a part of the process of shaping the city to correlate to his own narrative.

...a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since

²⁸⁵ See previous chapters.

²⁸⁶ The socially other figures of the Moonies in *Mao II* live on the road, a nomadic existence. "That we are willing to live on the road, sleep on the floor, crowd into vans and drive all night...how silently they despise us." DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 9.

²⁸⁷ See Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) for a full discussion of nodality.

²⁸⁸ The passage of information through these networks and nodal sites is also seen in Virilio and in Soja "Cities are specialized nodal agglomerations built around the instrumental 'presence availability' of social power. They are control centres, citadels designed to protect and dominate through what Foucault called 'the little tactics of the habitat', through a subtle geography of enclosure, confinement, surveillance, partitioning, social discipline and spatial differentiation" Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) p. 153.

²⁸⁹ The use of the nodal sites of information as locations of societal control is explored in Virilio's discussion of the city as dromology. "...this great automobile body has been emasculated, its road holding is defective and its powerful motor is bridled. Just as for the laws on speed limits, we are talking about acts of government, in other words of the political control of the highway, aiming precisely at limiting the "extraordinary power of assault" the motorization of the masses creates." Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 51.

the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.²⁹⁰

The combination of its connection to these historical spaces of subversive motion and the impetus toward transience which stems from its origins in the post war drive for motion link the highway firmly to the counter-narrative. As such it is repeatedly utilised throughout DeLillo's writing as a means of escaping the confines of society. The conjoined spatial origin of the motel and the highway explains the frequency with which they are utilised in tandem as space within which to evade the gaze of authoritarian society. The depiction of the deprogramming of Karen Novotny in *Mao II* which takes place in a motel²⁹¹ is rooted in her past as a member of the Unification Church (The Moonies as they are called in the novel). This existence takes place on the road, forever in motion so as to be able to continue their existence outside the accepted societal narrative of home and family.

“...how they hate our willingness to work and struggle. They want to snatch us back to the land of lawns. That we are willing to live on the road, sleep on the floor, crowd into vans and drive all night, fund raising, serving Master.”²⁹²

Living on the road in perpetual motion beyond the panoptic gaze of society is shown throughout DeLillo to be considered socially aberrant behaviour. Characters that are depicted as dwelling in railway stations²⁹³ and motels²⁹⁴ are figures connected to the counter-narrative to such a degree that they are lost to the societal narrative. The highway is not a space for life, rather it is frequently depicted as a space for death, be that actual or imagined. As such the concept of living in a space of motion connected to death makes this form of existence all the more socially untenable. Lives carried out beyond the limitations and boundaries of the fixed urban environment are repeatedly connected to anti social activity. This runs the gamut from the planning of assassinations²⁹⁵ to the misuse of socially understood spaces and the fixtures within them. There are rules that must be followed in these spaces, but they are not codified

²⁹⁰ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 98.

²⁹¹ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 79.

²⁹² DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 9.

²⁹³ “Lloyd was an actor who’d recently served time on a charge of reckless endangerment. Since his release he’d been living in Grand Central Station, sleeping on benches or in the doorways of clam bars. He told me he tried to think of Grand Central Station as his apartment. One room but a nice size. High ceiling. Nice big window. Marble floor.” DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 76.

²⁹⁴ “The reporter tracked him down. He is living in the same motel where all the controversy took place.” DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 300.

²⁹⁵ See later in this chapter and the discussion of the connection between the highway and assassination.

rules defined by society, rather they are observed and communicated as symbols, images and rumours.

These are the things they don't teach," Lasher said. "Bowls with no seats. Pissing in sinks. The culture of public toilets. All those great diners, movie houses, gas stations. The whole ethos of the road. I've pissed in sinks all through the American west. I've slipped across the border to piss in sinks in Manitoba and Alberta. This is what it's all about. The great western skies. The road, the plains, the desert. The filthy stinking toilets. I pissed in a sink in Utah when it was twenty-two below. That's the coldest I've ever pissed in a sink in."²⁹⁶

It is a means of existence taking place in sites not intended for dwelling²⁹⁷, where one must begin to understand the language of the spaces, the intricacies of their potential use beyond their intended function. DeLillo's depiction of these spaces provides a means of understanding the manner in which one may exist within them whilst also calling into question how existence in these spaces relates to accepted societal behaviour. The discussion of the motel and the suburb in the previous chapters illustrates the difficulties of dwelling within rootless spaces²⁹⁸. The inability to correlate a defined sense of identity once motion has become an integral element of daily life is experienced in its most extreme form on the highway. The anxiety which being disconnected from a stable sense of self or a controlling societal factor produces as seen in the motel is heightened on the highway.

I had some frightening dreams that night and in the morning one image in particular stayed with me, a blue bus moving down a highway in the desert, and the picture was so clear in my mind that I might still have been asleep and dreaming, that flash of bright blue metal across the lionskin desert.²⁹⁹

The dream is frightening as it depicts motion with no referents to any stabilising factor. The space of the desert is devoid of spatial guidance³⁰⁰ whilst the combination of automobile on a highway passing through that void is suggestive of death, instability and isolation. The

²⁹⁶ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 67 – 68.

²⁹⁷ "In what follows we shall try to think about dwelling and building. This thinking about building does not presume to discover architectural ideas, let alone to give rules for building. This venture in thought does not view building as an art or as a technique of construction; rather it traces building back into that domain to which everything that *is* belongs. We ask: 1. What is it to dwell? 2. How does building belong to dwelling?" Heidegger, M., 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1951), in *Poetry Language Thought* (New York, Harper Colophon, 1971) p. 145.

²⁹⁸ See earlier discussion of motels and railway stations used as dwelling sites.

²⁹⁹ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 235.

³⁰⁰ See the earlier discussion of the role of the desert in DeLillo.

collapse of the division between the internal and the external which is alluded to with “I might still have been asleep and dreaming” reflects fear of the ability to shift between identities in transitional space as exposed in the motel.³⁰¹ This anxiety over identity and spatial distinctions between self and other is explored as a wider societal concern throughout DeLillo’s writing. In *The Body Artist*³⁰² the main character, Lauren Hartke, in attempting to reconstruct her identity following a traumatic experience³⁰³ finds the barriers between her internal and external life blurring. She is uncertain of her own identity, unable to differentiate the division between herself and others. As part of the process of attempting to process this she spends time contemplating an empty highway.

She spent hours at the computer screen looking at a live-streaming video feed from the edge of a two-lane road in a city in Finland... It was interesting to her because it was happening now....

...It was simply the fact of Kotka. It was the sense of organization, a place contained in an unyielding frame, as it is and as you watch, with a reading of local time in the digital display in a corner of the screen. Kotka was another world but she could see it in its realness, in its hours, minutes and seconds.

...It emptied her mind and made her feel the deep silence of other places, the mystery of seeing over the world to a place stripped of everything but a road that approaches and recedes, both realities occurring at once...³⁰⁴

The uncertainty Lauren feels regarding her identity is reflected in the way that she perceives the space of Kotka and her distanced relationship from it.³⁰⁵ The appeal of Kotka is that it is fully defined; it is located in time and space in an unquestionable manner by the display on the screen. By comparison she is unable to define the divisions between her own identity, that of her deceased husband and the figure that comes to dwell in her house. However the stability Lauren feels the highway provides her is not reflective of the truth of the space as it exists in Kotka. Rather Lauren is taking the image of the highway for its reality.³⁰⁶ The visual

³⁰¹ See Chapter 3: The Motel and its discussion of the permeability of the boundaries in that space.

³⁰² DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002).

³⁰³ The use of the transitional space as a “Stimulus Shield” is discussed in Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) pp. 159 – 170.

³⁰⁴ DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) pp. 37 – 39.

³⁰⁵ Whilst this work is based in the physical spatial realm of the built environment, the nature of virtual space and the impact of the internet on the sense of identity provide other valuable areas for further study. See Bell, D., *Cybercultures: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2006).

³⁰⁶ “It is for such objects that we may reserve Plato’s conception of the “simulacrum,” the identical copy for which no original has ever existed.” Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of*

representation of the space is controlled, manageable and safe. The use of video footage as a means of exploring troubling elements of the counter-narrative is also utilised in DeLillo's description of the footage of the highway killer in *Underworld*³⁰⁷ and how it is processed by those that observe it

You keep on looking not because you know something is going to happen – of course you do know something is going to happen and you do look for that reason but you might also keep looking if you came across this footage for the first time without knowing the outcome. There is a crude power operating here. You keep on looking because things combine to hold you fast – a sense of the random, the amateurish, the accidental, the impending. You don't think of the tape as boring or interesting. It is crude, it is blunt, it is relentless. It is the jostled part of your mind, the film that runs through your hotel brain under all the thoughts you know you're thinking.

The world is lurking in the camera, already framed, waiting for the boy or girl who will come along and take up the device...³⁰⁸

The footage is in both cases described as having a power, the sense of an impending event combined with a framing of the moment.³⁰⁹ This represents a capturing and stabilising of what is in reality an unstable and fluctuating existence. The acknowledgement of this lack of stability is suggested by the discussion of the potential that the frame of the video holds. With both the footage of the Texas Highway Killer and the feed from Kotka it is the sense of an empty road that produces both anticipation and a sense of potential events that have yet to occur.³¹⁰

Means of Escape or Means of Control?

As a connective space the highway must be considered in relation to the social spaces that it joins. The suburb, the motel and the airport are all transitional spaces that are joined to the highway as parts of the network of associations that permeate DeLillo's work. However as the discussion of its spatial heritage suggests it is also related to those spaces that it connects to

Late Capitalism (London, Verso, 1991) p. 18. For further on the simulacrum see *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983).

³⁰⁷ See also the discussion of the footage of the Kennedy assassination later in this chapter.

³⁰⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 156.

³⁰⁹ The description of the desire to stop watching such footage is also described in relation to the attacks of 9/11 "Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved her finger toward the power button on the remote." DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 134. See Chapter 7: The Airport.

³¹⁰ The sense of potential motion is also seen in the discussion of *Dangling Man*. See Chapter 2.

only peripherally, cities. *Speed and Politics*³¹¹ explores how the highway as a spatial example of the motion of society and with it power interacts with the city in his discussion of dromology. He exposes that within a culture of motion and speed those that control the rate and flow of this speed control the motion and development of society. Just as in Foucault “Visibility is a trap”³¹², in Virilio “Stasis is death”.³¹³

Despite convincing examinations of city maps, the city has not been recognized as first and foremost a human dwelling place penetrated by channels of rapid communication (river, road, coastline, railway). It seems we’ve forgotten that the street is only a road passing through an agglomeration, whereas every day laws on the “speed limit” within the city walls remind us of the continuity of displacement, of movement, that only the speed laws modulate. The city is but a stopover, a point on the synoptic path of a trajectory... As I have said in the past, there is only *habitable circulation*.³¹⁴

The depiction of the city as a dromology, a space of speed and motion, suggests the transitional impetus previously associated with transient spaces must be considered in relation to spaces previously considered stable³¹⁵. The term “habitable circulation” used to describe the way in which one must live in this dromology, could as easily be read as a description of the 1950s suburb with its transient population.³¹⁶ Just as De Certeau exposed the degree to which the city had become shaped by the motion and movement of its inhabitants,³¹⁷ Virilio highlights the integral role transition has in the urban experience. The discussion of the dromology as a site for societal control and the monitoring of movement raises the issue of who it is that are free to pass through this city and to what degree that freedom is illusory. The monitoring and control of this space by military influence reflects the observation and control

³¹¹ Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006).

³¹² Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 200.

³¹³ Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 38.

³¹⁴ Ibid p. 31.

³¹⁵ The stability of the city is questionable. Like transitional space, the actions of those passing through it are able to shape its use and meaning. “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other’s blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice.” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 101.

³¹⁶ “The man who leaves home is not the exception in American society but the key to it...” Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) p. 248.

³¹⁷ See DeCerteau’s “Long poem of walking” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 101 as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

exerted by the panoptic gaze of the invisible prison guard in the panopticon³¹⁸. The monitoring of speed and motion limits the movement of those travelling through this space and as such controls the degree of power and influence which they are able to exert. Virilio considers the development of car culture and the American highway in order to question the possibility of breaking this societal control through increased movement and speed.

On the shores across the way, the perpetual transformation of the barbarous esthetic of the mass-produced American car, the provocative excess of its body, of its ornaments, manifest the permanence of the social revolution (progress towards the “American way of life”). But at the same time, this great automobile body has been emasculated, its road holding is defective and its powerful motor is bridled. Just as for the laws on speed limits, we are talking about acts of government, in other words of the political control of the highway, aiming precisely at limiting the “extraordinary power of assault” the motorization of the masses creates.³¹⁹

The car is emblematic of the society which appeared, in America particularly, after the Second World War that embraced speed, motion and technology as a form of “social revolution” to allow them to reach the “American Way of Life”. However the imposition of societal controls and the internalisation of the laws of cultural stability neutered the possibility of revolution. If “stasis is death” motion should present a means of escape and freedom, yet that potential is negated. This leads to the frustration, anxiety and feelings of a lack of personal control which is prevalent in DeLillo’s characters.³²⁰ With this insight into the function of the dromology the degree of freedom from the controlled social narrative the highway allows must be reconsidered. The motion of the highway only allows movement in set directions, there can be no deviation from these directions. Any sense of freedom of movement is illusory. When any deviation from the approved speed and direction of motion is attempted it results in a crash, in destruction and ultimately death.

Highway as a site of death and assassination

The potential for a crash on the highway relates to DeLillo’s depiction of that space as a location for contemplating destruction and experiencing death. The relationship between

³¹⁸ See Chapter 4: The Suburb for further discussion of the panoptic as discussed in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

³¹⁹ Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 51.

³²⁰ See the depiction of Wilder crossing the highway on a tricycle in *White Noise* for an illustration of the degree to which motion is controlled on the highway. DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 323 – 325.

speed, motion, death and the visual is prevalent in DeLillo's work. The discussion of a "...course in the cinema of car crashes"³²¹ in *White Noise* suggests that it is not only the car crash itself that is important but that the capturing of the car crash on film³²², the duality of the moment as a source of destruction and creation. The connection between the cinema of death and the road is suggestive of both the Texas Highway Killer and the assassination of Kennedy. The assassination of John F Kennedy is a touchstone of DeLillo's writing, being of major importance in *Libra*, and a clear influence on *White Noise* and *Underworld*. In an interview with Anthony DeCurtis DeLillo discusses the impact of the assassination on both his writing and American society.

DeLillo: Maybe it invented me... As I was working on *Libra*, it occurred to me that a lot of tendencies in my first eight novels seemed to be collecting around the dark center of the assassination.³²³

The connections between technology, speed and death are more apparent in DeLillo's depiction of the highway than in any of the other sites he investigates. The highway is used in *Underworld* in two different periods and in both it is a site for the contemplation of death, particularly public observable death. In the case of the 1950s depiction of the highway it is the site to consider the possibility of nuclear war, a concept which has been referred to repeatedly in the stage shows of Lenny Bruce in the book.

"We're all gonna die!"

He loved this line so much it was a little unnerving, especially in DeeAnn's voice, which could shatter a urinal at fifty feet. An hour later, after all the bits, the scatological asides, the improvised voices, it was this isolated line that stayed in people's minds when they went to their cars and drove home to Westwood or Brentwood or wherever, or roamed the freeways for half the night because they knew they wouldn't be able to sleep and what better place to imagine the flash and burst,

³²¹ Ibid p. 40.

³²² "Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the "spiritual," the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable... We postcontemporary people have a word for that discovery – a word that as tended to displace the older language of genres and forms – and this is, of course, the word medium, and in particular its plural, media," Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 67. Media technology, video, is integral in the process of confusing the reality and the simulacrum.

³²³ DeCurtis, A., 'An Outsider in This Society: An Interview with Don DeLillo' in Lentricchia, F., (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) p. 47.

where else would they go to rehearse the end of history, or actually see it –this was the meaning of the freeways and always had been and they’d always known it at some unsound level.³²⁴

The freeway (a form of highway) provides a space for the contemplation of death to the extent of rehearsal. Whilst in the 1950s the destruction of society on a mass scale exemplifies the fear of the destructive potential of the counter-narrative as embodied by cold war nuclear conflict.³²⁵ In the 1990s the personification of highway death is a lone figure. The Texas Highway Killer is featured throughout the novel, both as an example of a televised facet of societal death and the unknowable, death delivering element of society.³²⁶ The concept of capturing the moment of death, of being able to repeatedly review it, reflects the impulse of the figure on the highway recollecting the Lenny Bruce joke creating a facsimile of potential death through rehearsal.³²⁷ The highway becomes a site for not only contemplating death but carrying it out and capturing it on film.

It shows a man alone in a medium Dodge. It seems to go on forever.

There’s something about the nature of the tape, the grain of the image, the sputtering black-and-white tones, the starkness – you think this is more real, truer-to-life than anything around you. The things around you have a rehearsed and layered and cosmetic look. The tape is superreal, or maybe underreal is the way you want to put it. It is what lies at the scraped bottom of all the layers you have added. And this is another reason why you keep on looking. The tape has a searing realness...

And there is something about videotape, isn’t there, and this particular type of serial crime? This is a crime designed for random taping and immediate playing. You sit there and wonder if this kind of crime became more possible when the means of taping an event and playing it immediately, without a neutral interval, a balancing space and time, became widely available. Taping-and-playing intensifies and compresses the event. It dangles a need to do it again. You sit there thinking that the

³²⁴ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 508.

³²⁵ See also Chapter 7: The Airport for more on the fear of the technological elements of the counter-narrative connected to nuclear war.

³²⁶ The Texas Highway Killer as an uncanny societal other. See Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

³²⁷ The facsimile of death as a means of processing it as a trauma. See the gradual removal of the self in order to facilitate the acceptance of trauma in *The Body Artist*. “Her body felt different to her in ways she did not understand. Tight, framed, she didn’t know exactly. Slightly foreign and unfamiliar. Different, thinner, didn’t matter.” DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) p. 33.

serial murder has found its medium, or vice versa – an act of shadow technology, of compressed time and repeated images, stark and glary and unremarkable.³²⁸

The relationship between this form of highway death and capturing it on film reflects the manner in which “Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures.”³²⁹ The motion on the highway in proscribed directions and at monitored speeds is indicative of the form of “repetitive gesture” which produces the meaning of that space. The conjunction of this repetitious space and motion with the elements of the counter-narrative which the highway contains leads to highway murder of this sort. It is a perfect space for this due to its connection to speed, technology and death. It is also stated that this form of murder comes into existence as both a product of this space and the introduction of technology that allows for it to be captured and replayed. The relationship between the video and highway death connects the nature of repetitious space with its production of facsimiles of itself and the ability of video technology to exacerbate this desire to replicate an action or event.³³⁰ The focus on the visual representation of a moment or object at the expense of experiencing its reality allows aberrant social acts to be carried out without the attendant sense of guilt or societal judgement. These acts are disconnected from reality, they are “immediate” and “random” and yet they are more “real” than the reality of daily existence.³³¹ Just as the framing and date-stamping of the footage of the Kotka road gives it the appearance of stability the video footage of these murders “intensifies and compresses the event” The interaction of the highway, the contemplation of death and the ability to film the act is indicative of “shadow technology, of compressed time and repeated images”. The manner in which the footage of the Kennedy assassination was not only captured but that that technology was utilised to allow it to be repeatedly shown on television influenced the meaning of the event itself.

DeLillo: It’s strange that the power of television was utilized to its fullest, perhaps for the first time, as it pertained to a violent event. Not only violent, but of course, an extraordinarily significant event. This has become part of our consciousness. We’ve developed almost a sense of performance as it applies to televised events. And I think

³²⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 155 -160.

³²⁹ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

³³⁰ See Lefebvre’s discussion of repetitious space (Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75) and Jameson’s discussion of the role video technology (Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) pp. 67 – 96.

³³¹ “At the limit of this process of reproductibility, the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always, already reproduced. The Hyperreal.” Baudrillard, J., *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983) p. 146. Consider the concept of the hyperreal in relation to Marc Augé’s discussion of supermodernity and non-places. Augé, M., *Non-Places* (London, Verso, 1995).

some of the people who are essential to such events... [are] simply carrying their performing selves out of the wings and into the theatre. Such young men have a sense of the way in which their acts will be perceived by the rest of us, even as they commit the acts. So there is a deeply self-referential element in our lives that wasn't there before.³³²

Performance and repetition as aspects of highway murder and the repetitive viewing of it are connected to concepts of societal visibility and observation. The highway killer's awareness of societal observation regarding these acts is related to the internalised panoptic eye.³³³ These figures know they will be watched and that through the duplication of their acts they will also be duplicated as an image and a gesture which will locate them within the socio-spatial lexicon. DeLillo depicts Oswald in *Libra* in just this manner. He is a figure that desires to be outside of the accepted narrative of society, he identifies with and the counter-narrative which the USSR represents.³³⁴ The manner in which he turns his knowledge of military secrets into a performance to make himself visible to those he wishes to connect with is a precursor to his involvement in the assassination of Kennedy.

DeCurtis: It's almost as if Oswald embodied a postmodern notion of character in which the self isn't fixed and you assume or discard traits as the mood strikes you.

DeLillo: Someone who knew Oswald referred to him as an actor in real life, and I do think there is a sense in which he was watching himself perform.³³⁵

The unfixed identity of Oswald and the manner in which he chooses personality traits and knowledge from his own past and potential realities make him an exemplary depiction of a troubled individual of the transient society. The highways correlation with death, technology and societal observation combined with the video cameras ability to destabilise a sense of reality provides a perfect space for the creation of such figures. The visibility of Oswald through his acts, the space in which he carried them out and the materials used to achieve and capture the assassination marks this as the point at which the positivist interpretation of

³³² DeCurtis, A., *An Outsider in This Society: and Interview with Don DeLillo* in Lentricchia, F., (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) p. 49.

³³³ The spread of the panoptic gaze through the delinquent figure is comparable to the act of the killer spreading the counter-narrative through society through his actions. "And, although the universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law" Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 223.

³³⁴ The nature of the Cold War as a focus for anxiety and the location of a counter-narrative is prevalent throughout *Libra*.

³³⁵ DeCurtis, A., *An Outsider in This Society: and Interview with Don DeLillo* in Lentricchia, F (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) p. 51.

transitionality become untenable and the counter-narrative became an observable element of society.

“As the years have flowed away from that point, I think we’ve all come to feel that what’s been missing over these past twenty-five years is a sense of manageable reality. Much of that feeling can be traced to that one moment in Dallas. We seem much more aware of elements like randomness and ambiguity and chaos since then.”³³⁶

The increased sense of societal and spatial instability that stems from the repeatedly observable act of highway assassination reflects the way in which large scale traumatic events shift the accepted social narrative. The end of the Second World War led to the movement away from tradition and inner-direction toward other-direction.³³⁷ This alteration in interpretation of social motion and direction is observable in the transitional societal form and spaces that are created from it.³³⁸ Similarly the events of 9/11 led to societal and spatial alterations which DeLillo describes as a “counternarrative” The assassination of Kennedy exposes the uncertainty and anxiety which has been observed as being a facet of transitional space in the motel, the suburb and particularly the highway. The repetition of the footage of the assassination makes this counter-narrative visible to mass society and in doing so causes the society itself to seem unstable, anxious and dangerous. Questions over reality and unreality become commonplace, paranoia and conspiracy become elements of the accepted societal narrative³³⁹. It is now socially understood that there are levels of reality connected to unknown sources, none of which may be visible or any more stable than any other.

A character in the novel describes the assassination as “an aberration in the heartland of the real.” We still haven’t reached any consensus on the specifics of the crime: The number of gunmen, the number of shots, the location of the shots, the number of wounds in the President’s body – the list goes on and on. Beyond this confusion of data, people have developed a sense that history has been secretly manipulated.

Documents lost and destroyed. Official records sealed for fifty or seventy-five years.

³³⁶ DeCurtis, A., *An Outsider in This Society: and Interview with Don DeLillo* in Lentricchia, F., (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) pp. 48 – 49.

³³⁷ See Chapter 2 on Bellow’s *Dangling Man*.

³³⁸ See Kunstler, J. H., *Geography of Nowhere, The* (New York, Touchstone, 1993) discussion of the manner in which transitional spaces stemmed from the post-war period. Also see Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) on the manner in which those that had internalised the transitional impulse shaped their societal spaces.

³³⁹ See Hofstadter, R., *Paranoid Style in American Politics, The* (New York, Harper’s Magazine, November 1964) on the origins of paranoia and the role it played in the development of the American Political System.

A number of suggestive murders and suicides involving people who were connected to the events of November 22nd. So from the initial impact of the visceral shock, I think we've developed a much more deeply unsettled feeling about our grip on reality.³⁴⁰

Highway as Palimpsest

The assassination of Kennedy exposed the instability of society and the counter-narrative which existed behind it. This awareness of the unfixed meaning of society reflects the spatiality of the highway as it is not fixed to any one location. It is a network of associations and connections, an emblem of the manner in which the transient society must be observed. The flow of information that passes through it carries elements of its meaning. Whilst the highway has been understood as it relates to other spaces within this network such as the motel, the suburb and to some degree the city, the space itself contains guidance for understanding its functions and materials. As with the motel, the materials which constitute the highway and the manner in which they are constructed suggest elements of the spaces larger societal meaning. The concept of the highway as a palimpsest functions on numerous levels, both physically and culturally. As a space through which societal information in the form of people, materials and images pass, the highway is layered, each element that moves through it leaving a trace of meaning. There are connections embedded within the concrete and tarmac of the highway which retains both personal associations for those that traverse it and wider social connotations.

All around me the day was ending. I crossed the highway and walked along the side of the road. There was a car in the distance, coming toward me... I looked down at the road as I walked. The wind picked up again. I thought of men embedded in the ground, all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails, man-planet, a fresh intelligence revolving through the system... The sun. The desert. The sky. The silence. The flat stones. The insects. The wind and the clouds. The moon. The stars. The west and east. The song, the color, the smell of the earth.

Blast area. Fire area. Body-burn area.³⁴¹

The highway has already been discussed as a site within which to rehearse the mass death and destruction of nuclear war. In *End Zone* Gary Harkness is obsessed with this form of

³⁴⁰ DeCurtis, A., *An Outsider in This Society: and Interview with Don DeLillo* in Lentricchia, F., (ed.) *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) pp. 47 – 48.

³⁴¹ DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) pp. 85 – 86.

devastation, discussing it at great length in a motel, another safe space to consider the counter-narrative of nuclear devastation.³⁴² The experience of walking the highway allows Gary to absorb the materials of the space and to combine its associations with his own interests. Thematically the image of “men embedded in the ground, all killed, billions,” suggest the manner in which the transient, consumer driven society is anti-historical. It is a society which buries its past and moves rapidly across it, not looking back. The bodies which it is built upon have become the materials for this spatial form but they are not acknowledged by those that pass through these spaces at speed. It is only in walking that a vision of these figures comes to Gary as he carries out self propelled locomotion free of the technology of the car which supports motion through this space.³⁴³ The manner in which the road is depicted as absorbing people, of changing them from locatable, identifiable individuals to an indistinguishable mass is reflected in the term “a fresh intelligence revolving through the system”. Whilst the highway is connected to the counter-narrative and transitionality, Virilio illustrates that as a space which monitors and controls both speed and direction of motion it is also a space which is utilised to enforce the roles of mass society.³⁴⁴ The concept of an individual being brought into this space and “revolving through the system” is suggestive of the use of repetitious motion as a means of achieving not just a homogenised space, but a homogenised citizen. The highway offers the facsimile of spatial freedom yet in reality it is a closed system, connecting all elements of the spatial network to every other. The walker is shown to have more freedom than the driver on the highway as he is able to observe and understand the reality of the space, being in control of his own direction, speed and observation.³⁴⁵ In *White Noise* DeLillo depicts a figure that has not been fully immersed in his societal role. A child on a tricycle, Wilder, illustrates the degree to which the highway is an ordered, controlled space by refusing its laws of motion and speed:

Wilder, meanwhile, ignoring their cries or not hearing them in the serial whoosh of dashing hatchbacks and vans, began to pedal across the highway, mystically charged... The drivers could not quite comprehend. In their knotted posture, belted in, they knew this picture did not belong to the hurtling consciousness of the

³⁴² See Chapter 3; The Motel.

³⁴³ See the discussion of the elevator in Chapter 6: Interstices.

³⁴⁴ “It seems we’ve forgotten that the street is only a road passing through an agglomeration, whereas every day laws on the “speed limit” within the city walls remind us of the continuity of displacement, of movement, that only the speed laws” Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) P. 31.

³⁴⁵ The relationship between Foucault’s panoptic observation of individuals and Virilio’s monitoring of their motion and speed combine in this investigation of socio-spatial control.

highway, the broad-ribboned modernist stream. In speed there was sense. In signs, in patterns, in split-second lives. What did it mean, this little rotary blur?³⁴⁶

The highway is shown to be far more ordered and controlled than its transitional nature suggests. The uncertainty which was exposed as a previously hidden element of society led to the transitional impulse and awareness of the counter-narrative being internalised by those in mass society. They embraced the space of the highway as a means of motion and speed with a suggestion of danger. As the motel and suburb have become sites treated with nostalgia so the highway has become an accepted element of the daily spatial network. The repetitious nature of these spaces has resulted in the homogeneity Lefebvre notes that they tend towards.³⁴⁷ However the counter-narrative is still an aspect of this space and as such it is now locatable in the spaces above and below the highway.

Underpass - Overpass

The highway's meaning is not limited to the space between its crash barriers. Just as the areas that surround the highway such as the motel, the suburb and the airport, are influenced by its speed and transitionality,³⁴⁸ the spaces above and below the highway are connected to the complex network of associations that create the highway palimpsest. DeLillo repeatedly refers to the underpasses and overpasses as locations in which the darker elements of the highway are still visible even as the space itself becomes emblematic of speed and progress.³⁴⁹ The underpass becomes a space within which the dispossessed exist beneath the partially socially accepted space of forward motion the highway becomes. The overpass also maintains some of the spatial elements which the highway once represented. It becomes a location from which the flow of stable information on the highway can be undermined or destroyed. The overpass frequently functions as the vantage point from which highway assassination takes place in DeLillo's writing.³⁵⁰ As the highway is increasingly understood as a space which is more monitored and controlled than it appears the ability to carry out aberrant acts within that space becomes particularly difficult. The Texas Highway Killer in

³⁴⁶ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 322 – 323.

³⁴⁷ See earlier in this work for the full quote. Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

³⁴⁸ See previous chapters 3, 4 and 7 on these other transitional spaces.

³⁴⁹ The manner in which the internalisation of the transitional impulse leads to it being observable in smaller more transitional spaces is discussed in Chapter 6: Interstices.

³⁵⁰ The relationship between the overpass and assassination is clearly rooted in DeLillo's interest in the Kennedy assassination in which the fatal shot occurs within view of the "Elevated highway" DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989); p. 403.

Underworld, in an act of performance and controlled societal visibility, calls into a television show to discuss his killings. In doing so he notes how difficult the act he carries out is.³⁵¹

Which the correct term for this is not sniper by the way. This is not an individual with a rifle working more or less long-range. You're mobile here, you're moving, you want to get as close to the situation as humanly possible without bringing the two vehicles into contact, whereby a paint mark might result,³⁵²

The ability to undermine the spatial stability of the highway from within whilst it is in motion is claimed to be almost impossible. When both elements are mobile the difficulty of the act is increased. The Texas Highway Killer suggests that this is the reason most snipers would not carry it out, instead choosing stable positions. More commonly the act of highway assassination in DeLillo is connected to the highway overpass. They are carried out by "Men firing from highway overpasses, attic rooms. Unconnected to the earth"³⁵³ These figures are removed from the space of the highway and the network of associations it offers, they are figures that have placed themselves in the counter-narrative. They haunt the space of the highway but are unconnected from it when they carry out the act. The concept of their being "unconnected" also relates to the manner in which they are not in contact with the buried history which exists beneath the palimpsest of the highway. They float above it, removed from its meaning and guidance.³⁵⁴ The overpass is also used in *White Noise* in a manner which relates it to the dislocation of the transitional society from history.

Slowly we approached an overpass, seeing people on foot up there. They carried boxes and suitcases, objects in blankets, a long line of people leaning into the billowing snow. People cradling pets and small children, an old man wearing a blanket over his pajamas, two women shouldering a rolled-up rug... They just kept moving across the bridge through patches of snow-raging light. Out in the open, keeping their children near, carrying what they could, they seemed to be part of some ancient destiny, connected in doom and ruin to a whole history of people trekking across wasted landscapes. There was an epic quality about them that made me wonder for the first time at the scope of our predicament.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Compare this desire to expose specialist knowledge of counter-narrative techniques and materials with Oswald's interaction with Russian officers regarding the U2 in *Libra*. Ibid pp. 88 – 90.

³⁵² DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 217.

³⁵³ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 171.

³⁵⁴ Compare the figure "unconnected" from society in relation to the figure utilising the motel as a space outside of the societal narrative. See Chapter 3: The Motel.

³⁵⁵ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 121 – 122.

The figures that are seen walking across the overpass act as a visual reminder to the travellers on the highway of those that exist outside of the system. They are the lost, the dispossessed and the forgotten. These figures, much like the sniper on the overpass, are outsiders. It is unclear from this quote where these people have come from or where they are going to. Their existence, and the visibility of it, highlights the difference between their life and that of those on the highway. It is unusual for such figures to be viewed from the highway. As in *End Zone* the only reason that the Gray family is able to observe this element of highway spatiality is because their motion has been slowed.³⁵⁶ Whereas Gary Harkness views the historical connections hidden beneath the highway because he is walking, the Grays are able to see it because they have slowed to a crawl, held up in their escape from the airborne toxic event.³⁵⁷ The majority of the time these elements of the highway's spatiality are hidden. It is this hidden societal space with its connection to the negative associations of societal transitionality which are depicted by DeLillo as the underpass.

Whilst the overpass provides an elevated view of the highway and a space which may be utilised to pass across it safely the underpass is the invisible space beneath. The underpass cannot be manipulated by societal outsiders to function as a space to threaten the motion of the highway. Rather the underpass is a location within which the societal outcasts create a space for dwelling. Unlike the overpass the societal interactions which take place in the underpass are fully embedded in the counter-narrative.

Teenage boys in clusters, armed drug dealers – these were the men of the immediate streets. She didn't know where the others had gone, the fathers, living with second or third families, hidden in rooming houses or sleeping under highways in refrigerator boxes, buried in the potter's field on Hart Island.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Reduction of speed to allow observation, Compare this with the actions of DeCerteau's walker as a figure whose unmechanized and slow motion can undermine society and allow him to observe and shape it. "Rather than remaining within the field of a discourse that upholds its privilege by inverting its content (speaking of catastrophe and no longer of progress), one can try another path: one can analyze the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay; one can follow the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanism and discourses of the observational organization." DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 96.

³⁵⁷ The airborne toxic event is a chemical spill which is described as having numerous sources and effects throughout *White Noise*. The shifting nature of the event and the instability of its definition connect to larger issues of reality and simulation in the novel.

³⁵⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 240.

The figures that dwell in the space beneath the highway are aggressive and dispossessed. They are not simply homeless; they exist outside of societal space and forge a life of violence and imminent death in the lost spaces.³⁵⁹ Whilst the suburb, the motel and the highway may still be considered transitional spaces, they are still connected to the wider network of societal space. The underpass has more in connection with the alleyway which is the highway's forbear.³⁶⁰ It is the most unusual of spaces in the consumption driven society, a wasteland. When the highway is placed in direct comparison with the underpass it becomes apparent exactly how connected to the spatial network of mass society transitional sites, which developed out of the impetus for motion in the post war period, have become. As these spaces have become more stable elements in the societal network, the anxieties they held and role they played in the investigation of personal identity has shifted. The concept of a transitional space has altered from that of a solid space outside of accepted societal space to an internalised drive. The spaces within which this questioning of the balance between the individual and mass society become increasingly smaller. As the role of the highway shifts to the underpass and overpass, so the role of the motel and suburb shifts to the elevator and stairwell.

³⁵⁹ The manner in which the transitional network mirrors Foucault's Carceral network makes the possibility of "lost spaces" uncertain. "The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside. It takes back with one hand what it seems to exclude with the other." Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 301.

³⁶⁰ See Chapter 2 on Saul Bellow for more on the alleyway as a spatial forbear for the highway and Chapter 6: Interstices for a discussion of it's relationship to the staircase.

Chapter 6: Interstices: Spaces Between Spaces

The network of transient spaces that make up the landscape of DeLillo's writing is reflective of the expansion and normalisation of societal transience and encompasses the motel, the suburb and the highway.³⁶¹ As these spaces have become more readily accepted as sites of societal interaction DeLillo's depiction of social spatiality occurs in smaller and more personal spaces. The clearest microcosms of the transitional experience are shrunken, transient forms such as the elevator, the escalator and the stairwell. These spaces are the tissue which connects the wider network of transitional sites.³⁶² They are interstitial spaces which exist in the gaps between spaces which are themselves transient. The class of spaces which the elevator, the escalator and the stairwell belong to are frequently utilised throughout DeLillo's writing as a means of investigating socio-spatial interactions and illuminate the relationship between the individual, space and the society.³⁶³

The elevator, the escalator and the stairwell are the most prominent examples of this inter-transitional form of space within DeLillo's work. Although they share many spatial traits they illustrate numerous different forms of societal interaction within the spatial network of DeLillo's writing. Each allows for alternative ways in which the individual relates spatially to mass society.³⁶⁴ Whilst the staircase and the escalator seemingly fulfil a similar spatial role, the movement between floors, throughout DeLillo's work they are utilised by different elements of society. The technological aspect of the escalator leads to it being utilised as part of the figure immersed in mass society whilst the staircase is a more traditional space which has been co-opted by figures of the counter-narrative. Similarly the Elevator comes to represent a very specific element of the social relationship between technology and the isolated individual. The concept of individual action as opposed to the mass shaping society seen in these spaces is a microcosm of a larger conversation taking place in DeLillo's writing.

³⁶¹ See previous chapters.

³⁶² In this respect these interstitial sites reflect the connective function of the highway.

³⁶³ Steve Pile explores the manner in which the individual and the crowd function spatially. He considers Freud's discussion of groups. "...Freud wants to know, why do people bind themselves into collectivities so completely and so deeply. In this, he agrees with Le Bon, that individuals obliterate their conscious selves and give way to a 'racial unconscious', such that individual differences are submerged by group similarities." Pile, S., *The Body and the City* (London, Routledge, 1996) pp. 100 – 101.

³⁶⁴ DeCerteau's discussion of the manner in which the individual shapes space makes it clear that his opinion of the crowd / individual relationship is less obvious. "They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinaesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass in an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces" DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 97.

These spaces suggest issues of class with the differing degrees of access to both technology and social spaces dependant on social standing.³⁶⁵ By investigating these more liminal transitional spaces DeLillo is able to explore wider social and spatial questions which occur in the larger spaces of his work in a more focused manner. The staircase and stairwell allow for a discussion of the individual, both in motion and in isolation from the mass of society. Whilst the stairwell's use and location shows it to be a point of transition connected to more traditional means of spatial motion³⁶⁶ the escalator allows for an investigation of the uncanny relationship between motion and inaction as it relates to the technological. The inactive motion experienced on the escalator also introduces a discussion of the internalisation of the transitional impetus and how it relates to the individual experience of space.³⁶⁷ The elevator continues the themes suggested by the escalator but takes them to a more complex extreme, the enclosure of the elevator connecting them more firmly to a sense of place than the stairwell.³⁶⁸ The uncanny sensation of inactive motion is further illustrated by this space to the extent that it produces a feeling of motionless movement.³⁶⁹

Stairwells

In many respects the staircase is the most simplistic of the liminal transitional spaces within DeLillo's work. It is divorced from the technological in the sense that it relies only on the motion of an individual utilising the space to pass through it using their momentum.³⁷⁰ Despite this apparent simplicity the staircase plays a complex role in the spatial network of DeLillo's writing. Partially due to being divorced from mechanised technology it calls into question the balance between the individual in isolation and the figure as part of mass society.

³⁶⁵ The question of who retains political power as it relates to motion and spatiality is central to both Virilio and Lefebvre's discussions of social space.

³⁶⁶ The stairwell as a space of walking connects it to the alleyway (see Chapter 2 on Bellow) and also to DeCerteau's concept of the walker as a figure to undermine societal restrictions.

³⁶⁷ "The question bears on more than the procedures of production: in a different form, it concerns as well the *status of the individual* in technical systems, since the involvement of the subject diminishes in proportion to the technocratic expansion of these systems. Increasingly constrained, yet less and less concerned with the vast frameworks, the individual detaches himself from them without being able to escape them and can henceforth only try to outwit them," DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) pp. xxiii – xxiv.

³⁶⁸ The distinction between space and place is explored later in this chapter. Lefebvre considers the relationship between space and place in a way which is suggestive of the discussion of the counter-narrative "The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from the mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates." Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 28.

³⁶⁹ See the discussion of the elevator and the escalator later in this chapter but also Chapter 7: The Airport on uncanny mechanized motion.

³⁷⁰ Those that utilise the stair are a form of DeCerteau's walker.

The staircase is to the escalator what the alleyway is to the highway.³⁷¹ It is its progenitor; sharing many facets of its spatial function and origins yet throughout DeLillo's depictions of the staircase it becomes apparent that it fulfils a different spatial role. The locomotion required to utilise the staircase means that the action of passing through it has more in common with the act of walking than the mechanised motion of the escalator which is ridden.³⁷² The figure traversing the staircase shapes his environment through motion in a physical sense. The degree to which individuals control their motion has been discussed in relation to the highway and Virilio's discussion in *Speed and Politics*.³⁷³ The staircase provides an opportunity to investigate that relationship on a more personal scale through a comparison of those that use the stairwell and those that use the more mechanised space of the elevator and escalator.

In *Great Jones Street* the staircase is the primary means of movement between spaces, particularly between the street and the rented room. In that novel a successful musician, Bucky Wunderlick, opts out of the life he has created, choosing instead to live in an unfinished apartment in a tenement building.³⁷⁴ It is as a site of rental apartments³⁷⁵ and as such it retains many of the aspects of the home whilst still maintaining associations with the unfixed and shifting nature of the motel space. Within that building of temporarily owned spaces the stairwell is an unclaimed space,³⁷⁶ belonging neither to the street nor the room. As such it is a site of contested use, unstable and unfixed to any individuals preferred use. It is owned and maintained by no one tenant, it is a communal area for fleeting interactions between the residents of the tenement. Unlike the mechanised elevator and escalator which require maintenance to continue to function, the staircase is allowed to fall into disrepair.

³⁷¹ See Chapter 2 on Bellow for more on the relationship between the alleyway and the stairwell.

³⁷² Nicholson Baker in his discussion of the escalator in *The Mezzanine* connects forms of rideable space. "I admit that part of my pleasure in riding the escalator came from the links with childhood memory that the experience sustained. Other people remember liking boats, cars, trains, or planes when they were children – and I liked them too – but I was more interested in systems of local transport: airport luggage-handling systems ... supermarket checkout conveyer belts...milk bottling-bottling machines...marble chutes; Olympic luge and bobsled tracks; the hanger-management systems at the dry cleaners... The escalator shared qualities with all of these systems with one difference: it was the only one I could get on and ride." Baker, N., *The Mezzanine* (Cambridge, Granta, 1989) pp. 35 – 36.

³⁷³ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

³⁷⁴ The tenement building bridges the gap between the motel and the home, a space which is home and yet impermanent.

³⁷⁵ Consider in relation to Eliot's "thousand furnished rooms" Eliot, T.S., 'Preludes' in *Selected Poems* (London, Faber and Faber, 1954) p. 22.

³⁷⁶ Compare the concept of the unclaimed space with the discussion of the underpass in the previous chapter.

We entered a tenement and started to climb stairs. There were no lights in the hallway. I smelled babies and lush garbage. The tile steps were worn at the edges.³⁷⁷

At the heart of the novel, and thematically throughout DeLillo's depiction of the staircase, is the relationship between the mass and the individual, between privacy and the social. The staircase is a public space and yet one within which is designed to move people through it rather than foster connection.³⁷⁸ Many aspects of *Great Jones Street* revolve around Wunderlick's growing awareness of those in the other apartments, his relationships with them developing through brief meetings and conversations in stairwells. Social interactions in this space are jarringly personal and uncomfortable, exposing brutal truths about individuals throughout the novel.³⁷⁹ This troubling space of societal interaction illustrates the complexities of attempting to remove oneself from mass society and live in isolation.³⁸⁰ The depiction of the relationship between mass society and the individual stems from a discussion of the "Happy Valley Farms Commune"³⁸¹ and their beliefs.

Happy Valley thinks privacy is the essential freedom this nation, country or republic offered in the beginning. They think you exemplify some old idea of men alone with the land. You stepped out of your legend to pursue personal freedom. There is no freedom, according to them, without privacy. The return of the private man, according to them, is the only way to destroy the notion of mass man. Mass man ruined our freedoms for us. Turning inward will get them back. Revolutionary solitude. Turn inward one and all. Isolate yourself mentally, spiritually and physically, on and on, world without end. Sustain your privacy with aggressive self-defense.³⁸²

The questions of privacy and mass man continue to be played out in the uncanny site of the stairwell, the public nature of the space intimately connected to the unknowable isolation of those behind the tenement doors³⁸³. The use of isolation and an attempt at individuality is

³⁷⁷ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 248.

³⁷⁸ Consider this description of the staircase in relation to the highway, a social space for societal motion. Yet whilst the highway is still utilised as a mechanism of observation and control, the staircase has been discarded.

³⁷⁹ See the discussion between Bucky and a neighbour who exposes private information about herself and her family. DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) pp. 133 – 136.

³⁸⁰ This work has suggested that the connections between all elements of the transitional network render the potential to be entirely isolated impossible.

³⁸¹ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 16.

³⁸² *Ibid* p. 60.

³⁸³ The attempt to connect to a sense of self in isolation is another recurring theme in this work. The motel, the suburban house, the room as a monastic cell and even the prisoner's cell in the panopticon all provide an isolated space for self exploration.

considered a revolutionary act. The removal of the self from the network of societal associations undermines the stability of those associations and suggests Wunderlick as a figure of the counter-narrative. The balance between self imposed isolation is discussed spatially, as a disconnection from the transitional society and returning to a traditional interaction with “the land”³⁸⁴

Control and Power in the Stairwell

The stairwell becomes a space for investigating the division of those that prosper from mass life and those that do not.³⁸⁵ Although it is not purely a class divide, the difference between those that exist within the tenements and those that are uncomfortable there is connected to their social status, the degree to which they have become accustomed to the transitional form of life that mass society offers.³⁸⁶

I watched him make his way down the narrow staircase, prodigious in his width, haunches rocking in that firm eternal way of beasts of burden. I imagined him a few minutes hence, standing on the Bowery trying to hail a cab to take him to his car, a custom-made machine gleaming at the top of a circular ramp in some midtown garage. Globke was accustomed to being propelled, balistically, to and from distant points of commerce, and so there was something agreeably serene, even biblical, in his rudimentary journey down those stairs.³⁸⁷

The discussion of societal control exerted through the control of motion and speed on the highway related to Virilio in the previous chapter is also applicable to the stairwell. The freedom to move throughout the stairwell and who controls that motion becomes a major point of contention in *Great Jones Street*. The control of means of movement is a factor in understanding the societal role of spaces, particularly transitional spaces which are so connected to social motion.³⁸⁸ Transitional spaces have been shown throughout this work to allow the usurpation of their understood meaning. This had been seen as allowing the societal counter-narrative to flourish there or its utilisation to provide a location for acing out

³⁸⁴ Consider this desire to return to an idealised form of spatial existence with the actions of the Servatius Party in Bellow’s *Dangling Man*. See Chapter 2. The complex associations with traditional forms and transitionality’s anti-historical nature makes such attempts at isolation difficult.

³⁸⁵ The question of class could be discussed in relation to those that are able to use the spaces of mass society and those that are relegated to the forgotten spaces.

³⁸⁶ Globke in his acceptance of the means of societal motion is a descendant of Whyte’s transients and a part of the travelling class depicted in *The Names*. See Chapter 7: The Airport.

³⁸⁷ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 11.

³⁸⁸ See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

repressed elements of the psyche. The stairwell carries out a similar function, provides a space within which control of societal space can be questioned and usurped.

I'd rather be used than use others. It's easy to be used. There's no passion or morality. You're free to be nothing. I read their mail. I look in all the confidential files. When I deliver personal notes from floor to floor, I read them in the stairwell. I feel I'm free to do these things.³⁸⁹

The staircase becomes a site which represents the societal control of movement and within which social conventions must be maintained however it becomes clear from both the descriptions of the stairwell in *Great Jones Street* the rest of DeLillo's depictions of that space it is in fact a contested space. It is frequently utilised by those that exist on the fringes or boundaries of mass society to usurp or question societal control.³⁹⁰ Repeatedly in *Great Jones Street* the stairs become the space within which acts of societal disruption and incursion take place. The skinhead element of the Happy Valley Farms Commune, the dog boys, attempt to assert control through intimidation and violence, actions which manifest themselves in the stairwells of the tenement buildings

They made a lot of noise coming up the stairs and a lot of noise going back down the stairs. I think that was the biggest part of their operation. The idea of talking over a building. The idea of breaking and entering. The idea of domination.³⁹¹

Violence, the visible assertion of control and the domination of those within the tenement takes place on the stairs. The nature of the stairwell means that these acts are not visible to those in the room,³⁹² however they are acted out in such a way as to be heard. This fear of the violent means of societal control used to incorporate individuals into a mass³⁹³ represents the

³⁸⁹ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 45. Compare the concept of preferring to be used rather than using others to Joseph's disgust at "climbing upon the backs of the dead" Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, (1996) p. 64.

³⁹⁰ "The violence of power is answered by the violence of subversion." Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 23 The use of violence in transitional spaces to undermine societal control of space and motion is suggestive of DeLillo's later investigation of terrorism and the actions of the counter-narrative figure. See Chapter 7: The Airport.

³⁹¹ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 163.

³⁹² Consider this relationship between the hidden and the visible with regard to the spatial requirements of the panopticon for societal control. "He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility." Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 200.

³⁹³ When one considers the stated beliefs of the Happy Valley Farm Commune, that "There is no freedom, according to them, without privacy." (DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 60) this action seems absurd.

form of spatiality Wunderlick is attempting to escape form and as such these acts begin to appear in his dreams.

Terminal fantasy. I'm living all alone in this building. Outside the dog-boys are pursuing their life-style of constant prowling. They roam the empty streets, picking a building at random and then crashing right in to execute their punches and kicks, breaking down doors, charging up the stairs, loping though the hallways.³⁹⁴

The stairwell, like all other transitional spaces, becomes a contentious site of societal control. It is connected to questions of class and individual identity whilst also acting as form of connective societal space that predates the technological elements which further complicate DeLillo's investigation of the elevator and the escalator.³⁹⁵ The conflict between mass man and private man is one that runs through his depiction of the stairwell and introduces the concept of the man in isolation.³⁹⁶ This figure attempts to bypass the socially controlled spaces of motion in favour of the spaces of the counter-narrative such as the staircase. Such semi-forgotten forms are suggestive of earlier spaces³⁹⁷ yet are nevertheless connected to the transitional network of associated spaces such as the motel and the highway.

Stairwell as Site of the Other

The stairwell is repeatedly depicted in DeLillo's work as a decrepit space utilised by those on the fringes of society. The figures found there are those without agency in the spatiality of mass society, be they societal outcast, the destitute or those that choose to place themselves in line with a counter-narrative.³⁹⁸ The stairwell offers access and movement through the spatial elements of society that have been allowed to languish, as the example of the tenement in *Great Jones Street* illustrates. In *Americana* as the main character, David Bell, is gradually becoming more distanced from his role within "The Network"³⁹⁹ he describes his attempts to avoid detection as a means of self preservation. He tries to become socially invisible, escaping the view of others within the network of mass society. One means of achieving this is to locate himself in the forgotten transient space of the stairwell. "I did my best to keep low. I moved quietly close to walls and up and down the stairwells."⁴⁰⁰ Just as in *Great Jones*

³⁹⁴ Ibid p. 221.

³⁹⁵ See later in this chapter.

³⁹⁶ See discussion of the isolated cell in relation to the motel in the previous chapter.

³⁹⁷ See the relationship between the alleyway and the highway.

³⁹⁸ The figures that are found in the stairwell mirror those found in the underpass. The forgotten and rejected elements of society.

³⁹⁹ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 7.

⁴⁰⁰ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 13.

Street the stairwell is shown to be a space within which one can avoid detection, in that novel from a large record label and here from the network. The correlation between the role of the record label and a television network suggests the role which the mass media plays in creating and supporting the visual symbolism of mass society and the role of mass man.⁴⁰¹ Even within the closely controlled space of the network the stairwell functions as a hidden space. It allows societal invisibility and as such functions counter to the controlled means of the larger network of spaces within which it is embedded. In many respects the elevator performs a similar function, allowing passage through the large space of mass society in a seemingly isolated form. However the two are differentiated from one another as the elevator is still firmly connected to the technological means of motion and observation that link it to the network of associations. DeLillo's work which draws the most apparent comparison between these two forms of space is *Ratner's Star*.⁴⁰² Within that work the facility in which Billy Twillig attempts to decipher messages from space utilising mathematics is, on its surface, highly technologically advanced. Its elevators are described throughout the work as "Soundless, free of vibration, extremely rapid."⁴⁰³ However as the novel progresses and Twillig further investigates the facility, particularly those elements of it that are unseen, the role of the staircase and its connection to human motion becomes increasingly important. Initially the staircase is simply depicted as a space for play, a site for the games of hide and seek that Twillig and the other child prodigies play to keep themselves entertained.

One day Billy and two friends were being chased by the janitor through a series of passageways and alleys that ran under and between several adjacent buildings. With the route to his own building sealed off he climbed the first set of stairs he found.⁴⁰⁴

The staircase is used as a space for societal hiding.⁴⁰⁵ In attempting to avoid the authority figure of the janitor, a figure who monitors passage through this societal space, the alleyway and the staircase become a space for covert motion. As Twillig's investigation of the facility

⁴⁰¹ Jameson discusses the role which media plays in the shaping of mass society. "The contents of the media itself have now become commodities, which are then flung out on some wider version of the market with which they become affiliated until the two things are indistinguishable. Here, then, the media, as which the market was itself fantasized, now returns into the market and by becoming a part of it seals and certifies the formerly metaphorical or analogical identification as a "literal" reality." Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 277

⁴⁰² DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991).

⁴⁰³ Ibid p. 123. Also see the discussion of the elevator later in this chapter.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid p. 72.

⁴⁰⁵ Considering its association with the alleyway the use of the staircase as a space to hide from societal view is fitting.

progresses he becomes aware of increasingly aged staircases that suggest a more historic basis for this space ⁴⁰⁶than its technologically advanced appearance would suggest.

They went through the bronze door, past the instant silicone apparatus and down several flights of stairs that seemed even older and more damaged than the stairs he'd descended earlier.⁴⁰⁷

The age of these stairs lends them a sense of authority, grounded and stable reality ⁴⁰⁸which is lacking from the more technological spaces.⁴⁰⁹ They exist in counterpoint to uncanny motion of the elevator in which the reality of the motion is uncertain.⁴¹⁰ The difference between the technologically advanced semblance of motion offered by the elevator and the physical means of transition enacted on the stairs reflects the manner in which stairs function throughout DeLillo's writing. They are spaces for the social outcast whose access to more technologically advanced means of motion is restricted. The disparity between those that utilise the staircase and those the elevator is more clearly defined in *Cosmopolis*.⁴¹¹ As Eric Packer gradually steps outside of his life of privilege and wealth, a life that comes complete with two private elevators he more frequently comes into contact with staircases and those that utilise them.

...my wife took her child and left, carried down the stairs by her illegal immigrant brothers... They carried her down the stairs in her wheelchair with her baby. I was disoriented in my head. Maybe you have seen the spikes on a lying polygraph. This is my wave of thought sometimes, thinking how do I respond to this?⁴¹²

The staircase is utilised and occupied by illegal immigrants, a space of self propelled motion which is almost incomprehensible to a figure that is enmeshed in the technological motion of mass society. The section of the novel "The Confessions of Benno Levin"⁴¹³ provides insight into a character that has removed him self from the network of spaces which make up society

⁴⁰⁶ The manner in which the stairs and elevators in the building becoming increasingly decrepit as Twillig investigates further down the building is suggestive of the discussion of the highway in relation to the palimpsest. Layers of spatial information and historical developments are placed on top of one another, each suggestive of its own associations but each also part of the larger whole.

⁴⁰⁷ DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 211.

⁴⁰⁸ The disparity between the visual semblance of motion and its reality is suggestive of the confusion between image and object discussed by Baudrillard and Lefebvre in relation to the simulacrum.

⁴⁰⁹ See the discussion of the elevator later in this chapter.

⁴¹⁰ The concept of stationary motion is discussed later in this chapter in relation to the elevator and also in Chapter 7: The Airport.

⁴¹¹ DeLillo, D., *Cosmopolis* (London, Picador, 2003).

⁴¹² *Ibid* pp. 152 – 153.

⁴¹³ *Ibid* p. 149.

and has retreated into spaces associated with the counter narrative such as the stairwell. The character starts his confession by stating that “I am living offline now. I am all bared down.”⁴¹⁴ The concept of being “offline” and “bared down” is suggestive of being disconnected to the network of associations which constitute the spatiality of mass society. By retreating from this network these figures reject the role of the mass man and instead become fringe figures, isolated and connected to their own physicality. These are DeLillo’s “Men on small islands”⁴¹⁵ David Bell, Bucky Wunderlick, Bill Gray and Lee Harvey Oswald. DeLillo’s writing is littered with characters who attempt to strip themselves of connections to the network of associations and in doing so find themselves in transitional spaces such as the motel, communicating on stairs and struggling to re-establish the distinction between themselves and mass society.

In its connection to walking the discussion of those that use the staircases connects to the concept of the *flanêur*, the figure that passes through society, both isolated from it and influencing it through motion⁴¹⁶. The relationship between space and motion as it pertains to the control and action of both mass society and the individual is also discussed in DeCerteau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. His writing is of particular interest as it pertains to the relationship between the mass and the role of the *flanêur*, the act of walking in its shaping of society reflecting of the use of stairs. DeCerteau shifts his focus away from the external factors which shape societal space such as commerce and discipline and instead considers the spatial activities of those within society. In focusing on their actions it becomes apparent that acts of individual spatiality have become enmeshed in the societal fabric. The manner in which the subject is able to shape space through “microbe-like, singular and plural practices”⁴¹⁷ reflects the extent to which transitionality has become an internalised facet of identity. The forms these acts take and the specific manner in which this drive is represented are central to De Certeau’s exploration of everyday spatiality⁴¹⁸. The primary spatial practice

⁴¹⁴ Ibid p. 149.

⁴¹⁵ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 129

⁴¹⁶ “The *flanêur* is the man of the public who knows himself to be of the public ... the *flanêur* is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city. Consequently, *flanêurie* can, after Baudelaire, be understood as the activity of the sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence; replace the sense of bereavement with a sense of life.” Tester, K., (ed.), ‘Introduction’ in *The Flanêur* (London, Routledge, 1994) pp. 6 – 7 in Pile, S., *The Body and the City* (London, Routledge, 1996) pp. 229 – 230.

⁴¹⁷ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 96.

⁴¹⁸ “...our research has concentrated above all on the uses of space, on the ways of frequenting or dwelling in a place, on the complex processes of the art of cooking, and on the many ways of establishing a kind of reliability within the situations imposed on an individual, that is, of making it possible to live in them by reintroducing into them the plural mobility of goals and desires – an art of

which he highlights is the act of walking, the role of the walker within the space of the city and the impact that this figure has on the way in which the urban space is understood. The interest in the role of the walker and the act of walking is related to a figure that has been central to the understanding of urban space, the *flanêur*.⁴¹⁹ In his *The Body and the City* Steve Pile highlights the connection between De Certeau's walker and the *flanêur* and in doing so suggests the manner in which that figure interacts with space. He quotes a piece from Keith Tester's *The Flanêur* which encapsulates the history and nature of the *flanêur*.

The *flanêur* is the individual sovereign of the order of things who, as a poet or as the artist, is able to transform faces and things so that for him they have only that meaning which he attributes to them. He therefore treats the objects of the city with a somewhat detached attitude (an attitude which is only a short step away from isolation and alienation...) The *flanêur* is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city. Consequently, *flanêurie* can, after Baudelaire, be understood as the activity of the sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity; satisfy his otherwise dissatisfied existence; replace the sense of bereavement with a sense of life.⁴²⁰

This exploration provides a useful summation of the functions and actions of the *flanêur*. The role of the *flanêur* in transitional space has become complicated by the interconnectivity of societal space and the confusing division between the individual and mass society. The more traditional forms of spatial interaction which were applicable to the *flanêur* have become untenable. The modern walker is challenged with more complex forms of spatiality with technological advancement and the multitudinous connections that shape the individual and social understanding of a space. De Certeau makes this clear in his initial description of the walker.

Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinaesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass in an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrians

manipulating and enjoying." DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. xxii.

⁴¹⁹ Introduction' in *The Flanêur* (London, Routledge, 1994) pp. 6 – 7 in Pile, S., *The Body and the City* (London, Routledge, 1996).

⁴²⁰ Ibid p. 230.

movements form one of those “real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.” They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize. They are no more inserted within a container than those Chinese characters speakers sketch out on their hands with their fingertips.⁴²¹

The question as to how, within this spatial society, an individual is able to understand themselves in isolation from the crowd is prominent throughout DeLillo’s writing. De Certeau also explores this issue by tracing the manner in which the walker shapes space through his movements and acts. The points at which the paths of individuals intersect expose the interconnected nature of transitional spatiality. The spatial understanding of the urban environment is particular to the walker, they bring with them the associations that shape the space into a network of meaning, and in doing so challenge and deny the organised and panoptic arrangement of understanding.⁴²² De Certeau is particularly interested in this manner of spatial production. He focuses on the means of undermining spatial meaning through bricolage, the construction of a new form from disparate and disassociated elements.⁴²³ One may understand the production of space within transitional sites as such a form of *bricolage*, a network of seemingly dissociated elements brought together through the disruptive act of the walker in such a way that the “proper” of a space is disrupted⁴²⁴. The staircase provides a space, much like the alley, which bypasses the mass spatiality of society and as such may be utilised to shape a counter-narrative. The concept of *bricolage* and the means of spatial production it is connected to are also apparent in the manner in which individuals consider themselves in isolation. The isolated figure, like the space it creates, produces a sense of self from the surrounding material; the innumerable connections available both create limitless potential for cultural experience and also destroy a sense of internal unity. Transitional spaces which have been discarded by mass society such as the stairwell provide a form of isolation within which the internalised network of associations may be utilised to construct an identity rather than accepting the roles which is supported by socially codified space.

⁴²¹ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 97.

⁴²² Consider Wilder’s tricycle path across the highway in *White Noise* as an act of spatial defiance. DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 323 – 325.

⁴²³ Bricolage as described by DeCerteau “...organizes a network of relations, poetic ways of “making do” (bricolage), and a re-use of marketing structures.” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. xv.

⁴²⁴ “Both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system – that of language or that of an established order. “Turns” (or “tropes”) inscribe in ordinary language the ruses, displacements, ellipses etc., that scientific reason has eliminated from operational discourses in order to constitute “proper” meanings.” DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 24.

Mass Man vs. the Monastic Cell

The division between the figure immersed in the network of societal space and the figure in self-imposed isolation is observable in the way they utilise differing transitional spaces. The figure in isolation; due to them retreating from social connections and the attendant technology of mass space, tends to be connected to stairwells and other spaces which require physical individual motion.⁴²⁵ The depiction of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra* illustrates a figure on the fringes of society that is acted through; who isolates himself from society and associates himself with the counter-narrative. In his isolation he plans a means of undermining and reshaping society to fit his desires. DeLillo describes the site from which he plans these actions, a space partially isolated yet connected to a staircase.

The little room could be entered from the living room and from the staircase outside their flat. Both doors could be locked from inside. It was like an airtight compartment, part of the building but separate from it. He called the room his study. He squeezed a lamp table and chair in there and set to work on his notes for the death of the general... What a sense of destiny he had, locked in the miniature room, creating a design, a network of connections. It was a second existence, the private world floating out to three dimensions,⁴²⁶

This room is a cell, a space which exists between the home and the street, fully associated with neither. This degree of isolation allows Oswald to plan the actions he wished to carry out to shape the world to match his own counter-narrative. In this respect his room resembles both the tenement room in *Great Jones Street* and the room in the “Prairie motels”⁴²⁷ in *Americana*. The lone figure in self imposed isolation raises the issues of societal invisibility and enforced isolation Foucault broached in his enquiry into the panoptic society. The physical imposition of isolation, whether enforced by society or chosen is associated with attempts to investigate societal identity. The lack of connection to mass society on anything other than a surface level is due in part to the awareness of a counter-narrative over which one has no control, creating an apathetic and resigned attitude as seen in the quote, “let others stitch together the systems.”⁴²⁸ The system of spaces DeLillo introduces is manifested as various networks, be they the highway⁴²⁹ or the television network.⁴³⁰ These networks are all

⁴²⁵ Hence the connection to DeCerteau’s walker.

⁴²⁶ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) pp. 276 – 277.

⁴²⁷ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 118.

⁴²⁸ Ibid p. 129.

⁴²⁹ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992).

elements of the larger system of societal meaning which exists beyond the control or understanding of those that are manipulated by it. The apathy which accompanies this awareness exists in counterpoint to the anxiety it creates and both underscore the reaction of the figures in these works towards their societal impotence. If one considers characters shaped by the period at which transitionality become prominent from DeLillo's work these varying reactions to it become apparent. Whilst Oswald in *Libra* has been shown to wish to shape society to reflect the counter-narrative and is forced to act Chuck Jr in *Underworld* has lived a drifting life of apathy.⁴³¹ He too though shapes the world with his connection to nuclear warfare, a connection he shares with another product of that period, Eric Deming in the same novel. Just as the panoptic gaze is internalised by those that have been exposed to it for an extended period of time, the cultural impetus toward transitionality has been internalised by those that have dwelt within those sites over decades⁴³². Transitionality is no longer a concept which must be enforced or insinuated into daily life; those that have internalised it now shape society to reflect their own transitional desires. As in Foucault, once the inmates of the panoptic system are released from the prison, having internalised the disciplining force of the panoptic gaze, they disseminate that influence throughout society.⁴³³ Transitionality is no longer solely an architectural concern; it has become a physical and psychological aspect of individual experience. The use of staircases and other liminal spaces in DeLillo's writing illustrates that the investigation of identity occurs outside larger transitional spaces such as the suburbs and highway system. These spaces between spaces come to function as a zone of temporary removal from the network of meaning, providing the illusion of escape⁴³⁴ and in doing so creating a space within which the psyche, the societal and the symbolic may coalesce. Lefebvre's discussion of signs, images and their correlation to truth illuminates this role.

This world of images of signs, this tombstone of the 'world' (Mundus est immundus?) is situated at the edges of what exists, between the shadow and the light, between the conceived (abstraction) and the perceived (the readable/visible). Between the real and the unreal. Always in the interstices, in the cracks. Between directly lived experience and thought.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990).

⁴³¹ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 606 – 616.

⁴³² See the depiction of David Bell in DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990).

⁴³³ See the discussion of the carceral network in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) pp. 293 – 308.

⁴³⁴ The willingness to accept the simulacrum for reality in order to facilitate a comfortable transitional life.

⁴³⁵ Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 389.

The staircase is a prime example of this type of interstices. It is a gap which allows questions of authenticity and meaning to be raised and provides a societal pause within which they are considered. This occurs in the “cracks” in these uncanny sites which exist outside society and yet are integral to it. Through these sites of decompression and societal consideration the concept of the other space, the counter-narrative comes to the fore. The internalisation of this impulse as a personal drive creates a situation whereby the individual is uncertain of himself or society.⁴³⁶ However, the desire to understand one’s place within society leads to the awareness of the disparity between one’s perception of the world and its unknowable reality.⁴³⁷ It is from this disparity that the vertiginous sense of unreality develops, the sense of uncertainty regarding one’s identity and the potential for other lives represented by the counter-narrative creating paranoia, anxiety and perversion.

Escalators

The escalator as a spatial form shares many attributes with stairwell and the elevator, in many respects is the spatial intersection of both. The condensation of the transitional experience to smaller and more interstitial sites has occurred to the extent moments on the escalator now facilitate the same socio-spatial function that was once carried out by the suburb.⁴³⁸ The escalator journey becomes a microcosm of the individual’s life, a space for the investigation of its minutia. These transient journeys allow insight the self, offering a moment of reprieve from the mass experience of the transitional free from anxiety, judgement or influence.⁴³⁹ The escalator as a moving walkway produces the state of walking yet requires no effort or thought, the perpetual forward motion is facilitated by technology. In this respect it differs from the staircase, being a means of transition utilised by those who are comfortable enough in mass society to allow it to fully control their motion unlike those that challenge it through use of spaces such as the staircase. Whilst the stairs require physical propulsion, an interaction between the individual and the space, the escalator is a mobile spatial form which is ridden. In DeLillo’s writing the entrusting of ones motion to the technology of mass society is only called into question when the mechanism breaks down, at which point it is shown to

⁴³⁶ In a discussion of the manner in which drives of desire function in abstract space Lefebvre provides a description which encapsulates the personal and emotional impact of transitional space. They are “...a coded and decidable system allotted the task of mediating between the ‘real’ and the imaginary, between desire and anxiety, between needs and frustrations. Confined by the abstraction of a space broken down into specialized locations, the body itself is pulverized.” Ibid p. 310.

⁴³⁷ See Baudrillard, J., *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983) on hyperreality and the simulacrum.

⁴³⁸ See Chapter 4: The Suburb.

⁴³⁹ Consider the manner in which DeLillo depicts the comfort to be found in a crowd. Both *Mao II* and *Underworld* start with crowds from within which individuals emerge. It “...unburdens them of free will and independent thought” DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p.17.

be an uncanny space.⁴⁴⁰ In this situation the understanding of self, the space and movement become confused and troubling.

The down escalator as it turns out was not running at all, out of order, stalled. The Kliegls are standing there on the tops step, too drunk to know they're not moving. The up escalator is working fine and about a hundred people go gliding past the Kliegls before Mary Kliegl realizes they've been stationary all this while and begins punching Vernon Kliegl on the arm and chest, demanding to know what the hell is going on. A smile creases my face. I choose this moment to get them off the escalator.⁴⁴¹

The combination between technology and the individual's experience of this space introduces concepts that run throughout DeLillo's investigation of these forms of interstitial spaces. The escalator is a means of transition for the mass man as it facilitates motion whilst limiting the troubling awareness of the gap between the individual and space. The escalator is a means of easing transition, allowing it to become further accepted as the normal means of existence in mass society, moving without having to understand or question that movement. The control of societal motion on a personal level has been normalised by this technology.⁴⁴² The escalator is created in such a manner as to remove the questioning of the controlled motion in mass society.⁴⁴³ The escalator is only experienced as an uncanny space in DeLillo's writing at the point where the technology breaks down and the individual is made aware of the degree to which their motion has been controlled by an outside force.

She said she got confused when she stepped onto an escalator that wasn't functioning. This happened at the airport in San Diego, where her father was waiting to meet her. She stepped onto an up escalator that wasn't moving and she couldn't adjust to this, she had to self-consciously climb the steps and it was difficult because she kept expecting the steps to move and she'd sort of half walk but not seem to be going anywhere because the steps weren't moving.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ The collapse of the technological means of motion are exposed as facsimiles of movement when the break down at which point they are rendered uncanny. This is also seen in the discussion of the elevator with its "stationary motion" DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 16.

⁴⁴¹ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 176.

⁴⁴² See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) for more on the control of societal motion and speed.

⁴⁴³ The description of the elevator in DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) as moving with "infinte slowness" (p. 125) and creating the sense that they are not moving at all takes this sense of motionless motion as a means of societal control to another level.

⁴⁴⁴ DeLillo, D., *Point Omega* (London, Picador, 2010) p. 41. This quote illustrates the difference of experience of climbing stairs and riding an escalator.

With the collapse of the illusory stability and seamless motion the escalator provides the reality of the scale of controlled societal motion is observable. That this quote locates the escalator in an airport suggests that it is not simply individual control that is exposed in this moment, but the mass control of societal motion.⁴⁴⁵ Just as the highway is shown to be a connective site between other nodes in the transitional network, the escalator connects elements of the mechanised mean of motion. The airport as a space of transit and societal control mirrors the escalator. Both produce an illusion of movement and freedom whilst limiting both. The two sites are often used in conjunction in DeLillo as they support and extend their spatial function.

She read everything they wrote about the attacks.

She thought of her father. She saw him coming down an escalator, in an airport maybe.

Keith stopped shaving for a time, whatever that means. Everything seemed to mean something. Their lives were in transition and she looked for signs. Even when she was barely aware of an incident it came to mind later, with meaning attached, in sleepless episodes that lasted minutes or hours, she wasn't sure.⁴⁴⁶

The depiction of a life in transition is indicative of the experience of both the escalator and the airport. The degree to which this motion is out of the control of the individual is masked by both the materials of the space and by the lexicon of visual symbols that are connected to the nostalgic and comforting form of consumption depicted in *Underworld*. The division between this space of motion and consumption and that of the shopping mall is shown to be illusory as the escalator performs identical functions in each locale.

Voices rose ten stories from the gardens and promenades, a roar that echoed and swirled through the vast gallery through the vast gallery, mixing with noises from the tiers, with shuffling feet and chiming bells, the hum of escalators, the sound of people eating, the human buzz of some vivid and happy transaction.⁴⁴⁷

The escalator is a facet of the overall experience of the shopping mall. As the airport is a space for the complete societal focus on motion, so the mall is a space for the focus on

⁴⁴⁵ See Chapter 7: The Airport for further on the use of the airport space as a location to catalogue and codify transient figures.

⁴⁴⁶ DeLillo, D., *Point Omega* (London, Picador, 2010) p. 67.

⁴⁴⁷ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 84.

consumption. The escalator allows for this complete focus by removing the effort of propelling oneself through it. The “hum” of the escalators is reminiscent of the “throb” of the refrigerator in the home in *Underworld*⁴⁴⁸ and the supermarket in *White Noise*.⁴⁴⁹ The degree to which the elements which were so integral to the successful repetition of transitional spaces from their inception, visible consumption and technological movement, have become commonplace is startling. The small family refrigerator has progressed through the supermarket to the “vast gallery” of the shopping mall whilst the space which houses societal motion has developed from the “breezeway” to the enormous space of the airport.⁴⁵⁰ Similarly one may draw a direct line from the alleyway, through the stairwell to the escalator. As each progression takes place the societal role of the previous space is seen to change, yet each is spatially related to the other. The ultimate version of this connective transitional space rooted in consumption and motion is the elevator.

Elevator

The elevator contains many of the socio-spatial components that have been discussed in relation to the stairwell and the escalator. It is a site in which elements of personal identity are questioned in relation to mass society and is also a space of motion. However it becomes clear throughout DeLillo’s writing that there is a great deal more complexity involved in understanding the elevator. The enclosed nature of that space means that it functions in a different manner to the stairwell or escalator as it is suggestive of societal motion and a room in and of itself. It is an uncanny space in which identity, motion and space become confused and confusing. The complexity of the elevator is made apparent in the difficulty of deciding if it is a space or a place. The manner in which the elevator functions, as a box suspended in motion connects it other another thematic concern seen in DeLillo’s writing, the correlation between hanging, dangling and falling.⁴⁵¹ This form of spatiality is connected to both socio-spatial anxiety and discussion of motion as controlled by society or the individual. The image of “the falling man”⁴⁵² this relationship suggests connects the elevator to the World Trade Center, a space which it is associated with in DeLillo’s writing. He traces the manner in which the elevator functions in that space and the manner in which societal treatment of the

⁴⁴⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 518.

⁴⁴⁹ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 36 – 40.

⁴⁵⁰ See Chapter 7: The Airport.

⁴⁵¹ See Chapter 2 on Bellow’s *Dangling Man* and Boxall, P., *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London, Continuum, 2009), particularly Chapter 9 ‘Slow Man, Dangling Man, Falling Man: Beckett in the Ruins of the Future’ pp. 166-199.

⁴⁵² DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 33.

elevator alters after 9/11.⁴⁵³ The elevator is depicted as having differing socio-spatial roles dependant on the period in which it is being observed and the individual that is discussing it. It progresses both socially and technologically, shifting from an open space which required the interaction of an operator⁴⁵⁴ to an enclosed silent box in which any sense of motion is negated. As these developments in the materials of the space occur the manner in which the individual relates to the space becomes more complex.

Space or Place

Throughout DeLillo's writing characters attempt to define the elevator as a form of space and in doing so raise the issue of the distinction between a space and a place. The most concerted investigation of this question takes place in *Players*⁴⁵⁵ where it is discussed in connection to the World Trade Center. In this discussion the elevator is understood as it relates to those forms of space around it. In particular the elevator is considered in relation to the lobby of the building and to the World Trade Center in its entirety.⁴⁵⁶ In her description of the World Trade Center one of the novels major characters Pammy describes a network of spaces that illuminates the spatial network which the elevator is a part of. The elevator itself, due to elements of its spatial construction, is defined by Pammy as a place rather than a space.

“Pammy thought of the elevators in the World Trade Center as “places.” She asked herself, not without morbid scorn: “When does this place get to the forty-fourth floor?” Or: “Isn’t it just a matter of time before this place gets stuck with me inside it?” Elevators were supposed to be enclosures. These were too big, really, to fit that description. These also had different doors for entering and leaving, certainly a distinguishing feature of places more than of elevators.”⁴⁵⁷

The spatial elements of the elevator which contribute to Pammy's distinction between space and place are complex. In a comparison between the size and the enclosure provided by both the elevator and the lobby of the World Trade Center she opens a dialogue between those two

⁴⁵³ See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁴⁵⁴ “Softly cranked a lever and eventually a small elevator ascended and stopped, roughly at their level. It was really the frame of an elevator, much of its wiring exposed, no panelling at all, a few yards of hexagonal mesh closing in all but one side.” DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) pp. 282 – 283.

⁴⁵⁵ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991).

⁴⁵⁶ See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁴⁵⁷ DeLillo, D. *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) pp 23 – 24.

concepts.⁴⁵⁸ From the manner in which the elevators in the towers are described it seems that these elevators in particular are what she is describing as places specifically rather than elevators as a whole. She suggests that the elevator in its purest form is a smaller enclosure, an isolated moving space⁴⁵⁹ but that the size and multiple points of access and exit from these particular elevators differentiate them from those forms. The multiple points of access and exit suggests that rather than being an enclosed space in a perpetual state of dangling capable only of vertical movement, these elevators also allow horizontal societal motion through them. It is possible to pass through these elevators rather than entering and exiting them through an individual door.⁴⁶⁰ In this respect these elevators are a place along a path of motion, they are a location in the same manner as a room along a corridor, albeit one in which the concepts of spatiality and motion are inherent. In comparison to this the more traditional elevators which are smaller in size and enclosed function as an interstitial mobile space, a temporary location between other nodes of the network of transitional spaces.⁴⁶¹ They are a point of isolated motion.⁴⁶² This complex interaction of spatial forms is further complicated in the discussion of the relationship between the elevator and the lobby of the buildings.

If the elevators were places, the lobbies were “spaces.” She felt abstract terms were called for in the face of such tyrannic grandeur. Four times a day she was dwarfed, progressively midgeted, walking across that purplish-blue rug. Spaces. Indefinite locations. Positions regarded as occupied by something.⁴⁶³

The lobby of the building is in direct connection to the elevators yet the manner in which space is experienced differs. Whereas the elevators are places due to the degree of their enclosure, the lobby is a vast space suggestive of limitless connections.⁴⁶⁴ Whilst the elevator allows the individual to investigate their own identity in partial isolation the lobby illustrates that an individual identity may be impossible due to the connectivity of mass society. The use of the term “indefinite locations” suggests that their meaning is shifting; their relationship to

⁴⁵⁸ The towers themselves are discussed as being in conversation with one another in *Mao II*, a concept which is explored in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁴⁵⁹ Compare this description of the elevator with its depiction in its silent, technologically advanced form in *Ratner's Star*. DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) pp. 123 – 126.

⁴⁶⁰ This elevator as connective site with the potential for passage in multiple directions suggests the potential to usurp the societal control of motion.

⁴⁶¹ See Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) on nodal society.

⁴⁶² See Chapter 5: The Highway and Chapter 7: The Airport. Also see the discussion in Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) pp. 77 – 80 on isolation in the train carriage.

⁴⁶³ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 24.

⁴⁶⁴ The vast social space as a site of limitless connectivity. See Chapter 7: The Airport and the discussion of the terminal building in Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) pp. 45 – 51.

other spaces and the role they play in the wider associative network of spaces is unfixed. The indefinite is connected to DeLillo's other concept, "the untellable"⁴⁶⁵ and the counter-narrative. The elevator is also described in connection to this concept, particularly as it refers to the sense of things occurring in other spaces, that society is riddled with "out-of-placeness". As such these transient spaces must be understood as reflecting the wider society of "indefinite locations"

When there is enough out-of-placeness in the world, nothing is out of place. He rode to the eighth-floor lobby of a midtown hotel, an atrium palace in the Broadway ruck, with English ivy hanging off the tiered walkways, with trelliswork and groves of trees, elevators falling softly through the bared interior, a dream that once belonged to freeway cities.⁴⁶⁶

The elevators are both connected to the lobbies and towers as well as being part of the wider network of transitional spaces. They are a part of the same topography that is born of the motion and desire of the "freeway cities", suburbs and motels. The description of the decoration and suggestion of history of the hotel building, all facsimiles of previous spatial forms, is suggestive of the grandeur described in relation to the lobby of the World Trade Center. The connection between the elevator as a space and the other elements of the network of transient spaces is indicative of the manner in which the spatial society they are part of functions, that space and identity is in flux. It represents conversations and comparisons between previously understood spatial forms and the more unmoored spaces of daily experience.⁴⁶⁷ Such a conversation between spatial forms and their correlation with unstable societal interactions and personal identity in the mass society is related to the discussion of the World Trade Center as a whole.⁴⁶⁸

"If the elevators in the World Trade Center were places, as she believed them to be, and if the lobbies were spaces, as she further believed, what then was the World Trade Center itself? Was it a condition, an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence, a state, a set of invariables?"⁴⁶⁹

Location of Identity

⁴⁶⁵ See DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) p. 182.

⁴⁶⁶ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 22.

⁴⁶⁷ Consider the stairwell and the underpass.

⁴⁶⁸ See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁴⁶⁹ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 48.

As with the other transitional spaces in DeLillo's writing the elevator becomes a point of focus for the investigation of the relationship between personal identity and mass society. As with the escalator and the motor car, the question of identity as it pertains to the elevator is also connected to technology, motion, death and consumption.⁴⁷⁰ The discussion of understanding the elevator as a place rather than a space is related to the motion of the elevator, both in its vertical connection to falling and dangling and the motion through it as a point on a journey.⁴⁷¹ The confusion over the social role of the space is also reflected in the confusion over the motion of the elevator. In *Ratner's Star* the elevator is depicted as an advanced technological space, a fact which only increases the uncertainty and unease of the space.

There was no sense of movement on the elevator. Absolutely no vibration. Not the slightest linear ripple across the bottoms of his feet. He might have been at rest or going sideways or diagonally. Not fond of this idea of stationary motion. He wanted to know he was moving and in which direction. He felt he'd been given a restraining medication and then placed in a block of coagulated foam, deprived of the natural language of the continuous.⁴⁷²

The confusion over the means and direction of motion, indeed the confusion over whether motion is occurring at all, is experienced by the individual as an unsettling and uncanny. The individual in this case desires to know that he is moving and in which direction so that he feels he has some degree of personal connection to his motion. When the individual is unable to specify which direction the motion is progressing in, or indeed if he is moving, it is indicative of his having given up his personal control over his own motion to the technological mechanism of society.⁴⁷³ The uncanny nature of this form of motion, the sense that space is changing around the elevator rather than that the elevator is passing through stable space, illustrates the manner in which transitional society is experienced in its most unsettling form. Space seems unfixed and unknowable. Motion itself is rendered stationary yet still spatial change occurs. The passengers being disconnected from the "natural language of the continuous" illustrates that the comforting forward progress of motion that can be

⁴⁷⁰ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁴⁷¹ The elevator as a point on a journey. Compare this idea to Virilio's discussion of the role of the city as "a human dwelling place penetrated by channels of rapid communication" Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 31.

⁴⁷² DeLillo, D., *Ratner's Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 16.

⁴⁷³ The role of technology in the control of societal motion. See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989).

measured and understood has been destroyed by the technological processes of the elevator.⁴⁷⁴ The increase of technology has created a situation whereby the individual is not only uninvolved in the production of motion in these spaces but they are unable to experience motion through sensation or observation.⁴⁷⁵ It produces the effect of being disconnected from a sense of space which in turn leads to the questioning of the solidity of both society and identity.

He stopped wondering about the questions and turned his attention to the elevator. It should have arrived in his section long ago. These were high-speed elevators. Soundless, free of vibration, extremely rapid...

“It’s an interesting sensation,” Nut said. “Always we have stood in the elevators without seeming to move. Now we are really not moving and there is no change in sensation. It’s absolutely the same whether we move or stand at rest. Something is being violated here. Some rule of motion or logic, no? Perhaps we’re not stuck at all, we’re moving with infinite slowness.”⁴⁷⁶

Perceptions of motion are completely disconnected from the reality of that motion. This leads to the uncanny sensation that the elevator remains stationary whilst the world changes around the individual.⁴⁷⁷ There is no difference to the individual whether they are in motion or stationary, their experience of the space of the elevator is unreal. The enclosed nature of the elevator connects it to transitional sites of isolation and also to the monastic cell.⁴⁷⁸ It is as a space within which individuals attempt to extricate themselves from the connections to mass society in order to investigate their individual identity, albeit as it relates to the space around them. However the elevator is not an isolated space, it is enclosed and passes through larger societal spaces so to some degree is separate from them yet it exists in relation to the space

⁴⁷⁴ The observation and shaping of society carried out by DeCerteau’s walker differs from that of the stationary figure within controlled movement who has no interaction with the space around them.

⁴⁷⁵ Consider observable motion in relation to the concept of observable consumption shown to be such an important element of the consumer society of the suburbs.

⁴⁷⁶ DeLillo, D., *Ratner’s Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 123 – 124.

⁴⁷⁷ Consider the concept of the transitional object in the work of D.W. Winnicott. Winnicott’s work on child development is particularly concerned with relationships considered in spatial terms. His use of the concept of the transitional object as a focus of the awareness of the boundary between self another being of particular interest to this work. See Davis, M.; Wallbridge, D. (eds.), *Boundary and Space: An Introduction to the Work of D.W. Winnicott* (New York, Brunner/Mazel, 1981); Winnicott, D. W., *The Child and the Outside World: Studies in Developing Relationships* (London, Tavistock Publications, 1957) and Winnicott, D. W., *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980), particularly chapter 1 ‘Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena.’ (pp. 1-30).

⁴⁷⁸ The concept of the monastic cell as a space to consider personal identity in isolation is present throughout DeLillo’s work. See DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) and DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002).

that exists outside of its doors. This complex juxtaposition of spatial and societal referents makes it an anxious site to exist within.

Something has changed,” Hoy said. “I seem to believe we’re moving. I have a sixth sense in these matters. Any opinions anyone? The door will reslide open any second now. Do they expect us? Will the scene be set? Or will we walk out upon absolute void? I believe we seem to be moving. Feelings pro or con?”⁴⁷⁹

The relationship between the internal and the external is a major factor of the understanding of the enclosed space of the elevator. The “absolute void” which may exist beyond the elevator doors relates to the “Indefinite locations” in *Players*. The instability of both personal identity and a fixed understanding of the sources of spatial meaning stems from the numerous connections such a space contains. The potential for non existence, the void beyond the doors, is also suggestive of the relationship between these forms of space, technology and death. The connection between the elevator and the sense of death is intimately connected to a sense of a disconnected and dissociated personal identity. The elevator becomes a site for the investigation of personal identity as it is connected to other potential identities and to death.

At your age I began to feel my father present in me. There were unreal moments.”
 “You felt he was occupying you. I know. Suddenly he’s there. You even feel you look like him.”
 “Brief moments. I felt I’d become my father. He took me over, he filled me.”
 “You step into an elevator, suddenly you’re him. The door closes, the feelings gone. But now you know who he was.”⁴⁸⁰

Just as the escalator produces a sense of unreality through its mechanised seamless motion the elevator combines complex connections motion and identity. As in the motel it is shown to a space within which alternate identities can be explored. The connection with a deceased love one seemingly taking over the identity temporarily in the elevator in many respects this reflects the manner in which the home in *The Body Artist* functions. It is isolated yet connected through the internet to a distanced site of motion which is experienced whilst in a state of inaction. This combination of elements both provides a sense of comforting connection and allows the investigation of repressed selves and other identities.⁴⁸¹ This can be

⁴⁷⁹ DeLillo, D., *Ratner’s Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 126.

⁴⁸⁰ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 78.

⁴⁸¹ See DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002) and the concept of the other self as discussed in Chapter 3: The Motel.

both an act of personal investigation which produces greater understanding of personal identity or, in the case of an individual attempting to leave their identity behind, it can be an embracing of the loss of identity. The potential to utilise these spaces as a means of escape from societal connections is a relief sought by peripheral figures connected to the counter-narrative throughout DeLillo's novels.

Death-in-life. A string of make-believings. I moved through progressions of passive trains of thought. Nobody wanted to use me. I was prepared to be used. I did everything but take out ads in the newspapers. It was all a mistake. I'm meant to ride elevators floor to floor. More than that requires the mettle of demigods like yourself. I'm meant to crouch in stairwells reading inter-office mail.⁴⁸²

By riding the elevator constantly or sitting on the stairwell the individual is connected to the appearance of motion without making any spatial connections. In this transitional spatial society identity is connected to motion.⁴⁸³ The elevator and to some extent the escalator are allow motion to occur without the need to produce it personally. The apathy that is described in relation to these forms of space is connected to this lack of involvement in creating ones own identity. The sense of becoming another may be a facet of understanding ones own identity but equally it can be a space for "make-believing" that allow an escape from the permanent process of understanding societal rules and traversing the spaces and pathways of ones own identity.

The Mobile Consumer

The elevator is a site for the investigation and construction of identity spatially but also as it connects to consumption. The process of the production of identity through societal motion must take place within the network of transitional space. The motel, the suburb and the supermarket have all been shown to be spaces within which the spatial act of visible consumption plays a role in the formation of social identity. The elevator is no different in this respect. Much like the escalator it becomes a spatial element in the larger mechanism of societal consumption.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸² DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 210.

⁴⁸³ The importance of motion to a sense of social identity. See Virilio's assertion that "Stasis is death" Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 38.

⁴⁸⁴ See the discussion of the role of visible consumption as a form of production in Chapter 4: The Suburb.

The encounter put me in the mood to shop. I found the others and we walked across two parking lots to the main structure in the Mid-Village Mall, a ten-storey building arranged around a center court of waterfalls, promenades and gardens. Babette and the kids followed me into the elevator, into the shops set along the tiers, through the emporiums and department stores, puzzled by my desire to buy. When I could not decide between two shirts, they encouraged me to buy both. When I said I was hungry, they fed me pretzels, beer, souvlaki.⁴⁸⁵

The elevator functions as part of the mechanism and background noise of the consumer society.⁴⁸⁶ It provides a means of movement that requires no thought, in this instance allowing the character to fully envelope themselves in the action of consumption.⁴⁸⁷ The mall is a spatial manifestation of the consumer society and the elevator is emblematic of the role of technological motion through that society. The consumption of the products in this space acts both to confirm the role of the individual as an aspect of mass society, but also affirms their identity as it connects to that space. The association between consumption and motion which is represented in the elevator illustrates the importance of products. The discussion of the suburb highlighted the importance of the relationship between consumption and awareness of the visual symbolism in the creation of socio-spatial identities. The connection between motion, advertising and consumption forms a major thread which runs throughout the transitional spaces of DeLillo's work, stretching from the suburb to the complex site of the airport.⁴⁸⁸ The elevator, much like the elevator, is an integral part of the spatial motion of both the shopping mall and the airport. Their motion becomes emblematic of the repetitive movements within these sites and the homogenisation of space that such sites tend towards.⁴⁸⁹

The elevators climb and fall, the clock rotates, the bar slowly turns, the signs appear once more, the traffic lights change, the yellow taxis come and go. Magno, Minolta, Kirin, Sony, Suntory.⁴⁹⁰

On the societal level the repetitive nature of the elevator's motion is suggestive of the repetitive homogenised spaces of transitional society, be they suburbs or motels. Just as

⁴⁸⁵ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 83.

⁴⁸⁶ The white noise of the transitional consumption driven society. See the discussion of the supermarket (pp. 36 – 40) and the elevators (p. 83) in *White Noise* and the refrigerator (p. 518) in *Underworld*.

⁴⁸⁷ Consider in relation to the escalator, a means of motion that removes the need to walk. See the discussion of motionless motion in relation to the elevators in *Ratner's Star* earlier in this chapter.

⁴⁸⁸ See Chapter 4: The Suburbs and Chapter 8: The Airport.

⁴⁸⁹ See Lefebvre's discussion of repetitive space and homogeneity in Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

⁴⁹⁰ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 27.

individual understanding of the rhythmic, repetitive motion of the production / consumption cycle of mass society is illustrated by the motion of the elevator, so this motion also suggests the repetitious nature of their individual motion. As motion performs such an integral role in the formation of both personal identity and social space its repetitive homogenous nature explains the issues of individuality.

The movement of the elevator is perpetually going through a cycle of dangling and falling in a manner which connects it to the earlier discussion of *Dangling Man* and *Falling Man* and to the differing personal implications of dangling and falling.⁴⁹¹ The dangling element of the motion of the elevator further supports the sense of the elevator as a space of momentary pause outside of the societal network. It provides a pause, a moment of potential. The act of falling conversely suggests a letting go of the illusion of individual control over motion and identity and the giving over of the self to the role dictated by ones inclusion in mass society.

You board the singing elevator and drop an eighth of a mile in ten seconds flat. Your ears hum as you are decompressed. It is an almost frighteningly impersonal process and yet something of this kind seems necessary to translate you from the image to what is actually impaled on the dainty fork.⁴⁹²

The motion of the elevator plays a societal role, that of transporting an individual from one level to another, translating them from an internal sense of personal individuality⁴⁹³ to that of the mass society which controls identity, motion and space. As with the highway the control over the motion of the individual the elevator imposes also functions to shape the identity of the figure within that space. This control is carried through to the manner in which they interact with society, their spatial role. This function of the elevator becomes essential to allow individuals to function in the complex transitional spatial society. The inability to locate ones own identity divorced of the social role of mass society necessitates spaces such as the elevator to explore this relationship whilst their motion fulfils the essential translating act between internal and external, individual and the mass

⁴⁹¹ See Chapter 2 on Bellow's *Dangling man* and Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁴⁹² DeLillo, D., *Americana* (London, Penguin, 1990) p. 27.

⁴⁹³ It has already been suggested that any sense of isolation in the closed of transitional society is at least partially illusory. See the discussion of the Carceral network in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) pp. 293 – 308.

Chapter 7: Airports

The airport fulfils many socio-spatial functions in common with the other transitional transport spaces that have been seen throughout DeLillo's work. It is a spatial and social successor to the railway station,⁴⁹⁴ a portal between a stable and defined social space, the city, and a transient and fluctuating space of social and personal uncertainty. Through an investigation of the manner in which the railway station developed as a shield for societal trauma and spatial and technological uncertainty DeLillo's depiction of the airport is illuminated. The airport acts a space to prepare an individual to leave the narrative of society as it exists in their daily world and to enter the unreal, spatially complex, technologically terrifying space of air travel. The reverse of this process is also true and the airport is the space within which individuals must be re-tethered to society once they have experienced the relative freedom of purely transient space in flight.

Just as the railway station is understood spatially as it relates to the motion of the railway and the motel reflects the socio-spatial function of the highway,⁴⁹⁵ so the airport must be considered in relation to the flight of airplanes. The space of the plane removed from terrestrial social and spatial connections suggests it is a disconnected zone for the investigation of identity and social relations in a more abstract form. It is for this reason that the interactions depicted in flight take on an unreal aspect. However, the plane is an extension of the societal space of the airport and the theoretical concepts it exhibits as a transient site but also to the wider network of socio-spatial connections which form the topography of DeLillo's writing. It is depicted throughout his writing as the confluence of technology, consumption and the counter-narrative. Just as one may trace the development of the airport from the railway station, so you can draw a distinct connection to the socio-spatial roles of the train, the automobile and the plane. Those forms of motion have been discussed in relation to Virilio's Dromology,⁴⁹⁶ elements of a society founded on speed and social control. The connection to these concepts and its relationship with the counter-narrative⁴⁹⁷ explains why the plane figures frequently in both its commercial and military form.

⁴⁹⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the spatial history of the railway station see Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986).

⁴⁹⁵ For further discussion of the manner in which motion shapes space see Chapter 3: The Motel, Chapter 5: The Highway and DeCerteau's discussion of the walker in DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

⁴⁹⁶ See Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006).

⁴⁹⁷ See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

The Space of the Airport

The airport functions in a similar socio-spatial manner to the railway station and, to a lesser degree, the motel.⁴⁹⁸ Much like the railway station the airport acts as both a transitional point of societal arrival and departure whilst also providing a space for the investigation of personal identity as it interacts with mass society. However, whereas the railway station's location at the heart of the urban environment places it in a direct relationship with the social milieu of the city,⁴⁹⁹ the airport is located in more deserted spaces. The manner in which DeLillo depicts the airport is influenced by both its location in peripheral areas of society such as deserts and by its connection to the technology and velocity of the airplanes that emanate from it. An understanding of the railway station provides a basis for the investigation of the socio-spatial heredity of the airport and allows a greater degree of understanding of some of the facets of its use in DeLillo's writing. In his *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* Wolfgang Schivelbusch provides some useful perspective on the spatial and social impact that the railway station had on the individuals that passed through it and the society that they were part of.

The new spatial arrangement quite obviously reflected a speeding-up of the process of spatial transition. The traveller's sojourn in the waiting room, that hiatus in the passage of traffic from city to railway, was perhaps the clearest indication of the station's function as a gateway. One might say that the pause was necessary to enable the traveller to cope with the change in the quality of space.⁵⁰⁰

The role of the railway station as a gateway is reflected in the role of the airport. The concept of the airport as a means of transitioning between both spatial forms and states of understanding is seen throughout DeLillo. Much like the motel the airport is a point along a journey, a way station, although as Schivelbusch's description of the railway station suggests, the airport has much more in common with that space than the motel. The concepts of dwelling and the imitation of a homelike, albeit uncanny, space that is found in the motel is absent in the airport.⁵⁰¹ Spatially the airport reflects the railway station more than the motel as

⁴⁹⁸ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁴⁹⁹ Schivelbusch discusses the relationship between the transitional space of the railways station and the more stable space of the city. Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986); pp. 159 – 177.

⁵⁰⁰ Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) p. 177.

⁵⁰¹ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

it is a large open public space, the division of space in the motel⁵⁰² and the blurring between public and private seen there are not present in the airport. The rules that govern behaviour in the motel differ from the roles that are observable in the public spaces of the airport.

By coming in here, you agree to a certain behavior,” Mink said.

“What behavior?”

“Room behavior. The point of rooms is that they’re inside. No one should go into a room unless he understands this. People behave one way in rooms, another way in streets, parks and airports.”⁵⁰³

The location of the airport is essential to the way in which the space functions socially. The railway station being within the city connects it to the forms of societal interactions which occur in that space, even if it is in contrast. The stop-gap element of the station allows the transition of the individual from the city to pass from the societal understanding of that space to the forms of interaction which occur in transit. Because of this proximity to the city a degree of the interaction which takes place in the station mirrors those of the city. This differs with the airport which exists outside the city in areas where transitional spaces such as the suburb and the motel are to be found.⁵⁰⁴ It is connected to the forms of disjointed and unreal interactions that are seen in those sites. The gateway function observed in the railway station is further complicated in the airport due to its location beyond the confines of the understood socio-spatial norms of mass-society.

Just as the societal interactions observed in the airport provide insight into the role it plays in DeLillo’s work,⁵⁰⁵ an understanding of the connection between the technological, the political and the spatial that makes up the site is useful. In these respects the airport once again reflects the form of the railway station. In functioning as a gateway the airport both allows access and egress from understood societal space. Much like the railways station this functions to control the movement and rules of societal interaction on the mass and individual scale.⁵⁰⁶ It also makes the process of travel and the experience of interacting with the technological and

⁵⁰² Within the motel and throughout transitional space the division between states and forms is shown to be permeable.

⁵⁰³ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 306.

⁵⁰⁴ See Chapter 3: The Motel and Chapter 4: The Suburbs.

⁵⁰⁵ See later in this chapter.

⁵⁰⁶ The control of societal motion is a major factor throughout this work, particularly as discussed in the Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Foucault, M, *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

societal process of air travel less anxious.⁵⁰⁷ Just as the airport may be understood as an advanced and more complex form of the railway station, so the plane may be considered a descendent of the motor car. Through its interaction with the highway the car connects the concepts of speed, death and sex. The airplane holds similar, if not more extreme, examples of these fears and anxieties, its increased speed and the literal unfettering of the individual from a grounded sense of self make it an all the more terrifying means of transport. In this respect the airport mirrors another role which Schivelbusch illustrates the railway station does, that of stimulus shield.

...we have to distinguish between two different formations of stimulus shields or psychic civilizing processes, occurring at different levels: on one hand, interiorization of social rules, on the other, interiorization of technologically caused stimuli. As qualitatively different as the sources are, their stimulus effect on the psychic structure is comparable. Social rules and technologically produced stimuli structure the individual in a similar manner, regularizing, regulating, shaping him according to their inherent law.⁵⁰⁸

The role of the railway station and airport as stimulus shields is connected to Virilio's discussion in *Speed and Politics* of the manner in which the societal control over the motion of its citizens allows it to control and shape both their interactions with one another and understanding of their individual identity. The airport fulfils this function. The space of the airport elicits forms of behaviour and interactions between those that pass through it that appear unreal and unnatural in comparison to those observed in ordinary life.⁵⁰⁹ Whilst the railway station produced this effect in those that utilised it, the increased complexity of the technological and spatiality of the airport lead to this effect being observable in the spaces around the airport.

⁵⁰⁷ Schivelbusch discusses the anxiety of technological travel, connecting it to both the train and the airplane. "One might say that he felt secure because he had forgotten how disquieting the technological conveyance still was, how tremendous and potentially destructive were the amounts of energy contained. This forgetfulness was possible because the technology itself helped it along by eliminating or obfuscating all its initially anxiety-producing manifestations (vibration, mechanical jolts, etc.).

Every airplane traveller experiences this process today, and re-remembers it, while anxiously and attentively observing the mighty vibrations of the machine in its takeoff phase, then relaxing entirely during the flight, and then again, when it is time to land, attentively listening to the technological noises to detect any irregularity that might herald catastrophe." Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) p. 161.

⁵⁰⁸ Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) p. 168.

⁵⁰⁹ See the actions of Buddy Wunderlick in DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) as discussed later in this chapter.

Interactions with Other Transitional Spaces

The spatial and technological requirements of the airport mean that unlike the railway station it must always be located outside the boundaries of the city. Much like the motel and the highway it is situated in the spaces between cities, in desert and Waste Land⁵¹⁰ unclaimed by the spatial network of the urban environment. The highway network provides a means of connection between other sites and the airport and the behaviours of those travelling to the space are seen to alter to reflect the airport as their journey progresses.⁵¹¹ In much the same manner as the elevator translates the individual from a sense of an internal individual self to a part of mass society,⁵¹² the airport and the roads around it disconnect the individual from their daily identity. The highway surrounding the airport functions in tandem with the airport, a spatial extension of the process that the airport puts the individual through. The drive to and from the airport often begins DeLillo's depiction of the experience of that space.

When the land began to flatten and empty out, she knew they were in the vicinity of the airport. It was a landscape that acceded readily to a sense of pre-emption.⁵¹³

The location of the airport is described as a void between other understood forms of space. This spatial form pre-empts the transitional space of the airport. The highway has already been shown to function as a path between points, as a space rather than a location,⁵¹⁴ the experience of passing along it providing a transient space for the investigation of personal identity. In this respect the highway pre-empts the airport which fulfils all of these functions on a larger, more technologically advanced scale. The awareness of the behavioural change that occurs to the individual in the airport as their societal role alters begins on the highway. The type of space which is being passed through and the way in which identity in relation to mass society functions within it begins to shift.

There was a noise that started, a world hum – you began to hear it when you left your carpeted house and rode out to the airport.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹⁰ The socio-spatial Waste Land has been discussed in relation to both the desert and the highway underpass in this work. See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁵¹¹ See later in this chapter.

⁵¹² See Chapter 6: Interstices on the elevator.

⁵¹³ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 88.

⁵¹⁴ See Chapter 5: The Highway and the discussion of the difference between a space and a place as it connects to the elevator and the World Trade Center in DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991).

⁵¹⁵ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 252.

The change from the socially codified space of the city to the transitional space around the airport elicits an alteration in the way individuals function. This is initiated by both the spatial alteration and the reshaping of societal connections that takes place in the journey. On an individual level this produces an effect similar to that depicted when individuals pass through other transient spaces. The identity of the individual is questioned in this space as it no longer has the connections to a stable social role which support and affirms individual identity. Without this support the individual is both disconnected from a stable sense of personal identity and able to experiment with other personality traits, even identities. In DeLillo's writing this is represented in either a shift in mood brought about by the journey to the airport; "In the morning I drove Bee to the airport. Rides to airports make me quiet and glum."⁵¹⁶ or a more extreme version whereby a character will act in a way that they are not comfortable with as an attempt to understand the new role that this spatial form requires of them.

She didn't like martinis particularly but felt they represented a certain flamboyant abandon, at least in theory – a devil-may-care quality that suited a trip to the airport. If she had to go to the airport at all, she would go in a limousine, wearing high boots, faded denims and a street kid's jive cap. She knew she looked pretty terrific.⁵¹⁷

The form of personal identity that this character chooses to inhabit is connected to the consumption element of transitional space. It is telling that without consciously making the decision to manifest a personality almost exclusively connected to the idea of consumption the character illustrates one of the major elements that defines these forms of space. The connection between travel, technology and consumption is particularly strong in the airport, so much so that its role in the understanding of this space leaches out into the space around it. There is no connection here to more stable, comforting social referents such as home or family. Travel and movement into the spaces between urban and even suburban environments dislocates a sense of identity connected to those points of personal identification.⁵¹⁸ The discussion of the wider network of transitional space connected to the growth of the forward focused society perpetually in motion and how it is experienced in the suburb calls into question the degree to which concepts such as home are still valid. However DeLillo still occasionally calls on that space, even if it is no more than a facsimile or production made to resemble a previous form, in order to place the fully transient spaces such as the airport into contrast.

⁵¹⁶ DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) p. 96.

⁵¹⁷ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 87.

⁵¹⁸ Consider the discussion of the shaping of both space and personal identity being created through societal motion as discussed in DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

The room with its stone hearth, marble font, its ferns and fan palms and village rugs as devised by Lindsay to make her husband feel he had put behind him, at least for a time, all airports and travel.”⁵¹⁹

The suggestion of a connection to a familial and historical tradition is placed in direct contrast to the world of motion and travel with its lifeless and man-made, technological environment of signs and symbols. Although the highway and the airport are still connected to technology and death, the manner in which characters manifest new personalities in these spaces suggests a freedom to escape pre-existing personalities and connections which they desire to leave behind.⁵²⁰ In the example of the limo-ride to the airport this takes on an almost playful manner,⁵²¹ whilst elsewhere in DeLillo’s work this desire to leave behind old personal and social connections and the ability to do so in the airport appears more serious. In *Great Jones Street* the airport acts as a gateway for Bucky to escape the life which he has created as a rock star, a commodity in the mass society. He utilises the space of the airport to disconnect himself from that life and its associations.

In Houston I left the group, saying nothing, and boarded a plane for New York City, that contaminated shrine, place of my birth.⁵²²

In this case the individual is able to utilise the transient spatiality of the airport to disconnect from an unwanted identity. It is interesting that what Bucky chooses to do in this situation is to return to the place of his birth, an urban environment, as a means of connecting to an earlier form of identity which is not associated with the motion and consumption of the life of a successful musician.⁵²³ In this respect the airport functions as a space through which to locate oneself or disconnect oneself from socio-spatial associations. As such the airport may also be used as a space to re-integrate an individual that has placed themselves outside of the network of associations which form an accepted societal identity. In *Mao II* the motel is utilised to attempt a similar process of socially relocating a character that has aligned her self with a counter-narrative back into accepted society. The airport is also used in this manner;

⁵¹⁹ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 259.

⁵²⁰ Oswald epitomises the desire to join the counter-narrative in the form of the USSR. DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989).

⁵²¹ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 87.

⁵²² DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) p. 2.

⁵²³ Consider Buck’s desire to return to an earlier, more grounded form of identity to the desire to The Servatius group in *Dangling Man* to reconnect with a tradition. Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007) pp. 38 – 57. See Chapter 2.

although its relative openness means that the attempt to extract Karen from the Unification Church through it fails and actually provides a space to escape through.

So a multivoice discussion starts on the sidewalk outside the terminal with the normal airport scramble all around. One of the men tried to tell the officer about state conservatorship laws, which entitled them – and Karen was running, gone, through the terminal, down some stairs, feeling light and swift and young, hand-paddling through the crowds, then out a lower-level door and into a taxi, softly saying, *Downtown*.⁵²⁴

Numerous forces which control and shape the manner in which the space of the airport functions are apparent in the “multivoice”. The voices of societal authority be they patriarchal or authoritarian are all bought to bear on Karen in an attempt to control her motion and locate her within an understood social role.⁵²⁵ However, the nature of the airport space with its connection to the counter-narrative allows Karen to escape, to return to her existence in the counter-narrative.⁵²⁶ This escape is a temporary anomaly though. The airport remains controlled, monitored and its architectural openness disguises the degree to which it acts to codify those that pass through it.⁵²⁷ The sporadic awareness of this reality causes the airport to also be a space within which aberrations of social interaction occur and the potential to escape a life, no matter how illusory that potential may be, still appears to be an option.

Experiences within Airport Space

The relationship between the airport and the spaces it connects to, both physically and thematically, reflects the societal and personal issue of self and other. In a manner similar to the World Trade Center⁵²⁸ the airport space locates a dialogue between the self and the other, the accepted narrative and the counter-narrative. As such the airport presents both an anxious space and an emotional void disconnected from the referents which stabilise identity and give it relevance. Without these referents the airport calls into question both personal and spatial identity. One of DeLillo’s novels that is particularly focused on these issues depicts the social

⁵²⁴ DeLillo, J.D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 83.

⁵²⁵ The control of societal motion in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) and Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006).

⁵²⁶ The counter-narrative as connected to concepts of otherness, be that religious beliefs or political opinion. Consider DeLillo’s depiction of the terrorist as counter-narrative figure in DeLillo, J.D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) as discussed in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁵²⁷ Compare the manner in which the escalator and elevator perform on a personal scale what the Airport performs on a societal scale, the control of social motion.

⁵²⁸ See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

types that utilise the airport the most frequently and are in a state of transit at almost all times. In *The Names* he explores the lives of a professional class of Americans that spend a great deal of their existence away from their home either travelling or living abroad.⁵²⁹ In following these characters DeLillo provides insight into both the manner in which airport space functions but also what it represents to those that inhabit it. This illustrates some of the peculiarities of the space and suggests its importance to the topography of DeLillo's writing. Within the novel discussion of the airport and the experience of air travel are frequent. Perhaps the most useful of these takes place at the start of the section "The Desert"⁵³⁰. The relevance of the desert to both the novel and as a location for the airport is supported throughout the quote as the scale and sense of emptiness that is emblematic of both the desert and the airport itself is illustrated.

In this vast space, which seems like nothing so much as a container for emptiness, we sit with our documents always ready, wondering if someone will appear and demand to know who we are, someone in authority, and to be unprepared is to risk serious things.⁵³¹

The size of the World Trade Center brings its own socio-spatial implications.⁵³² It is a space which dwarfs the individual, making the disparity between the individual's desires and the mass society which shapes their motion and role crushingly apparent. The airport is a space which houses the transitional drive which is prevalent in all transient spaces but the vast scale of it illustrates the degree to which it has become disconnected from individual desires. It has become a means of monitoring and controlling the societal motion of individuals within mass society. The disparity between the desire of the individual toward motion and the utilisation of societal space to manipulate and encourage those drives to shape societal behaviour and actions is clear in this space. The anxiety DeLillo describes those that travel through the airport as feeling is focused on the fear of the airport as a location for the judging and investigation of personal identity and societal role.

⁵²⁹ The contemporary traveller class seen in *Players* is a descendant of the transitional "Organization Man" of the 1950s. Both "in short, make a home of the home away from home" Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956) p. 274.

⁵³⁰ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 251.

⁵³¹ Ibid pp. 253 – 254.

⁵³² Whereas the elevator, the motel and the escalator function as cells which suggest isolation despite their societal connections and the highway and suburbs illustrate the connections between the individual and the mass in the form of network of associations, the vast scale of the World Trade Center and the airport produces its own social connotations.

The terminal at each end is full of categories of inspection to which we must submit, impelling us toward a sense of inwardness, a sense of smallness, a self-exposure we are never prepared for no matter how often we take this journey, the buried journey through categories and definitions and foreign languages, not the other, the sunlit trip to the east which we thought we'd decided to make. the decision we'd arrived at is the one that brings us through passport control, through the security check and customs, the one that presents to us the magnetic metal detector, the baggage x-ray machine, the currency declaration, the customs declaration, the cards for embarkation and disembarkation, the flight number, the seat number, the times of departure and arrival.⁵³³

There are two journeys which are taking place in the airport, each of which provides insight into the differing ways in which the transitional impulse is experienced in this space. There is the journey that stems from the internal drive of the individual, the act of escaping the life on the ground and attempting to experience a connection to another narrative free of grounded associations. This is the journey that takes place in the mind of the individual. It is a transition through various perceptions of identity facilitated by the spatial nature of the airport and its connections to concepts of consumption, motion and the counter-narrative.⁵³⁴ The illusion of emptiness the vast space of the airport produces allows the individual to consider themselves disconnected from those around them, lost in a crowd.⁵³⁵ However the manner in which the authoritarian and technological aspects of the space position and shape the movements and actions of the individual suggests that the reality of the journey is more connected to the social mechanism of the airport. The observation, declarations, scanning and control which the individual passes through leaves no question as to the guiding forces of the space. The between individual space and the vastness of mass space relies on both sides allowing themselves to believe in the illusion. The anxiety of the space and the lack of control over personal momentum it encapsulates, from the moving walkways to the plane itself, is balanced by a sense of repetition which creates a feeling of familiarity and homogenous comfort.⁵³⁶ These conflicting interpretations and intentions create numerous unusual modes of behaviour that, although reflective of the behaviour of individuals in other transitional spaces, is particular to the airport itself.

⁵³³ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 253.

⁵³⁴ The connection between consumption and identity has been a facet of DeLillo's writing which has been discussed throughout this work. I particular see Chapter 4: The Suburb.

⁵³⁵ Consider the concept of being lost in the crowd in relation to both Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001) and DeLillo's depictions of crowd scenes in *Mao II* and *Underworld*.

⁵³⁶ The homogeneity of repetitious spaces. Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991) p. 75.

It does no good to say, as I've done a hundred times, it's just another plane trip, I've made a hundred. It's just another terminal, another country, the same floating seats, the documents of admission, the proofs and identifications. Air travel reminds us who we are. It's the means by which we recognize ourselves as modern. The process removes us from the world and sets us apart from each other. We wander in the ambient noise, checking one more time for the flight coupon, the boarding pass, the visa. The process convinces us that at any moment we may have to submit to the force that is implied in all this, the unknown authority behind it, behind the categories, the languages we don't understand. This vast terminal has been erected to examine souls.⁵³⁷

The process of passing through the airport space has the effect of locating the individual within societal space. It affirms and corroborates all of the connections that exist between the individual and mass society in an authoritarian manner. The technology and architecture of the space is all designed to limit movement, control flow and process the individual, to make them knowable to the narrative of society.⁵³⁸ Whilst many of the transitional forms DeLillo describes allow an illusion of invisibility to facilitate an investigation of personal identity in isolation⁵³⁹ the airport makes the individual entirely observable, both physically and socially. The anxiety which is discussed in relation to this process is comparable to the manner in which prisoners were observed in Foucault's discussion of the panopticon.⁵⁴⁰ The open space, the use of glass⁵⁴¹ and the developments of unobtrusive observation technology produce socially acceptable behaviours within the individuals as they are aware of and have internalised. As has been shown repeatedly when individuals who are questioning their identity and societal role become aware of the degree to which they are being monitored and observed they move towards embracing a counter-narrative.⁵⁴² This is no less the case in the airport where creating new personalities and embracing the consumption so prevalent in that space masks the reality of societal control.

All of this we choose to forget. We devise a counter-system of elaborate forgetfulness. We agree on this together. And out in the street we see how easy it is,

⁵³⁷ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 254.

⁵³⁸ Consider in relation to the panoptic gaze.

⁵³⁹ The elevator and the motel in particular instil the false sense of isolation in their inhabitant.

⁵⁴⁰ Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

⁵⁴¹ Compare the structural composition of the airport terminal to the railway terminal as discussed in Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) pp. 45 – 51.

⁵⁴² *Libra* etc.

once we're immersed in the thick crowded paint of things, the bright clothes and massed brown faces. But the experience is no less deep because we've agreed to forget it.⁵⁴³

A self imposed amnesia occurs to ignore the means of observation and the degree to which they are monitored in that space. There is an elaborate balance created between the romanticised version of the process of travel with the promise of freedom and the reality of the experience. The depictions of the character in DeLillo mirror this balance. One form of traveller is perfectly aware of the degree to which the airport is a controlled space with limits imposed on motion and action. This figure codifies those limitations by listing the ways in which an individual must behave in order to survive these spaces. This is seen particularly clearly in *End Zone* as a young character that is going to undergo his first experience of the airport and air travel is informed of the processes and actions he must undertake.

Flying is easy if you keep alert and know what you're doing. When you get to the Midland-Odessa airport, go straight to the ticket counter of the airline you're flying. If the airport there is too small to have separate ticket counters, go to the single all-purpose counter. All right, you're at the counter now. You hand the person the ticket and you put your suitcase on the weight machine. (Carry your ticket in the inside left pocket of your jacket. That's the best place because you're right handed and you'll be able to reach it easier. It's also safe from anybody with ideas on their mind. They go looking for credit cards to steal mostly. You don't have one yet." The airline employee will write on your ticket and stamp some things on it purely for airline use and then he'll give you back the ticket and tell you the gate number to go to. Go at once to that gate. If you fool around and start exploring the airport or wandering off somewhere like you always do, you're going to miss your plane. So head for the gate right off the bat and avoid headaches later on. If you have trouble finding the gate, ask someone in authority. That usually means uniformed personnel. When you find the gate, you give your ticket to the man on duty and he sends you aboard the plane. (Your luggage is already on.) Try to get a window seat so you can look out. Don't go to the bathroom until after the plane takes off. Follow similar procedures to the above-mentioned at the Dallas and NYC airports. We'll be at the airport in Saranac Lake to meet you when you land... And be sure you carry some kind of identification in case of a crash.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 254.

⁵⁴⁴ DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) pp. 157 – 158.

The intricacy of the detail in these instructions reads as means of passing parental control over a youth to the authoritarian societal control which is manifested in the space of the airport.⁵⁴⁵ It illustrates both the level of control which is exerted on individuals at the airport and highlights its focus on mass social interaction it is rather than personal identity. The child is provided with both practical information and an indication of the anxiety that passing through this space will elicit whilst also acknowledging the inherent tendency of the youth to attempt to usurp the control the space asserts over him. The desire to usurp this level of control is strongest in those that are to observe the manufactured rules and barriers to motion that, depending on the outlook of the individual, are either stable and comforting or limiting and unreal. Bucky in *Great Jones Street* observes the unreality of the airport space and takes advantage of its porous barriers as a means of escaping his pre-defined societal role. He embraces the unreality of the space as an exemplar of the disparity between the accepted reality of the societal narrative and his personal desires and sense of identity. The breaking point for the character occurs in the airport and it is there that he returns to escape into his own past.

You were on your knees making faces at some old woman in a wheelchair. I knew it wasn't a joke. It was too unreal for that. You were sweating and babbling and making incredible unreal faces at the old woman. I've never seen anyone sweating the way you were. Laughing and babbling and down on your knees. Laughing-crying. I'll never forget it. A few other people saw it too but nobody knew how to react. It was too unreal. And besides you were in tears. So nobody knew what was what. There was no reality. There was no way to know what to do. Then somebody wheeled the old lady away and you got up and it was over.⁵⁴⁶

Unlike those that adhere to the societal conventions imposed by airport space Bucky highlights them by acting in an unacceptable manner. It is a testament to the complex balance between reality and unreality in the space that even this display of unacceptable social behaviour is assimilated.⁵⁴⁷ The lack of reality in the space of the airport, the disparity

⁵⁴⁵ Consider the concept of authoritarian control being passed from the parent to the airport space in relation to Riesman's description of Tradition Direction. "A *definition of tradition-directed*. ... The important relationships of life may be controlled by careful and rigid etiquette, learned by the young during the years of intensive socialization that end with initiation into full adult membership. Moreover, the culture, in addition to its economic tasks, or as part of them, provides ritual, routine, and religion to occupy and to orient everyone. Little energy is directed toward finding new solutions to the age-old problems..." Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001) p. 11.

⁵⁴⁶ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992) pp. 34 – 35.

⁵⁴⁷ The ability of the transitional society to absorb aberrant behaviour and spaces. See the discussion of the Carceral Network in Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

between the solidity of the rules and control which govern its use and understanding as a point between more stable social points make it an anxious space. This anxiety and confusion over the rules of societal interactions and identity is further experienced by those in flight, the airplane containing the anxiety ridden elements observed in the motor car and the elevator as mechanical means of motion whilst also containing the socio-spatial confusion of the airport and the railway station.

The Experience of Air Travel

The experience of air travel reflects the societal interactions that are observed in the airport in an enclosed space. The enclosure of the airplane and its more direct connection to the themes of technology and death amplify the anxiety and unreality which is observed in the interactions of the airport. In much the same manner as the isolated cell is suggested as a prime location for the contemplation of personal identity divorced from society, the airplane removes the individual and the societal interactions which are observed on the ground and explores them in a dislocated, almost theoretical manner.⁵⁴⁸ The proliferation of flights in DeLillo's novels and the level of social commentary and thematic insight they offer provide fertile ground for the investigation of the manner in which spatiality functions in this space.

The airplane becomes a microcosm of numerous socio-spatial themes which recur throughout DeLillo's writing. Issues of time and space are observed along with a questioning of self and other in the form of the mass and the individual.⁵⁴⁹ Technology, consumption and the visual landscape of mass society are all at their height in the airplane. *The Names* continues its investigation of airport culture and the manner in which it is experienced by the transient commuter class through discussions of the sort of existence it prompts on planes. The description of the necessary actions for successful navigation of the airport in *End Zone* illustrates the intricacies of spatial interactions in that space. A similar depth of knowledge of the customs of air travel is illustrated in *The Names*, an awareness of which illustrates many of the socio-spatial issues faced within the plane and illuminates the degree to which knowledge of it is essential to individual success as a member of the transient society.

I flew a lot, of course. We all did. We were a subculture, business people in transit, growing old in planes and airports. We were versed in percentages, safety records, in

⁵⁴⁸ The degree to which dislocation from the ground identity will be further investigated throughout this chapter.

⁵⁴⁹ Time and Space become unstable whilst in flight. Compare to the manner in which time and space collapse with the appearance of the fallen man in *Dangling Man*. Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, 1996 p. 115.

the humor of flaming death. We knew which airlines food would double you up, which routes connected well. We knew the various aircraft and their configurations and measured this against the distances we were flying. We could distinguish between bad-weather categories and relate them to the guidance system of the plane we were on. We knew which airports were efficient, which were experiments in timelessness or mob rule; which had radar, which didn't; which might be filled with pilgrims making the *hadj*. Open seating never caught us by surprise and we were quick to identify our luggage on the runway where that was the practice and we didn't exchange wild looks when the oxygen masks dropped during touchdown...⁵⁵⁰

The description of these "business people in transit" suggests they take pleasure in placing themselves outside of mass society through their awareness of the intricacies of air travel.⁵⁵¹ This knowledge and their enjoyment in it allow them to experience these spaces as not unreality, but a form of hyperreality.⁵⁵² By focussing on the minutia of air travel and its social peculiarities they are able to place the fear and uncertainty that is felt by less experienced air travellers out of their mind.⁵⁵³ They normalise air travel and the forms of space it requires them to travel through. They are fully accepting of the associations it holds with death and observation. It is interesting that whereas a great deal of the discussion of the airport and airplane space has revolved around the homogeneity it produces in spatial forms this subculture finds comfort and support in their knowledge of the small elements that mark out each airline and specific plane.⁵⁵⁴ They seek differentiation as a comfort to mask the homogeneity of the space. The concept that they are a subculture which is in some way unique in their awareness of the peculiarities of air travel is mitigated by how they attempt to normalise it, making it a part of the regular experience of social life. The replacing of uncertainty, which is a hallmark of the less experienced air traveller, with knowledge staves off the anxiety so prevalent in these spaces. Awareness of social customs and mores based on the experience of permanent travel produces the effect that all space is treated as a form of airport space. Again, this does not preclude differences; in fact it relies on them but suggests

⁵⁵⁰ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 6 – 7.

⁵⁵¹ The use of specialised knowledge to navigate unstable social space if employed by both the travelling class and the figure of the counter narrative as Oswald's use of specialised information about the U2 plane in *Libra* shows. DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) p. 77.

⁵⁵² For further information on the concept of hyperreality see Baudrillard, J, *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983) and the discussion of super-modernity in Auge, M., *Non-Places* (London, Verso, 1995).

⁵⁵³ The repression of fear by absorbing it into the known. See the discussion of the post 9/11 interaction with the space of the twin tower in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁵⁵⁴ The observation of marginal differences suggests both specialist knowledge and spatial differentiation.

that these small differences are allowable as they are expected and observable.⁵⁵⁵ The expansion and proliferation of space understandable as an extension of airport space is further discussed in relation to the perception of space as it is altered by the development of technology.

How big the world is. They keep telling us it's getting smaller all the time. But it's not, is it? Whatever we learn about it makes it bigger. Whatever we do to complicate things makes it bigger. It's all a complication. It's one big tangled thing." She began to laugh. "Modern communications don't shrink the world, they make it bigger. Faster planes make it bigger. They give us more, they connect more things. The world isn't shrinking at all. People who say it's shrinking have never flown Air Zaire in a tropical storm.⁵⁵⁶

There is a questioning of the common conception of the manner in which space and technology interact to this understanding of space. The understanding that technology and travel make the world smaller by making it possible to experience places previously beyond reach is refuted here. DeLillo illustrates that as travel and communication become more advanced they allow connection to more remote spaces. As this occurs the amount of spaces which are unreachable may decline but the amount of spaces that are understandable expands massively. As spaces become connected within the network of motion and travel that is facilitated by planes and communication technology it becomes understandable and reachable. The process discussed in *The Names* where all space which can be reached is differentiated by its details whilst being essentially connected and homogenous is expanded upon here. Schivelbusch exposes a similar effect after the appearance of the railway system.

As the space between these points – the traditional travelling space – was destroyed, those points moved into each other's immediate vicinity: one might say they collided. They lost their old sense of local identity, formerly determined by the spaces between them.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Compare the process of the individualization of prisoners so that they are identifiable and therefore easier to control. "The theme of the panopticon – at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency – found in the prison its privileged locus of realization." Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 249.

⁵⁵⁶ DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) pp. 322 – 323.

⁵⁵⁷ Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) p. 38. Compare this concept to the events of 9/11.

The manner in which travel through intervening space links the two terminal points at either end and removes their individual identity is an extension of the process that is seen as the transitional impulse expands. The nodal points; motels, suburbs, airports, are all connected within the transitional network through the highway.⁵⁵⁸ Similarly the trajectories of aircraft and the location of airports at either end place them within this network. As such although space may appear to shrink in the sense that less space is unreachable, the network of spatial association is expanding. Perceptually to those within this network the world is expanding as accessible points within the network increase.⁵⁵⁹ Whilst this explains the manner in which the traveller understands the spaces connected by air travel, the interactions which take place within the space of air travel itself is less certain. The flight is an experience of the space between spaces yet it still retains some of the societal conventions of a room due to its enclosed nature.⁵⁶⁰ The enforced enclosure of the space only heightens its unreality, producing a seemingly isolated space in which the balance between individuality and mass identity is explored.⁵⁶¹ Social interactions in DeLillo are either depicted as moments of societal isolation or unexpected and unusual societal interaction. In their depiction as a point of internal thought and personal isolation it reflects the manner in which the cell is used in DeLillo's work.

And then aboard, even softer seats. He will feel the systems running power through the aircraft, running light, running air. To the edge of the stratosphere, world hum, the sudden night. Even the night seems engineered, Japanese, his brief sleep calmed by the planes massive heartbeat. The journey is a muted pause between the noise of Athens and the roiling voice of Bombay.⁵⁶²

One of the elements which contributes to the anxiety frequently discussed in relation to transitional space is here shown to contribute to a comforting sense of isolation and disconnection, technology.⁵⁶³ The reality of what technology contributes to air travel is described as experienced by the individual in flight whilst suggesting its masking of unseen or repressed elements. The description of technology here as a "world hum" connects it to the

⁵⁵⁸ See Chapter 5: The Highway and Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) on societal nodality.

⁵⁵⁹ The expansion of the network of associations is discussed in DeCerteau as the walker creates and ever expanding narrative as they traverse the urban space. DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 115.

⁵⁶⁰ As a transitional space the airplane, like the elevator, is made more complex by its enclosed spatiality.

⁵⁶¹ See Chapter 6: Interstices on the elevator.

⁵⁶² DeLillo, D., *The Names* (London, Picador, 1989) p. 90.

⁵⁶³ See Chapter 5: The Highway for more on the relationship between the technological aspects of transitionality and anxiety.

“white noise” associated with modern society throughout DeLillo’s writing.⁵⁶⁴ In the case of air travel the sound of technology is both comforting and terrifying. In the experience of the frequent traveller in *The Names* the noise turns the plane into a womblike space within which to remove oneself from the experience of life below. A similar discussion of way airplane technology is perceived and experienced by the travellers takes place in *Players* where the relationships between the individual’s travelling, the space of the plane and their own individuality is considered.

The lights inside the aircraft go dim. In the piano bar everyone is momentarily still. It’s as though they’re realizing for the first time how many systems of mechanical and electric components, what exact management of stresses, power units, consolidated thrust and energy it has taken to reduce their sensation of flight to this rudimentary tremble.⁵⁶⁵

The relationship between technology and motion in DeLillo is repeatedly a balance between necessity and anxiety. The degree to which the noise of the technological means of motion has been suppressed to remove the anxiety of motion also reflects the discussion of the elevator in *Ratner’s Star*.⁵⁶⁶ That the motion has until this point gone unnoticed suggests the degree to which the individuals on the plane have been able to immerse themselves in their own sense of identity and space in order to repress the anxiety the plane journey may elicit in them.⁵⁶⁷ The repression of the anxiety regarding the vital role of the technological element of flight to life, and by association death, is explored by Schivelbusch in connection to both the railway and the airplane.

The sinister aspect of the machinery that first was so evident and frightening gradually disappeared and with this disappearance, fear waned and was replaced by a feeling of security based on familiarity. The traveller who sat reading his newspaper or novel instead of worrying about the ever-present possibility of derailment or collision no doubt felt secure. His attention was diverted from the technological situation in which he found himself and directed to an entirely independent object. One might say that he felt secure because he had forgotten how disquieting the technological conveyance still was, how tremendous and potentially destructive were

⁵⁶⁴ Consider the world hum described in flight with the societal white noise experienced as a throb or hum in *White Noise* and *Underworld*.

⁵⁶⁵ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 3.

⁵⁶⁶ DeLillo, D., *Ratner’s Star* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 126.

⁵⁶⁷ Consider the manner in which Lauren Hartke immerses herself in her own identity to process trauma. DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002).

the amounts of energy it contained. This forgetfulness was possible because the technology itself helped it along by eliminating or obfuscating all its initial anxiety-producing manifestations (vibrations, mechanical jolts, etc.)

Every airplane traveller experiences this process today, and re-remembers it, while anxiously and attentively observing the mighty vibrations of the machine in its takeoff phase, then relaxing entirely during the flight, and then again, when it is time to land, attentively listening to the technological noises to detect any irregularity that might herald catastrophe.⁵⁶⁸

Just as the motel is designed to appear comforting through its homogenised visual approximation of home, the airplane is designed to distract and mask the anxiety inducing elements of the technological process of flight. DeLillo's description of the soft seats and lighting all suggest an attempt to create comfort to dissipate anxiety. Beneath the hum of the engineered space is the awareness of the potential for death that exists in this space and with this technology. This awareness also produces an impulse in the traveller to consider their own space and identity, an effect similar to retreating to a cell when an awareness of the scope and scale of mass threatens to overwhelm the individual.⁵⁶⁹ The internalisation and focus on an isolated experience is common in DeLillo's writing and the connection between this impulse and the degree of anxiety created by the technological elements of this form of travel is frequently raised. However as the previous quote suggests, the technology of air travel also plays a major part in comforting the individual attempting to repress their anxiety. The technology allows the introduction of further isolating factors, be that the listening to music through headphones, submersing oneself in the background hum of the plane or watching a movie in isolation.

Britta watched the in-flight movie and listened to some brawling jazz on the earphones. The movie seemed subjective, slightly distracted, the screen suspended in partial darkness and specked and blotched by occasional turbulence and the sound track strictly optional. She thought movies on planes were different for everybody, little floating memories of earth. She had a magazine on her food tray with a soft drink and peanuts and she flipped pages without bothering to look at them. A man across the aisle talked on the telephone, his voice leaking into her brain with the bass line and drums, all America unreeling below her.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ Schivelbusch, W., *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (California, The University of California Press, 1986) pp. 160-161.

⁵⁶⁹ This process of retreat into an isolated space is carried out in DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) and DeLillo, D., *The Body Artist* (London, Picador, 2002).

⁵⁷⁰ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 165.

The control in the plane over the light, air and sound all place the individual under the complete control of the technology of the airplane. In much the same manner as the prisoner in the panopticon internalises this level of control and becomes an isolated figure who questions their own identity⁵⁷¹ the passenger is driven into their own isolated perception. The experience of the flight as described in *Mao II* illustrates the complex balance that exists between it being a mass experience and an individual one. Whilst all the individuals on the plane may be watching the same movie on the screen, the darkness and headphones that allow the experience to occur make it an isolated activity, one which is particular to each of them.⁵⁷² The description of the movie screen and the film being viewed in the plane as “floating memories” is suggestive of the manner in which the space relates to the social experiences that the individuals understand as creating their own identity. This places the relationship between the identity on the ground and the identity in the air into an interesting dialogue. The world is described as “unreeling below” suggesting that the existence on the plane is unreal and disconnected from the reality of society on the ground.⁵⁷³ That the airplane space is experienced similarly to the transitional spaces on the ground and the term “unreeling” used in close proximity to a discussion of cinema suggests that the masking of anxiety over identity and freedom is as unreal on the ground as in the air.⁵⁷⁴ The depiction of air travel in DeLillo illustrates and confirms many of the concepts regarding spatiality which relate to the rest of the space in his work; the plane simply provides an isolated space where these issues are condensed and heightened.

The only sound is drone. One second of darkness, all we’ve had thus far, has been enough to intensify the implied bond which, more than distance, speed or destination, makes each journey something of a mystery to be worked out by the combined talents of the travellers, all gradually aware of each others code of recognition.⁵⁷⁵

The meaning of the journey must be understood as not simply an investigation of isolated identity disconnected from the world below or those other figures on the plane. The airplane provides a distanced space within which the interactions and relationships of the personal and social network intermingle to provide numerous meanings. Each individual is configured of a multitude of associations and connections, not only to individuals but also to space, images

⁵⁷¹ Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991).

⁵⁷² In the airplane technology is utilised as a means of isolation rather than societal connection.

⁵⁷³ The sense that real life is on the ground is suggestive of the sense with the counter-narrative that truth lies elsewhere, hidden.

⁵⁷⁴ It is worth questioning whether the reality on the ground is anymore stable than that in the air. From the investigation of the transitional society it would suggest not.

⁵⁷⁵ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 3.

and products. They are the product of these associations. Within the plane, as in spatial society on the ground, these associations are shared by many others. Indeed as the discussion of the suburban consumer society of the 1950s⁵⁷⁶ shows being seen to share an awareness of products, images and spaces allows for greater societal acceptance and interaction. To sever oneself from these associations is to place oneself outside of society, to locate oneself within a counter-narrative in which these products, images and space all have different meanings and associations.⁵⁷⁷ The plane, along with the airport, allows the appearance of freedom and the ability to leave behind the life that one lives on the ground, whilst actually strictly observing and enforcing the associations that create not only an understandable and controllable personal identity but also a coherent interactive society. Its connection to technology, consumption and death are masked yet impossible to entirely repress.⁵⁷⁸ The act of flight offers a temporary illusion of the ability to escape one's life for a period, yet this period is always temporary and fraught with potential dangers and ultimately one must always land.⁵⁷⁹

...there is a sense of turning inward. They remember they are on a plane, travellers. Their true lives lie below, even now beginning to reassemble themselves, calling this very flesh out of the air, in mail waiting to be opened, in telephones ringing and paper work on office desks, in the chance utterance of a name.⁵⁸⁰

The Airplane and the Counter-Narrative

The connection between the visual realm, consumption and technology all contribute to an understanding of the airport and the airplane. They are factors in establishing the accepted meaning of the space of the airport and as such enforce the societal roles of the individuals that pass through it.⁵⁸¹ However as with all other transitional spaces in DeLillo's writing these elements of the spatial society are also intimately connected with the counter-narrative and are prime points for usurping the accepted roles and meanings of spaces. He connects the airport and the airplane to the counter-narrative through discussions of its relationship with

⁵⁷⁶ See Chapter 4: The Suburb.

⁵⁷⁷ The concept of the counter-narrative and the manner it interacts with the understood narrative of mass society shifts after 9/11 as shown in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁵⁷⁸ The desire, yet inability, to fully repress trauma has been connected to transitional society since the end of World War 2.

⁵⁷⁹ Consider in relation to Karen in *Mao II* and Oswald in *Libra*. Both temporarily succeed in escaping into the counter-narrative but are ultimately pulled back into the primary societal narrative.

⁵⁸⁰ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 10.

⁵⁸¹ Compare to the role of the city as discussed in Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006).

the military and terrorism. The importance of the planes meaning is becomes intimately connected to the events of September 11th 2001 but even before that date DeLillo explores the connections between those spaces, technology and death.

The airplane plays a central role in many of DeLillo's novels, in particular *Underworld* and *Libra*. In both those novels it is not the public plane which is focussed on, rather it is the military plane.⁵⁸² In both those novels the military plane becomes emblematic of the counter-narrative's attempts to undermine and manipulate socio-spatial meaning.⁵⁸³ The primary example of discussion of military aircraft in *Underworld* revolves around the art project being carried out by Klara Sax in the desert in which she takes defunct military aircraft and turns them into large scale art pieces.⁵⁸⁴ Through her discussion of this piece and the reaction it instils in those that work on it and observe it numerous facets of the socio-spatial meaning of the airplane in both the present and the cold war of the 1960s are exposed. The artwork focuses not on one single plane but on many. Klara explains the process that has been carried out in shifting the spatial meaning of each aircraft from a technological means of motion and death connected to the anxious period of the 1960s to a symbolic element in the understanding of social and personal identity.

Abandoned aircraft. Like the end of World War II," Klara said. "the one difference is – two differences. The one difference is we haven't actually fought a war this time. We have a number of postwar conditions without a war having been fought. And second we are not going to let these great machines expire in a field or get sold as scrap."

"You are going to paint them."

"We are in the process of painting them."⁵⁸⁵

The meaning of the aircraft is being altered by the re-appropriation of its space. By altering its composition through the process of stripping it of the components that make it valid to carry out its original function, changing the way it appears and placing it in a location and spatial arrangement, its meaning is altered. These planes had been set aside, relics of a previous form

⁵⁸² The role of the military in an understanding of modern spatiality is explored by both Virilio and Soja. Virilio discusses "...the condition of habitable circulation and its origins in military logistics." (Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) p. 9) whilst the role of the military industrial complex is vital to an understanding of Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) particularly as it relates to Los Angeles.

⁵⁸³ The role of the plane as a means of the misappropriation of technology for use by the counter-narrative is fully explored in Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁵⁸⁴ The Long Tall Sally work is first discussed in DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 63.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid pp. 69 – 70.

of war. They had been relegated to an existence of gradual decay, their importance and role having been rendered unnecessary by both shifting socio-political relationships and the progression and forward motion of technological progress.⁵⁸⁶ The planes being used by Sax, B52 bombers, were the technological means of shaping the narrative of a global society in much the same manner as the motel and suburb shaped the social interactions of 1950s America. As the more contemporary depictions of these spaces in DeLillo's writing show though those spaces are no longer the vibrant hubs of social space they once were, they have become derelict, tarnished, their meaning sullied with a sense of decay and sordidness, a site within which the counter-narrative thrives.⁵⁸⁷ The manner in which Sax uses these planes reflects this. She re-appropriates them, both as a means to represent her own social intentions as an artist and an individual, but also re-appropriating the role that their past use plays in societal memory. Their connections to death, anxiety and negative associations with the counter-narrative are sidelined as the importance of these machines as nodal points in an understanding of contemporary society and spatiality is emphasised through her act of making them visible again.

...I am now dealing with B-52 long-range bombers. I am painting airplanes that are a hundred and sixty feet long with wingspans even longer and total weight operating on full tanks maybe half a million pounds. I don't know about empty – planes that used to carry nuclear bombs, ta-da, ta-da, out across the world.⁵⁸⁸

The physical space of these machines reflects both their original use and the scale of their importance to the period in which they were created. The later discussion of the planes set in the 1960s⁵⁸⁹ illustrates the impact that these planes and their actions had on the mass consciousness of global society. That role is hinted at here with the discussion of nuclear bombs. Those planes are intimately connected to the Cold War and the levels of anxiety which existed in that period, tension which was focused on the space of those planes and the payloads that they carried.⁵⁹⁰ They were the physical manifestation of the potential for mass death and nuclear war. Their every movement and action had serious ramifications for the continued existence of the societal narrative as it existed at that point. "Those planes on

⁵⁸⁶ The decay of these military aircraft mirrors the decline of roadside architecture discussed in Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁵⁸⁷ The conflict between Jack Gladney and Mink in a decaying motel at the end of *White Noise* also illustrates this. DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 304 – 321.

⁵⁸⁸ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 70.

⁵⁸⁹ See later in this chapter.

⁵⁹⁰ See the section focused on Lenny Bruce taken from *Underworld* in Chapter 5: The Highway. DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 508.

permanent alert, ever present you know, sweeping the Soviet borders.”⁵⁹¹ This element of the planes meaning is a major reason for their use in Sax’ art piece and her interpretation of their role in the shaping of the late 20th century. The description of the artwork also illustrates other ways in which these airplanes connect to the network of associations that is prevalent throughout DeLillo’s writing. The inherent connection between the plane, death and societal struggle to understand identity is discussed by Sax and illustrated to be a vital part of the manner in which the art piece should be understood. The relationship between art and military technology is not immediately apparent but it is a relevant connection in relation to the planes use in the artwork.

She said, “Some of the planes had markings painted on the nose. Emblems, unit insignia, some with figures, an animal mascot snarling and dripping juices from the mouth and jowls. Wonderful, actually, cartoons. Nose art, they call it. And sometimes with women. Because it’s all about luck isn’t it? The sexy woman painted on the nose is a charm against death. We may want to place this whole business in some bottom pit of nostalgia but in fact the men who flew these planes, and we are talking about high alert and distant early warning, we are talking about the edge of everything – well, I think they lived in a closed world with it’s particular omens and symbols and they were young and horny to boot.”⁵⁹²

The relationship between war, death, sex and technology is clearly present in the original meaning of the plane as a societal space. It becomes fully apparent later in *Underworld* in the depiction of the planes in use in their prime⁵⁹³ quite how important these concepts were to understanding the space of the military plane. The interpretation and representation of this meaning in contemporary society is reflective of the manner in which societal memory utilises transitional space as a location for the repression of anxiety and trauma. The military aircraft functioned when in use as a locus for societal anxiety, sexual desire and imminent death. At the height of the Cold War these machines were focal spaces for all of these personal and societal forces. However what becomes interesting in Klara Sax discussion of them is the way in which these machines are interpreted removed from the context of that period. The discussion of the impulse to “place this whole business in some bottom pit of nostalgia”⁵⁹⁴ is suggestive of the impetus that has been seen throughout this work to repress trauma on a personal and societal level only to later utilise that trauma in a sanitised form in

⁵⁹¹ Ibid p. 75.

⁵⁹² Ibid p. 77.

⁵⁹³ Ibid pp. 641 – 656.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid p. 77.

order to help assimilate it into a sense of identity. An awareness of this impulse toward nostalgia and its removing of the more traumatic associations of a space illuminates that impulse and renders it less acceptable as a means of societal coping mechanism. By locating them within her art these planes are brought within a network of associations that mirrors the “omens and symbols” that made them such important societal spaces originally. As other transitional spaces become sites for the investigation of personal identity and the connection between the mass and the individual, so this artwork forces the viewer to “...see a single mass, not a collection of objects”⁵⁹⁵ The work questions perceptions of mass and the individual whilst also illustrating the importance of the network of associations that contribute to both a space and an individual.

I didn't know there would be so many planes. I was astonished at the number of planes... There were two hundred and thirty planes, swept-winged, finned like bottom creatures, some painted in part, some nearly completed, many not yet touched by the paint machines, and these last were gunship gray or wearing faded camouflage or sanded down to bare metal.

The painted aircraft took on sunlight and pulse. Sweeps of color, bands and spatters, airy washes, the force of saturated light – the whole thing oddly personal, a sense of one painter's hand moved by impulse and afterthought as much as by epic design. I hadn't expected to register such pleasure and sensation.⁵⁹⁶

This discussion of the mass meaning of these planes as a mass is relevant to the discussion of mass society. The role of personal memories and the associations that contribute to a sense of individual identity as related to mass society is reminiscent of the nostalgia that is associated with these planes. These spaces are a nodal point in the meaning of society just as individuals are yet this artwork suggests that the individual is never fully isolated, it is always a connected part of this mass. Just as each of these planes, although connected to specific societal referents as one space, had a societal impact they have come to be understood as a spatially important mass. The identity of the mass overpowers the individual through the stripping of differentiating factors and the repainting to suggest homogeneity. The later discussion of the pilots of one of these particular planes also suggests the loss of a differentiated personal identity.⁵⁹⁷ In the section set on December 1, 1969 a flight of one of the B-52s that becomes the namesake of the piece of art, “Long Tall Sally”, over Vietnam is described in a bombing run. Within this section the personal history of members of the crew,

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid p. 84.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid pp. 83 – 84.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid pp. 641 – 656.

particularly Louis T Bakey and Charles Wainwright Jr or Chuckie, is explored. Each of these characters provides information about their own history, be it Louis involvement in testing of the Atomic Bomb or Chuckie's connection to the baseball that weaves a connective path throughout *Underworld*. The characters also carry out regular conversations about their lives, their relationships, their desires and the meaning of the lyrics of Little Richard's Long Tall Sally.⁵⁹⁸ They are shown as individuals with associations that make them unique however the scale of the events which they are involved in overshadows this individuality.

They were fifty thousand feet above the South China Sea, flying in a three-bomber formation called a cell, and there were fifteen cells in the air today, and each cell carried over three hundred bombs, and the resulting zone of destruction was known as a sandbox, and Chuckie was bizzaro'd in one part of his brain by the crazy conversation he was having with old Louis even as he felt sad and hurt, in another and nearer part, by his buddy's attitude toward the girl on the nose of their aircraft."⁵⁹⁹

Pulling back from the individual to observe the mass mirrors the movement from the discussion of one plane to the mass which occurs in order to appreciate the piece of art Klara Sax is working on. This shift illustrates the mass scale and mechanisation involved in both the bombing campaign these planes were a part of and the relationship between the individual and the mass. The description of the planes and their destructive power also connects the discussion to death and technology in a manner which is connected to DeLillo's *Libra* where the role of the military airplane is even more firmly associated with the counter narrative.

The Airplane as Consumable Product

In *Libra* the military airplane which is focused on is the U-2, a plane which is firmly rooted in secrecy. This connection between secrecy, technology and death firmly roots this plane in the counter-narrative.

“...Tell them what you talked about.”

“Very sexy stuff.”

“Oh sure really”

⁵⁹⁸ This section illustrates the combination of mass societal events and small personal details that constitute the meaning of transitional society.

⁵⁹⁹ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 610.

“U2 planes. The planes that spotted the missiles the Soviets were putting into Cuba. We used to call the photos pornography. The photo interpreters would gather to interpret. ‘Let’s see what kind of pornography we pulled in today.’ Kennedy looked at the pictures in his bedroom as a matter of fact.”

“Talk,” she said.

“Spy planes, drone aircraft, satellite cameras that can see from three hundred miles what you can see from a hundred feet. They see and they hear. Like ancient monks, you know, who recorded knowledge, wrote it painstakingly down. These systems collect and process. All the secret knowledge of the world.”⁶⁰⁰

The U2 represents the technological means of observing and manipulating space which both supports the motion of mass society and connects it to a counter-narrative.⁶⁰¹ The role of the plane, of the drone aircraft, mirrors that of the panoptic eye in Bentham’s panopticon, instilling the sense of observation in those on the ground without necessarily always being present. The advancement in technology allows the panoptic eye of to venture farther, to gather more elements of spatial knowledge into its network of associations. The recording of this knowledge and that it is kept secret further emphasises it’s importance to an understanding of the counter-narrative as being a socio-spatial progression connected to the understood narrative of mass society.⁶⁰² The U2 is the panoptic eye in motion, a technological manifestation of the social urge to observe and catalogue information as a means to understand society and shape its meaning.⁶⁰³ In this respect it is firmly connected to the major narrative drive of the novel, the assassination of John F Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald’s part in it.⁶⁰⁴ The desire to master this secret information as a means of controlling ones own societal role is what Oswald is seen to do with his knowledge of the U2 itself.

The U2 aircraft is intimately connected to Oswald’s attempts to enter into a new life in Russia. In many respects it becomes his means of escaping his own life and entering the counter-narrative. Just as the commercial airplane has been shown to give the temporary appearance of removing individuals from their daily life⁶⁰⁵ through flight, Oswald utilises the

⁶⁰⁰ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) p. 77.

⁶⁰¹ The U2 as a technological form of the societal panoptic eye. It observes and collates information about those it observes whilst never itself being seen.

⁶⁰² Consider in relation to the recording and repeated viewing of the traumatic societal event such as the assassination of Kennedy or the attacks on the World Trade Center. See Chapter 5: The Highway and Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁶⁰³ Compare the observing and cataloguing of details which the U2 carries out to the actions of the traveller class in *The Names* and the archivist in *Libra* who manages the seemingly endless network of connections that stem from the Kennedy assassination.

⁶⁰⁴ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁶⁰⁵ See earlier in this chapter.

technology of the plane to achieve similar ends. Through his knowledge of the technological elements of the aircraft, although what level of knowledge he actually possesses comes into question, he is able to leave his old life behind him and begin a new life in the Soviet Union.

It was a vast place, a noisy crowd. Konno was tired and hoarse, coming down with something. A silence at the table. Then Lee let it be known that he'd seen something interesting in Atsugi one day, a plane called a U-2.

He paused, measuring how he felt. Inside the bouncy music and applause, he occupied a pocket of calm. He was not connected to anything here and not quite connected to himself and he spoke less to Konno than to the person Konno would report to, someone out there, in the floating world, a collector of loose talk, a specialist who lived in the dark like the men with bright lips and spun-silk wigs.

He pointed out that the plane climbed right off the radarscopes

He said it reached an altitude almost five miles above the known record. He suggested it was armed with amazing cameras and headed for hostile soil.⁶⁰⁶

The relationship between technology, the military and the counter-narrative is clear in Oswald's attempt to achieve escape from his life. That Oswald is described as being "not quite connected" to either the spatial interactions that are taking place in the bar or his own sense of identity is telling.⁶⁰⁷ It suggests that at this point he is in a transitional state. In attempting to remove himself from his life by sharing the information he has about the U2 he has placed himself out of the network of associations and interactions that have governed it.⁶⁰⁸ Much like Joseph in *Dangling Man* his decision to sever his connections to mass society produce in Oswald a sense of freedom, of calm disconnection.⁶⁰⁹ His embracing of this transitional state leaves him free to explore new identities which are more appealing to those he is attempting to forge new connections with.⁶¹⁰ The form this takes is that of an expert on the U2 which is at odds to what is shown to be in reality a fleeting knowledge at best. The instability of this reality become apparent when his superiors begin to call into question his knowledge, a process which is intensified with the arrival of the U2 itself and the pilot Gary Powers. The space of the plane starts to cause Oswald's constructed reality to collapse.

⁶⁰⁶ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) pp. 89 – 90.

⁶⁰⁷ The disconnection from a stable sense of identity, playing with other identities. Consider in relation to Freud's discussion of the uncanny double. Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

⁶⁰⁸ Oswald's connection with the military means that he has been connected to one of the more overt means of societal control.

⁶⁰⁹ The depiction of the flight in *The Names* also suggests that the disconnection from the self creates this sense of calm. DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 3.

⁶¹⁰ The creation of a more appealing facsimile of the self to appeal to peers. Compare Oswald's actions to that of the suburbanite in the 1950s.

“Francis Gary Powers repeatedly claimed he was at maximum altitude when he felt the impact and saw the flash. Sixty-Eight thousand feet. It seemed the GRU thought he was lying. They believed U-2s went much higher and they knew Soviet missiles could not reach these altitudes.

Why would they believe the plane flew higher than the pilot contended?

Because Oswald told them?⁶¹¹

The introduction of the space of the plane illustrates its technological capacity and in doing so reasserts the connection between the military plane and the understood narrative of American mass society. Until this point Oswald has been utilising the inherent counter-narrative associations of the spy plane. By associating himself with it and acting as a point of connection to the plane he brings it and himself into the counter-narrative. The breakdown of this connection leads to the collapse of the life that he has created.⁶¹² The U2 highlights the unreality of Oswald’s self-created life, thus asserting the dominance of the mass over the individual and pulling him back into his role in American Mass society.⁶¹³ Oswald being forced to reassume a role he fought to escape and the brief period which he succeeded in escaping it influences his future interactions with mass society. He illustrates a desire to remain connected to the counter-narrative and the life he created within it. This takes the form of acts of violence, societal disturbance and whatever else he can do to undermine the narrative of American mass society.⁶¹⁴ This is apparent within the novel before he becomes connected to the plot to assassinate the President, his connection to acts of terrorism and societal violence are a major element in his own sense of identity and the way he interacts with others.

We’re here to start over,” he said.

“I am thinking he wants me to go back to Russia. This is what he means by starting over.”

⁶¹¹ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) p. 194.

⁶¹² The life created in the counter-narrative is unstable, liable to be destroyed at any moment. It is no less rooted than the life built in the accepted societal narrative, it simply does not have the comforting and stabilising factors which the transitional society produces.

⁶¹³ Compare to the deprogramming and forcible reintroduction back into mass society of Karen in *Mao II*.

⁶¹⁴ Compare Oswald’s acts of violence to destabilise the narrative society and those of the terrorists depicted in *Falling Man*. See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center for more on this.

“Russia is one idea. I’ve also been working on the idea I could hijack a plane, take a plane and go to Cuba and then you’ll come with June to live there.”

“First you shoot a man.”

“We may not be finished with him.”

“I am finished with him.”

“There’s a travel ban to Cuba.”

“And you are finished with him. Leaving me a note.”

“Little Cuba needs trained soldiers and advisers.”

“Scaring me to death. Now you want to steal an airplane. Who will fly it?”

“Stupid. The pilot. I kidnap it, I hijack it. It’s a flight to Miami and I take my revolver and go in the flight cabin. It’s called the flight cabin.”

“Who is stupid? Which one of us?”

“My snub-nose revolver. My two-inch Commando.”

She had to laugh at that.

“I stick up the plane and tell them to drop me in Havana.”⁶¹⁵

Terrorism, violence and a desire for a new life beyond the bounds of the narrative of American mass society are all integral to Oswald’s sense of self. His desire for acts of destructive violence is utilised by figures within the novel to carry out acts to unsettle that narrative. The connection between terrorism, the aircraft and the destructive act as a means to bring about the fall of the narrative of American mass society is manifested in another form that reverberates through the spaces of DeLillo’s work.⁶¹⁶

Post 9/11

In the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center the manner in which societal space is depicted in DeLillo’s work shifts.⁶¹⁷ Those events had a profound effect on his depiction of the relationship between the airplane, individuals and other spaces. After the events of 9/11 the elements which connected the airplane to the counter-narrative; technology, anxiety and death, have been made manifest. The space of the airplane has been shown to be a site within which those with a desire to escape or undermine the narrative of mass society may experiment with other identities.⁶¹⁸ Oswald states his desire to hijack a plane as a means of escaping his own life entirely rather than just for a period of time and in doing so

⁶¹⁵ DeLillo, D., *Libra* (London, Penguin, 1989) pp. 306 – 307.

⁶¹⁶ See Chapter 8 The World Trade Center.

⁶¹⁷ See Chapter 8 The World Trade Center.

⁶¹⁸ See earlier discussion of the space within the airplane.

undermining the stability of mass society. With the events of 9/11 the plane is fully connected to this desire, fulfilling its promise as a space of technological death and fear in the hands of those of a counter-narrative.⁶¹⁹ This awareness of the potential for destruction and the unfettering of identity offered by the plane are understood by those that see the mechanism of controlling society, whether that be figures of the counter-narrative or children.⁶²⁰

My son used to believe that he could look at a plane in flight and make it explode in midair by simply thinking it. He believed, at thirteen, that the border between himself and the world was thin and porous enough to allow him to affect the course of events. An aircraft in flight was a provocation too strong to ignore. He'd watch a plane gaining altitude after taking off from Sky Harbor and he'd sense an element of catastrophe tact in the very fact of a flying object filled with people.⁶²¹

The incident becomes intimately connected to the manner in which DeLillo depicts airplanes and the reaction they elicit. *Falling Man*, the first novel DeLillo wrote after September 11th, is focused not only on the events of the day as they affected the individuals and society, but also with the way in which it altered the perception of the spaces involved.⁶²² The plane becomes a touchstone for the fear and anxiety the events created, an unstable and unsafe social which becomes a focal point for attempts to locate the event both in time and as a codified event. "The planes" becomes a point of time, a location from which events may be measured. "This was all, a lost moment on the Friday of that lifelong week, three days after the planes."⁶²³ Their movement and appearance becomes a reference point for those that experienced the event. "She was ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue."⁶²⁴ The desire to return to the pre-understood narrative of life before the arrival of the planes is palpable, yet the space of the plane looms over this desire. The wish to be alone the memory of the planes elicits suggests that the events of 9/11 and the impact of the planes has created a new societal narrative. This new counter-narrative in which the network of associations connects individuals to the space of the towers and the plane, their individuality subsumed in the mass experience of the event.⁶²⁵ The desire to escape this counter-narrative and return to the previously understood

⁶¹⁹ See discussion of terrorism in DeLillo in the next chapter.

⁶²⁰ See earlier discussion that it would be a child that would seek to cause trouble. DeLillo, D., *End Zone* (London, Picador, 2004) pp. 157 – 158.

⁶²¹ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 88.

⁶²² See Chapter 8: The World Trade Center.

⁶²³ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 8.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid* p. 236.

⁶²⁵ The destruction of history to create a new society. Consider in relation to the anti-historicism of transitionality.

social narrative reverses the desire expressed by Oswald and the terrorist figures DeLillo depicts in his work.⁶²⁶

The manner in which individuals are shown to attempt to assimilate the events and the ensuing societal shift that the events of the day created is shown as a desire to write about the planes

They wrote about the planes. They wrote about where they were when it happened. They wrote about people they knew who were in the towers, or nearby, and they wrote about God.

How could God let this happen? Where was God when this happened?"⁶²⁷

The desire to discuss the events of the day inverts the previously discussed desire to turn away from trauma and to see the past as a void which shaped transitional space.⁶²⁸ Instead there is an impetus to talk about the event, to bring it into the understanding of the self and society.⁶²⁹ The discussion of the perception of the world growing as technology and travel expand inverts the commonly stated belief that the world shrinks by this process. The process actually brings more points of connection within the network of associations which constitutes mass society. Similarly, by bringing the traumatic events and spaces associated with them into one's awareness of the events the individual is able to process and understand it as an element of their own identity.⁶³⁰ To suggest that this process is always fully successful would be misleading as the desire to turn away from this trauma is still depicted. However even on the occasions in *Falling Man* when a character states a desire to turn away and repress the trauma of the day they are compelled, either by their contemporaries or by the internalised societal drive, to accept and absorb the events.

Every time she saw a videotape of the planes she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept watching. The second plane coming out of that ice blue sky, this was the footage that entered the body, that seemed to run beneath

⁶²⁶ The terrorist figure is more fully explored in the next chapter.

⁶²⁷ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007).

⁶²⁸ See Chapter 2 on Bellow.

⁶²⁹ See Chapter 2 on Bellow.

⁶³⁰ The processing of trauma by observing and cataloguing it. Consider in relation to the role of the archivist in *Libra*.

her skin, the fleeting sprint that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone's, into some other distance, out beyond the towers.⁶³¹

The desire to turn away from trauma by turning off the footage here reflects the individual reactions of individuals to the footage of traumatic events throughout DeLillo. The impulse to turn away from such footage is discussed in *Underworld* in relation to the "Texas Highway Killer" and in that event, the footage is also watched, proving too tempting to resist. The events started by the motion of the plane through space and of the observer's memory raise the issue of the understanding of self and other as related to individual personality and mass society. The events, the space they inhabit and, perhaps more importantly, those they create and destroy act as nodal points within which relationships between these societal and personal elements of identity and history converge.

⁶³¹ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 134 compare this reaction to the very similar reaction produced by the footage of the Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld* "You keep on looking" DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 156.

Chapter 8: The World Trade Center

The World Trade Center is a recurring figure in DeLillo's writing, the space functioning as both the ultimate physical exemplar of mass consumer society and a location of importance for the counter-narrative which defies this society. Although the towers occupy an important space in the geography of DeLillo's writing before 9/11⁶³² it is impossible to talk about them without making reference to that date and the manner in which it affected DeLillo's depiction of the site.⁶³³ The towers are one space and two. This uncanny doubling is a focal point for many characters understanding of the space as it suggests a dialogue between the two. They are emblematic of the duality of social spatiality, the dialogue between the narrative and the counter-narrative; internal and external; the individual and the mass. This dialogue occurs not just between the towers but also between the World Trade Center and the space which surrounds it, both physically and thematically. The division between the self and other reflects the division between the individual and mass society and has been established as a facet of transitional space throughout DeLillo's work. In many respects the World Trade Centre in its role both pre and post 9/11 represents the apotheosis of this dichotomy. The balance between self and other is also observable in the interactions between the interior space of the tower and the way it is viewed from outside.⁶³⁴ In *Players* DeLillo provides the perspective of characters that work within the towers and in doing so illustrate the manner in which the vast singular space within the towers is manipulated so as to make it inhabitable.⁶³⁵ From the outside the towers are seen as vast, "All the space is inside"⁶³⁶. This depiction of the towers is indicative of the discussion taking place in DeLillo's work regarding the interaction of mass society and the potential for isolation or individuality. This question becomes even more pertinent post 9/11 when connection between mass society and consumption comes into conflict with the isolated individual in the form of the terrorist. This figure is the ultimate extension of DeLillo's men in small rooms shaping history.⁶³⁷ With the destruction of the physical space of the towers what remain behind are the social actions and spatial motions which shaped the

⁶³² The World Trade Center has been a spatial presence in DeLillo's writing throughout his career.

⁶³³ The previous chapter illustrates the connection between the airplane and the twin towers which has existed since 9/11.

⁶³⁴ The position of observation, both from inside and out, influences the view that the towers provide. Consider in relation to the view of society from the highway and the panopticon.

⁶³⁵ Compare this manipulation of space to create a sense of comfort with that of the airport. In both spaces the illusion of differentiated space is created to mask the homogeneity of the space. See the previous chapter.

⁶³⁶ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 40.

⁶³⁷ This description is fitting of many characters in DeLillo's writing. Oswald in *Libra* is a prime example.

towers.⁶³⁸ It is noted that even before this point there was a sense of impermanence in the towers despite their vast physicality. The shadow that the towers cast is extended in its absence throughout society. Just as the death of Kennedy made him a nodal point in the network of social relations so the tower becomes more than the limits of its physical space.⁶³⁹ Before 9/11 the towers are described as a site for the codification of emotions whether they be grief or anger, and with the collapse of that space those emotions are given free reign, becoming all the more visceral.

The World Trade Centre is a space with numerous meanings within the work of DeLillo. These meanings differ depending on the point from which the towers are being viewed. One of the major differing viewpoints is whether it is being observed pre 9/11 in its physical form or post 9/11 as the after image of a destroyed location. It is impossible to now completely separate a discussion of the World Trade Centre and its meaning, both socially and spatially, from the events of its destruction on September 11th 2001. However its importance within DeLillo's writing predates that event. The spatial and sociological understanding of that site DeLillo attempts throughout his work which predate that event provide a great degree of illumination to the way in which it is depicted after. An introduction to an interview with DeLillo after the release of his novel *Falling Man* notes that:

As many critics have noted, the fact that DeLillo would attempt a "9/11 novel" is hardly surprising. He's been writing 9/11 novels for the past thirty years. Terrorists have been making regular appearances in his books since *Players* (1977) a satirical portrait of a young urban professional couple. (The husband becomes involved with a terrorist group that is plotting to blow up the New York Stock Exchange, where he works; the wife, meanwhile, is employed by a firm called the Grief Management Council, which is based in the World Trade Center. At one point, during a rooftop dinner party in which the wife gazes at the towers, a neighbor casually notes, "That plane looks like it's going to hit.") Other favorite DeLillo themes—conspiracy theories, cult violence, religious fanaticism, large-scale cataclysmic events, the terror of crowds, secret histories, lone men in small rooms plotting dramatic acts of violence—all but make *Falling Man* seem inevitable. The word "paranoid," seemingly required in early

⁶³⁸ With the physical space of the towers gone all that remains is the connections that existed within it as part of the network of associations.

⁶³⁹ Consider the manner in which the after image of the towers begins to appear in daily objects. See later in this chapter.

reviews of DeLillo's work, has since been replaced with "prophetic." (He owns up to neither: "What I try to do is understand the currents flowing through the culture around us. That's where all the paranoia comes from in my early novels.")⁶⁴⁰

Although it is possible to discuss the depictions of the World Trade Center in DeLillo's writing before and after the events of 9/11 it is useful to recognize that the themes he depicts in relation to the space overlap and influence each other. Thematically it connects to the other transitional spaces DeLillo explores being a focus of the division between personal identity and mass society. Although there are many complex spatial and social interactions which one can explore in connection to the World Trade Center perhaps the most basic duality to investigate is that between the view from inside the towers and that from without. The vantage point from which one views this space illustrates both social division, the impact of the space on those within and without and its spatial and physical proportions.

Within the Towers

The primary source for an internal viewpoint of the tower is *Players*.⁶⁴¹ Within that novel a character Pammy, works in the World Trade Center and it is her perspective which provides insight into the socio-spatial reality of that space. A large portion of these insights are related to the elevators of the towers, as previously discussed⁶⁴² however they do connect to wider issues of space and place in the towers. As such we must return to the discussion of whether the towers, and the elevators within them, are spaces or places.

If the elevators in the World Trade Center were places, as she believed them to be, and if the lobbies were spaces, as she further believed, what then was the World Trade Center itself? Was it a condition, an occurrence, a physical event, an existing circumstance, a presence, a state, a set of invariables?⁶⁴³

The space of the World Trade Center is almost impossible to understand in its entirety to those that function within it.⁶⁴⁴ Much like the wider transitional society the balance between

⁶⁴⁰ http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/ (July 17, 2007).

⁶⁴¹ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991).

⁶⁴² See Chapter 6: Interstices regarding the elevator.

⁶⁴³ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991); p. 48.

⁶⁴⁴ Compare the airport and the World Trade Center as the opposite end of the spectrum to the elevator and the escalator. They reflect the social and personal elements of the same socio-spatial concerns.

the individual and the mass is complicated by the extent of the space. For the most part this issue is overcome by introducing partitions within the space to define cellular parameters, to provide the illusion of individualised space and therefore to allow a degree of personal understanding.⁶⁴⁵ Much like the rooms of the motel these smaller, almost identical individualised spaces produce the sense of comfort and isolation to avert the attention of those within the space from the vastness of the society in which they exist.⁶⁴⁶ However even these seemingly singular spaces are unstable and only act to further complicate the understanding of the towers as a whole.

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 the fact that office space at Grief Management was constantly being reapportioned. Workmen sealed off some areas with partitions, opened up others, moved out file cabinets, wheeled in chairs and desks.⁶⁴⁷ It was as though they'd been directed to adjust the amount of furniture to the levels of national grief.⁶⁴⁸

Pammy's overriding experience within the towers is of their feeling of impermanence, that they are more of a space created of theories, interactions and dialogues than they are a liveable, comprehensible social space. If one compares this to the manner in which the towers are perceived from those externally the question of what the towers signify to those within and those without, is brought to the fore. In doing so one is able to consider wider concepts of societal spatiality as they relate to the dialogue between mass society and the individual on both a local and a global scale. It also provides insight into the way in which the combinations of technology, consumption and transitional spatiality have progressed and how the towers are considered the apotheosis of this development, if not by those within then by those without.⁶⁴⁹ Just as the motel is emblematic of the development of the form of transitional society as it flourished in 1950s the World Trade Centers is emblematic of socio-spatial

⁶⁴⁵ The partitions as impermanent and porous, see the discussion of Frank Lloyd Wright's work as it relates to transitional space in Chapter 3: The Motel.

⁶⁴⁶ The production of space and the comfort of the homogenous and repetitive.

⁶⁴⁷ The reapportioning of space to create a sense of individual spaces within the WTC, to make the vast internal space understandable and liveable. Consider in relation to Lloyd Wright's discussion of "Walls are now apparent more as humanized screens." Lloyd Wright, F., *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings* (New York, Meridian Books, 1960) p. 313.

⁶⁴⁸ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) pp. 18 – 19.

⁶⁴⁹ The viewpoint of the counter-narrative, the excluded and forgotten. Consider in relation to the underpass and the role of the terrorist. The counter-narrative as a global and domestic concern.

developments at their zenith.⁶⁵⁰ This concept is more apparent when one considers them as they interact with the wider spatial network however the description of the experience of dwelling within the towers illustrates an awareness of their theoretical meaning as well as their spatial impact on the individual. For Pammy the towers are a confusing arrangement of shifting spaces, what appears solid from the outside is transitional. The arrangement of ever-changing divisions is combined with the means of travelling around the tower which makes it apparent that the combination of technology and motion exemplified by elevators and escalators is essential to the understanding of the internal space of the towers.⁶⁵¹

But don't you love this place? You should see how I have to get to the cafeteria. A local and an express down, then an express up, then an escalator if you can get there without them ripping your flesh to pieces.⁶⁵²

The mechanised motion of these forms of interstitial spaces illustrates the focus on motion and technology which have been shown to be a function of controlling motion in the mass society. This is emphasised within the towers, movements influence on the understanding of the internal spaces of the towers even becomes a factor in the way that formerly stable elements of the space, such as walls, become unmoored.⁶⁵³ For Pammy this clearly creates a degree of discomfort, she is unsettled by the perpetual movement and instability of the space. The fact that it is “transient” and “fleeting” hinder her in getting her bearings, leading to her losing her way. The unease and discomfort she feels are a permanent background presence in her existence within the towers. She is incapable of shaping this space, of challenging it and remapping it with her motion⁶⁵⁴ In an essay he wrote following the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 DeLillo suggested what the towers were emblematic of, both in his own network of spaces and for those that attacked it, a definition which further exposes the dialogue taking place between the individual and the mass in his work.

The World Trade towers were not only an emblem of advanced technology but a justification, in a sense, for technology's irresistible will to realise in solid form whatever becomes theoretically allowable. Once defined, every limit must be reached. The tactful sheathing of the towers was intended to reduce the direct threat

⁶⁵⁰ Compare to the “nether curve” (Bellow, S., *Dangling Man*, (1996) p. 25) which society was at with the end of the Second World War.

⁶⁵¹ See Chapter 6: Interstices on the elevator in the towers.

⁶⁵² DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 15.

⁶⁵³ The temporality of walls as divisions, see Lloyd Wright and the permeability of the motel walls.

⁶⁵⁴ Consider in relation to DeCerteau's walker shaping societal space through motion. DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

of such straight-edge enormity, a giantism that eased over the years into something a little more familiar and comfortable, even dependable in a way.⁶⁵⁵

The sense of fear and background discomfort that such a focus on motion and the technological creates in Pammy is shared even by those who revel in that space. Even Jeanette, who speaks to Pammy in the elevators of the building and claims to “love this place”⁶⁵⁶ is also aware of the potential it has for “ripping your flesh to pieces”.⁶⁵⁷ DeLillo’s definition of what the towers were emblematic of appears less stable and set in his investigation of the space in his novels than in his essay however the discussion of perpetual forward motion and the desire that “every limit must be reached” is present in the majority of depictions of the space whether internal or external. What is common in descriptions of the space from those within it is the suggestion that it is a troubling site that has been rendered “familiar and comfortable” through the technological and architectural “sheathing” of the sources of unease.⁶⁵⁸ This sense of paranoia and discomfort has been a constant factor in the depiction of transitional spaces. The unsettling connection of these spaces to the counter-narrative which suggests an alternative social understanding of them and their impact on the individual is seen in depiction of the tower from the outside looking in.

The relationship between motion and technology which is unsettling to those within the building is seen as potentially threatening to those outside, a source of the spaces strength and continued control of the spaces around it. Virilio’s discussion of *Speed and Politics* has been connected to various transitional spatial forms, particularly the highway,⁶⁵⁹ and is of use to an investigation of the World Trade Centre. This is true not only in discussion of the elevators and escalators within the towers with their connection to technology and controlled motion,⁶⁶⁰ but also to the theoretical role that the site comes to take on for both those within it and without it. Virilio furthers his discussion of speed and politics in a manner which is particularly applicable to the twin towers. “Our societies have become arrhythmic. Or they only know one rhythm: constant acceleration. Until the crash and systemic failure.”⁶⁶¹ Both Virilio and DeLillo suggest that the World Trade Center has become emblematic of a societal form which has its roots in the desire for motion and progress.⁶⁶² Pammy’s description of life

⁶⁵⁵ *In the Ruins of the Future*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

⁶⁵⁶ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) p. 15.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid* p. 15.

⁶⁵⁸ Consider in relation to the use of facsimiles of comfort to mask anxiety.

⁶⁵⁹ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁶⁶⁰ See Chapter 6: Interstices on the elevator and escalator.

⁶⁶¹ Virilio, P., *The Administration of Fear* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2012) p. 27.

⁶⁶² The transitional impulse which runs throughout this work and is traceable back to the end of the Second World War.

inside the towers can be read as the definition of a figure living in the wider transitional society. Confused, comforted and always moving. DeLillo's use of this insiders view allows him to produce a commentary on the society which created the World Trade Center, a commentary which becomes a part of the discussion with those that exist outside the space. If we are to consider the depiction of the site from those within looking around them and those without looking in, it is also interesting to consider the spatial gaze of those looking out.⁶⁶³

De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* makes the movement from a consideration of the panoptic form of space to a discussion of the manipulation and reconfiguration of controlled space that is available to the individual. These methods allow the production of space in a manner which connects to the experience of those within the city, being based on their actions rather than simply the effect the network of societal meaning has on them.⁶⁶⁴ Clearly the towers and the socio-spatial form of city that De Certeau discusses are strongly connected; one is not visible without the other in the spatial metaphor he creates. He focuses on urban space as the predominant form of social and cultural spatiality at the end of the Twentieth Century. More specifically he uses Manhattan as an example of a primary urban site within which to examine the individual's role in relation to space. De Certeau introduces the space of New York from the perspective of a spatial form which had been central to the previous era, the panoptic site.

Seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center. Beneath the haze stirred up by the winds, the urban island, a sea in the middle of the sea, lifts up the skyscrapers over Wall Street, sinks down at Greenwich, then rises again to the crests of Midtown, quietly passes over Central Park and finally undulates off into the distance beyond Harlem. A wave of verticals. Its agitation is momentarily arrested by vision. The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes. It is transformed into a textuology in which extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space. Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its pasts. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶³ The multiplication of the panoptic gaze as it has spread throughout society allowing different perspective.

⁶⁶⁴ Consider in relation to DeCerteau's discussion of the walker. DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid p. 91.

The use of the World Trade Center as a site from which to view the role of contemporary spatiality has a great deal of resonance for many reasons. It is chosen by De Certeau as it is the “most monumental figure of Western urban development.”⁶⁶⁶ If one considers the discussion in previous chapters for the growth of transitionality as a societal factor as connected to the expansion of a particular form of consumption and commercialism then the use of this site as emblematic of that society is fitting. The towers take on the role of the panoptic observer,⁶⁶⁷ its gaze considers the entirety of the urban setting whilst also exemplifying the forces which organise that space. Steve Pile in his *The Body and the City*⁶⁶⁸ compares De Certeau’s interaction with the city to that of a writer and a text.⁶⁶⁹ As panoptic eye atop the World Trade Centre he is placed in the role of observer and creator, both reading the city and creating it by locating it with his gaze.⁶⁷⁰ “The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes. It is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide”⁶⁷¹ The degree to which this space can be read or created by the singular panoptic eye is questioned as the work continues yet from this position it appears that it can be. The discussion of the individual’s ability to shape society connects to the concept of the terrorist as the ultimate exemplar of the individual representing the counter-narrative who attempts to reshape the spatiality of mass society. This is a discussion that will develop out of the discussion of the space beyond the walls of the tower that De Certeau’s panoptic eye captures, the space outside the twin towers.

External Understanding of the Towers

The differing viewpoints of the World Trade Center are not fixed, the panoptic observer from the top is able to come down into the streets and the worker from inside the towers is able to come out of the building and see tower from the outside. The positions are changeable, the understanding of the space a discussion rather than fixed.⁶⁷² Pammy in *Players* provides an interesting perspective on the towers as a figure that has experienced them from the inside and

⁶⁶⁶Ibid p. 93.

⁶⁶⁷ The location of the panoptic gaze within the tower induces in those outside the tower the sense that they are the delinquent, the observed, the other. Consider in relation to the attacks on the tower.

⁶⁶⁸ Pile, S., *The Body and the City* (London, Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid p. 225.

⁶⁷⁰ The use of the panoptic gaze to locate and fix the observed in a socio-spatial role. “Visibility is a trap” Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish* (London, Penguin 1991) p. 200.

⁶⁷¹ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 91.

⁶⁷² The boundaries and locations have become changeable as transitionality has become an internalised personal and societal drive.

also observes them from outside. In doing so the character provides further insight into the manner in which they reflect the socio-spatial outlook of those that dwell within them.⁶⁷³

Ethan and Jake came over the next evening with meat loaf leftovers. They all went up to the roof, where management had laid slate over the tar and provided four picnic tables (chained to the walls) and several evergreen shrubs in large planters. Lyle arrived last, carrying drinks on a tray.

“I didn’t know this was up here,” Jack said.

“It’s to give Pammy a look at the World Trade Center whenever she’s depressed.

That gets her going again.”⁶⁷⁴

Although Pammy is clearly uncomfortable with the manner in which the space of the towers work, how she fits as an individual in that space, she feels connected to the societal form that the space represents. This is a unique perspective in DeLillo’s writing as the majority of characters that comment on the towers and their role in society are figures that are never shown as interacting with the towers directly. It is important to note here though that although the World Trade Center is emblematic of the mass consumer society it is not divorced from the city in which the other characters that view it inhabit. As DeCerteau noted, Manhattan is a “gigantic mass” that exemplifies the development of the consumer society.⁶⁷⁵ The majority of the characters DeLillo utilises to view the towers and pass comment on them are those that are connected to forms of the counter-narrative, figures with viewpoints that allow them to question the structure of the understood and accepted narrative of society. These are almost without exception artists with a perspective on the space and volume of the sites and an interest in their social meaning.⁶⁷⁶ In *Mao II* and *Underworld* differing perspectives are given on the towers by a photographer and an artist. The photographer Britta in *Mao II* provides her own impressions of the towers as they relate to her understanding of space and identity and discusses them with the author Bill Gray. The interaction between these two characters provides a great deal of insight into the various roles that the towers play in the spatial structure of the novel and the society it depicts.

⁶⁷³ Societal space shaped by those that pass through it. See DeCerteau on the walker. DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988).

⁶⁷⁴ DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) P. 81. The World Trade Center as a space which restores the faith of those that are successful, reinvigorates them Consider the elevated vantage point from which they view it, on a level rather than from below.

⁶⁷⁵ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 91.

⁶⁷⁶ The connection between the artist and the walker in DeCerteau’s discussion of bricolage as a means of appropriating space. DeCerteau also describes bricolage as “a network of relations, poetic ways of “making do”” Ibid p. xv.

“You’ll wonder what made you mad.”

“I already have the World Trade Center.”

“And it’s already harmless and ageless. Forgotten-looking. And think how much worse.”

“What?” she said.

“If there was only one tower instead of two.”

“You mean they interact. There is a play of light.”

“Wouldn’t a single tower be much worse?”

“No, because my big complaint is only partly size. The size is deadly. But having two of them is like a comment, it’s like a dialogue, only I don’t know what they’re saying.”⁶⁷⁷

“They’re saying, ‘Have a nice day.’”

“Someday, go walk those streets,” she said. “Sick and dying people with nowhere to live and there are bigger and bigger towers all the time, fantastic buildings with miles of rentable space. All the space is inside. Am I exaggerating?”

“I’m the one who exaggerates.”⁶⁷⁸

The suggestion that there is a dialogue taking place between the two towers, that their space and form is essential to an understanding of their meaning both to these individuals and to society in general, is central to DeLillo’s ongoing investigation of the space. There is a difference in opinion here which is interesting. The author Gray states that the dialogue between the towers is what makes them bearable, that it is their interaction with one another and the dialogue between spatial and societal forms which makes the towers an acceptable space.⁶⁷⁹ The duality of the site for Gray is preferable to there being one tower.⁶⁸⁰ The duality and interaction of the towers is representative of there being the potential for numerous perspectives, that there is more than just the understood and accepted narrative. If there were one tower its monolithic form would be suggestive of a panoptic isolated site which is prevalent over all others, that there is no potential for dialogue between those within and without.⁶⁸¹ That there is an inherent suggestion of dialogue in space itself allows it to function as part of the wider socio-spatial narrative despite being emblematic of the most advanced form of technological and consumer driven society. It is arguable that Bill holds this opinion as he is to some degree a figure that fits within the towers. As a successful author he is a part

⁶⁷⁷ The duality of the space.

⁶⁷⁸ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 40.

⁶⁷⁹ The meaning of the towers stems from the interaction between the mass and the individual, the self and other.

⁶⁸⁰ The singular tower would be authoritarian and panoptic.

⁶⁸¹ Consider this in relation to the view of the counter-narrative

of the consumption / production cycle which the towers are a manifestation of.⁶⁸² As the novel progresses the character removes himself from these connections. In his self-imposed isolation Gray is attempting to distance himself from that cycle but in doing so he simply increases the desire of the mass to absorb him into an understood narrative. It is only when the character erases his own identity by spatially substituting himself for an imprisoned writer within an entirely alien society that he feels completely isolated from the narrative the towers represent.⁶⁸³ Britta's perspective is based in her sense of disconnection from the towers and the society they represent which Gray finds "harmless and ageless". As a photographer Brita places a lens between herself and that which she sees. She is intensely visual which allows her to look at the meaning of the spaces yet she is also distanced from it.⁶⁸⁴ Her interpretation of the dialogue between the two towers differs greatly from Bill's. Whilst he considers the interaction between the towers as suggestive of an open dialogue between spaces and societal forms, Brita considers it more of a "comment" on the spaces around them. She claims to not "know what they're saying" which suggests an anxious feeling that there are controlling factors of the societal narrative which are hidden from her.⁶⁸⁵ This is the viewpoint of someone who feels outside of the meaning of those spaces, a suggestion which is confirmed when she aligns herself with the streets around the towers. She illustrates the disparity between the space inside the tower and the space outside the tower. Britta's interpretation of the towers becomes a commentary on the production and manipulation of space⁶⁸⁶ and the disparity that exists between those that control this space and those that are outside of it. The towers are a construction which produces space, it captures space in a manner that can be controlled and commodified. The economic impetus that lies behind the production of spaces such as the World Trade Center, its name illustrates its connection to the global economy, and its role as a physical manifestation of that societal drive, is discussed by DeLillo in his essay on 9/11. In many respects Britta's commentary exposes many themes which will be relevant to a discussion of the collision between mass society and the individual as terrorist that stem from 9/11.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸² This is the case with Bucky Wunderlick in *Great Jones Street*, a visible figure / product in the societal narrative that escapes causing the mass society to attempt to pull him back in. See DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992).

⁶⁸³ This process occurs gradually but primarily occurs in DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 195 – 217).

⁶⁸⁴ Consider the manner in which the act of photography distance Brita in comparison to the discussion of the "most photographed Barn in America" DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (London, Picador, 1986) pp. 12 – 13. The distance from the item being photographed and the balance between reality and unreality the act produces.

⁶⁸⁵ The concept that the truth is always elsewhere in the counter-narrative.

⁶⁸⁶ The towers also are suggested to be connected to the consumption of space.

⁶⁸⁷ See later in this chapter.

In the past decade 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.⁶⁸⁸

The perpetual development of technology and the increasing speed of the ability for transactions created by the advances of technology are connected to the increased velocity and control of space and social movement. The transitional impetus apparent in the spaces of DeLillo's writing has reached their apotheosis here.⁶⁸⁹ The increase of speed and technology as connected to the global economic market is also apparent in the novel DeLillo was in the process of writing at the point the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred. Within *Cosmopolis* DeLillo explores the protests and acts of public outrage that are a factor of this form of economic and social development. In doing so he ties those actions to the roles of technology and finance, even prophetically tying it to an attack on the towering buildings of a financial institution. Rather than the protesters being described as separate from the primary thrust of the economic structure due to their opposition to it, the novel supports the theory put forward by Bill Gray's interpretation of the World Trade Center, that these two narrative forces are connected as part of a conversation.

"The market culture is total. It breeds these men and women. They are necessary to the system they despise. They give it energy and definition. They are market-driven. They are traded on the markets of the world. This is why they exist, to invigorate and perpetuate the system."⁶⁹⁰

The narrative which the towers are emblematic of is intimately connected to the counter-narrative which these protesters believe themselves to be a part of. Whilst it is useful to observe the differing perspectives on the space of the World Trade Center and through those perspectives to observe facets of the economic system and the spatial culture it creates, it is also important to note their connection. Much like the doubling of the towers to suggest it is two spaces rather than one, the fact remains that they are a part of the same space "There is nowhere they can go to be outside. There is no outside."⁶⁹¹ This is a concept which will

⁶⁸⁸ *In the Ruins of the Future*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo> .

⁶⁸⁹ *Cosmopolis* illustrates the point at which the boundaries between technology and reality begin to blur. DeLillo, D., *Cosmopolis* (London, Picador, 2003).

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid p. 90.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid p. 90.

become of even greater importance in the discussion of the depiction of the towers in the post 9/11 period as the figures make the step from protestors to terrorists and their acts to subvert the narrative of which the towers are emblematic become all the more destructive.

The viewpoint that Britta provides as a figure that places herself outside of this narrative to a degree whilst also interacting with it⁶⁹² may be placed in contrast to the opinions of the towers and the role they play in both the life and artistic outlook of Klara Sax.⁶⁹³ She is portrayed living in New York in the mid 1970s as the towers were being built. This provides a unique perspective on the towers and their place in DeLillo's spatial network. In exposing the construction of the space and the impact that it had on the spatial lives of those around it DeLillo connects it to the development of the spatial narrative of the mass consumer culture whilst also suggesting its relationship to the counter-narrative of the artist.

The World Trade Center was under construction, already towering, twin-towering, with cranes tilted at the summits and work elevators sliding up the flanks. She saw it almost everywhere she went. She ate a meal and drank a glass of wine and walked to the rail or ledge and there it usually was, bulked up at the funnelled end of the island, and a man stood next to her one evening, early, drinks on the roof of a gallery building – about sixty, she thought, portly and jowled but also sleek in a way, assured and contained and hard-polished, a substantial sort, European.

“I think of it as one, not two,” she said. “Even though there are clearly two towers, it’s a single entity, isn’t it?”

“Very terrible thing but you have to look at it, I think.”

“Yes, you have to look.”⁶⁹⁴

The description of the tower as being uncovered, that the elevators and internal workings are still visible at this point is suggestive of the nature of the mass consumer society in this period. It's mechanisms for the production of space are complex and yet still observable and understandable. It is still in motion, progressing and building. In comparison by the period at which Britta is discussing the towers with Bill Gray they have become “forgotten-looking”. This masking of their complexities as a spatial manifestation of the mass consumer society is misleading, their surface appearance and their comfortable relationship with the spaces

⁶⁹² The photographer captures images but also places themselves outside the narrative to gain a perspective.

⁶⁹³ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998).

⁶⁹⁴ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) p. 372. The towers are considered a single entity.

around them belies the intricacies and troubling facets of the space.⁶⁹⁵ The question of the duality of the space is also considered in the 1970s in a different manner. In a conversation very reminiscent to that which takes place between Bill and Britta the concept of there being both one tower and two is approached from a different perspective. Sax makes the suggestion that despite the fact that there are two towers physically it is impossible not to see it as a “single entity”. Sax is able to see the connection and the balance between the narrative and the counter-narrative it suggests. This understanding of the connection between consumer mass culture and its darker other is reflected in the art that she is shown to produce throughout the work. Whilst this is a disturbing thing for her to be able to see she feels compelled to look.⁶⁹⁶ This compulsion is partially explained by the towers perpetual presence in her recollections of the period. It casts a shadow over her life, often throwing spatial forms that she finds more comforting from previous periods into stark relief.

She loved the water tanks she saw from the roofs, perched everywhere, old brown wood with tops like coolie hats. They often built the tanks right on site, the way you make a barrel, grooved staves bound with metal hoops, and of course the twin towers in the distance, a model of behemoth mass production, units that roll identically off the line and end up in your supermarket, stamped with the day’s prices.⁶⁹⁷

Her viewpoint on the towers as a persistent presence in her life, whether unseen or seen in the distance,⁶⁹⁸ connects it to mass society, consumption and the production of spatial forms which propagate homogeneity.⁶⁹⁹ It is unsurprising that this viewpoint is indicative of the opinions which DeLillo attributes to characters that place themselves in opposition to the narrative the towers represent, be that protesters artists, or terrorists.⁷⁰⁰ The spatial and economic forms that developed alongside the World Trade Center which make Sax feel so uneasy are connected to the transitional impulse.⁷⁰¹ The spatial forms this impulse created and those that DeLillo depicts are solidly American in their materials and construction. This

⁶⁹⁵ The façade as a comforting form of spatial production.

⁶⁹⁶ Consider in relation to the inability to view the repeated footage of highway death and terrorist attacks. The appeal of the repetition of the footage.

⁶⁹⁷ DeLillo, D., *Underworld* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1998) pp. 377 – 378.

⁶⁹⁸ The sense of observation, the internalised panoptic gaze.

⁶⁹⁹ See Lefebvre on the production of homogenous, repetitious spaces. Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

⁷⁰⁰ The terrorist shaping society. “What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous.” DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 157.

⁷⁰¹ Consider the original economic and sociological impulse to create the transitional society. See Riesman, D., *The Lonely Crowd* (New York, Yale University Press, 2001); Whyte, W. H., *The Organization Man* (London, Penguin, 1956); Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society* (London, Penguin, 1958).

homogenized form of space and economy becomes the predominant narrative of economics and society. It is this which became the focus of those connected to the counter-narrative on September 11th:

...the primary target of the men who attacked the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre was not the global economy. It was America that drew their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. It was our perceived godlessness. It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life and mind.⁷⁰²

Post 9/11

The depiction of the World Trade Center in DeLillo's work changes in the period after 9/11. It becomes a site that is present by its absence, a void from which theoretical and spatial forms appear.⁷⁰³ It influences daily life in the production of ghostly forms suggestive of the previous built space.⁷⁰⁴ However it is clearly connected to the spatial and social themes that predominated DeLillo's spatial investigations. He tackles the events of 9/11 in *Falling Man* in which the after effects of the attacks still linger in the memories of those that experienced it whilst he discusses his opinions of the causes and meaning of the attacks themselves in a number of essays and interviews. These works combine to give an overall view of his thoughts on the space of the World Trade Center itself, what it means in the spatial network of his writing and how that is connected to the viewpoint of those that attacked it, be that in his work or in reality. The shadow that the towers cast over those that lived around it has been explored through the character of Klara Sax in *Underworld*.⁷⁰⁵ The void which is left in the wake of the events provides a reminder of the space which previously existed there, a reverberation through their lives which proves both impossible to capture through art and technology yet impossible to avoid in the most mundane daily elements of life.⁷⁰⁶ Although neither the artist Klara Sax nor the photographer Britta Nilsson produce images or reproductions of the towers that space clearly formed a part of their own spatial network of meaning, something visible to them that played a part in their understanding of their environment.

⁷⁰² *In the Ruins of the Future*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

⁷⁰³ Compare the new spatial form that is prompted by the void left after 9/11 and that created form the void at the heart of Europe after World War Two.

⁷⁰⁴ Consider in relation to the uncanny double Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London, Penguin, 2003).

⁷⁰⁵ See earlier in this chapter.

⁷⁰⁶ See the inability to create art in the post war period in Germany is discussed by W.G. Sebald. Sebald, W. G., *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London, Penguin, 2004).

She was thinking that everything that came into her mind lately and developed as a perception seemed at once to enter the culture, to become a painting or photograph... she saw a painting reproduced in an art journal and it was called *Skyscraper III*, a panelled canvas showing the World Trade Center at precisely the angle she saw it from her window and in the same dark spirit. These were her towers, standing windowless, two black latex slabs that consumed the available space.⁷⁰⁷

There is a sense of ownership to the way in which Britta discusses the towers as they are a physical presence in her life, a space that is a vector in her own spatial network of associations. She sees them as “her towers” despite her stated sense of distance from what they represent. She takes personal ownership over a particular view of them and has created her own dialogue with the space. Similarly Klara Sax recollects them both spatially and emotionally as the shape that cast a shadow over much of her life and as the image she saw on the first occasion she met a lover. In the period post 9/11 the relationship between the artist and the space of the World Trade Center becomes more complex. It becomes a case of not only understanding their relationship to the space but also their relationship to the events of the day and the void that has been left in its space.⁷⁰⁸ This void forces them to confront not only what the towers meant to them personally but also what it represented to those that destroyed it.⁷⁰⁹ It is both a personal and an alien site, an emotional vortex which is both painful and impossible to view or comprehend. The manner in which this appears in artistic representations is interesting. Rather than capturing a facet of the space to represent an element of its theoretical meaning the towers are now only depicted obliquely as suggestions of the memory of the space. These are manifested as fragmented and fractured images or motions. *Falling Man* provides two differing references to artistic interpretations of the events and the towers. One example shows two characters, a mother and daughter, attempting to interpret a still life painting in which two objects suggest the towers, a suggestion which leads to them having to consider its meaning more deeply.

The two dark objects, the white bottle, the huddled boxes. Lianne turned away from the painting and saw the room itself as a still life, briefly. Then the human figures appear. Mother and Lover, with Nina still in the armchair, thinking remotely of something, and Martin hunched on the sofa now, facing her.

⁷⁰⁷ DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London, Vintage, 1992) p. 165.

⁷⁰⁸ The personal connections to the space remain despite its physical destruction.

⁷⁰⁹ The events of September 11th forced mass society to acknowledge the existence of the counter-narrative and its opinion. This mirrors the outcome of both the end of the Second World War and the assassination of Kennedy. The exposure of other potential societal narratives.

Finally her mother said “Architecture, yes, maybe, but coming out of another time entirely, another century. Office towers, no. These shapes are not translatable to modern towers, twin towers. It’s work that rejects that kind of extension or projection. It takes you inward, down and in. That’s what I see there, half buried, something deeper than things or shapes of things.”

Lianne knew, in a pinprick of light, what her mother was going to say.

She said “It’s all about mortality, isn’t it?”

“Being human” Lianne said.

“Being human, being mortal. I think these pictures are what I’ll look at when

I’ve stopped looking at everything else. I’ll look at bottles and jars. I’ll sit here looking,⁷¹⁰

The picture is imbued with a resonance it may not have previously contained which the viewer brings to it with the memory of the resonant and emotionally charged space of the towers. The suggestion of those spaces, even just their size and volume, is enough to elicit an emotional response that gets to the core of their personal emotional reactions to the space.⁷¹¹ The meaning of the tower’s space has forever been altered for them. DeLillo discusses his own perception of the towers in relation to the attacks in a manner which reflects the reaction of his characters. He makes it clear that, partially due to an inability to fully process the meaning of the day’s events in the moment, he approaches it as an author. He visualises the image of an isolated figure, a moment of the events that both conveys a sense of its entirety whilst also acknowledging the inability of capturing it.⁷¹² During an interview with *Guernica* magazine DeLillo both discusses his first experience of the void created by that space and his artistic reaction to attempting to deal with it.

DeLillo originally travelled to Ground Zero with vague intentions of writing an essay about the attacks... “But I was thinking as a novelist,” he says. “I needed to see things, to literally smell things. I wanted to start at street level⁷¹³... What made it happen was a visual image: a man in a suit and tie, carrying a briefcase, walking through a storm of smoke and ash. I had nothing beyond that...

⁷¹⁰ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 111.

⁷¹¹ The repressed manifesting as memories, not in the transitional space, but in its absence.

⁷¹² DeLillo creates his own uncanny double, a facsimile surrounded by the physical suggestion of exploded identity.

⁷¹³ Starting at street level, the experience of the space from the outside, its mass and meaning understood through smell. Compare this to the movement from the top of that space down to the street in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 91.

Guernica: Did this image just come out of nowhere, or from a photograph, or from stories of people you knew?

Don DeLillo: It just came out of nowhere, as these images tend to. It frequently happens that I begin a novel with just a visual image of something, a vague sense of people in three dimensional space.⁷¹⁴

That the initial means of understanding the event is not to view it theoretically but to experience it viscerally suggests the inability to capture the meaning of the events. This is returned to repeatedly throughout *Falling Man* and DeLillo's own writing about the day. The figure in isolation provides an introduction to the novel, a street level experience of the events where the unnamed character relates that "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night."⁷¹⁵ From this first experience of the space, for both DeLillo and his fictional counterpart, the meaning of the space has altered completely. The towers have physically and theoretically been exploded and the void left in that space contains boundless new connections and associations. The use of a single figure as an isolated image to elicit an emotional and theoretical interpretation of the events is also utilised later in the novel with the figure of the Falling Man. This character connects too many of the issues raised by DeLillo's interpretation of the space and wider thematic concepts such as the nature of dangling, hanging and falling.⁷¹⁶ The character is a performance artist that mimics the position and appearance of the people that fell from the towers.

She thought it could be the trump card in a tarot deck, Falling Man, name in gothic type, the figure twisting down in a stormy night sky.

There is some dispute over the issue of the position he assumed during the fall, the position he maintained in his suspended state. Was this position intended to reflect the body position of a particular man who was photographed falling from the north tower of the World Trade Center, headfirst, arms at his sides, one leg bent, a man set forever in free fall against the looming background of the column panels in the tower?⁷¹⁷

The particular position that the figure assumes and the degree to which it is a recreation of an individual is telling. The artist is unable to completely replicate the position of the figure

⁷¹⁴ http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/ (July 17, 2007).

⁷¹⁵ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 3.

⁷¹⁶ See Chapter 2 on Bellow's *Dangling Man*.

⁷¹⁷ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London, Picador, 2007) p. 221.

which supports the suggestion that it is impossible to fully recreate or represent the events. The work that he creates connects to the emotional experience of those that witnessed the events.⁷¹⁸ Much like the previous discussion of the painting in *Falling Man* this is the level at which events have become ingrained into the understanding of the space, as motion, scale and volume. It is impossible to capture the full scope of the events but they are present in the minutest elements of daily life.

The Inability to Capture

As the attempts to capture or represent the events of 9/11 in *Falling Man* suggest it is an impossible task. In DeLillo's essays on the day it becomes apparent that this sense of the inability to fully convey the enormity of the event or its theoretical importance was clear to him from his first interaction with the newly created void.⁷¹⁹ However what is also clear is the desire to describe what has happened, to create a narrative from the void so as to be able to place it within ones own network of understanding.

It was a gray landscape, virtually empty," DeLillo recalls. "A few people wandering around. Stacks of garbage bags on the sidewalk, uncollected... The few people I encountered, most of them were on cell phones, describing the scene."⁷²⁰

The desire to capture what has happened and describe it in order to understand it, no matter how impossible that may be, is connected to the impulse to move forward from destruction and the void created in society by it. In the period following the Second World War the desire to move past the destruction caused in that period led to what has become associated with the transitional impulse, a desire to move forward and forget the past.⁷²¹ Whereas in that period there was a general desire to forget the past, in the case of the World Trade Centre the technology which was so integral to an understanding of its spatiality has an impact in the way it is dealt with. The speed of technology, the ability to experience an event instantaneously, means that the reaction to it and the desire to forget it is no longer a possibility.⁷²² The event is captured and replayed repeatedly through the mass media. This is

⁷¹⁸ The witness as a form of societal observer. Consider the unreliability of the observer though, the associations they bring with their observation.

⁷¹⁹ http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/ (July 17, 2007).

⁷²⁰ http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/ (July 17, 2007).

⁷²¹ The anti-historicism that is central to the transitional society.

⁷²² See the discussion of the Kennedy assassination in Chapter 5: Highways. The instantly observable and instantly replayable.

the societal equivalent of attempting to render the void harmless, to create a narrative from it that allows it to be placed within the network of societal and spatial connections. The role of technology as it connects to the mass media and mass society is vital to an understanding of this event.

The events of September 11 were covered unstintingly. There was no confusion of roles on TV. The raw event was one thing, the coverage another. The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalising and some of us said it was unreal. When we say a thing is unreal, we mean it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions. First the planes struck the towers. After a time it became possible for us to absorb this, barely. But when the towers fell. When the rolling smoke began moving downward, floor to floor. This was so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened. We could not catch up with it. But it was real, punishingly so, an expression of the physics of structural limits and a void in one's soul, and there was the huge antenna falling out of the sky, straight down, blunt end first, like an arrow moving backwards in time⁷²³

The description of the television coverage of the event and the role it had played in not only the depiction and interpretation of the day but also the understanding of it, is telling. The capturing on film of the Kennedy Assassination and the ability it provided to replay the event had a similar effect.⁷²⁴ The advances in communication technology allow for the immediate communication of the events across the world, removing any sort of filter and rendering them both hyperreal and unreal.⁷²⁵ Virilio extends his discussion of modern society as a dromology to consider the manner in which the advanced speed of communication influences the interpretation and impact of events such as the attacks on the World Trade center.⁷²⁶ In doing so he traces the developing connection between mass communication and the narrative and counter-narrative of society.

I call it an ecological bomb in relation to the atomic bomb. I should also mention a second type, which is intimately connected to this time of the imbalance of terror. It is no longer atomic and not yet ecological but informational. This bomb comes from instantaneous means of communication and in particular the transmission of

⁷²³ *In The Ruins of Terror*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo> .

⁷²⁴ See Chapter 5: The Highway.

⁷²⁵ See Baudrillard, J., *Simulations* (New York, Semiotext, 1983) on Hyperreality.

⁷²⁶ The increased speed of communication as a facet to technological progress.

information. It plays a prominent role in establishing fear as a global environment, because it allows the synchronization of emotion on a global scale. Because of the absolute speed of electromagnetic waves, the same feeling of terror can be felt in all corners of the world at the same time. It is not a localized bomb: it explodes each second, with the news of a new attack, a natural disaster, a health scare, a malicious rumor. It creates a “community of emotions”, a communism of affects coming after the communism of the “community of interests” shared by different social classes. There is something in the synchronization of emotion that surpasses the power of standardization of opinion that was typical of the mass media in the second half of the 20th century. With the industrial revolution of the second half of the 19th century, the democracy of opinions flourished through the press, pamphlets and then the mass media – press, radio and television. The first regime consisted of the standardization of products and opinions. The second, current regime is comprised of the synchronization of emotions, ensuring the transition from a democracy of opinion to a democracy of emotion.⁷²⁷

The concept of a community of emotions as a progression from the standardization of opinion is suggestive of the shift from the narrative of mass society of which the towers were emblematic to a more complex counter-narrative. DeLillo describes the events as exposing a “void” in the souls of those that are observing the events through the mass media as they happen.⁷²⁸ This void reflects that left in both the New York skyline and the spatial network of DeLillo’s writing. The event itself must be interpreted in order to place it within the understanding of society but also so that it functions within the wider narrative of mass society. The destruction of the emblem of the mass consumer society calls into question the stability of the previously understood controlling narrative, indeed it destroys it entirely. The towers represented a particular societal form at its most advanced which was largely accepted by mass society. This illustrates the degree to which it had become comfortable with the spatial and economic realities of that state.⁷²⁹ It is the accepted narrative for mass society although those who feel themselves outside of that narrative, either by choice or because it has been decided by those within it, seek to usurp this narrative.⁷³⁰ “The narrative ends in the

⁷²⁷ Virilio, P., *The Administration of Fear* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2012) p. 30.

⁷²⁸ In *Cosmopolis* technology has advanced to the degree that images are viewable before they happen. DeLillo, D., *Cosmopolis* (London, Picador, 2003) p. 94 – 95.

⁷²⁹ Comfort was not complete for those with the towers. The reaction of Pammy in *Players* to the space is also anxious. DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991) pp. 14 – 24.

⁷³⁰ See Oswald usurping the social narrative through violent acts and the reappropriation of space in *Libra*.

rubble and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative.”⁷³¹ The concept of the counter-narrative that has been so prevalent in the discussion of transitional spaces throughout this work shifts is discussed from a different perspective.⁷³² The figurehead of the understood and accepted narrative is destroyed and what has been left in its space is a void. Those that adhered to the narrative and formed the mass society have seen it destroyed live, in a form that is both too real to question and yet too real to accept. The counter-narrative, previously used by those on the outside of this mass society, both economically and more importantly spatially, becomes a means of trauma repression for those now left without a symbolic space.

For the next 50 years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it. Others will claim to have lost friends or relatives, although they did not.

This is also the counternarrative, a shadow history of false memories and imagined loss.

The internet is a counternarrative, shaped in part by rumour, fantasy and mystical reverberation.

The cellphones, the lost shoes, the handkerchiefs mashed in the faces of running men and women. The box cutters and credit cards. The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn backyards, status reports, résumés, insurance forms. Sheets of paper driven into concrete, according to witnesses. Paper slicing into truck tyres, fixed there.⁷³³

The counter-narrative of false memories, plots and rumours which had reflected the spaces and experiences on the periphery of society has become the means by which mass society attempts to understand the events of 9/11. Items and spaces that could previously be understood as part of the daily experience of mass society must be questioned and reinterpreted. The inability to understand the day's events has influenced the lives of those who experienced it as their misinterpretation of daily items such as bottles and boxes which elicit memories of the towers highlights.⁷³⁴ DeLillo is particularly interested in the manner in which the events of the day and the altering of space it created had impacted on the smallest and most mundane elements of daily life. "... I was thinking about the impact of history on

⁷³¹ In *The Ruins of Terror*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>. The suggestion that the narrative will have to change after the events of 9/11, that it cannot continue in the same form.

⁷³² The shift of the societal narrative to reflect the inclusion of the counter-narrative.

⁷³³ In *The Ruins of Terror*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

⁷³⁴ Spatial memory, after images of trauma.

the smallest details of ordinary life,”⁷³⁵ The desire to reshape and re-appropriate the meaning and reality of the fractional aspects of daily life is an element has previously been associated with the counter-narrative, yet now that has become the impulse of mass society. The attempt to gain control over the destruction of understood spatial forms is carried out on the minutest details as they represent the only societal elements which still seem to be under the control of those left devastated by the events of 9/11.

These are among the smaller objects and more marginal stories in the sifted ruins of the day. We need them, even the common tools of the terrorists, to set against the massive spectacle that continues to seem unmanageable, too powerful a thing to set into our frame of practised response.⁷³⁶

When the scale of events has become impossible to comprehend resorting to the counter-narrative facilitates bypassing the standard response to the spaces and social forms that no longer exist in any understood way. The degree of terror and grief that is elicited by this change is apparent throughout DeLillo’s work and is related to both the spatial and theoretical destruction of understood forms. However the towers themselves suggested a connection to the terrible reality of the mass society and were a space for grief, trauma and a discussion of the counter-narrative even before 9/11.⁷³⁷ The location of the “Grief Management Council”⁷³⁸ in the towers in *Players* is indicative of a system in which nothing is outside of the network of associations. If one accepts that the World Trade Center is emblematic of the success of the transitional society and the progress of technology and the capitalist global economy then it also being a site of grief, terror and paranoia as depicted in *Players* is seemingly incongruous. Yet as Pammy notes in the novel “It was her original view that the World Trade Center was an unlikely headquarters for an outfit such as this. But she changed her mind as time passed. Where else would you stack all this grief?”⁷³⁹ The tower contains spatial and thematic references to the counter-narrative as it is all connected. The manner in which grief and terror come to be associated with the World Trade Center Clearly shifts with the events of 9/11. This shift is suggestive of Virilio’s movement from a “community of opinion” to a “community of emotion”. Those figures that were placed outside the societal narrative and the

⁷³⁵ http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/ (July 17, 2007).

⁷³⁶ *In The Ruins of Terror*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>.

⁷³⁷ See DeLillo, D., *Players* (London, Vintage, 1991).

⁷³⁸ *Ibid* p. 18.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid* p. 18.

space it is manifested in become intimately enmeshed in the meaning of that space as the counter-narrative and the narratives collide, forcing the creation of a new narrative form.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Throughout this work the concept of transitionality has developed from a societal and spatial necessity born of the cataclysmic end of the Second World War to the point whereby it provides a means of understanding all elements of societal interaction, spatial or personal, as a mode of thought in the post 9/11 period. As the transitional impulse has become normalised and internalised by mass society the spaces which it produces and is visible in alter. They grow in size and social stature, becoming nodes within the societal network through which the meaning of the spatial society passes. Despite these seeming changes to the transitional space DeLillo's utilisation of them remains consistently focused on their role as a location for the investigation of the division between the individual and the mass. The persistent presence of the counter-narrative is found throughout all transitional spaces in his work, from those that came to the fore in the 1950s such as the motel and the suburb, to the airport and World Trade Center. The spaces themselves vary in size and appearance but their societal role varies very little. As a point of motion, socialisation and observation each of the spaces DeLillo explores could said to have a very similar intended function. It is in their interaction with the counter-narrative that their use function shifts. The malleability of their boundaries and lack of stable social history makes them spaces which are easily manipulated by figures on the periphery of mass society. Their basic use function may be re-appropriated to suit the aberrant desires and intentions of these societal others. However it is this instability and relationship with the counter-narrative that places these spaces at the center of societal shifts in the balance between the narrative and the counter-narrative. The highway, the World Trade Center and the airport all act as focal points for DeLillo's investigation of the periods at which the counter-narrative becomes more visible to mass society. The Kennedy Assassination and the attacks of 9/11 removed the simulation of societal stability which the mass media and consumption had provided and exposed the more negative elements of embracing and internalising transitionality as a societal drive. The interactions that take place in these spaces illustrate these shifts, the role and structural concepts behind the spaces continuing to support the transient form of consumer society whilst the questioning of individual societal role and identity becomes increasingly complex. The alterations to perceptions of spatiality which have taken place have produced a situation within which spatial and personal interaction has become fully interconnected and self-referential. The schizophrenic form of identity Jameson explores⁷⁴⁰ exemplifies the spatiality of the postmodern period whilst also highlighting the

⁷⁴⁰“I have found Lacan's account of schizophrenia useful here not because I have any way of knowing whether it has clinical accuracy but chiefly because – as a description rather than a diagnosis – it seems to me to offer a suggestive aesthetic model... Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a

parity which now exists between the two concepts. Examples from throughout the novels used in this work expose the manner in which individuals attempted to stabilise their status.

Nostalgia and the Commodification of History

The continually shifting balance between societal control and the individual shaping of social space produces an increasingly anxious and unstable experience. The use of nostalgia, of the idolisation of a past period which pre-dates trauma focused on products, images and particularly spaces⁷⁴¹ provides a potential means of existence within transitionality throughout this work. The creation of a society based on the transitional impulse as a means of escaping societal trauma is necessarily anti-historical. As an attempt to move away from societal trauma it disconnects itself from and stable connections to history making any interactions with a sense of past no more than groundless facsimiles. The earliest example of this comes from Bellow's *Dangling Man*⁷⁴² in which a group attempts to create a "colony of the spirit"⁷⁴³ based on principles taken, albeit misinterpreted, from classical mythology. The degree to which this attempt fails becomes apparent in the Servatius party scene in the novel in which this colony collapses⁷⁴⁴; the weight of attempting to exist outside of one's own society and to embrace the rituals and tastes of a past period, no matter how idealised, proves impossible. This modernist attempt at existing outside of a distasteful society prefigures the more postmodern understanding of nostalgia which appears throughout DeLillo's work in which the stability of the past is called into question. The items, figures and facts which one understood to structure previous periods, and therefore one's own past, are rendered uncertain through paranoia and conspiracy. This process of sanitising history, of commoditising it so it functions as another means of stabilising mass society is also visible in the means by which culture defining events are incorporated into society. The assassination of Kennedy and the use of the Atomic Bomb at the end of the Second World War are fragmented and understood as individual elements divorced from their larger social implications, instead understood as artefacts in such a manner that they become points within the network of transitional meaning that, whilst containing a great deal of emotional resonance, are stripped of their historical relevance. This becomes process becomes more troubling as societal trauma becomes more visible through the technological advances of capturing and replaying such events yet those

breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance of meaning." Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 26.

⁷⁴¹ Nostalgia is repeatedly discussed in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* in relation to art and spatial experience.

⁷⁴² Bellow, S., *Dangling Man* (London, Penguin, 2007).

⁷⁴³ Ibid p. 39.

⁷⁴⁴ The Servatius Party scene, Ibid pp. 38 – 57.

same developments also aide in speeding the normalisation and internalisation of these events as the depiction of the attacks on the World Trade Center in *Falling Man* illustrate.

Jameson's focuses on nostalgia as a factor of postmodernism furthers concepts seen throughout DeLillo. Through his discussion of nostalgia in film and its importance to a broader understanding of postmodernism he highlights the different form of historicism it illustrates in a period that must largely be understood for its anti-historicism. Using the examples of architecture and cinema he illuminates the commodification of history represented by nostalgia in terms based in transitionality, spatiality and the visual.

“ the remarkable current intensification of an addiction to the photographic image is itself a tangible symptom of an omnipresent, omnivorous, and well-nigh libidinal historicism...Nostalgia films restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion, change and the emergent ideology of the generation...Faced with these ultimate objects – our social, historical and existential present, and the past as “referent” – the incompatibility of a postmodernist “nostalgia” art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. The contradiction propels this mode, however, into complex and interesting new formal inventiveness; it being understood that the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned “representation” of historical content, but instead approached the “past” through stylistic connotation, conveying “pastness” by the glossy qualities of the image, and the “1930s-ness” or “1950s-ness” by the attributes of fashion...”⁷⁴⁵

This quote does a great deal to both explain the manner in which nostalgia functions in the postmodern society whilst suggesting connections to many of the facets of transitionality which have been explored in this work. Jameson's basis of his postmodern study in the spatial and visual form of architecture combined with nostalgia provides a basis for the understanding of the shifting manner in which the motel as a model for transitional space functions. The motel began as a site which stemmed from the culture of the 1950s and reflected that periods desire for speed, movement and consumption, it was a space that embodied the anti-historicism which so informed the birth of transitionality. However, as depictions of the motel in the work of DeLillo shows, that space becomes emblematic of the shifting perception of transitionality.⁷⁴⁶ As transitionality becomes an internalised drive the

⁷⁴⁵ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) pp. 18 – 19.

⁷⁴⁶ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

necessity for a physical embodiment of transitionality diminishes, leaving that spatial construction to fulfil a different function. This arc from exemplar of a period's relationship with transitionality to a decaying and forgotten space is recurrent with transitional spaces, including the suburb, the railway station and, potentially, the airport. Just as with the nostalgia film, the transitional space becomes understood in terms of its cultural connections. Its perceived associations with a simpler period colour the way it is understood, even if that does not reflect the truth of the period of its heyday or the space's use. The reason the motel provides a model for understanding of transitional spaces as a whole is that its connections to speed, motion and consumption continue to be the major forces that shape transitional space. It's connection to the origin of the form makes it interesting that it is to a nostalgic film based around those forces in the 1950s to which Jameson refers, claiming that,

the inaugural film of this new aesthetic discourse, George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), set out to recapture, as so many films have attempted since, the henceforth mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era; and one tends to feel, that for Americans at least, the 1950s remain the privileged lost object of desire – not merely the stability and prosperity of a *pax Americana* but also the first naïve innocence of the countercultural impulses of early rock and roll and youth gangs.⁷⁴⁷

The focus on this film's connections to 1950s idealism, the burgeoning car culture of that period and the cultural malaise of the 1970s which evoked the desire to return to that period are all implicitly connected to the motel. The manner in which that space is shown to be used in the work of DeLillo in particular show the tarnishing of the site's transitional implications and a disconnection from the positive impulses that led to its creation. It becomes a site in which individuals attempt to forge a connection to those more positive times, its transitional nature suggesting a desired distance from the paranoiac, panoptic society of the 1970s. The form of connections found here are no longer based on personal history or stable identity, rather they are constructed from the multitudinous disparate connections that are now available. They convey a representation of "pastness", the illusion of history passed through a contemporary cultural filter. It is for this reason that more negative elements of transitionality and the space of the motel come to the fore.⁷⁴⁸ The cultural self discovered in the motel is no longer the naïve face of transitional positivism; rather it is the dislocated, schizophrenic self uncertain of sources or roles. Nostalgia, like transitionality, has been both internalised and accepted as a facet of postmodern culture. By the period in which Jameson writes

⁷⁴⁷ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. 19.

⁷⁴⁸ See Chapter 3: The Motel.

*Postmodernism*⁷⁴⁹ the nostalgic impulse has become a comforting and yet illusory means of understanding both art and one's own personal and social identity. In DeLillo's *Point Omega*⁷⁵⁰ he depicts a figure watching a frame from *Psycho*, the motel scene, to demonstrate the nature of and the manner in which transitionality has become embedded in concepts of the self, society and culture.

The slightest camera movement was a profound shift in space and time but the camera was not moving now. Anthony Perkins is turning his head. It was like whole numbers. The man could count the gradations in the movement of Anthony Perkins' head. Anthony Perkins turns his head in five incremental movements rather than one continual motion. It was like bricks in a wall, clearly countable, not like the flight of an arrow or a bird. Then again it was not like or unlike anything. Anthony Perkins' head swivelling over time on his long thin neck.

It was only the closest watching that yielded this perception. He found himself undistracted for some minutes by the coming and going of others and he was able to look at the film with the degree of intensity that was required. The nature of the film permitted total concentration and also depended on it. The film's merciless pacing had no meaning without corresponding watchfulness, the individual whose absolute alertness did not betray what was demanded. He stood and looked. In the time it took Anthony Perkins to turn his head, there seemed to flow an array of ideas involving science and philosophy and nameless other things, or maybe he was seeing too much. But it was impossible to see too much. The less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw. This was the point. To see what's here, finally to look and to know you're looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of motion.

Everybody remembers the killer's name, Norman Bates, but nobody remembers the victim's name. Anthony Perkins is Norman Bates, Janet Leigh is Janet Leigh. The victim is required to share the name of the actress who plays here. It is Janet Leigh who enters the remote motel owned by Norman Bates.⁷⁵¹

This quote exposes the manner in which the spatial elements which have defined transitionality must be understood in the post 9/11 period. Nostalgia is still an active cultural component yet one is fully aware of its unreality, the falsity of its connection to history. Its spatial and visual referents are more important than its cultural or historical associations. The

⁷⁴⁹ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991).

⁷⁵⁰ DeLillo, D., *Point Omega* (London, Picador, 2010).

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid* pp. 5 – 6.

past is a number of referents within a network of associations, its impact on the self no longer a question of heredity or familial connection. The lines of association extend from a subject in all directions and with equal validity. The degree of self-awareness suggested by the quote is heightened by the fact that the viewer of the film associates himself with Norman Bates, he knows who the character is yet the identity of the victim is unimportant. The contemporary transitional figure is a viewer, observing all and accepting it into himself yet he is also the shaper of his own sense of self identity like Bates, able to facilitate an identity from the spatial and cultural elements around him without ever fully connecting to any. The division between the figure of the self and other, the societal outcast and the member of mass society has become negligible. The societal actions of the terrorist are extreme and violent versions of the attempt to re-appropriate space to create a societal narrative within which one may locate an individual role. The schizophrenia of the postmodern period has created a society of disconnected individuals so transitional in their sense of self and other that they may shape their own reality from any elements they see fit. The self may be reconstructed as a facsimile, becoming a referent for one's identity rather than the basis of it. The sense of identity has become truly fragmentary, unrooted and transitional by this period⁷⁵².

The Re-appropriation of Space

The internalisation of transitionality which leads to the schizophrenic present explored by Jameson produces an alteration in the way in which societal space is used. It has already been made clear that societal space reflects socio-cultural events and shifts. The example of the motel shows the manner in which the same physical space can be understood to have different connotations and connections depending on the societal milieu in which it is considered. As the description of the World Trade Center in *Falling Man* highlights these multiple views of the same space is true of transitional spaces whether they originate from the 1950s or are more contemporary. In order to fully understand the manner in which the individual, society and space interact in the post-millennial period one must consider the manner in which space is re-appropriated and shaped by tracing the progression of Benjamin's flâneur⁷⁵³ through De Certeau's walker and onward. These figures master space, refusing to use it in the manner in which it was intended, and as such are a vital element of shaping space itself.

⁷⁵² Whilst this work is based in the physical spatial realm of the built environment, the nature of virtual space and the impact of the internet on the sense of identity provide other valuable areas for further study.

⁷⁵³ Benjamin, W., *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002).

De Certeau's walker differs from Benjamin's flâneur in that it is not connected to the modern but to the postmodern. He does not exist outside of the crowd observing but within it as an integral factor to its meaning and shape. De Certeau explores what the walker may achieve and in doing so provides us with a basis for the manner in which the spatiality of the individual and the crowd may be understood moving forward.

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, and personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler, carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of rhetoric. They can even be said to define it.⁷⁵⁴

Perhaps the most telling aspect of the above quote is the speed with which walking shifts from being an act to a figure. Transitionality has become such a central element of the societal self that it is no longer distinguishable from the act of movement, it has become movement. The figure has become the act and as such it must be understood that the figure is shaping space as much as it is being shaped by economics and culture.⁷⁵⁵ The question of the degree to which the individual is capable of defining his own path is questionable, indeed it is interesting that De Certeau focus on the traces of the rest of society that the individual brings into the social space he shapes in the form of his connections to others⁷⁵⁶. De Certeau exposes the form which the re-appropriation of space takes through an observation of this walker and the role of his act of motion in defining the use of space by defying its intended use. He considers the manner in which the fragmentation of space strips space of its proper meaning,

⁷⁵⁴ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 101. De Certeau's exploration of the concept of Synecdoche and Asyndeton which directly follows this quote are extremely interesting in furthering an understanding of the manner of post-millennial spatiality. "Synecdoche consists in 'using a word in a sense in which is part of another meaning of the same word.'" In essence, it names a part instead of the whole which includes it. Thus "sail" is taken for "ship" in the expression "a fleet of fifty sails"; in the same way, a brick shelter or a hill is taken for the park in the narration of a trajectory. Asyndeton is the suppression of linking words such as conjunctions and adverbs, either within a sentence or between sentences. In the same way, in walking it selects and fragments the space traversed; it skips over links and whole parts that it omits."

⁷⁵⁵ Just as Lefebvre explore what produces space (Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991), De Certeau, Soja and Jameson consider that which shapes it.

⁷⁵⁶ Consider this concept of the figure bringing his own meaning to a space to Heidegger's concept of The Fourfold and what it is to dwell. Heidegger, M., 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1951) in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Colophon, 1975).

its proper names,⁷⁵⁷ thus allowing the walker to create his own lexicon by which to understand the spaces he inhabits. Through a semiotic investigation of the relation between names, spaces and symbols De Certeau illustrates the manner in which movement shapes a city around the connections associated with the individual. Having considered the manner in which a named space in a city can both have the effect of making sense of a space but also of repressing the freedom of those that use it he goes on to note the complexity created in social space when both of these facets of properly named space are true.

What is it then they spell out? Disposed in constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city, operating chronological arrangements and historical justifications, these words (*Berrego, Botzaris, Bougainville...*) slowly lose, like worn coins, the value engraved on them, but their ability to signify outlives its first definition. *Saints-Peres, Corentin, Celton, Red Square...* these names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points or itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by. A strange toponymy that is detached from actual places and flies high over the city like a foggy geography of “meanings” held in suspension, directing the physical deambulations below.⁷⁵⁸

This “strange toponymy” describes the manner in which space is experienced in this period. Space exists as both a referent to the past, as the motel has been shown to have become, and a correlation between that physical site and the associations of the individual passing through it. The individual produces their own psychogeographic topography of space as they experience it.⁷⁵⁹ As the schizophrenic present may be understood as stemming from the fragmentation of space and the self due to the internalisation of transitionality, this process also created a

⁷⁵⁷ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 103.

⁷⁵⁸ DeCerteau, M., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988) p. 104.

⁷⁵⁹ Psychogeography combines elements of the flâneur’s wandering as a means of developing a personal interaction with the space of the city. It was defined by Guy Debord “*Psychogeography* could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective *psychogeographical*, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery” Debord, G., ‘Introduction to a critique of Urban Geography’ in Knabb, K., (ed.) *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) p. 8. Sebald’s work is to some extent psychogeographical and the manner in which the characters in Baker’s work experience space is also suggestive of the concept.

situation whereby space could be shaped and understood in apparent isolation, as part of the self and detached from its original meaning.

The re-appropriation of space which is understood in theoretical terms in the work of De Certeau is manifested in reality in the postmodern period, indeed the manner in which space is re-appropriated physically and socially continues to take on new forms. Just as the role of nostalgia is foreshadowed in the novels from earlier decades studied in this work, so the re-appropriation of space is seen throughout those same works in the misuse and abuse of properly defined social sites. In DeLillo's *Great Jones Street*⁷⁶⁰ a character lives in Grand Central Station, understanding it to function for him as a home does for others.

He told me he tried to think of Grand Central Station as his apartment. One room but a nice size. High Ceiling. Nice big window. Marble floor,⁷⁶¹

The space of transportation such as the station is accepted as a dwelling site provided the dweller instils within it the social referents which contribute to the concept of "home", shelter, comfort etc. This alteration of perspective, a trick to fool the self out of the sense of rootlessness transitionality creates, has become an accepted means of understanding space in this period. Spaces such as banks, railway stations and churches are regularly re-appropriated as dwelling spaces, their roles as centres of transport or capital having being reassigned by either technological development or market forces.⁷⁶² Spaces once central to an understanding of a city, or even of ones own identity, can no longer be relied upon to still exist in the contemporary period, the motels and drive-thrus are being demolished or recreated as replicas unmoored from history.⁷⁶³ Even Bentham's panopticon is no longer safe as symbolic site of panoptic discipline as prisons are increasingly being sought out for use as hotels and function centres.⁷⁶⁴ The centres of capital and culture which once defined the shape of society have been gradually eroded through the embracing of transitionality until now they have lost the associations which once made them such powerful symbolic sites. As transitional spaces have become more central to the manner in which spatial and economic factors are to be

⁷⁶⁰ DeLillo, D., *Great Jones Street* (London, Picador, 1992).

⁷⁶¹ Ibid p. 76.

⁷⁶² In his description of the historical reshaping of Los Angeles Soja provides an insightful case study regarding the manner in which the use of space shifts as social and economic factors alter the nature of a city. The intended use of a site does not remain fixed. See chapters 7 and 8 of Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989).

⁷⁶³ Chapter 10 of Hess, A., *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2004) chronicles the decline of roadside architecture and its re-appropriation in the form of nostalgia fuelled recreations.

⁷⁶⁴ The re-appropriation of Prisons as hotels has become a fairly widespread phenomenon with the Malmaison in Oxford, The Lloyd Hotel in Amsterdam and the Charles Street Jail in Boston being some of the most prominent examples.

understood and the periphery of cities becomes their centre, the centre is left as a fragmented and confusing amalgam of ideas and people all with their own connections and associations. Soja provides the example of Los Angeles, the prime postmodern city, in order to expose the nature of the urban site at the end of the 20th century.

Los Angeles, like Borges's Aleph, is exceedingly tough-to-track, peculiarly resistant to conventional description. It is difficult to grasp persuasively in a temporal narrative for it generates too many conflicting images, confounding historicization, always seeming to stretch laterally instead of unfolding sequentially. At the same time, its spatiality challenges orthodox analysis and interpretation, for it too seems limitless and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass, too filled with 'other spaces' to be informatively described. Looking at Los Angeles from the inside, introspectively, one tends to see only fragments and immediacies, fixed sites of myopic understanding impulsively generalized to represent the whole. To the more far-sighted outsider, the visible aggregate of the whole of Los Angeles churns so confusingly that it induces little more than illusory stereotypes or self-serving caricatures – if its reality is ever seen at all.⁷⁶⁵

The suggestion of the impossibility of seeing the entirety of Los Angeles, and by extension postmodern urban space, illustrates contemporary spatiality. All space is now transitional space and those within it are only able to see the "fragments and immediacies" that hurtle past them. It creates a situation in which those within this transitional space of perpetual motion, a hyper-kinetic version of Virilio's Dromology⁷⁶⁶ must adapt, new forms of motion are created, speed increasing, the physical exertions of Parkour, Skateboarding and other urban sports not only altering the means of locomotion but also once again re-appropriating the space of the city.⁷⁶⁷

Having begun this essay with a discussion of the destruction of the Second World War which altered the trajectory of society forever it is fitting that, for the sake of balance, this work finishes with the events of September 11th. Its importance to the writing of the early 21st Century is unquestionable, indeed it is felt throughout the work of DeLillo from that period

⁷⁶⁵ Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies* (London, Verso, 1989) p. 222.

⁷⁶⁶ See both Virilio, P., *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2006) and Virilio, P., *The Futurism of the Instant* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010).

⁷⁶⁷ See Borden, I., *Skateboarding Space and the City* (Oxford, Berg, 2001) for a discussion of the re-appropriation of space through skateboarding. The potential for study of urban sports and their use of the city space, particularly with regard to Parkour, is as yet a field in its infancy.

being particularly central to *Falling Man*.⁷⁶⁸ However it is the suggestion that it represents a break, that it is both an end and a beginning which, in a period which has become so entirely transitional, makes little sense. To return once again to Jameson and the suggestion that transitionality and postmodernity are intimately connected, it does not aid in an understanding of either concept to locate them entirely within one moment. It becomes apparent throughout this work that concepts and spaces vital in one period bleed into all others; the lines of association are not confined by the spatial or the chronological. As Jameson notes:

In periodizing a phenomenon of this kind, we have to complicate the model with all kinds of supplementary epicycles. It is necessary to distinguish between the gradual setting in place of the various (often unrelated) preconditions for the new structure and the “moment” (not exactly chronological) when they all jell and combine into a functional system.⁷⁶⁹

The gradual development of transitionality over time and throughout space and makes it, like Los Angeles and all of postmodern space, an impossible concept to contain or localize. It takes place in many different spaces at many different times; it seems to be both wholly new and yet is traceable to a period long before its inception. It is a momentum, an impetus and a drive within society and the individual and, in the contemporary period, it exists in all sites at all times. It is only possible to capture fragments and glimpses of it and from those fragments to attempt to construct an understanding of self, society and space.

⁷⁶⁸ DeLillo, D., *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007).

⁷⁶⁹ Jameson, F., *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 1991) p. xix.

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