

Fracturing Histories: Understanding the writing of Narratives in a Visual Culture through Don DeLillo's Fiction



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Abstract

The experience of film has acquired a kind of independent existence in our consciousness, it's that deeply embedded...Film creates a dreaming space all of us occupy.

(Don DeLillo, *The Word, the Image and the Gun*: BBC Omnibus, 27/09/1991).

The novelistic works of Don DeLillo repeatedly examine contemporary subjectivity and its relationship with the moving image. This concern resonates throughout the author's fiction from his early short stories of the 1960's through to his most recent work, 2003's *Cosmopolis*.

In his 1988 novel, *Libra*, DeLillo explores the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, shifting the focus from, arguably, the world's most visually arresting piece of film, to the man who was, allegedly, absent from the frame. Chapter one of this study consists of an analysis of the text, and builds upon an apparent shift in DeLillo's conception of Oswald from pre- to post-*Libra*. The theoretical foundation of the argument draws upon the early psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, particularly his seminal paper on subjectivity's origin, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.'

Chapter two considers the issues raised in chapter one and applies them to DeLillo's 1998 epic, *Underworld*. By extending these concerns to a far larger novelistic time frame, this chapter analyses the rise of the moving image and its increasing influence on human selfhood. This chapter will also draw upon Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' and demonstrate that, for DeLillo, the dissipation of aura has a much more negative impact on human consciousness than Benjamin initially envisaged.

The study will conclude by arguing that the author himself has been heavily influenced by the moving image, as the cinematic works of Jean-Luc Godard have permeated his literary constructions. To do this I will examine a number of parallels between DeLillo's and Godard's early work, and argue that an echo of Godard's earlier films still resounds in DeLillo's most recent novelistic work.

To my knowledge, this is the only academic study of DeLillo to draw on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, and I contend that this is a fruitful area for further investigation.

<u>Contents</u>	Page
Introduction	4
Chapter One Subjectivity in the balance: DeLillo's <i>Libra</i>	15
Chapter Two The Resilvered Mirror: DeLillo's <i>Underworld</i>	43
Conclusion From Belmondo to Bell and beyond	75
Bibliography	88

Introduction

The fiction of Don DeLillo exhibits an ongoing concern with the proliferation of images projected by a variety of media, and their effect on the contemporary subjectivity. This relationship, arguably, dominates DeLillo's first novel, 1971's *Americana*, in which the television executive protagonist, David Bell, is virtually undone, as Mark Osteen notes, by an awareness that 'his identity is not only composed of the psychological patterns bequeathed him by his parents, but is also burdened by the immense weight of the cultural images, texts, and discourses that have influenced him' (Osteen 17). The parental contribution 'bequeathed to him,' however, is largely nullified by the fact that his father, a producer of television commercials, exhibits a fascination with his work that is transmitted to his children. That a maker of television commercials would raise a son that went on to work as a network executive is crucial to the text's idea of continuity, and has caused David Cowart to note that 'the familial relationship reifies the idea that television is the child of advertising' (Cowart 608). Along with its exploration of subjectivity in what might be called a 'media saturated' environment, *Americana* abounds with oedipal overtones. Moreover, whilst critical discussions of *Americana* are sparse, two of the three journal articles written on the text namely by Cowart and Osteen draw upon the threads of subjectivity in an increasingly image driven environment and the apparent oedipal dimension of Bell's journey of self-discovery. Of these two pieces, Cowart's is the most psychoanalytically driven thesis, and he concludes that Bell's oedipal drama involves not only reconciling feelings for his late mother, but also the violation of the American motherland by Bell's European

forefathers. The text's apparent psychoanalytic perspective on diminishing individual autonomy in an image-bloated environment is pertinent to the theoretical underpinning of this study. Indeed, whilst Bell's father's obsession with the moving image is driven by his desire to find the perfect advertisement, Bell's fascination centres upon eminently desirable cinematic heroes, namely Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas:

Burt was like a city in which we are all living. He was that big. Within the conflux of shadow and time there was room for all of us and I knew I must extend *myself* until the molecules parted and I was spliced into the image (*Americana* 12-3 emphasis added).

As this quotation suggests, Bell's concept of an ideal image lies within the cinema screen, rather than in others, and he seeks to align himself with this blueprint of masculine perfection. Furthermore, he is portrayed as a man obsessed with his own youth and good looks, stating that 'I had the same kind of relationship with my mirror that many of my contemporaries had with their analyst' (*Americana* 11).

The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan is heavily influenced by his early, and seminal, paper 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,' so much so that Anika Lemaire sees fit to label the concept of the mirror stage as 'the corner-stone of his work' (Lemaire 79). With this in mind, the following thesis will attempt to analyse the relationship between the media and individual subjectivity, in DeLillo's work, by way of the post-Freudian theory of Jacques Lacan. Lacan noted that the self-image, or ego, cannot be deemed autonomous. In his landmark paper on the mirror stage, Lacan outlined how the human subject from an early age bases its

self-image on a successive series of 'other' subjects; or more simply role-models. The concept of the mirror stage takes its name from the infant's primary misrecognition of its self in a mirror image around the age of six months. As Lacan notes:

We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he [sic] assumes an image. (*Ecrits* 2).

As the child first realizes that the reflection is her/him, she/he is struck by the notion that this idealised image of self, or *imago*, is better in every way than the perception they previously had of themselves; more distinct, more defined, and more co-ordinated. Thus the child first sees its totality, but in recognizing its image the infant also misrecognises *itself*, believing the image to be better than they feel, which leads in turn to alienation between what Sarup calls 'a fragmented or inco-ordinate subject and its totalising image' (Sarup 102). As Lacan notes in the original paper:

The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*...in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this *Gestalt*...symbolises the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination (*Ecrits* 2).

This identification with the image, and alienation by it, continues throughout a subject's life, moving the identification out of the mirror and onto those around us as we constantly update our sense of self; our ego ideal. Hence

it best not to think of the mirror stage as a stage in the temporal sense, but rather as a stage in the performance sense.

The mirror stage paper was first delivered in 1949, and in the fifty or so years that have passed since then the mass media has saturated the human consciousness and driven the ego ideal to unrealistic heights. In addition, it is important to acknowledge here that this thesis is working through analogy. Lacan's theory does not directly concern the mass media, only the individual subject, and this work aims to extend his theories on subjectivity into a more contemporary sphere.

Following Lacan's early work, film theorists such as Christian Metz have acknowledged that the cinema screen, and by extension the TV screen, can be aligned with the mirror of Lacan's theory:

A very strange mirror, then, like the mirror of childhood...because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub motor and hyper perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double (Metz 49).

As Metz notes, the cinematic subject is 'prey to the imaginary,' in a conventional sense. One must have an imagination, or be imaginative to enjoy such a spectacle. However, in strictly Lacanian terms the Imaginary is the proper name of the first of Lacan's three registers, namely the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. In his early work, Lacan focused almost exclusively on the Imaginary, and it is this order that is most relevant to this study. The Imaginary stems from the child's experience of its specular ego, whilst gazing in the mirror, but continues throughout adult life. The Imaginary, in simple terms, is the realm of false identification, or misrecognition. The second order, chronologically, is that of the Symbolic and is harder to pin down, not least as

Lacan's theories were in a constant state of flux. Simply put, the Symbolic arises with the child's ascension into language, and it is through the Symbolic order that we make sense of the Imaginary, indeed of everything; for this reason the Imaginary and the Symbolic are not, strictly, separate entities but intertwined. The Real is the last of Lacan's orders, both here and chronologically, and is most concisely described, as space is limited, as that which resists, and threatens to shatter, signification. The Real is that which necessitates a restructuring of the Symbolic to account for its very impossibility.

As noted, the Imaginary order is most relevant to this thesis, although the other orders will be discussed, and David Bell's obsession with American cinematic icons marks a valid fictional representation of the Imaginary at work. In an episode of the BBC's *Omnibus* DeLillo underlines this reading, with the following:

In my first novel, *Americana*, the hero lives a kind of third person existence, as an ideal figure made up of images, media messages. He's image haunted. He constantly reinvents himself through film and television, from the person he is to the person he would be. This is what media America promises, access to our desires, to our invented selves (DeLillo, *The Word, the Image and the Gun*: BBC *Omnibus* 27/09/91).

Following *Americana*'s close-up examination of the self and its relation to the image, DeLillo's fiction pans back to focus upon other topics. The screen's glow, however, is never far away: from Lyle's constant channel-surfing in *Players* searching for 'fresh image burns' (*Players* 16); to Lightbourne's insistence that '[t]he image had to move' (*Running* 80) in *Running Dog*; to Volterra's proclamation that '[f]ilm is more than the twentieth-century art. It's another part of the twentieth-century mind' (*Names* 200) in *The Names*.

Following DeLillo's return to America, from Greece, in the early 1980's, the influence of the screen returns to the foreground, especially in *White Noise*, where the language of TV advertising appears to have brainwashed the Gladney family, with outbursts such as 'Clorets, Velamints, Freedent' (*WN* 229), but also in *Maot II* with Karen's repeated silent viewing of disaster footage: 'you could make up the news as you went along by sticking to picture only' (*Mao* 32).

DeLillo's repeated examinations of the self and its relation to mediated representations has caused Philip Simmons to propose:

DeLillo's protagonists are restless seekers of self, and their search typically involves both an engagement with and a repulsion from a culture glutted with images, information, and jargon... The sense of televisual exposure DeLillo's characters suffer develops into a self-consciousness that is not the development of a sustainable interiority but rather an emptying of the self into the domain of image-production (Simmons 42).

Whilst Simmons' argument doesn't engage with Lacanian theory, the particular phrasing of 'an engagement with and a repulsion from' displays a consonance with Lacan's postulations regarding the formation of the self. DeLillo, it appears, has an ambivalent attitude towards the magnitude of this mediated reformation of subjectivity and was recently quoted in *The Guardian* as saying, 'You might adopt a hairstyle or a clothing style based on movies, but I don't know if it goes much deeper than that'

<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,962338,00.html>>. This noncommittal stance, however, appears somewhat at odds with the views espoused in the previously cited edition of the BBC's *Omnibus*, produced in close collaboration with the author to coincide with the release of *Maot II*:

Think of these young men, media poisoned. Men who believe that electronic images contain some element of healing magic. Who feel deprived of spiritual sustenance, and who try to find their destiny not through religious vocation, or high adventure, or even somewhere in the alignment of the stars. But through the media, the information grids. As if orbiting satellites contain the message of who you are and what you must do (DeLillo, *The Word, the Image and the Gun*: BBC *Omnibus* 27/09/91).

The incongruity between these two quotes is overcome when one notes the subject of each extract, namely 'you' and 'these young men.' It is certainly quite disturbing to consider that we are being unconsciously shaped by the constant bombardment of images offered in contemporary life. However, the imitation is quite unlike that of David Bell, and appears only to take a malevolent turn when it overtakes a certain brand of disaffected young males. DeLillo's term 'media poisoned' refers specifically to men such as Arthur Bremer, who shot Governor George Wallace after watching *A Clockwork Orange*. Bremer became the model for Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, which in turn inspired John Hinckley to shoot at Ronald Reagan in a bid to impress the character of Iris, played by Jodie Foster. One can easily see from this well-known lineage that a curious link exists between the moving image and the killer who kills for (mis)recognition above all else.

Aside from the aforementioned documentary, which is strangely ignored by De Lillo's critics, the author's most rigorous exploration of this idea is undertaken in his fictional reworking of the facts surrounding the Kennedy assassination, 1988's *Libra*. For this reason chapter one of this study will focus upon this text, with careful attention paid to the intrusion of film on the characters' conceptions of self. None more so than Lee Harvey Oswald, who appears, for DeLillo, to be the first 'media poisoned' assassin. Indeed, many

first-time readers of *Libra* may be struck by Oswald's similarity to DeNiro's Travis Bickle, as William Cain notes:

Oswald's disgust at the world's corruption and unfairness and his impulse toward violence and political assassination make him kin to...Scorcese's anti-hero (Cain 279).

However, Bickle, along with DeLillo's Oswald, was conceived in a post JFK era, and the broader thesis will pay attention to Oswald's status as cause as well as effect, arguing that his actions set the paradigm for such acts. Many critics appear determined to label DeLillo's work as postmodern, and in an often cited interview with the author, DeCurtis refers to DeLillo's Oswald as 'a postmodern notion of character in which the self isn't fixed' (Lentricchia 51). However, in answering the charge, the author appears keen to disavow the term, preferring the following:

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. I tried to insert this element into *Libra* on a number of occasions (Lentricchia 51).

These 'inserted' elements are easily identified by anyone familiar with the text - namely Oswald's paranoid delusions whilst watching a double feature and his reaction upon being shot - and will be fully analyzed in the attendant chapter. Whilst these episodes are well suited to a Lacanian analysis, the dominant critical approach draws heavily upon Baudrillard, Jameson, and Deleuze, as in Jeremy Green's essay 'Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction.' Furthermore, when theorists do apply Lacanian theory, they do so from a late Lacanian perspective, rather than his early work on the Imaginary. The

later work of Lacan was heavily influenced by his belief that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ (*Concepts* 203), and his work increasingly drew upon the advances in the field of linguistics. This influence, throughout the 1950’s, was particularly indebted to the work of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Jakobson. Lacanian critical readings of *Libra* draw upon this era and pair it with more overtly poststructuralist theory; as in Thomas Carmichael and Glen Thomas, who both prefer to briefly focus on the linguistic disorder of Oswald’s musings, as emblematic of his status as a postmodern subject. What these two theorists miss, however, is that Oswald’s apparent dyslexia suggests a consciousness in which the Symbolic, or the order of consciousness that helps order and construct our reality and identity, is rapidly losing ground to the Imaginary, the realm of the specular ego where misrecognition is born. Moreover, the available information on Hinckley and Bremer, from Bremer’s published diary and a wealth of conspiracy texts, suggests not only that these men dwell largely in the Imaginary, and the images of media, but that the two of them, like Oswald, kept journals that are marked by disordered orthography and syntax. Whilst mentioning these two would-be assassins, it is crucial to note that, like DeLillo’s *Libra*, this thesis will have little time to engage with the abundance of contradictory data espoused by conspiracy-driven texts and websites.

The JFK assassination was, as DeLillo proposes, the first time ‘that the power of television was utilized to its fullest’ (Lentricchia 48). In his 1997 text, *Underworld*, the author backs further into the century to scrutinize the tectonic shifts in American culture, both public and private, and the ways in which the moving image has engendered this shift. For these reasons, chapter two of this

study will focus upon *Underworld*, and its presentation of the increasing power of the image to shape consciousness, and arguably replace reality. Through his presentation of the Zapruder film, and the prescient Texas Highway Killer, whose actions prefigure the Washington Sniper, DeLillo charts the further rise of the 'media poisoned' assassin. The chapter will argue that DeLillo's linking of Oswald and the aforementioned assassins is extended into the 1990's, with the actions becoming more random and ambivalent as the century draws to a close.

The chapter will also note how the Capitalist mechanism has seized control of the medium and exploited desire for the accumulation of revenue. To do this, I will engage with the Lacanian reading of *Underworld* offered by Todd McGowan, who investigates how objects of desire, or *objet petit a* after Lacan, are increasingly commodified and exhausted, leading to successive moral transgressions to keep the viewers' attention. McGowan's reading of *Underworld* represents the lengthiest Lacanian exposition of DeLillo, his theory, however, appears rigid, and slightly flawed, a factor that will be addressed in chapter two. The *objet petit a* for Slavoj Žižek is:

[T]he object cause of desire: an object that is, in a way, posited by desire itself. The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object *a* is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze 'distorted' by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an 'objective' gaze (*Looking* 12).

This object is that which is unknowable and so attracts our desire, only to appear as a chimera upon attainment, or as Žižek would have it, 'the point at which the Holy Grail itself is revealed as nothing but a piece of shit' (*Fragile* 49).

Chapter two will close with an analysis of the apparent miracle of the epilogue, and how this vision balances the comparative lack of vision of the prologue. For this it will be necessary to draw not only on Lacan but also on Benjamin's groundbreaking essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' and to note how DeLillo's views on the dissipation of 'aura' appears at odds with Benjamin's initial postulations, which regarded the 'aura' as a negative and cultic aspect.

In a meta-fictional twist, the author himself appears 'media poisoned' as the following, and frequently cited, quote reveals: '...[T]he movies of Jean-Luc Godard had a more immediate effect on my early work than anything I'd ever read' (LeClair & Mc Caffery 25). Indeed, the early short stories and first major work from the novelist draw heavily on Godard's images. Godard himself envisaged his work as occupying a liminal zone between the two, or even three, genres, calling himself 'an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them' (Narboni 171). With this in mind the concluding section of this study will examine how DeLillo's early unpublished work mirrors a number of Godard's texts, by building on Osteen's essay 'Children of Godard and Coca Cola.' This analysis will be paired with a brief reading of DeLillo's latest novel, *Cosmopolis*. By aligning DeLillo's earliest and most recent work, I will argue that the author's whole oeuvre has inherited, via Godard and others, a highly visual style. And, moreover, I will contend that DeLillo's concern with the self and *imago* is, partially, indebted to Godard's work, which he has, arguably, used as a foundation on which to fabricate his own quasi-theoretical fictions of the self.

Chapter One

Subjectivity in the balance: DeLillo's *Libra*

Don DeLillo has long been cognizant of the curious knot that binds contemporary acts of violence and the strong images presented by the mass media. As noted in the introduction, DeLillo is aware of the lineage from the real life of Arthur Bremer, to the fictional life of Travis Bickle, and back to the reality of John Hinckley. Upon first reading DeLillo's *Libra*, I was struck by the similarity between Lee Harvey Oswald's characterization and the classic cinematic anti-hero Travis Bickle, an observation that played a large part in the conception of this thesis.

In the article 'American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK,' first published in *Rolling Stone*, five years prior to the publication of *Libra*, DeLillo uses the phrase 'media-poisoned' to describe the modern political assassin. DeLillo further posits the notion that modern assassins, after Oswald, actively court the publicity their act generates, with specific reference to John Hinckley, and by association Arthur Bremer:

If Oswald was put together by others, a secret pawn, then John Hinckley is a self-created media event ('American' 24).

However, in an interview, undertaken shortly after *Libra*'s release, DeLillo's opinion appears to have shifted:

I think Oswald *anticipates* men like Hinckley and Bremer...I think he presages the acts of all the subsequent disaffected young men who seem to approach their assassination attempts out of a backdrop of dreams and personal fantasy much more than politics (Lentricchia 51, emphasis added).

The specific phrasing this extract, referring specifically to ‘dreams’ and ‘fantasy,’ positively invites a psychoanalytic reading of DeLillo’s Oswald. With these factors in mind, the aim of this chapter is to inspect the shaping of Lee Harvey Oswald, and others, by external forces; namely the government agencies (and agency), and (posthumously) by DeLillo. And further, to argue that DeLillo, after *Libra*, is suggesting that Oswald set the paradigm for the ‘media-poisoned’ killer in the age of TV.

The fact that DeLillo refers to ‘dreams’ and ‘fantasy’ in the previous extract, also draws keen attention to the mass media not only as entertainment, but also as the medium through which our desires are manipulated for the accumulation of capital. Indeed, the media, and specifically television, forge, for DeLillo, the link between the modern assassin and the capitalist machine:

I see contemporary violence as a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment in America...I see this desperation against the backdrop of brightly colored packages and products and consumer happiness (Lentricchia 57-8).

From the outset of *Libra*, DeLillo highlights this link with the inclusion of an excerpt from Oswald’s letter to his brother:

Happiness is not based on oneself, it does not consist of a small home of taking and getting. Happiness is taking part in the struggle, where there is no borderline between one’s own personal world and the world in general (*Libra* 1).

The original meaning of this message is surely a reference to Oswald’s Marxist beliefs, with its repudiation of capitalist consumption and specific mention of ‘the struggle.’ The final clause, however, in light of Oswald’s ascent into

infamy, is open to a re-interpretation. One can hazard a guess that Oswald is referring to a Marxist utopia, and a related sense of unity and community. Nevertheless, it appears that winning 'the struggle' was unachievable in 1960's America, and that Oswald's deconstruction of 'the borderline,' between the self and the other, was only achieved in his final hours, as a man dying, and an image born of, and spawned by, millions of TV sets.

Throughout *Libra*, and much of his oeuvre, DeLillo manipulates and constructs examples of how film and TV images, in particular the transgressive and / or violent spectacle, invade the human consciousness. In an interview, following *Libra*'s publication, the author hints that he, too, is susceptible to the power of the transgressive spectacle, and, moreover, that documents such as the Zapruder film have the power not only to shock, but also to change the way we view the world and the self:

De Curtis: The Kennedy assassination seems perfectly in line with the concerns of your fiction. Do you feel that you could have invented it if it hadn't happened?

DeLillo: Maybe it invented me. Certainly, when it happened, I was not a fully formed writer...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 centre of the assassination (Lentricchia 47-8).

Whilst it is obvious from this exchange that DeLillo is a cunning wordsmith and conversationalist, reversing the subject and object of the question to form his response, it is also an illustration of the pervasive nature of the event in human consciousness. That is not to say that the modern subject is prone to ponder the event on a regular, conscious, basis, rather that such events are buried deeper in the unconscious, the realm of fear, fantasy, and desire. As DeLillo notes in 'The

Power of History,' a piece written for the *New York Times Magazine*: 'We depend upon disaster to consolidate our vision... These things represent moments of binding power' ('Power' 63). This concept echoes DeLillo's earlier examination of small town America in *White Noise*, where the Gladney family, so often uncomfortable in each other's presence, are united by their almost narcotic desire for televised catastrophe: 'Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping' (*WN* 64). The vicarious thrill generated by this catastrophic material is dependent upon the victim being structurally other, outside the living room in the realm of the (televised) real. However, when the real disaster strikes, in the form of 'The Airborne Toxic Event,' Jack finds comfort in the TV disaster paradigm:

'I don't see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event. That's for people who live in mobile homes out in the scrubby parts of the country, where the fish hatcheries are' (*WN* 117).

Through his portrayal of this episode, DeLillo also draws attention to a hierarchy of senses, with the visual taking precedence over the radio's aural report:

'The radio calls it a feathery plume,' he said. 'But it's not a plume.'
'What is it?'
'Like a shapeless growing thing. A dark black breathing thing of smoke.'
'Why do they call it a plume?' (*WN* 111).

Crucially, in this instance, the cloud is only ever viewed through a piece of glass, which can be likened to the window, or mirror, of the TV screen. After Christian Metz's application of Lacan's mirror, in the field of film studies, the mirror is often aligned with the cinema, and by extension the TV, screen, and

yet the screen is somehow 'different, because this mirror returns us everything but ourselves' (Metz 49). Heinrich first views the spectacle through a pair of binoculars, whilst the escaping family view the cloud with awe through the car windows. Indeed, it is only when Jack leaves his vehicle, at the petrol pump, and steps out from behind the (wind)screen that the real danger manifests itself.

Throughout DeLillo's body of work, the images given by TV come to stand in for, and hence mask, a real existence, and real human interaction. Furthermore, these images can be said to have a notable impact on constructions of self and subjectivity. Frank Lentricchia notes that from his first novel, *Americana*, DeLillo addresses the impact of media culture on the collective psyche of a nation:

[T]he genius of television emerges as nothing other than the desire for the universal third person – it is *that* which 'came over on the Mayflower,' the person we dream about from our armchairs in front of the television ...the *object* of the dream being the person those pilgrims would become, could the dream be fulfilled: a new self because of a new world (Lentricchia 193-4, emphasis added).

He goes on to outline how the real American dream is a reinvention of the individual's concept of self, and how this dream has been co-opted by the capital-driven domain of TV advertising. The reinvention of the self was, for Lentricchia, the force that drove a multitudinal migration of people progressively further west, from the old self in the Old World to a new self in the New World. In their introduction to *American Cultural Studies*, Campbell and Kean outline the concept of American exceptionalism as a defining principle in the formation of an American character, a character founded upon difference: 'The differences between American culture and other cultures, has

come out of a deep-seated preoccupation with national self-definition’
(Campbell & Kean 2).

For Lentricchia a distinction can be drawn between the specific genre of TV advertising and cinema. This distinction centres on the manipulation of the American dream, which appears to have shifted from the Protestant work ethic to an ethic of rabid consumerism. The manipulation of a desire to consume is accomplished through TV advertising, ‘which triggers our move...from the self we are...to the self we would become’ (Lentricchia 194) or from the first person to the third. This dream, however, must always be attainable, whereas the genre of film ‘blow[s] up the image of the third-person ideal to larger-than-life proportions’ (Lentricchia 194). DeLillo’s Oswald, however, is unable to realise this dream, his labour bears little fruit, resulting in an inability to consume. This impotence reminds us of *Libra*’s epigraph, and provides explanation of Oswald’s wish to break down his perceived borderline between self and others. Given that DeLillo’s Oswald is barred from this capitalist dream, his *objet petit a* shifts, from the realistic fantasies offered by advertisements to a deluded dream of infamy, which will be addressed further later.

Oswald is not alone in his sense of a larger-than-life projected self; others in *Libra* appear keen to demonstrate how their self might be seen as ‘a man in history’ (*Libra* 149). Early in the text, we see Guy Banister referring to his involvement in the Dillinger case, where the infamous 1930’s public enemy number one was apprehended leaving a movie theatre. Later we see Banister in a bar lecturing the barman on the specifics of the case:

‘Famous finish. Old Dillinger buffs could tell you what was
playing at the movie house when we gunned him down.’
‘All right I’ll bite.’

‘*Manhattan Melodrama* with Clark Gable.’
The barman poured the drink, oblivious.
‘Whenever there’s a famous finish in the vicinity of a movie house
it behoves you to know what’s playing.’
‘I don’t doubt it, Mr. Banister.’
‘This is history with a fucking flourish’ (*Libra* 140).

The effects of this exchange are numerous. Firstly, it enforces the idea that the mise-en-scene is invaluable to gaining a full understanding of an event. Secondly, the specific phrase ‘Dillinger buffs’ suggests that these nefarious exploits are the object of fascination, rather than dread, for a morbid minority. But perhaps most importantly, this exchange prefigures the capture of Oswald, which conspiracy buffs will know ends in a movie theatre. Like theatrical cliché of a gun on the wall in Act One being fired in the final act, DeLillo here reminds the reader of the only way *Libra* can end. The reference to John Dillinger is also used here to further DeLillo’s ideas concerning infamy and *imago*. Dillinger was the first public enemy number one, and was arguably the first media savvy outlaw; whether posing for pictures with unwitting police officers, or famously hand delivering a book named *How to be a Detective* to a prominent State Police investigator. Moreover, Dillinger’s notoriety has led Frank Prassel to suggest that ‘his name [was] perhaps the second best known in the country, rivalling Franklin D. Roosevelt in [terms of] publicity’ (Prassel 277). Furthermore, the print media of the day aligned Dillinger, somewhat romantically, with the Wild West heroes of old. If DeLillo is trying to construct a lineage of gunmen who courted the media, then Dillinger is a key figure in a line of outlaws actively seeking the media gaze.

Dillinger’s final minutes alive also have striking parallels with Oswald’s capture and subsequent assassination. Like Oswald he was apprehended in the

vicinity of a cinema. Furthermore, Dillinger was led by the arm through a prearranged route (by a madam facing deportation, who had contacted police with the details of their date and her plan to wear a conspicuous red dress) and ambushed by gunmen, albeit FBI gunmen. Once Dillinger had been swiftly shot in the back, the disinformation machine came into effect with press releases stating that Dillinger had thrown his date between himself and the agents whilst trying to draw his pistol, a claim that was refuted by a number of witnesses. The inconsistencies in the case continued after his death, with numerous doubts raised concerning the identity of the deceased and a lack of correlation between previous photographs and autopsy details. The official explanation involved the fugitive undergoing plastic surgery while on the run. Dillinger was buried before 5000 mourners in a reinforced concrete grave two days after his shooting, whilst the primary witness to the reported plastic surgery died a day later in a fall from the nineteenth floor of a federal office building in Chicago. Just one year after his death Hollywood would feed the public fascination with Dillinger, with the release of a film titled *The Woman in Red*. Whilst in the realm of Hollywood, it is worthy of note that the last film Dillinger saw that fateful night, *Manhattan Melodrama*, sees the antagonist, Clarke Gable, sent to the electric chair by a childhood friend and love rival who has risen to rank of District Attorney, an eerie pre-echo of the betrayal awaiting him outside.

Some 262 pages after Guy Banister's barroom bravado, we see Oswald in the theatre unwittingly awaiting execution at the hands of Wayne Elko, the double feature being *Cry of Battle* followed by *War Is Hell*. The author draws no parallels between the double feature and the 'actors' in the assassination plot here, as the films screened that day are a matter of historical fact. However, it is

worthy of note that the plot of *Cry of Battle*, the film during which Oswald was apprehended, is centred on a small group of American soldiers who team up with Filipino commandos to rid the island of Japanese invaders. Furthermore, the American group contains a rogue antagonist who is killed by one of his own at the film's climax. The links are somewhat tenuous but it is undeniable that the film's plot has resonance with the life of Elko, particularly his involvement in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. As noted, these facts are mere coincidences, explained away by the fact that a large proportion of Hollywood's output in this era drew on the wars in the Pacific and Europe. These coincidences, however, are noteworthy, as in DeLillo's world a loop exists in which art imitates life, which in turn imitates art in an ever-decreasing orbit. Indeed, Elko's actions appear theatrically self-conscious, waiting in position with a silenced pistol that wouldn't be heard above the dialogue:

But he would wait for the noise and cries.
He would let the tension build.
Because that's the way they do it in the movies (*Libra* 412).

This self-conscious pause for dramatic effect, in DeLillo's version of events, ultimately gives the police time to arrive and apprehend Oswald, which in turn necessitates Ruby's later intervention, but Elko calmly remains in his seat to take in the second film. It is inconceivable that a hitman would take such a pause, or that the author could know such a detail, so DeLillo is surely forcing his point that the participants in this 'plot' are all 'actors.' *War is Hell* can also be said to have a certain resonance with DeLillo's theory of the assassination plot, as it centres on a rogue general stationed in Korea who ignores a cease-fire, choosing to continue the war in his own bloodthirsty quest for medals.

Wayne Elko's characterisation in *Libra* has numerous similarities to Oswald's. He is out of work, liminal, and perpetually on the move. The most noticeable difference between the two is Elko's desire to truly remain an outsider in society. Like Oswald, he often pictures himself in terms of cinematic cliché, relating his work in the Bay of Pigs, and later the assassination, to his 'favorite movie,' *Seven Samurai* (*Libra* 145). It is through this misrecognition that Elko romanticises his shady existence: 'warriors without masters, willing to band together to save a village from marauders, to win back a country, only to see themselves betrayed in the end' (*Libra* 145). As is the norm in DeLillo's writing, this is not a simple throwaway reference, but one loaded with allusions to *Libra* itself. Film critic Joan Mellon ranks *Seven Samurai* among those:

[R]are great works of art in the epic mode that chronicle the historic fate of entire societies, cultures, and communities... at moments of historical transition. Kurosawa... evokes the cultural upheaval which followed the fall of Japanese militarism in the sixteenth century, no less than that of the moment [1952-1954] in which he made the film, the aftermath of the American Occupation [of Japan after the end of World War II]' (Mellon 7).

The film draws on the existence of a group of Samurai, whose Warlord has been killed. In this instance the Samurai are faced with three options: they can change caste (which was unthinkable in Japanese society); they can commit hara kiri; or they can become Ronin - bandits, or warriors without masters. The allusion here is quite fitting as John and Bobby Kennedy were seeking to partially disband and rein in the various secret services, giving some of the more covert elements quiet, out-of-the-way assignments. This change of caste is a factor which arguably (depending upon which theory one subscribes to) led the secret service

personnel to disown and distrust their master, and to look elsewhere for the thrill of operating outside the law. DeLillo exemplifies this resentment early in the text with an imagined conversation between Win Everett and Larry Parmenter, sitting in Win's new office:

Laurence Parmenter leaned forward in his chair...Win thought he was an impressive sort of fellow, *self*-assured, well connected, one of the men behind the crisp and scintillating coup in Guatemala in 1954, a collector of vintage wines, friend and fellow veteran of the Bay of Pigs.

'My God, they buried you.'

'Texas Woman's University. Savor the name.'

... 'First they hand me over to a psychiatrist,' Win said. 'Then they send me into exile.'

'What country is this anyway?'

They both laughed (*Libra* 19, emphasis added).

The fact that DeLillo cites Kurosawa's film as Elko's favourite movie raises further questions about the character and his links with Oswald. The film is often cited as the pinnacle of Japanese cinema and had such an impact on a worldwide audience that Hollywood remade the 1954 classic in 1960 with the highly Americanised *The Magnificent Seven*. That an ex-paratrooper would discount *The Magnificent Seven* in favour of the epic Japanese original, especially at a time of conflict, raises questions about his conformity to the American way of life. Bert Cardullo argues that *Seven Samurai* 'portrays the power of circumstance over its characters' lives...The work of circumstance is interested in what surrounds the human being, and how he reacts to it...It is the difference between East and West, self and other' (Cardullo 113). A few parallels exist between Elko and Oswald, in the text, indeed Oswald can be said to be a double for many of *Libra*'s major characters, including himself. Elko is an ex-serviceman, like Oswald, and shares an affinity for Eastern culture, and

hence the Eastern other. The similarities, however, end there. Unlike Oswald, Elko never wishes to break out of his liminal existence and into the media glare, remaining true to his concept of self as a warrior outside of society's sight – a concept of self governed by a movie representation.

The author's portrayal of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra* has been described by DeCurtis as 'a postmodern notion of character in which the self isn't fixed' (Lentricchia 51). Indeed upon reading *Libra* one is struck by the complexity of a character the historical record has labelled a lone nut or a patsy – dependent upon which version of events one subscribes to. In answer to De Curtis's question, DeLillo offers the following:

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. I tried to insert this element into *Libra* on a number of occasions (Lentricchia 51).

DeLillo's admission that he 'inserted' a performative dimension to his characterization of Oswald, along with the specific phrase 'watching himself,' makes plain the author's conception of Oswald as a man obsessed with the projection of his *imago*. This admission, along with the multitude of contradictions in Oswald's real life, point to a portrait of Oswald as a man who, depending on his needs, was constantly playing a role: be it the unapproachable outsider, as in Japan; or the sycophantic chameleon, as in Russia. Moreover, for a man to be so self-conscious as to be always playing a role, surely the true, balanced, and autonomous self must have never had a chance to fully form.

As early as the fourth paragraph of *Libra*, the author asserts the influence of television on a young Oswald, living with his mother in the poverty of the Bronx:

They watched TV, mother and son, in the basement room. She'd bought a tinted filter for their Motorola. The top third of the screen was permanently blue, the middle third was pink, the band across the bottom was a wavy green (*Libra* 4).

If we are to follow Lentricchia's idea of a third person self constructed by reference to the televisual model, and Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, then it can be argued that Oswald's early experience of television has shaped a self in which the constituent parts, much like the primitive R.G.B. filter, refuse to coalesce. As Lacan notes, in his original paper on the mirror stage, 'the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*' (*Ecrits* 2). It is, therefore, arguable that DeLillo's inclusion of the fragmented Oswald television can be seen as an allusion to the pseudo-schizophrenic tendencies of Oswald – the prototypical 'media-poisoned' assassin.

What DeLillo alludes to in the previous example, is implicitly spelt out in the episode directly following Oswald's return from Minsk with his Russian bride Marina:

One evening they walked past a department store...and Marina looked at a television set in the window and saw the most remarkable thing, something so strange she had to stop and stare, grab hard at Lee. It was the world gone inside out. There they were gaping back at themselves from the TV screen....She didn't know anything like this could ever happen....She kept walking out of the picture and coming back. She was amazed every time she saw herself return (*Libra* 227).

By viewing a Western phenomenon through the eyes of a young Russian woman, the author effectively portrays the experience as a revelation, an experience that is unprecedented in her life. By using the word 'gape,' rather

than the more obvious gaze, DeLillo not only highlights the surprise of Marina, but also the large division between the self and the image. This experience, seen anew, makes Marina appear naïve, immature even, and the scene would surely appear comical to any bystanders, even in 1960's America. Indeed, Marina's awe at 'the world gone inside out' is reminiscent of a young child, like the one in Lacan's formulation, being shown the mirror moved into its gaze and then out repeatedly, just to confirm the suspicion that the image corresponds. As Lacan notes, in his original paper:

...[R]epetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror...[H]eld tightly...he [sic] nevertheless overcomes, in a *flutter of jubilant activity*, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image (*Ecrits 2*, emphasis added).

To Oswald the spectacle is less than revelatory, as he has, one assumes, passed through this modern mirror stage, in which the image is truer due to a lack of inversion. This is not to say that Oswald's *imago* is now fixed, but that the primary identification has initiated the mechanism through which the secondary identifications are formed.

In the Atsugi portion of *Libra*, DeLillo unites the world of Oswald and the world of cinematic other with the insertion of John Wayne, the epitome of an American movie star. The particular inclusion of John Wayne is further notable, as he changed his name twice to become the icon we know; from Marion Robert Morrison, to Marion Michael Morrison, to John Wayne or 'The Duke.' Such a change suggests the possibility that a new name can bestow a new identity upon the bearer. Through this idea a link can be drawn between Wayne and Oswald,

as both maintain multiple nominal identities, which are interchangeable dependent on the role being played. However, the crucial difference between these interchangeable identities is that Oswald only uses his phoney persona for clandestine activities, such as ordering a rifle, whilst his real nomenclature is used whenever there is a chance of recognition, as in his New Orleans radio interview defending Cuba's status.

The portrayal of this episode highlights one of the many inconsistencies in Oswald's character, namely that for one so enamoured of Marxist ideology, Oswald is dazzled by a man who is the embodiment of Hollywood, and by extension American idealism and capitalism:

...[H]e sneaks a look at the famous man eating lunch with a group of officers – roast beef and gravy that he helped prepare. He wants to get close to John Wayne, say something authentic. He watches John Wayne talk and laugh. It's remarkable and startling to see the screen laugh repeated in life. It makes him feel good. The man is doubly real. When John Wayne laughs, Ozzie smiles, he lights up, he practically disappears in his own glow. Someone takes a photograph of John Wayne and the officers, and Ozzie wonders if he will show up in the background (*Libra* 93).

That DeLillo repeatedly refers to John Wayne by his full screen name, refusing to reduce him to a pronoun, appears almost comical in this passage. Moreover, the one instance in which the referent is not given his Hollywood title, the author refers to him as 'the man' *the* definite article, the man by which all other men shall be measured. Oswald 'lights up' 'disappears in his own glow' seemingly overcome by the aura this megastar generates. Whilst Kennedy, in the latter chapters, appears to be 'real' and 'look like himself,' John Wayne is pictured here larger than life and 'doubly real.' Oswald searches for a link between the icon and his self: noting that he prepared his meal; wanting to

approach and ‘say something authentic’; and wondering if he will show up in the picture’s background. In the last instance, envisaging himself in the picture’s background, Oswald’s desire appears to be drawing the gaze, in a Lacanian sense, an external view of himself as subject from the object position. One of Lacan’s greatest exponents, Slavoj Žižek, compares the self-conscious nature of the gaze to the classic cinematic technique of the shot reverse-shot, perhaps most notably used in the films of Alfred Hitchcock.

...[W]hen, in a Hitchcock film, a hero, a person around whom the scene is structured, approaches an object, a thing, another person anything that can become ‘uncanny’ (*unheimlich*) in the Freudian sense, Hitchcock as a rule alternates the ‘objective’ shot of this person in motion...with a subjective shot of what this person sees (*Looking* 117).

The Oswald portrayed in this short segment of the text is so emphatically different from the Oswald(s) depicted elsewhere in *Libra* that one suspects the author is emphasizing the influence of a Hollywood dream on the prototypical ‘media-poisoned’ individual. Such an influence positively invites an early Lacanian reading of Oswald the subject. Furthermore, the objectification of himself, as subject, is a recurring feature in DeLillo’s portrayal of Oswald, notably when he loses his virginity ten pages prior to the John Wayne episode. However, the specific instance of imagining himself in the picture’s background has further significance here, as after his death, teams of investigators will pour over rolls and rolls of film searching for a glimpse of Oswald in the background.

For Oswald John Wayne can be said to function as the *objet petit a*. This object, under Lacan’s formulation, is defined as that which sets desire in motion, it is that which is left over from the hypothetical unity the subject had, prior to the mirror phase, with the (m)other. Moreover, Wayne corresponds with

his own image, be it 'the screen laugh repeated in life,' or the fact that he is 'doubly real.' This correlation between the man and his image is what makes Oswald's desire so strong, as it is a unity that is beyond his grasp within the text. Thomas Carmichael goes on from this to note that Oswald is continually 'haunted by doubling and the sense of his own subjectivity as an entity realized only in the field of the Other' (Carmichael 210). The idea that Oswald is 'haunted by doubling' is perhaps best exemplified in the episode where Oswald is pictured on a ship bound for Europe. Oswald feels uncomfortable in the presence of a Texan passenger travelling to study in France who is 'just close enough to Lee outwardly to be the world's preferred version of the type... It is like the shadow of his own life keeps falling across his path' (*Libra* 133). This feeling of inferiority shows Oswald as a man troubled in the presence of *another*, and so self-conscious that he is prone to consider himself outwardly, as one would observe others.

Back in Atsugi, the John Wayne episode continues, with Oswald hesitating to return to work as he 'watches John Wayne a moment longer' (*Libra* 94). Oswald is almost dreaming now, remembering a scene in the film *Red River* and romanticizing the paternal qualities of the mature actor:

[T]he deep sure voice of aging John Wayne, the voice with so many shades of feeling and reassurance, John Wayne resolutely to his adopted son: 'Take 'em to Missouri, Matt' (*Libra* 94).

Jon Buscall offers a Baudrillardian reading of this section, positing the notion that the intrusion of John Wayne's voice into Oswald's consciousness is 'reminiscent of the Baudrillardian nightmare of "peak experience" typifying the

postmodern condition- where the ultimate outcome of an “obscurity of communication” is when the self succumbs utterly to the “networks of influence”” (Buscall 38). Indeed, the fact that DeLillo’s Oswald repeats this line to himself, while practice firing his Italian carbine in the New Orleans swamp, has been cited by Lentricchia as marking Oswald as ‘the genuine American article’ and ‘the product, the plaything even, of Hollywood’s image factories’ (Lentricchia 199). This factor situates him, for Lentricchia, in direct opposition to Kennedy’s European origins, exemplified by a written scrap of Shakespeare’s *King John* stating, ‘They whirl asunder and dismember me’ (*Libra* 393). Whilst this is an accurate reading of the difference between Oswald the generic American, wild-west desperado even, and Kennedy as the Roman Catholic president from an Irish American dynasty, it also draws keen attention to Oswald’s lack of a father, and forefathers. That Oswald never knew his father adds another layer of meaning to Oswald’s repetition of this line as he works the bolt of his rifle, standing on the plain with a band of desperados. Oswald’s traits presented as being those of a negative Libran, ‘[e]asily, easily, easily influenced’ (*Libra* 315), could also be said of a man searching for a father figure, who is repeatedly drawn into relationships with men who try to shape him.

Of all the men who try to shape Oswald to their own ends, it is perhaps David Ferrie who shows the most compassion for the man who is the lead actor in this plot. Ferrie’s character is essential to DeLillo’s version of events, the pseudo philosopher, the intellectual, and the collector of esoteric knowledge. During a number of meetings, notably one under the influence of alcohol, the other whilst smoking hashish, Ferrie begins to mould Oswald with his theories

of conspiracy and chance versus fate. These meetings mark a point of intensification in *Libra*, whereby the influence the media on Oswald's sense of self, and sense of destiny, becomes stronger and more direct:

Lee read the story several times. It was as if they had control of the news, Ferrie, Banister, all of them, all-knowing. Of course it was only coincidence that Ferrie mentioned the thing one day and it appeared in the paper the next. But maybe that was stranger than total control (*Libra* 336).

In the end Ferrie has to spell out the specifics of what Oswald has found himself caught up in, after running into him, by 'chance,' at the bus terminal leaving for Mexico City:

'Think of two parallel lines' he said. 'One is the life of Lee H. Oswald. One is the conspiracy to kill the president. What bridges the space between them? What makes the connection inevitable? It is a third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest levels of the self...It puts a man on the path to his destiny' (*Libra* 339).

Following this meeting, and the realization of his role, Oswald becomes increasingly neurotic, finding connections everywhere: for example, linking relevant dates in his life, with the simultaneous arrival of weapons ordered on different dates. Moreover, in this portion of the text, he begins aligning himself with his target, as if proving himself worthy of entering the public gaze:

Coincidence. Lee was always reading two or three books, like Kennedy. Did military service in the Pacific, like Kennedy. Poor handwriting, terrible speller, like Kennedy. Wives pregnant at the same time. Brothers named Robert. (*Libra* 336).

Following his indoctrination at the hands of Ferrie, Oswald enters his most paranoid state where everything he sees becomes relevant to his mission. The most notable occurrence is as he sits watching a movie double bill on television. The first film is *Suddenly*, in which Frank Sinatra plots to shoot the American President with a high powered rifle. The second is *We Were Strangers* starring John Garfield in an American plot to overthrow Machado in 1930's Cuba. This assassination double feature seems uncanny to Oswald, unleashing a paranoid delusion whereby the line that separates the tangible world of reality and the incorporeal world of television becomes irrevocably breached:

Lee felt stillness around him. He had an eerie sense he was being watched for his reaction...He felt connected to the events on the screen. It was like secret instructions entering the network of signals and broadcast bands, the whole busy air of transmission. Marina was asleep. They were running a message through the night into his skin (*Libra* 370).

DeLillo states that the message travels 'into his skin,' which, aside from being a synaesthesis overlap between the senses, suggests that Oswald has finally become passive and accepted his destiny, that even if he closed his eyes, the message would still reach him. This segment of the text lends itself perfectly to Lacan's theory of the gaze, with DeLillo practically spelling out the objectification of Oswald, 'he was being watched.' The particular phrasing has the effect of drawing the reader into the scene, whereby we can picture Oswald in a darkened room with the dim light of a television flickering upon his face. In an episode of the BBC arts show *Omnibus*, screened to coincide with the release of *Mao II*, DeLillo worked with producers, providing images to correspond with

extracts read from *Libra*, including this particular episode. In the scene we see an Oswald look alike sitting in his small room viewed from behind the T.V. with a trance like expression bathed in the blue light of the film.

Frank Sinatra's failure to kill the President in *Suddenly* has more meaning than initially meets the eye. The plot is foiled when agents electrocute his co-conspirator through the metal table on which the rifle is mounted, with Sinatra being shot in the ensuing confusion. The origin of the current which electrifies the table mounted firearm is a television, meaning that his death is transmitted in more than one sense. At one point in *Suddenly*, a character attempts to dissuade Sinatra, noting that no one who kills a President ever gets chance to enjoy their success if they do indeed succeed. Oswald, however, dismisses the negative portion of the message, preferring to dismiss the film as nothing more than fantasy: 'Lee knew *he* would fail. It was, in the end, a movie. *They* had to fix it so *he* failed and died' (*Libra* 370, emphasis added). This last quote becomes quite prophetic, as in DeLillo's version of events Oswald as a lone gunman would arguably have failed. Furthermore, as we well know Oswald is shot, and shot, in a 'live' television transmission, which becomes the simulacrum of the Hollywood original.

From here on out the portrayal Oswald's daily existence becomes ever more fantastic and detached, he goes to a local bar and supposes that he could easily 'clear the room with an AR-15' (*Libra* 371). He visits a General Walker rally and looks him in the eye whilst gripping his .38 under a jacket:

...[J]ust to do it..how strangely easy to make your existence felt. He saw a picture of the crowd breaking apart, crying out as they scattered, *No, no, no*, and Walker on the pavement, hatless now, a front page photo in the Morning News (*Libra* 373).

This particular fantasy, as well as being another example of Oswald seeing himself objectively from an external position, is eerily similar to the footage of Arthur Bremer's attempted assassination of George Wallace. It appears that DeLillo, writing from a late 80's perspective, is trying to draw a lineage from Oswald, the prototype, to the then contemporary Bremer.

As well as the author's construction of Oswald in *Libra*, there is also a curious doubling and re-doubling of the character, both by the conspirators and by the character himself. Win Everett instructs T.J. Mackey to find, 'a model... a name, a face, a bodily frame that they might use to extend their fiction into the world' (*Libra* 50). Win is confident that the expert forger Mackey can create a paper trail that, after the event, will lead the investigators straight to the scapegoat. The authorial construction of Oswald also serves as a double for DeLillo himself, with Win noting that the whole thing can be done 'with paper' that they can 'script a person....out of ordinary pocket litter' (*Libra* 28).

The concept of 'a model' and 'a frame' evokes Baudrillard's definition of a second order simulacrum, in that the scripted Oswald already exists as a 'map that precedes the territory' (*Simulations* 1). The fact that Oswald, in DeLillo's version of events, walks right into the place where he is being constructed appears to be an assertion that this plot is bigger than all its constitutive parts, and that this thing had to happen irrespective of reason or motive. As Christopher Mott notes, 'Oswald's role is not really the creation of a single man, nor a specific group of men. Oswald's role is a position created by the confluence of ideologies that define his/our episteme' (Mott 138).

The scripting of Oswald by the authors of the plot in *Libra*, and their attempt to place this fiction in the real world, appears as the inverse of a cinematic 'real' encroaching upon Oswald's concept of reality. That the conspirator's textual plot was unravelled by a newer medium highlights the aforementioned shift into the age of moving image as the dominant media format. As DeLillo notes in his interview with DeCurtis: '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' (Lentricchia 48). The fact that the official version of events was undone by a man with a primitive cine camera emphasizes the transitional phase, in which the event occurred. The conspirators were still working under the assumption that the event would only be viewed by eyewitnesses in real time, and that their fiction could be dictated in print form. As the president makes his final turn onto Elm street, Oswald, in DeLillo's fiction, is hiding behind the boxes of texts, concealed by fiction. Then, as the limousine pulls into view, the first shot is discharged: 'He fired through an opening in the leaf cover' (*Libra* 395). The specific choice of the phrase 'leaf cover' appears almost as a reference to the textual nature of the cover story, and Oswald, in his many inconsistencies and refusal to be the patsy, has just shot through it.

As *Libra* reaches the assassination event, DeLillo's pair of linear narratives converge, with the event seen from a multitude of perspectives. It is fair to say that by this point the reader is most interested in Oswald's perspective and how the author will present this historic event, which remains shrouded in ambiguity. Oswald's motives here seem ambivalent, and the reader is never sure whether Oswald is shooting to kill or not. The one thing Oswald

does seem certain of is the magnitude of what is about to unfold, noting that ‘the First Lady was radiant...Lee was glad she looked so good. For her own sake. For the cameras. For the pictures that would enter the permanent record’ (*Libra* 395). As the cars approach Lee notices that ‘[e]verything looked so painfully clear’ (*Libra* 395). Oswald here is almost in a dream like state: ‘There was so much clarity that Lee could watch himself in the huge room of stacked cartons’ (*Libra* 398). The repeated use of clarity gives the episode an unreal sheen, with Oswald once again perceiving himself from an objective external perspective, the object observing the subject entering history.

Whilst Oswald’s view of himself, from the position of the Other, is clear, his view of the quarry is constantly framed and distanced by a sniper’s sight. This distance underlines the impersonal nature of shooting through an optical scope. Oswald’s view of the President is artificial and framed by a device, even as the fatal shot is fired by Raymo. Furthermore, Lee is shooting from the rear at faceless targets, just like a training exercise in the New Orleans swamp. When compared with the clear view Lee had of himself, it appears that the sniper’s primary concern is with how he is perceived rather than the ramifications of the event. Indeed, Oswald never personalizes his targets, referring to ‘the President,’ ‘the First Lady,’ and ‘the Lincoln,’ however, ‘Governor John Connally’ is named in full with Lee admiring his ‘rugged Texas face’ (*Libra* 395), in a moment that recalls the John Wayne episode in *Atsugi*.

Throughout the episode in Dealey Plaza Kennedy appears almost depersonalized by everyone, with Oswald referring to him only by his title and the secret service agents referring to him by his code-name of Lancer. Indeed Kennedy’s minimal dialogue coupled with the lack of nominal recognition

further depersonalizes this charismatic figure to the point where he functions almost as a target and little else. Part of this can obviously be attributed to DeLillo's shift of focus from the vivid event to the marginal plotters, out of sight in the historical document that is the Zapruder film. The fact remains, however, that the author's presentation of John F. Kennedy appears deliberately vague, with bystanders commenting that '[t]hey're real' (*Libra* 394), content that the aura corresponds with the depthless omnipresent version that 'floats over the landscape at night, entering dreams and fantasies, entering the act of love between husbands and wives' (*Libra* 324). Furthermore, it appears that everyone present wants a piece of the aura. Not only are the gunmen sighting upon Kennedy, but civilians, too, in a moment that is all too reminiscent of the most photographed barn in America from *White Noise*: 'There was a woman taking a picture and another woman about twenty feet behind her taking the same picture, only with the first woman in it' (*Libra* 398-9).

One perspective of the event, however, appears all too personal. Whilst Oswald is shooting from an elevated perspective behind Kennedy, DeLillo has Raymo on the infamous grassy knoll looking at the President face on and referring to him nominally:

He knew Connally was hit. He had time to think, Leon's picking them off one by one. He had a sense of people ducking and scattering even though they weren't in the frame. Now the car moved clear, quartering slowly in. He held on Kennedy's head. The man was leaning left, tight-eyed in pain. A hundred and thirty feet. A hundred and twenty feet. He got off the shot. The man's hair stood up. It just rippled and flew (*Libra* 402).

DeLillo has stated on record that he chose the most probable scenario as a template for the assassination event described in *Libra*, namely an anti-Castro

Cuban plot. And whilst it is not my intention to get caught up in matters of historical fact, it is worthy of note that the only characters in DeLillo's plot who stood to gain from a direct hit, rather than a miss, were the embittered Cubans represented here by Raymo.

If Kennedy's assassination was somewhat impersonal in that it was undertaken from a great distance, Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby can be considered as its antithesis: up close, personal, and broadcast live to a nation hungry for justice. Beryl Parmenter is presented throughout the text as a woman who practically devours media events, and it is through her that DeLillo communicates the unifying power of mediated tragedy and outrage. Early in *Libra*, we see the wife of conspirator Larry Parmenter clipping tragic and violent news stories from the newspaper and sending them to friends, '[b]ecause these are the things that tell us how we live' (*Libra* 261). Rather than write letters to friends, Beryl sends these unifying cultural barometers. DeLillo uses this character to exemplify the power of the media master-narrative and the resultant regression from community to isolation as the televisual glow becomes a substitute for human interaction. As a character in *Underworld* notes: 'When JFK was shot, people went inside' (*UW* 94). However, Beryl is far from being afraid of this progression and appears quite liberally minded, most notably in her outrage that a 'folk singer named Bob Dylan is told by CBS that he can't sing one of his songs on the *Ed Sullivan Show*' (*Libra* 124).

As noted earlier, the alleged conspiracy to kill Kennedy was arguably undone by the plotters' ignorance of the power of the moving image, as their disinformation apparatus still operated in the realm of print and audio media. In *Libra*, DeLillo explicitly marks this shift through the character of Beryl, who

stops communicating through newspaper clippings, as television's omnipresence made itself felt through Oswald's repeated death:

These men were in her house with their hats and guns. Pictures from the other world. They'd located her, forced her to look, and it was not at all like the news items she clipped and mailed to friends (*Libra* 446).

For Oswald his televised death is a chance to enter history and break down the 'borderline between one's own personal world, and the world in general' (*Libra* 1). At the moment of his death Lee is again outside himself, watching his infamy preserved for eternity:

There was something in Oswald's face, a glance at the camera before he was shot, that put him here in the audience, among the rest of us, sleepless in our homes – a glance, a way of telling us that he knows who we are and how we feel, that he has brought our perceptions and interpretations into his sense of the crime. Something in the look, some sly intelligence, exceedingly brief but far-reaching, a connection all but bleached away by glare, tells us that he is outside the moment, watching with the rest of us... He is commenting on the documentary footage even as it is being shot. Then he himself is shot, and shot, and shot, and the look becomes another kind of knowledge. But he has made us part of his dying (*Libra* 447).

DeLillo here plays with the multiple signifieds of the word 'shot,' that Oswald's infamy and recognition is dependent upon being shot, and shot, at the same time. Oswald, who is constantly realizing his concept of self in the field of the other, is outside himself now, watching his physical self fade with each repetition of his death, a multiple dying for a multitude of Oswalds. Oswald here, in Lacanian terms, is wholly in the realm of the Imaginary. This episode is far removed from his attempted suicide in Russia, where the Symbolic order gave meaning to the imaginary with Oswald noting that '*somewhere, a violin*

plays, as I watch my life whirl away' (*Libra* 152). Conversely, as Oswald dies on TV, he is image and image alone, finally and fatally trapped in the imaginary and removed from the corporeality of the moment as he is re-born forever as Lee Harvey Oswald: 'He was in pain. He knew what it meant to be in pain. All you had to do was watch TV' (*Libra* 440).

Chapter Two

The Resilvered Mirror: DeLillo's *Underworld*

The previous chapter explored how DeLillo's representation of the events leading up to the Kennedy assassination promoted the supposition that technologies of the moving image, which played a huge role in Kennedy's success, could warp the disaffected human subject's concept of self. In his 1997 epic, *Underworld*, DeLillo further backtracks to the autumn of 1951 to chart the fall of American society: from the brief post-war optimism of the 1950's; through the Cold War's era of paranoia and information control; to the comparative void some forty-two years later. In this chapter, I will further explore the rise of visual media, over the text's forty-two year time frame, and its relation to the self and desire, by way of the previously outlined aspects of Lacanian critical theory. Furthermore, due to DeLillo's repeated use of the word 'aura,' it will be necessary to draw on Walter Benjamin's seminal essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.'

Underworld begins with the now legendary World Series baseball game in 1951 and then fast-forwards to the 1990's to trace, by reverse chronology, how the nation, and the world, changed so dramatically over these forty-two years. DeLillo's presentation of these two eras, and those between, invites a study of how the mass media has encroached upon, and come to saturate and shape, the individual subject's consciousness. The half-century span, which DeLillo uses

as his template, is notable not just for its political upheavals, but also as its beginning marks the point at which the TV set became a more attainable object. The years directly following the Second World War marked the point at which television sets became far more affordable, and therefore more widespread. At the beginning of 1940, American television set sales reached the 2000 mark, with 63.8% of those in New York State. These sales progressed at an incremental rate, until, by 1948, 33,836 had been sold countrywide. The following years saw a huge increase in the number of sets sold in the United States, from 33,836 in 1948, to 150,358 in 1949, to 438,700 in 1950 (source: <<http://www.tvhistory.tv/facts-stats.htm>>). Many critics of DeLillo's *Underworld* cite the prologue's temporal setting, in the *fall* of 1951, as the point at which Western society fell into Cold War paranoia. None, however, have noted that this particular era saw the television become an object that one could more realistically own. Marvin Lundy, the text's resident conspiracy theorist, notes how the impending doom of a Soviet test and the beginnings of an exponential rise in television ownership conspired to leave the Polo Grounds of the novel's prologue suspiciously empty:

Because this was an all-or-nothing game between the two hated rivals of the city. People had a premonition that this game was related to something much bigger. They had the mental process of do I want to go out and be in a big crowd, which if something happens is the worst place to be, or should I stay home with my family and my brand-new TV, which common sense says yes, in a cabinet with a maple veneer (*UW* 172).

With its exponential increase in TV ownership, the 1950's marked the point at which the individual's desires began to be far more efficiently manipulated, not

just for ideological unity – as in the century’s numerous conflicts – but for the accumulation of capital. Indeed, as early as 1957, Packard noted that:

Large scale efforts [are] being made, often with impressive success, to *channel* our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, *and our thought processes* by use of the insights gleaned from psychiatry and the social sciences. (Packard 3, emphasis added).

The fifth clause of this extract is telling, as Packard is hinting that the manipulation goes beyond simple advertising, and towards a wholesale conditioning of the (decreasingly) individual subject. DeLillo appears aware of the link between the advertising apparatus and the corruption of ‘our thought processes,’ and links the two threads in an interview with DeCurtis:

I see contemporary violence as a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment in America...I see this desperation against the backdrop of brightly colored packages and products and consumer happiness (Lentricchia 57-8).

DeLillo returns to this idea in an essay written for the *New York Times*, to coincide with *Underworld*’s release, calling the video-taped actions of an armed robber a ‘warped act of consumption’ (‘Power’ 63). He notes that:

...[I]f you view the tape often enough, it tends to transform you, to make you a passive variation of the armed robber...it separates you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape’ (‘Power’ 63).

The implications of this idea, and indeed the genre of real-life video-clip TV, are unsettling when read in terms of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. As the

previous chapter outlined, the identification with *another* subject, following the original misrecognition in childhood, shapes the viewer's ego ideal, or what (s)he would like to be. Following Metz's appropriation of the theory to film studies, the modern subject gazing at the screen can be aligned with the child looking in the mirror, a point illustrated by DeLillo's conception of Oswald watching Sinatra in *Suddenly*. Metz, however, dismisses the idea that a fictional character could exert such a strong influence on a *rational* human subject, as does DeLillo, who, in an interview with *The Guardian*, comments that, '[y]ou might adopt a hairstyle or a clothing style based on movies, but I don't know if it goes much deeper than that'

<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,962338,00.html>>. However, with the massive increase in 'real' violent spectacles available to the TV viewer, identification with the 'actor' in a 'scene' surely becomes stronger, as the other of the screen is no longer an acknowledged fiction.

The narrative we call history has also been increasingly acknowledged as a fiction. And in the previously cited article, DeLillo discusses the moment of inspiration for *Underworld*, as he ventured to a library basement following a report on the 40th anniversary of the baseball game of his youth and the novel's prologue:

I located the appropriate reel of filmed text, slid it onto the spindle and nudged the speed switch. This was history in the microwave, the news pages speeding across the screen in a black-and-white blur. When I slowed the movement and found the date I wanted, I looked at the screen for some time, feeling a detached fascination.....
Front page of *The New York Times*. Oct. 4, 1951. A pair of mated headlines, top of the page. Same typeface, same size type. Each headline three columns wide, three lines deep.

Giants capture pennant -- this was the dramatic substance of the first headline.

Soviets explode atomic bomb – this was the ominous threat of the second.

...[T]he power of history. This is what kept me fixed to the swivel chair, eyes on the screen but not really looking anymore, staring past the page or into it ('Power' 60).

This quotation almost acts as the novel in miniature, 'history in the microwave,' an ascription of the glory that events gather over time: the amalgamation of the Cold War's locus, and the aura retained by an event from a time before the media's mechanical reproduction drained it of all meaning within hours. This piece also evokes memories of the fictional Lee Harvey Oswald watching a screen in Fort Worth and feeling driven towards 'writing' his own history, much like the author with 'eyes on the screen but not really looking anymore.' The image of DeLillo viewing an odd juxtaposition of shots heard round the world is also reminiscent of Lacan's theory of the gaze. However, rather than looking from awry, as in Žižek's appropriation of the theory, the author views the piece with the benefit of hindsight. With a knowledge of the years that followed, the front page is, in the present, endowed with a wealth of meaning. However, back in 1951 this explosion of the 'real' is balanced with, or even relegated by, the wholly symbolic battle between sporting rivals. Interestingly, DeLillo here is outside of the cinematic gaze, closer to the original theory of Lacan, whereby the unsettling notion felt draws the phantasmic gaze from all around, not simply from the screen.

Within the text, few people even notice the implications of the Soviet explosion, a point emphasised by Albert Bronzini's exchange with Father Paulus:

‘No no no no. We’re speaking about the home run. Bobby Thompson’s heroic shot. The tabloids have dubbed it for posterity.’
Bronzini had to pause to take this in.
‘The Shot Heard Round the World? Is the rest of the world all that interested?’ (*UW* 669).

Bronzini here appears to be shocked by the concepts of American exceptionalism, and cultural imperialism, as well as the apparent blind spot engendered by the game’s powerful aura. Writing about the prologue’s first outing as a short story, Duvall notes that the game serves as a unifying device for the masses, building an aura, which distracts them from the ominous threat of a Communist Other:

In DeLillo’s postwar America, there is no Fuhrer figure attempting to manipulate the masses; nevertheless, there operates what might be termed a postmodern, decentralized totalitarianism in which the mass media – often linked to advertising – constructs an aura around popular culture events (*‘Baseball’* 286).

The term ‘aura’ in literary theory is now inseparable from Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.’ In this essay, Benjamin, at times, appears optimistic that the aura of a classic work of art can be diminished by the reproduction, welcoming the process reproduction of photography / film, which may be used to aid, what Duvall terms, ‘political communication’ (*‘Baseball’* 306). However, this era was yet to fully arrive, and yet the print media still maintained ‘political communication,’ as Father Paulus’s apparent blind spot demonstrates. Furthermore, it is essential to note, for the aims of this thesis, that the game of the prologue occurs in the relative infancy of process reproduction. Whilst the field of print media, itself a mechanical reproduction, was able to transmit the game’s authority as a

transcendent event, the field of photography, and by extension, film was relatively limited, in terms of picture quality and resolution. This lack of clarity, when compared to subsequent decades, resulted in a failure to reveal the game in its totality, and hence the retention of its aura. As Benjamin notes: 'In photography, process reproduction can bring out those aspects of an original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens' (Benjamin 214). Process reproduction in the game of *Underworld*'s prologue fails to capture the 'aspects' that are 'unattainable,' a point supported by Marvin's attempts to authenticate the ball's lineage, and as a result the game's aura remains undiminished.

The power of the event in this era, before media saturation, is perhaps best exemplified in the text by Russ Hodges, who aligns this event with the time his father took him to see a Fourth of July prize fight: 'When you see a thing like that, a thing that becomes a newsreel, you begin to feel you are a carrier of some solemn scrap of history' (*UW* 16). The subordinate clause in this extract is telling, 'a thing that becomes a newsreel' suggests that only the most sacred, important, or culturally relevant events make it onto a newsreel. The proposition that only these events make the transition to a moving projected image, which would be seen only by cinema goers or the wealthy classes, conjures up an image of the lengths that cameramen would have to go to, to film an event. In the 1950's camera operators would be well-trained individuals who had to set up a cumbersome tripod mounted camera, load the film, and focus manually. The cost of filming is also a key factor. Benjamin, in a footnote to the previously cited piece, noted that '[i]n 1927...a major film, in order to pay its way, had to reach an audience of nine million' (Benjamin 237).

Over the last fifty years, this process was reduced to the lightweight cine camera wielded by Abraham Zapruder, to the video camera pointed by the Video Kid of *Underworld*, and then again to the digital cameras which capture one's every movement in the modern urban space as a series of zeros and ones. Each of these technical innovations has brought about successively larger masses of taped material, which ultimately leads to an increase in the recording of previously private acts. *Underworld's* forty-two year span traces how Western society has developed: from a time when only the most important events were filmed; to a time when a very public killing was captured by chance; to the chance capture of a totally random killing; to a point where much of what happens in a public space is systematically and ceaselessly recorded.

Underworld's prologue and epilogue pay keen attention to the rise of visual media spectacles over the text's forty-two year span. For DeLillo the baseball game of the prologue retains its aura, as it exists only in crude still photographs. In the contemporary sphere the games are replayed *ad infinitum*, which serves to decontextualize and dehistoricize the historical, for if we can still see it, it is still happening. The historic game of the prologue is unable to be graphically repeated and therefore impossible to commodify. The exception, of course, is memorabilia, which draws much of its value from the aura retained by its lack of visual repetition. Indeed, the only record of the game, other than still photographs, is a tape of the commentary recorded, much like the Texas Highway Killer, by a fluke of mechanical reproduction:

There's a man on 12th Street in Brooklyn who has attached a tape machine to his radio so he can record the voice of Russ Hodges broadcasting the game. The man doesn't know why he's doing this. It's just an impulse, a fancy, it's like hearing the game twice, it's like

being young and being old, and this will turn out to be the only known recording of Russ's famous account of the final moments of the game. The game and its extensions (*UW* 32).

Timothy Parrish notes how DeLillo 'recreates the game to explore how this accidental recording replaces – becomes in fact – the game itself' (Parrish 704). He goes on to posit the notion that the replacement of the game by an audio recording adds to its aura and the cultural memory of the event. The notion that an audio recording serves to dissipate the cultural memory less than an audio / visual recording is an interesting one and recalls Christian Metz's statement that 'the cinema is *more perceptual*...than many other means of expression; it mobilises a larger number of the axes of perception' (Metz 43). It is therefore reasonable to state that due to the lack of a clear audio/visual document, the play off game remains partially shrouded in mystery. As a result of this mystery, from a Lacanian perspective, the game still functions as an object of desire.

This point is best demonstrated in the text by Marvin Lundy's inability to establish an incontestable lineage from the ball that left Thompson's bat to the one for which Nick paid thousands of dollars. By the book's conclusion, the reader, like Nick, is unsure yet tantalisingly close. Indeed, as soon as the ball passes from Cotter to Manx Martin the doubt begins to creep in and is never really diffused. The ball then, from a Lacanian perspective, functions perfectly as the *objet petit a*, that which is constantly unknowable, unattainable, undefinable, and not what it seems to be. If the ball were to be confirmed as the definite article, then its mystery, its myth, its aura, would cease. The ball would simply become one of thousands of pieces of sporting memorabilia. Whilst the

financial value of the ball would increase dramatically, its status as a mythical object of desire would be diminished. As Todd McGowan notes: 'The ball is *the* object, and yet no one seems to have it. Even the person who actually has the ball is unable to possess it because its value lies in its absence' (McGowan 126).

The game itself functions as the *objet petit a*, for those in the text who are old enough to remember it, by virtue of its singularity amongst a plethora of mediated and replayed games in the decades that followed. The text emphasises that the game is omnipresent in the minds of New York sports fans of a certain age:

...[H]e told Farish how people claimed to have been present at the game who were not and how some of them honestly insisted they were there because the event had sufficient seeping power to make them think they had been at the Polo Grounds that day or else how did they feel the thing so strongly in their skin.

'You're not saying like Kennedy. Where were you when Kennedy was shot?'

Classic said, 'When JFK was shot people went inside. We watched TV in dark rooms and talked on the phone with friends and relatives. We were all separate and alone. But when Thompson hit *the* homer, people rushed outside. People wanted to be together' (UW 94).

If familiarity breeds contempt, then unfamiliarity breeds reverence. DeLillo's alignment of the mythical homer with the JFK assassination draws keen attention to the lure of the unknowable. Rather than 'where were you when?' the game's aura convinces people that 'they were there then!' Moreover, people went outside because the event had a purity in its singularity. There was no post-game analysis to sit through, and the mystery added to the luminescence. To spell out this disjunction between the games of the past and those of the present day, DeLillo stages this exchange in the corporate section of the (now Los Angeles) Dodgers stadium. Whilst watching the game from their table

behind glass high in the corporate section, Brian Glassic states that he wants to finish eating and get into the stands 'like real people' (*UW 92*), prompting the following exchange:

'I need to hear the crowd.'

'No you don't.'

'What's a ballgame without crowd noise?'

'We're here to eat a meal and see a game,' Sims said. 'I took the trouble to book us a table by the window. You don't go to a ballpark to hear a game. You go to see a game. Can you see alright?' (*UW 92*).

The idea that in a hierarchy of the senses, the visual takes precedence over the aural is key here, and it is undeniable that in the act of watching the game take place in reality one absorbs more sensory information than listening to one man's narrative interpretation of the spectacle. Moreover, by witnessing the game with one's own eyes and ears, rather than watching on TV, a degree of mystery still lingers, as the event occurs in real time with no replays. Such a gap in the spectacle aids the retention of some of the aura in the modern game despite its inherent reproducibility. However, this view, from the sanitised Stadium Club, cannot be aligned with the traditional notion of spectating from the stands, like Cotter Martin. As McGowan notes:

In 1992, one can experience a baseball game without having to encounter the Other[sic]- without overhearing obnoxious fans, sweating in the hot sun, or sitting on an uncomfortable seat. But this also destroys the appeal of the game. We enjoy a baseball game not in spite of obnoxious fans, hot sun, and hard bleachers, but precisely because of these things. They help create the aura that surrounds the game and entices our desire (McGowan 128).

Interestingly, McGowan here appears to be noting that aura still surrounds the normal baseball game, and that this is mainly achieved by engaging with the

‘other’ of rival fans, not the (big) Other as McGowan states. Moreover, DeLillo resists the portrayal of this event as a pseudo-televised one, by stating that the commentary that complements the images – seen through glass like some huge TV screen – is that of the radio announcer. Brian Glassic, in his desire to get onto the other side of the glass and out of the sterile bubble, is painfully aware of his dislocation from the tangible event, commenting that ‘We need video helmets and power gloves. Because this isn’t reality. This is virtual reality and we don’t have the proper equipment’ (*UW* 92). This view of the game evokes Baudrillard’s theory of a hyperreal third order simulacrum, yet applying this to the modern game portrayed in *Underworld* would be foolish, as the game really is taking place on the other side of the glass. Furthermore, the game of the prologue is more susceptible to a Baudrillardian reading as Russ Hodges recalls the time he used to create big game commentaries from telegraph print outs sitting in an enclosed studio, ‘blabbermouth Hodges inventing ninety-nine percent of the action’ (*UW* 24). The fact that Russ Hodges was doing reports which were generated by models with no real original before 1950 renders any Baudrillardian reading of contemporary baseball, as presented in *Underworld*, chronologically problematic. Indeed, John Duvall notes that DeLillo’s prose ‘seems to be moving away from a strictly Baudrillardian notion of the orders of simulacra as he locates American culture’s immersion in mediation progressively earlier’ (‘Baseball’ 303), from *Libra* in the 1960’s into pre-*Underworld* 1951. In the same essay Duvall notes how Ronald Reagan began his career, much like Hodges, by doing simulated broadcasts of baseball games. Reagan, who is conspicuously absent from *Underworld*, was emblematic of the blurring of boundaries between the real and the fictionalised, whether he was

confusing American history with Hollywood films or naming a strategic defence project after the George Lucas film *Star Wars*.

Throughout *Underworld*, and indeed much of DeLillo's oeuvre, the text's fictional characters are found time and again to be using stereotypes, television and movie characters, and celebrities - all of whom are themselves fictions - as a framework for their conceptual self and others. Benjamin showed an awareness that film would make such an impression upon the human consciousness, noting that framing and changes in the speed of motion could reveal hidden elements of human behaviour. Interestingly, he linked this with psychology's revelations concerning the workings of the mind, stating that '[t]he camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses' ('Benjamin' 230).

The use of characters as a reflective surfaces is evident in the prologue's crowd scenes, which when they are not focusing upon Cotter, are centred around the celebrity quartet of Hoover, Sinatra, Gleason, and Shor. These 'characters' were at the game in question, and the author himself is drawn to the lure of re-presenting them, referring to them in 'The Power of History' as 'a certain picturesque foursome' ('Power' 60). In the same piece DeLillo states how he used Hoover's presence as a tool to imbricate the Cold War threat with the novel's other thematic concerns, but more tellingly he suggests how the remaining threesome function as a blueprint for America's patchwork society:

...[T]he other three men in their Irish, Italian, and Jewish combustibility and their working class-backgrounds, became a collective herald of themes and characters that would flow through the novel proper ('Power' 61).

Whilst this statement suggests that stars function as a reference point for human identity, a 'herald' of 'characters', the passages in *Underworld* itself underline the power of celebrity, even in television's infancy. Jackie Gleason, missing a rehearsal for his upcoming sit-com, courts the crowd's adoration, doing lines from the show on request and mocking all and sundry in his stand-up style. The inclusion of the word 'herald' is also interesting here, as DeLillo is surely stating that the unification of celebrity and the director of investigations marks the arrival of an era where TV would be a controller as well as an entertainer. Whilst Gleason courts his public, DeLillo's Sinatra is a man fastidiously avoiding a connection with his fans, and yet he appears to be the object of their fascination:

Gleason sees nothing strange about missing a rehearsal to entertain fans in the stands. But it's making Sinatra uneasy, all these people lapping at their seat backs. ...[P]eople keep pressing in, showing a sense of mission. He sees them decide one by one that they must speak to him. The rigid grins floating near. And the way they use him as a reference for everything that happens. Somebody makes a nice play, they look at Frank to see how he reacts. The beer vendor trips on a step, they look at Frank to see if he has noticed.

He leans over and says, 'Jack it's a great boot being here but you think you can put a towel over your face so these people can go back to watching the game?' (*UW* 24).

This section of text acts as a demonstration of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, with the members of the public using Sinatra 'as a reference,' and a reflective surface. Indeed, Sinatra in his prime was the epitome of the (in)eligible bachelor, the mediatized alpha male, so much so that these ordinary sports fans would seek to emulate him. Like John Wayne in *Libra*, he is the pinnacle of his 'type': that is, if John Wayne represents the ultimate cowboy then Sinatra is undoubtedly the ultimate crooner. The theory of the mirror phase

is, like much of Lacan's theory, linked to desire. Under Lacanian theory human subjects are subliminally drawn to emulate those who make an impression upon them by the nuances of body language and speech, or what Lacan dubs 'morphological mimicry' (*Ecrits* 3). It is, therefore, also worthy of note here that Sinatra, much like John Wayne in *Libra*, acts as the *objet petit a*.

Whilst Sinatra only appears in the prologue, Gleason's presence, in the text, echoes across the decades through the magic of television as DeLillo refers to Nick's mother in modern Phoenix watching re-runs of *The Honeymooners*:

She must have felt a certain clean release, looking at the sadly furnished apartment, at wife Alice in her apron or dowdy coat, at Norton the neighbour with a bent fedora on his jerky head – things that were close to what she knew. Superficially of course. Close to what she knew in an apparent rather than actual way. A closeness that was shallow but still a bit touching and maybe even mysteriously real. Look at the picture on the screen, flat and gray and staticky with years, not unlike memories she carried to her sleep. She slept in a room in Arizona and how strange this must have seemed to her. But Jackie Gleason on the screen made the place more plausible – he drew her toward a perceptible centre (*UW* 103).

Watching *The Honeymooners* acts for Nick's mother as a nostalgic device, as the time and place portrayed is that of her younger years, 1950's Brooklyn. This portion of the text suggests that nostalgia is strongest in the Imaginary register. Moreover, this idea is fortified, as regards this study, by the following extract, which, in classic DeLillo style, is repeated numerous times in the form of a list: '[we] fixed her up with the TV set and the *resilvered mirror* and the good hard healthy bed' (*UW* 104, emphasis added). By re-running *The Honeymooners* in modern Phoenix, DeLillo also suggests that these moving images may blend with Nick's mother's recollections, as they were 'not unlike memories she carried to her sleep' (*UW* 103). Furthermore, this section's close

implies that images may be strong enough to override one's own memories - which are surely in colour - with a black and white representation given by the omnipresent TV set:

...[T]he Polo Grounds stood, west by southwest, and I imagined the field and the players, the crisp blues and elysian greens on that great somber-skyed day – great and terrible, a day now gone to black and white in the film fade of memory (*UW* 134).

These words are all that is printed on page 134, and what follows is Manx Martin I, a section which is marked, like the others, by a jet black page. The effect is quite striking as the almost empty white page 134 is set against a plain black dividing page. The striking juxtaposition of colours, or lack thereof, in the visual layout of the text suggests that memories may be recalled in black and white, like the television of Nick's youth. Furthermore, once the page is turned, we are met not only by a shift from 1992 to 1951, but also a shift from affluent *white* suburbia to the *black* Martin family living in Harlem, from the anonymous space of reclaimed desert in an age of media saturation to the 'real' of Harlem before the typical African-American could afford a TV set.

In the chronologically later portions of *Underworld*, the TV set is never far away. DeLillo introduces this omnipresence into the narrative, and its numerous characters' lives, via the (non)appearance of the Texas Highway killer. The Texas Highway Killer is DeLillo's invention, however, the first time reader of *Underworld* may be uncertain as to his status as a fictional character. Firstly, because this novel consciously blurs the boundary between fact and fiction (to paraphrase Linda Hutcheon), and secondly, as random acts of violence, and lawlessness, have become a common feature of contemporary

entertainment. DeLillo names the killer Richard Henry Gilkey in an obvious allusion to the nomenclature of Lee Harvey Oswald explored in *Libra*. There is, however, some difference between the Texas Highway Killer tape and the Zapruder film in that the technology has shifted. Whilst the prototypical Zapruder footage was classed as a film, due to its recording on an 8mm transparency, the Texas Highway Killer footage is a tape, recorded and stored on magnetic tape easily erased, reused and copied. One is a real image stored in a transparent form; the other is data stored in magnetic form. The titular difference is also loaded with meaning, as a film carries more prestige than a simple tape, in terms of connotation and collocation.

DeLillo illustrates this point by staging a screening of the Zapruder film at the close of part four of the text, 'Cocksucker Blues,' which takes place in the summer of 1974. The film is aligned with the Texas Highway Killer tape by DeLillo's repeated use of the term 'jostled' (*UW* 495, 156) to describe the home-movie quality of the two spectacles. The Zapruder film, however, is presented as an 'event' that 'had a cachet' (*UW* 488), and the film itself is described as 'completely steeped in being what it was, in being film' (*UW* 495). Rather than being kept 'running...until everybody on the planet had seen it' (*UW* 232), as Bronzini notes, the Zapruder film is seen by invitation only in the studio of a video artist. O'Donnell suggests that the event, with its stacks of TV screens, is 'a conscious, if ironic, reference to the notion of pastiche' (O'Donnell 180) articulated by Jameson in relation to the video installations of Nam June Paik. In O'Donnell's lengthy footnote, Jameson notes how viewers 'bewildered by this discontinuous variety, decided to concentrate on a single screen' whilst '[t]he postmodern viewer...is called upon to ...see all the screens

at once' (O'Donnell 181). This apparent reference supports the often articulated notion that the Kennedy assassination marked the advent of the postmodern moment.

In Lacanian terms the Zapruder film, both within and without *Underworld*, can be said to be an eruption of the 'Real', that which lies outside the fields of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and in Lacan's terms is 'impossible to symbolise' (Sarup 104). Within the text, Miles shows an understanding of how this event transgresses everything he knows to be real, by stating that 'it's outside language' (*UW* 496). This comment itself is an apt description of the Lacanian Real, as the Real is that which resists signification. As Žižek notes, the Real is an 'entity that must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the Symbolic structure' (*Sublime* 162). Once the Real has been encountered, therefore, the subject reorders the Symbolic component of the psyche to incorporate this transgressive information. As Klara notices, 'it was amazing that there were forces in the culture that could out- imagine them, make their druggiest terrors seem futile and cheap' (*UW* 495). In simpler terms, the incorporation of the transgressive Real into the unconscious, and here also the conscious, can be compared with the concept of systematic desensitisation. This is evinced in *Underworld* by the initial shock the Zapruder film produces, which is subsequently subsumed by apathy, as the pot-smoking Bohemians return to 'making out' (*UW* 495).

The Zapruder film's modern double is the Texas Highway Killer tape, and its earliest concrete appearance in the text occurs in the first chapter of part two of the text, 'Elegy for the Left Hand Alone,' which is an allusion to Gilkey's technique of shooting with his weaker hand. Ironically, Gilkey found that once

he mastered this technique, it was futile; he could have simply shot with his natural hand from the other lane. It is also worthy of note here that the left hand is traditionally considered evil, as the word 'sinister' is the Latin for left. The chapter's title is also a work written for the piano by Leopold Godowsky, a man whose genius was never truly appreciated in his lifetime and whose epitaph, self-composed five years prior to his death, has resonance with Gilkey's deluded self-worth:

I worked honestly with the highest ideals for my chosen art and beloved instrument. I have accomplished in my field more and greater things than all my contemporary colleagues. Yet real recognition and material benefits were not given to me; but crediting me sparingly and grudgingly, my life ebbed, and now I find myself ill and poor. A few know the importance of my having lived. When I am but a memory my works and my influence will begin to live
(Nicholas < <http://www.godowsky.com/Biography/bio.html>>).

The random taping of a random killing is emblematic of the era of postmodernism. There is no depth, no motive, no real vengeance. This is killing for killing's sake. Moreover, when the reader first encounters the tape, it is delivered as though the reader is the viewer, with the repetitive style of the narrative serving to build the tension:

It shows a man driving a car. It is the simplest sort of family video. You see a man at the wheel of a medium Dodge. It is just a kid aiming her camera through the rear window of the family car at the windshield of the car behind her.....she is neither the victim nor the perpetrator of the crime but only the means of recording it. It shows a man in a sport shirt at the wheel of his car. There is nothing else to see (*UW* 155).

The narrative continues in this manner for three and a half pages until the fatal head shot occurs, with DeLillo's slow purposeful narrative mimicking the tension that the tape's viewer would have to endure before the gory pay off. The

reader knows something is about to happen as the word 'crime' is used in the first few paragraphs, just as the viewer knows something is going to happen even if viewing for the first time:

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 (*UW* 156).

DeLillo spells this out time and again. The tape has a lure in its mundanity, as though something is not quite right in the picture. The tape has an out-of-placeness that serves to make this everyday scene morbidly fascinating: 'Here it comes all right. He is shot, head-shot, and the camera reacts, the child reacts – there is a jolting movement but she keeps on taping' (*UW* 158). The sense of a camera movement as the shot hits serves to remind us that the child is a part of the act, like Beryl Parmenter watching Oswald die and realizing that he had 'made us part of his dying' (*Libra* 447).

The failure to capture the random gunman loose on the highway gives the act of driving an added edge; not only do we not know the killer's identity, we could be the next target. The description of the victim in the tape underscores this idea, as he is the embodiment of the average Texan, 'man in a sport shirt' and 'driving a medium Dodge' (*UW* 155). DeLillo exemplifies the imprint on the collective psyche prior to his introduction in the text as Nick searches for Klara in the desert:

'We were saying I bet he thinks this is the Texas Highway Killer getting ready to claim another victim.'

'I knew you weren't the Texas Highway Killer because this isn't Texas.'

'Plus I doubt if he drives a yellow cab.'

'That's the other reason' (*UW* 79).

When Gilkey arrives in the narrative in person, a little under 200 pages later, we find him a classic disaffected loner, forty-two years old and living with his mother and terminally ill father. He is a man who drives forty miles to see his friend who 'wasn't really his friend' (*UW* 262). Furthermore, his 'friend' Bud is a recovering crack addict, and yet *he* has a wife and a home. Gilkey, by contrast, lives with his parents and was recently demoted in his job at the supermarket. This is a portrait of a man who, much like DeLillo's Oswald, has been denied the American life portrayed on television and in advertisements. McGowan's Lacanian reading of *Underworld* argues that the late capitalist society is incrementally closing all the gaps in the other where the *objet petit a* might reside. This lack of the unknowable is further compounded in Gilkey's case as he has, one assumes, spent his life in his family home and crummy job and knows everything. This is a man existing on the fringe of society, a 'zero in the system' (*Libra* 40,357), so much so in fact that when he arrives at Bud's house, 'Bud barely noticed him, it was like the normalcy of dying. It was the empty hollow thing of not being there' (*UW* 268). Gilkey acts to give meaning to his meaningless existence. However, once his actions are captured on film, they become a product for consumption. This factor gives Gilkey the true *objet petit a* of recognition for his actions, and further the projection of an ideal screen image. The cruel paradox is that in his attainment of this desired fame, he is no longer such an enigma. With the chance capture, and subsequent reproduction, of a homicide, Gilkey's legacy becomes no more than a piece of news footage. Every time a new victim is shot, the television networks play the commodified version, reducing the killer's mythic status to a piece of grisly

entertainment. Furthermore, once in possession of the tape, the television networks must provide a narrative to accompany the footage. This accompanying narrative takes the form of police postulation that the killer must be given a profile that might guide them closer to the individual. In Gilkey's view the very profile that is constructed, along with the unseen work of a copycat killer, robs him and his actions of the individuality he desires. With his actions mechanically reproduced and his personality given a 'profile,' Gilkey must enter the medium that has reduced him to just another violent spectacle by calling the television station:

The voice said, 'Why I'm calling is to set the record straight. People write things and say things on air that I don't know from day one where they're coming from. I feel like my situation has been twisted in with the profiles of a hundred other individuals in the crime computer' (*UW* 216).

McGowan explores much of this in his Lacanian exposition of *Underworld*. However, McGowan fails to note that once Gilkey has entered the medium, his desire takes a new object, namely the anchorwoman Sue Ann Corcoran. Whilst it is considerably more 'wholesome' for the object of a man's desire to be a beautiful woman, rather than anonymous infamy, the conversations that fuel his desire are nothing more than simulations:

He made the call and turned on the TV, or vice versa, without the sound...and he never felt so easy talking to someone on the phone or face-to-face or man to woman as he felt that day talking to Sue Ann. He watched her over there and talked to her over here. He saw her lips move silent in one part of the room while her words fell soft and warm on the coils of his secret ear. He talked to her and made eye contact with the TV. This was the waking of the knowledge that he was real...[S]he listened and asked questions watching him from the screen ten feet away. She had so much radiance she could make him real (*UW* 270).

This passage highlights the absence at the centre of Gilkey's existence. By speaking 'face-to-face' with a beautiful woman, he realizes that his longing for recognition has found a desired object. That television is the medium of this exchange is crucial here. DeLillo has already spelt out that Gilkey has no real social interaction through Bud's indifference, his mother's apathy, and a reference to his anonymous and automaton job at the checkout. Furthermore, every scene in Gilkey's parents' house features a glowing TV set, suggesting that, like many in *Underworld*, the act of watching television has become a substitute for normal family interaction. DeLillo notes this with the following:

He [Gilkey] was suspicious of the tape because it had a vista different from his experience and he kept thinking the girl was going to move the camera and get him in the picture. He'd watched the tape a dozen times sitting with his pain-racked dad and every time he watched the tape he thought he was going to turn up in his own living room, detached from who he was, peering squint-eyed over the wheel of his compact car (*UW* 270).

The fact that the text specifies 'a dozen times' can be taken as proof that Gilkey spends a lot of his spare time watching television. The killer has only struck ten times, eleven if we include the copycat. Therefore, this is not a man watching just to verify his actions are noticed; this is a man with nothing better to do. This extract also draws keen attention to Gilkey's sense of self and detachment from reality, expecting to 'turn up in his own living room' as though he wasn't there already. More notably the clause 'detached from who he was' evokes Lacan's theory of the mirror stage whereby the image one sees, in a mirror or otherwise, is essentially a misrecognition, differing from the self the ego sees. As Lacan notes: 'The ego longs for unity of and identification with its own image. This is

perpetually frustrated' (*Ecrits* 17). The image at once confirms and shatters the desire for unity – hence the constitutive misrecognition that structures the subject and consigns us to loss, lack and alienation. Lacan further notes that through this act of misrecognition, 'the human individual fixes upon himself [sic] an image that alienates him from himself' (*Ecrits* 19). Following Lacan's hypothesis, Gilkey's lucky escape from the camera's eye means that his ego's concept of self can run on unabated, content that the actions are the image and the illusion can remain intact.

Gilkey's *objet petit a* cements the notion that his concept of reality is skewed by television. The woman he talks to is not a friend, just the constructed demeanor dictated by the role of a local TV news anchor:

The anchorwoman looked into the camera. She had no choice of course. The camera was on her, not the caller... They cut to the face above the desk. The anchorwoman live. Her elbows rested on the desk now, hands tucked together beneath her chin. Matt wondered what this meant. Every shift of position meant a change in the state of the news (*UW* 216-7).

Matt's awareness of body language in this passage shows that he is *au fait* with the performative nature of a news anchor. Gilkey, however, fails to recognize that her actions on screen are measured and ultimately fictive. This is most apparent in the passage when Gilkey believes, somewhat ambivalently, in 'the knowledge that he was real' and that 'she could make him real' (*UW* 270). Once Gilkey's desire finds a new object, a new point of interaction with the other, he sees himself in fantasy with Sue Anne. The crucial point is that if he were captured on film, the illusion would be shattered, not least because he would be awaiting execution, but also because his self-image would be destroyed:

He would have surrendered to her in a blaze of lights, Richard Henry Gilkey, hustled down a hallway with Stetsoned men all around him and Sue Anne Corcoran by his side (*UW* 270).

Aside from the romantic Bonnie and Clyde inspired notion of his hypothetical surrender, this extract further links Gilkey to Lee Harvey Oswald by way of the now iconic image of Oswald's murder. The fact that Gilkey operates solely in Texas makes it logical that the officers who would capture him would be likely to wear Stetsons. However, DeLillo's repeated links between these 'media poisoned' young men suggests that he is alluding to the iconic image of the condemned Oswald.

Nick's son Jeff is also influenced by the world of television and film, and like Beryl Parmenter (in *Libra*) and Klara Sax (in 1970's *Underworld*) he acts as a cultural reader, aware of the latest advances and transgressions of media and information. Through his immersion in the images given by technology, Jeff misrecognises his self in the field of the other. As his father notes: 'After the riots in Los Angeles my son started wearing baggy shorts and a cap turned backwards and sneakers with bloated tongues' (*UW* 102). Much like his father adopting the manner and parlance of the Italian gangster, Jeff Shay emulates the modern day hoodlum stereotype, marketed by rap musicians and lapped up by white boys from suburbia. Under the Lacanian formulation, these misrecognitions can be seen as the subject's ego ideal. As Lacan outlined in his 1949 paper, the initial misrecognition of oneself in the mirror, at a very young age, leads the subject to constantly seek out this ego ideal in the field of the other. In the postmodern moment the other is most likely to be observed on television:

[A]fter the riots he put on an L.A. Raiders hat and an ultralong T-shirt that had a pair of sunglasses slung from the pocket. Nothing else changed. He lived in his room, disappearing into chips and discs, the same shy boy but physically vivid now, a social being with a ghetto strut (*UW* 104-5).

The apparent contradiction in this extract, 'lived in his room' and 'social being,' emphasises the previous point. Jeff is presented as a boy who spends his time alone with his computer, and yet he has a fashionable image, a projected self. Once over, the teenage subject would have to move in the right circles and go to the hip hangouts to be deemed fashionable, or a 'social being.' However, as the media increasingly controls our view of the outside world, one now needs only an internet connection or a television to know what is going on.

DeLillo also uses the character of Jeff to posit the notion that the younger generation has a diminishing ability to know the difference between fiction and the real world:

[T]he gift he thought he possessed to take an aircraft out of the sky, the mastery of space and matter, a power and control that rose damnably from the curse of unbelonging....It was science-fiction stuff or horror-movie stuff except that Jeff was too frightened to test it in the world, even with his sister whispering in his ear to make the thing explode (*UW* 106-7).

This idea, that the younger generation are more in tune with the world of television and film, is best demonstrated by the young Eric Deming, in the hilarious parody of the late fifties world of technological advances and ridiculous brand names:

The boy could sit in the family room and watch their super console

TV....and he could anticipate the dialogue on every show. Newscasts, ball games, comedy hours. He did whatever voice the announcer or actor used, matching the words nearly seamlessly, and he never stuttered (*UW* 519).

This Cronenberg-esque episode is told from the point of view of Eric's horrified mother, and DeLillo here appears to be suggesting that the young prodigy is so immersed in the media sphere that he can pre-empt the parlance and cadence of genre. Indeed, Eric appears to be so immersed in the medium that his fear of his sordid fantasising over Jayne Mansfield will be judged after his death not by the Other of a Christian God, but by an audience of the footage of his life:

But what happens, he thought, if you die some day and it turns out that everything you've ever done in private becomes general knowledge in the hereafter. Everybody automatically knows everything you ever did when you thought you were totally and sneakily and safely unseen (*UW* 514).

...[T]hat wouldn't be fully established until both boys were dead and Eric had a chance to see the footage (*UW* 517).

Through this extract, dated October 8, 1957, DeLillo identifies that the younger generation embraces emerging technologies with more dynamism than their parents. This point is further evinced by Jeff Shay, who acts as *Underworld's* most internet savvy character, and in Part One of the text proper, we are told that he visits a site posting the Texas Highway Killer tape:

Jeff became absorbed in these images, devising routines and programs, using filtering techniques to remove background texture. He was looking for lost information. He enhanced and super slowed, trying to find some pixel in the data swarm that might provide a clue to the identity of the shooter (*UW* 118).

Here, it appears, Jeff has found his own *objet petit a*, and, much like Marvin's quest to verify the ball's lineage, he is driven by the lure of the unknowable.

This extract also serves to remind the critical reader of Benjamin's postulations on the possibilities that new modes of reproduction afford the viewer:

'Photographic reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as enlargement or slow motion, can capture images which escape our natural vision' (Benjamin 214).

It is through the character of Jeff that DeLillo introduces the supposed miracle of the text's epilogue, and much like Nick's shooting of George Manza, the reader learns of the murder before the scene is played out. The murder and rebirth of Esmeralda is presented under two sub-sections titled '*Keystroke 1*' and '*Keystroke 2*,' leading many critics to note that the mystery murderer is a cyber-killer, as the following passage suggests:

He's up there wandering, thinking his thoughts, a man who drifts in and out of the Wall, a sidler type, doesn't like to be looked at, and when you enter a name-search the screen reads *Searching* (UW 817).

The inclusion of the word 'searching' is key here. The unknown killer appears disconnected from the rest of existence, like a computer awaiting a dial-up connection to the World Wide Web. Despite the novel's insistence that 'everything is connected,' as the phrase World Wide Web suggests, DeLillo shows that this technology may give rise to dark corners of humanity that refuse any connection with the other, and indeed the Other. Jeff, again, is emblematic of the internet reader, and DeLillo notes his lack of connection with others in this medium:

Jeff is a lurker. He visits sites but does not post. He gathers the waves and rays. He adds components and functions and sits before a spreading mass of compatible hardware. The real miracle is the web, the net, where everybody is everywhere at once, and he is there among them, unseen (*UW* 808).

Jeff, like many internet users, is empowered by the invisibility that this medium provides him with. He takes but doesn't give, like some cyber-parasite. One hopes, however, that 'lurker' is simply an example of internet dialect, as the true definition of the word suggests an attack in the near future. And perhaps this is DeLillo's point, that the contemporary media poisoned killer seeks not to project their ideal ego into the image world of the screen, in some narcissistic scheme, but to project their act alone, and further, that this projection could be made via their own connection, from an untraceable location out of the other's reach.

The cyber-killer's lack of connection with the other is demonstrated by the narrator's comment that the '[l]ast woman he looked at was his *mother*' (*UW* 818, emphasis added). Unlike the previous murders, however, Esmeralda's killing is not broadcast. Indeed, the Bronx, or more specifically the Wall, appears not to have changed in the forty-two years that separate the last chapter and the epilogue. This fact is underlined by the introduction of the first ever TV set, 'a brave beat-up model...dug out of the garbage pits, where it was layered in the geological age of leisure appliances' (*UW* 812). The narrative stresses this link to the 1950's by noting that the appliance was powered by a 'World War II generator' (*UW* 812). This anachronism, and the insular nature of the South Bronx, is further played out, as news of the miracle spreads:

Then the stories begin, word passing block to block, moving through the churches and superettes, maybe garbled slightly, mistranslated here and there, but not deeply distorted (*UW* 818).

And so Sister Edgar ventures to the site of the ‘miracle’, despite Gracie’s protestations, and the image appears:

...[T]he train lights hit the dimmest part of the billboard a face appears above the misty lake and it belongs to the murdered girl. A dozen women clutch their heads, they whoop and sob, a spirit, a godsbreath passing through the crowd (*UW* 821).

As Kavadlo notes ‘the images of the Texas Highway Killer video and the Esmiralda [sic] miracle website appear complementary’ (Kavadlo 111). This balance can also be extended to the other violent spectacles in this study, not least to *Underworld*’s staging of the Zapruder film which is met with similar ‘blurts of disbelief’ (*UW* 488). Moreover, whilst Kavadlo is right to note that the ‘miracle’ acts as an inversion of the violent spectacle, for the purposes of this study it is germane to note that all these examples function as an occurrence of the Lacanian Real. McGowan’s Lacanian reading of the text suggests the characters take one of two positions on the event: blind faith, in an ‘Other of the Other’ (McGowan 140); or cynicism. He goes on to note that while both of these positions ‘grant an unsurpassable hegemony to global capitalism’ (McGowan 140), the possibility for the *objet petit a*, and therefore desire, ‘still endures’ (McGowan 140).

One of the most interesting critical approaches to the ‘miracle’ in *Underworld*, however, is that of Duvall, who is alone in noticing that:

...[T]he novel strongly implies that Ismael is responsible for the

image...That the image depends on the headlights of a subway train points to the fact that Ismael's first art was marking subway cars. When Sister Edgar arrives to witness the miracle, she notices Ismael and his crew in attendance (*Reader's Guide* 61-2).

If this hypothesis is correct, then DeLillo is no doubt suggesting that the contemporary killer has returned to his (for it is always a he) rightful place in the shadows. In balance with this, the projection of an ideal ego, which is the fundamental rule of wildstyle graffiti with its pseudonyms and area codes, has taken an artistic form, which offers redemption in the increasingly controlling sphere of late capitalist society.

The text refuses confirmation of whether the image seen is Ismael's work, a genuine miracle, or, in the words of Sister Gracie a 'technical flaw that causes the image underneath...to show through' (*UW* 822). This, however, is beside the point. DeLillo's real aim here is the creation of an event, which would balance this painstakingly structured text. As DeLillo notes, *Underworld* may be considered, for style more than content, as 'the last modernist gasp' <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,96812,00.html>>.

Bearing this in mind, the text can be seen to hinge around the 'core' of *Unterwelt*, which is an apt example of mechanical reproduction. In the original essay, Benjamin saw the dissipation of aura as a positive step noting that 'mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art' (Benjamin 218). This position, however, is far from solid, and Benjamin noted that the media, by way of mechanical reproduction, could create a specious aura, which could be used as a tool for propaganda.

DeLillo, who has admitted a knowledge of the essay, appears at odds with Benjamin, and the retention of aura in *Underworld* is undoubtedly a positive

aspect of culture. As with the game of the prologue, Esmeralda's appearance goes largely unmediated, the TV crews are present but the image is never captured. This creation of an aura, like the World Series final, draws people outside, eager to see the unknown. That the scene has religious undertones is crucial. The event marks a further transgression, not a new and more shocking violent act, that draws people's desire, but an image, a fleeting glimpse, of redemption. Like the Thompson homer, masking the Soviet threat, the angel Esmeralda replaces the violent news article with one of faith in humanity, and the advertisement with the words 'Space available.' (*UW* 824).

Conclusion

From Belmondo to Bell and Beyond.

This thesis has argued that the novelistic works of Don DeLillo repeatedly investigate the power of the image, and the variety of ways that the conscious, and subconscious, mind absorbs the profusion of information projected at the contemporary subject. Chapter one examined DeLillo's presentation of Lee Harvey Oswald, examining the text in light of the author's statement, that Oswald was 'an actor in real life...[and that DeLillo] tried to insert this element into *Libra*' (Lentricchia 51). The application of Lacan's early theories on the formation of the self, by way of Slavoj Žižek's more recent musings and Christian Metz's psychoanalytic film theory, brings a new method of critical examination to read the actions of a man which history has predominantly labeled simply as either a lone nut or a patsy. This is not to suggest that the real Oswald can irrefutably be aligned with characters such as John Hinckley, who was mentioned in the introductory section, or DeLillo has an awareness of Lacanian theory. Moreover, that, much like DeLillo's staging of the events surrounding the Kennedy assassination, this thesis provides 'a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities' (*Libra* author's note). Indeed, one must be careful to not investigate these characters too closely, as the wealth of conflicting narratives on men like Oswald, Bremer, and Hinckley, and later Timothy McVeigh increase with every year, and exponentially so since the internet's inception. Therefore, the fundamental proposition of this thesis is that Lacan's theory of the mirror, whilst not empirically verifiable, provides an analogy which may

shed light on the nuances of subjectivity in the contemporary, image bloated, western world.

Whilst chapter one focused closely upon *Libra*, and the events during which DeLillo believes ‘the power of television was utilized to its fullest, perhaps for the first time’ (Lentricchia 48), chapter two panned back to survey the broader rise of the moving image as a feature of everyday existence, through DeLillo’s *Underworld*. This chapter examined the text in light of the issues raised by chapter one, and explored, by way of Lacanian theory, the rise of the image through the latter half of the twentieth century, and its relationship with what Lacan dubbed the Imaginary. This chapter also drew upon Benjamin’s concept of aura, and suggested that DeLillo’s views on this often slippery concept were in direct opposition to Benjamin’s view that the dissipation of aura was a positive step for humanity.

In a meta-fictional twist, the author himself appears ‘media poisoned’ as the following, often cited, statement reveals: ‘...[T]he movies of Jean-Luc Godard had a more immediate effect on my early work than anything I’d ever read’ (LeClair & McCafferey 25). Whilst it is arguable that Godard’s work falls outside the strict definition of mass media, this thesis’ specific focus upon the moving image necessitates that any image be deemed relevant. Moreover, the early short stories, and first major work, of DeLillo can be seen to draw heavily on Godard’s images, and themes, and it is arguable that DeLillo’s highly visual writing style owes much to this borrowing. Somewhat resonantly, Godard’s films are frequently cited as literary in style, as Kevin Hayes notes: ‘Godard emphasized the association between auteur and novelist that was so important to the *nouvelle vague*’ (Hayes 187). This factor can be partially attributed to his

origins as a critic for 'Cahiers du Cinema,' and in part to the fact that Godard envisaged his work as occupying a liminal zone between the two, or even three, genres calling himself, 'an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them' (Narboni 171). A consideration of DeLillo's borrowing from Godard will reinforce, and help conclude, how a Lacanian reading of DeLillo underscores the link between the conscious and unconscious mind in environment of the image.

In his essay 'Children of Godard and Coca-Cola,' Mark Osteen identifies numerous scenes from Godard's work that have permeated DeLillo's literary constructions. The most telling of these, as regards this study, is a scene from Godard's *Breathless*: in which Jean-Paul Belmondo's Michel, who is constantly observing himself in the mirror, gazes at a movie poster of Humphrey Bogart. This self-consciously drawn-out scene is one of the few in which Godard adheres to the cinematic conventions with the inclusion of the shot/reverse-shot, giving the impression of Bogart's image looking back at the young protagonist. The power of this image appears to dominate Michel's concept of self, and we repeatedly see the character rubbing his thumb over his lips as he seeks to emulate Bogart's *film noir* tough-guy persona, much like DeLillo's Oswald repeating John Wayne's dialogue. As noted in the previous chapters, these cinematic misrecognitions can be viewed as an extension of Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, with modern subjects misrecognizing themselves in the projections of visual media. The emulation of Bogart is most notable at the film's close, as the treacherous Patricia looks directly at the camera, as though gazing at the viewer, and imitates Michel, imitating Bogart.

The idea of an 'image haunted' protagonist appears to be not only a defining feature of Belmondo's character, but one of few solid ideas in Godard's rough conception of his first feature length presentation. Director Roger Vadim claims that Godard cornered him on a film set, shortly before production began on *Breathless*, and exclaimed, 'I'm a genius,' before thrusting a match book in his face, which would serve as the film's genesis. Vadim writes:

I could make out few words: 'He's a hooligan. Obsessed by heroes of American films. She has an accent. She sells the *New York Herald Tribune*. It's not really love, it's the Illusion of love. It ends badly. Well, no. Finally it ends well. Or it ends badly' (Vadim 140).

DeLillo initially appropriated Belmondo's misrecognition in the short story 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.,' with the nameless protagonist standing 'in front of a movie theater looking at a poster of Jean Paul Belmondo' ('Coming' 393). That 'the boy' looks at Belmondo, rather than the iconic Bogart, appears to be suggestion that this misrecognition marks another level of identification, and a further regression from the idea of autonomous self-hood: a copy of a copy, to paraphrase Baudrillard. This idea is supported by the story's refusal to name the main characters, and the multitude of possible locales, as though the characters are unsure of both who and where they are: 'the boy and girl go to a store in San Francisco or Toronto or Liverpool' ('Coming' 392). The story ends with the couple visiting the funfair and viewing themselves in the distorted aspect of the hall of mirrors, which can be taken as a simplistic definition of the term misrecognition, as it 'marks a gap between the subject and its own self' (Sarup 111).

DeLillo returns to this scene again in *Americana*, and draws attention to the chain of apperception, by adding another layer of misrecognition, as the protagonist, David Bell, looks 'at the poster of Belmondo looking at the poster of a purposeful Bogart' (*Americana* 287). Commenting on the original short story, Osteen notes that:

Like Bell, the boy...is an image...able to see himself only when reflected from a screen or piece of glass. At the end of the story the couple look at themselves in distorted funhouse mirrors, illustrating the infinite regress of images that has shaped – or misshaped – their identities (Osteen 10).

As noted above, DeLillo's novelistic work is, arguably, indebted to Godard's early 'texts.' One may go further, and suggest that, like David Bell, the author has been 'shaped' by an 'infinite regress of images.' Bell's project in *Americana* is the production of a short autobiographical Godardian film, leading critics to note that the novel functions as a *Kunstlerroman*. However, DeLillo's apparent debt to Godard, and the parallels between Bell's existence and his own, leads one to suggest that *Americana* could well be dubbed a *Meta-kunstlerroman*. Indeed, by DeLillo's own admission, *Americana* is closest to his own experience, with the author noting that 'I drew material more directly from material I knew firsthand' (LeClair & McCaffery 80). Whilst autobiographical readings are to be discouraged, not least by DeLillo who states, 'It's not an autobiographical novel' (LeClair & McCaffery 80), there exist a number of parallels between David Bell and Don DeLillo, in that they both left the field of advertising to pursue an artistic venture indebted to Jean-Luc Godard.

Whilst DeLillo's Godardian borrowings in 'Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.,' and later *Americana*, are brief, his reworking of *Weekend*, in 'The Uniforms,' borrows the film's plot almost wholesale. The most notable deviation, from the original text, is the complete absence of the motor car. *Weekend* is arguably most famous for its nearly ten-minute tracking shot of a chaotic traffic jam, which lasts for almost a full reel of film. Other than the meticulous tracking shot, *Weekend* is also notable as it marks the arrival of Godard the polemicist, and a period in which the *auteur* became less interested in pleasing the audience, preferring to adhere to his own agenda. Moreover, this shift from visual to rhetorical arguably occurs within the film, and arguably directly after the famed tracking shot, as Wheeler Winston Dixon notes:

Coming as it does in the first thirty minutes of the film, this magnificently choreographed sequence dominates our expectations for the rest of the film, but Godard willfully undercuts our implicit spectatorial wish for a series of arresting and apocalyptic tableaux. Most of *Le Week-end* is comprised of a series of functional almost drab visuals backed up with intensely complicated dialogue tracks, and the traffic jam sequence is the most memorable imagistic construct in the entire film. The rest is political theatre (Dixon 92).

With the cars, and the bourgeois couple, absent from 'The Uniforms,' all that really remains are the revolutionaries. In Godard's original, these characters reject the notion of capitalism, and yet appear heavily influenced by pop-culture, which of course is inseparable from consumerism. They dress in a style reminiscent of the Beatles of the era and carry out their cannibalistic acts to an incessant four-four rock beat. DeLillo explores this apparent incongruity further in 'The Uniforms,' where the revolutionaries appear more concerned with their appearance than their politics:

The revolutionary uniform must be tight and spare. Touches of color, individuality and personal fantasy are to be encouraged. We have thrown off the shackles of black-and-white revisionism. We will shoot in color because color is the color of childhood fantasy ('Uniforms' 7).

Whereas Godard views the bourgeois as terrorists, DeLillo draws attention to Godard's apparent blind-spot by inverting the equation to portray the over-stylized revolutionaries as consumers of images. This consumption of images also pervades the revolutionary's knowledge of self, as one thinks of his 'soft focus childhood' ('Uniforms' 6) and another is named 'Breathless' ('Uniforms' 4). This 'media poisoned' cognition also extends to the supposed political activists' knowledge of history, as they know about the American Revolution and Civil War only from 'the films of John Ford and John Huston' ('Uniforms' 70).

Towards 'The Uniforms' close, the revolutionaries massacre a group of 'middle-class white Protestant [golfers]' ('Uniforms' 9). DeLillo replays this scene in the opening chapter of *Players*, as the book's characters watch the macabre scene as an in-flight movie. Indeed, the themes and concerns of DeLillo's early fiction, for which he is indebted to Godard, resonate throughout his oeuvre. This influence can even be felt in DeLillo's most recent novelistic work, *Cosmopolis* (2003). Godard's *Weekend*, is often cited as prescient as it 'deal[t] with the events of May [19]68 before they happened' (Temple 76). Like *Weekend*, DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* can also be considered prescient, as it deals with an attack on American capitalism in the heart of Manhattan, prior to the epoch-defining events of 9/11. Whilst 'The Uniforms' lacked Godard's wrecked motor cars as a metaphor for rampant consumption, *Cosmopolis* can be

considered almost one continuous episode of gridlock, reinserting the previously lost traffic jam into DeLillo's work. Furthermore, the anti-globalization protestors, who attack the stock exchange, show similarities to the revolutionaries portrayed in 'The Uniforms,' by way of their depthless application of political ideology. This factor is evinced by the performative nature of their protest, but also in their misappropriation of a line from *The Communist Manifesto*, on the stock market ticker, whereby 'the specter of Communism' (Marx 218), becomes 'THE SPECTER OF CAPITALISM' (*Cosmopolis* 96). Somewhat ironically, it is Eric Packer, the novel's misanthropic rogue capitalist protagonist, who spots the mistake, and yet the act rather than the message impresses him: 'They were confused and wrongheaded. But his respect for the protestors' ingenuity grew more certain' (*Cosmopolis* 96).

Packer's lust for the accumulation of capital above all else can be said to mirror that of the bourgeois couple in *Weekend*. However, rather than sadistically killing a family member, as in *Weekend*, Packer's transgression is more masochistic, ignoring the advice of analysts and models of markets, and borrowing huge sums which ultimately ruin him. Once ruined, Packer's descent briefly takes a more sadistic turn, as he empties his wife's bank account to fund his increasingly desperate gamble. That his wife is emblematic of old-money, returns us to *Weekend*'s portrayal of a bourgeois economic strength, and by extension covetousness. Furthermore, Packer's avarice shows a complete lack of empathy, for a single other or for the world as a whole, whether he is shooting his chief of security, or threatening the global economy with 'storms of disorder' (*Cosmopolis* 116).

Cosmopolis is certainly one of DeLillo's most cinematic novels, and its structure can be compared with Godard's *Weekend*, as Packer's slow picaresque journey is interspersed with set pieces that, in the words of Jerry Varsava, 'inspire philosophical reflections and dialogues on history, futurity, technology, global capitalism, and...death' (Varsava 84). Furthermore, the novel's vivid description, like much of DeLillo's work, creates an unambiguous, almost cinematic, picture in the reader's mind. Indeed, by the time Eric leaves his limousine, the reader undoubtedly has a clear picture of this vehicle, about which his chief of finance Jane Melman comments, 'All these limos, my god, you can't tell one from another' (*Cosmopolis* 39). The limousine acts, for Packer, as an extension of all of his senses, with banks of screens, a heart monitor, spycam, night vision, and visual display units. Moreover, this vehicle serves, in the text, as a framing device, not just through the wealth of technology, but also through the comparatively archaic features, such as the window, and the sunroof. By way of these high, and low, tech features, DeLillo portrays Packer's life not just as mediated but constantly framed. Like the Texas Highway Killer footage, or Oswald viewing John Wayne through a pane of glass, Packer's vision is, almost, constantly captured in two dimensions. And yet when he does engage in unmediated human interaction with the other, DeLillo's staging of the episode often has a cinematic quality. This feature of DeLillo's writing is perhaps best exemplified by the episode between Packer and Melman, which reads like a literary version of the cinematic shot/reverse shot technique, with an almost constant, free, direct discourse from the scene's start interspersed with interior monologues describing Packer's visual perspective:

'Take some water. Sit on the banquette.'

‘I like face-to-face. And I don’t need to look at all those screens,’ she said. ‘I know what’s happening’ (*Cosmopolis* 40).

The multitude of screens at Packer’s disposal in his limousine mediate his view of the world, not just outside, but globally. This omniscient view marks a further progression from DeLillo’s portrayal of the all seeing, and seen, world of TV in *Underworld*’s chronologically later chapters, typified by the chance capture of a homicide which would be played ‘until everyone on the planet had seen it’ (*UW* 232). Indeed, the passage where Packer watches one of his peers shot live on the money channel has parallels with the omnipresence of the Texas Highway Killer tape:

Eric wanted them to show it again. *Show it again*. They did this of course, and he knew they would do it repeatedly into the night, our night, until the sensation drained out of it or everyone in the world had seen it, whichever came first (*Cosmopolis* 34).

Whilst Packer’s wish to see this *objet petit a* duplicates the typical response to such phenomena in *Underworld*, the younger generation in DeLillo’s post-millennial sphere appear to have become indifferent to such spectacles, a point evinced by Packer’s technology expert Michael Chin:

Eric watched him now, wondering whether the young man’s restraint was a form of moral rigor or an apathy so deep it was not pierced by the muses, even of sex and death (*Cosmopolis* 34).

Following DeLillo’s apparent postulation that the aura could possibly return to contemporary events, by way of a partial absence or lack in the visual field, as explored in chapter two, it appears that in *Cosmopolis*, which was completed shortly after 9/11, the author has returned to a bleak view of

contemporary life, and an environment in which the media drains all meaning from an event in a matter of hours. Furthermore, it is evident that in the post-millennial moment, a simple killing on live TV is now passé as increasingly shocking spectacles compete for our attention.

Unlike Chin, Packer is enthralled by the violent spectacle, the explosion of the Real, not least as the victim is a contemporary and a rival, but also because he is a consumer of all things; a veritable omnivore. He eats a number of meals in the text, always meat, and always voraciously, be it sausage, raw fish, or liver: 'He ate quickly, inhaling his food. Then he ate her food' (*Cosmopolis* 18). Moreover, Packer consumes in every area of his life whether bidding for Rothko originals or buying a Soviet strategic bomber. Furthermore, his acts of consumption appear to be driven, at least in part, by contempt for his fellow man, as with the tale of his 'requisitioning' the second of two elevators in his building. However, Packer appears more disillusioned as the novel wears on, and in a series of increasingly erratic steps he financially ruins himself, and shoots his bodyguard before descending into Hell's Kitchen and the Bronx of his youth.

Packer's descent into Hell's Kitchen is analogous to the actions of a number of DeLillo's other protagonists, specifically Bucky Wunderlick's withdrawal from the media glare and Nick Shay's yearning for a return to his old self and 'the days when I was alive on earth, rippling in the quick of my skin, heedless and real' (*UW* 810). For DeLillo, it seems, the Bronx is a site for the real and a place to find the antidote for media poisoning. This notion is underscored by Packer's return to his father's barber to get the haircut he has sought since the text's first chapter. The term 'haircut,' in financial circles, is a

byword for a massive loss, and it appears that Packer, who has amassed every object he ever desired, has found that these objects do little to distract from the lack in the very core of the self. To fill this gap Packer must return to his beginnings, and the enduring barbershop:

...[T]he man used the same words nearly every time, with topical variations. This is what he wanted from Anthony. The same words. The oil company calendar on the wall. *The mirror that needed silvering*. (*Cosmopolis* 161, emphasis added).

The inclusion of the last sentence invites a Lacanian reading, and can be seen as a metaphor for Packer's need to get in touch with his old self, as though he was the mirror that needed restoring to a previous state. DeLillo has previously mentioned a re-silvered mirror, in Nick's mother's room, and its occurrence, in *Underworld's* Phoenix, is paired with his Mrs. Shay's nostalgia for the Bronx, which takes place wholly in the Imaginary, as she watches *The Honeymooners*. During the course of the haircut Packer falls asleep, and upon waking he leaves quickly, reluctantly taking the gun as though he is aware of what must come next.

Death brings *Cosmopolis* to a close, like much of DeLillo's (and Godard's) fiction. Moreover, *Cosmopolis* contains numerous links to Godard's *Weekend*, not least the traffic jam or the insurmountable opposition between a libertarian ideology and the accumulation of wealth, but also Packer's wish to burn the car and Anthony the barber's statement that 'they' would '[t]ear out your entrails' (*Cosmopolis* 167). This is not to say that DeLillo's novel consciously evokes *Weekend*, but the thematic concerns, scene arrangements, and structure certainly show a number of parallels between the two authors. That these parallels still reverberate in DeLillo's most recent work, after the numerous borrowings in his

early fiction, is noteworthy, and surely an opportunity for a further and closer study of this element of his oeuvre. Moreover, any thesis dealing with DeLillo's body of work is certain to ask more questions than it answers, as his work is so tightly structured and filled with allusions one might dub his style as meta-critical. However, by looking to Godard and the influence over DeLillo's body of work, one can gain a further understanding of the author's enduring thematic and stylistic concerns.

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