

## EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED IN THE SIMULACRUM: DON DeLILLO'S DIALOGUE WITH THE IMAGES OF CONSUMER MEDIA

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### **ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION**

This essay will look at certain works by Don DeLillo and examine how he employs various philosophers and social theorists to construct fictional realities that reflect the cryptic and perplexing conditions of the individual in modern America. Drawing primarily from the influential works of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord, I will explore DeLillo's portrayal of the "spectacle" in the systems novel, which serves as the foundation for his portrayal of simulacra *through* simulacra, offering both an illustration of and a comment on American culture. I intend to show how DeLillo's fiction (*White Noise*, *Libra*, *Underworld*, and *Cosmopolis*) depicts the harrowing "society of the spectacle" and the detrimental effects that postmodern simulacra have on human life. However, DeLillo's fiction is duplicitous, and at times the author embraces the simulation and adopts a kind of "new sincerity" toward simulacra: accepting its dominance and exploring what it reveals about our culture and ourselves.

### **SPECTACLE AND SIMULATION: FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES FOR DeLILLO'S FICTION**

In 1967, Guy Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*, which analyzes contemporary consumer culture through a Marxist lens, and like many Marxist theorists, he theorizes that with the rise of commodity fetishism "in societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (1). Debord's theory only garners more verity with the increase of technological development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, specifically social media, in which "images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream" (2). Debord sees the development of the spectacle as a degradation of concrete human life since it necessitates the negation of lived experience in favor of contrived and abstract images whose meaning is constituted by the commodities of a consumer economy.

For Debord, "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images," in which representations replace reality (4). The spectacle, then, becomes autonomous: those who are immersed in the society of the spectacle incessantly contemplate the images that construct their social reality, and any attempt at analyzing the spectacle can only be done in the spectacular terms generated by society. Therefore, analytical language of the spectacle is insufficient since the spectacle perpetuates itself in society's expressions of it, "it is the historical movement in which we are caught" (11). In chapter three of *White Noise*, Murray states, "No one sees the barn...Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn...we're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one" (DeLillo WN 10). DeLillo's character Murray recognizes his inescapable immersion in the spectacle and the power that images have in the development of collective social consciousness: a very real barn is turned into a tourist attraction by the notion that it is "the most photographed barn in America." This label is completely detached from any concrete realities regarding the barn, yet it imposes itself on the perceptions of the barn, creating what Murray calls an "aura," "the barn has been subsumed into the process of image replication" (Wilcox 199). Once Jack and Murray *see* the signs and *see* people taking pictures, they enter into the reality of the spectacle that affects how they *see* the barn itself. Its inescapability is attributed to what Debord would call "lived reality materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle" (Debord 8). In the case of a locale for tourism, the significance of the site is entirely dependent on the images associated with it, "they are taking pictures of taking pictures," they are preserving the spectacle (DeLillo WN 13).

Jean Baudrillard was profoundly influenced by Debord's school of thought, and his 1981 treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* expounds upon the notions that reality has been replaced by the signs and symbols of society, and ultimately concludes that the "simulation" has replaced reality. For Baudrillard, "simulacra" refers to copies without originals, to appearances that dictate a mode of being without actually participating in the act of *being*, "signs become more real than reality and stand in for the world they erase" (Wilcox 196). For Baudrillard, the simulation constructs reality: the signs that precede the barn affect how Murray and Jack see the barn itself. The physical barn, separated from the simulacra of its esteem, becomes what Baudrillard would call "hyperreal".

Guy Debord's assertion, that those immersed in the spectacle can only think and communicate in spectacular terms and images (in Debord's sense of the word), is echoed in Baudrillard's claim that "the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of referentials", where the signs and symbols that society uses to interpret reality lose their connections to reality itself (2). In *White Noise*, simulation's encroachment on reality is exemplified in the scene where Jack encounters SIMUVAC during the airborne toxic event. The real life evacuation is ironically used as a practice model for the construction of a *simulated* evacuation, as if the simulacrum of the catastrophe is truly superior and preferred to the real one, the real is substituted for the fake. The worker tells Jack:

We don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation... We didn't get a jump on computer traffic. Suddenly it just spilled out, three-dimensionally, all over the landscape. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There's a lot of polishing we still have to do. But that's what this exercise is all about. (DeLillo WN 139)

SIMUVAC appropriates a real life situation, and the simulation is preferred to what has become hyperreal, just as televised images are preferred to whatever real life disaster they depict. The "real" is "no longer anything but operational" and the simulation is seen as a better and more perfected reality (Baudrillard 2).

Baudrillard's influence on DeLillo frequently appears in his construction of characters who are detached from the hyperreal. In *White Noise*, the school chancellor advises Jack Gladney "to do something about [his] name or appearance if [he] wanted to be taken seriously as a Hitler innovator" (DeLillo WN 16). In an attempt to further his academic career, Jack constructs an identity out of pure simulacra: black-rimmed glasses, an avant-garde course on Adolf Hitler (although he cannot even speak German), and the invented initials J.A.K. Jack's intellectual value is of no use, only his *appearance* dictates his success in academia, and he says, "I am the false character that follows the name around" (17). Jack's subjectivity is assembled by simulacra. The fake has been institutionalized, absorbed and accepted as real without bearing any resemblance to material reality, the simulacrum precedes the real, and the real becomes hyperreal. Therefore, originality disintegrates, historicity loses its validity, and every act or production is a mere copy of a copy, like the burning man in *Cosmopolis*, whom Vija Kinski likens to the Vietnamese monk who burned himself in the 1960s (DeLillo C 100).

In the late twentieth century, individuals define themselves based on the complex system of images with which they are constantly bombarded, the white noise of consumer media. DeLillo's characters and novels themselves are only understood in their relation to other pop images in media culture; identity is formulated from the constantly consumable fragments of media images. This notion is developed in the scene where Jack takes his family on a shopping spree, he says, "I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had not intention of buying, then buying it... I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed" (DeLillo WN 84). Jack fully submits to the society of the spectacle, affirming his existence and constructing his identity from the commodities he purchases, and since each purchase arises from conditions where "being" becomes simply "having", "these sums in fact came back to [him] in the form of existential credit" (WN 84). In postmodernity, Jack's subjective identity and the simulacra of consumerism are mutually diffused, and Jack's personal revelations come with his participation in the inescapable simulation.

Instead of purchasing goods to fulfill a realistic human need, Americans are persuaded to buy things based on a *simulated need* generated by images of commercialism. The transaction yields an existential and emotional fulfillment for the consumer rather than a physical utility to fulfill a function. Moreover, commodities are no longer evaluated based on use-value, but exchange-value, "Once money became a 'universal equivalent,' against which everything in our lives is measured, things lost their material reality... We began even to think of our own lives in terms of money rather than in terms of the real things" (Felluga). Taken in conjunction with Guy Debord, the images associated with commodities replace the practical need for the commodity itself (Debord 17). In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo's parable on cyber-capital, Vija Kinski tells Eric, "you paid the money for the number itself. One hundred and four million. This is what you bought. And it's worth it. The number justifies itself" (DeLillo C 78). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy of nonphysical money, the simulacrum of wealth is the price tag, not the object itself. When Jack Gladney goes to the ATM in *White Noise*, he experiences a kind of religious zeal. Jack finds his individuality established and indebted to "the networks, the circuits, the steams, the harmonies," to the digital number that appears on the screen; his self-worth is determined by his economic status, what Felluga would call his exchange-value, which is made "real" by the appearance of a number on a screen that bears no resemblance to any concrete, livable experience (WN 46). His existence is affirmed through the psychological associations of simulacra that he and the rest of society share, which are inextricable from the conditions of a consumer economy.

### TELEVISION PROVIDES THE PAINT AND THE NAME

Throughout *White Noise*, truth and facticity are found only in the media; news reports on the television and radio are the communal agreement on events and happenings and if something is not reported on, it may as well not have happened. Heinrich's irritating debate on whether or not it is really raining illustrates the ways in which an individual's understanding of reality, in this case nature, is dictated by the radio, not by their own subjective experience. Similarly, DeLillo's *Underworld* expresses the aforementioned, Baudrillardian themes, in occurrences akin to the riot that Marian hears first on the radio, only to manifest itself on the streets, "the riot out there... was being augmented and improved by a simulated riot on the radio" (DeLillo U 599). The simulacrum of radio becomes real, and the "riot" is the hyperreal result of the police's reactions to radio waves. Its listeners are "unaware of its mediating effect – even when the commentary was entirely simulated" (Knight 34). DeLillo takes popular images to be important for shaping the ways in which we perceive and contemplate reality.

Stacey Olster writes, "the characters in *White Noise* are quite willing to place themselves under the control of others," and she goes on to quote Babette, "people need to be reassured by someone in a position of authority that a certain way to do something is the right way or the wrong way" (Olster 86; DeLillo WN 171-2). In the postmodern, technological age where previously established verities are doubted, "in a world which *really is topsy-turvy*, the true is a moment of the false," and "my truth means nothing," the only thing qualified to dispense information is television (and radio), which assumes the simulacra of an all-knowing authority (Debord 9; DeLillo WN 23). Heinrich relies on the radio's weather report to inform his own interpretation of reality, the simulation constructs the real, just as the characters only experience déjà vu after hearing about the symptom on the radio. Déjà vu itself is the perfect metaphor for postmodern life, the symptom of the spectacle: the ever-present feeling of having already experienced a situation is the direct result of a social world that is completely composed of unoriginal copies and representations.

The narration of *White Noise* is rife with snippets of advertising slogans and arbitrary phrases heard on TV, the "white noise" of the simulation permeates the postmodern lives of those immersed in the simulacrum. In "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of the Heroic Narrative," Leonard Wilcox asserts that Jack "succumbs to the Baudrillardian condition, floating 'ecstatically' in a delirium of networks, hyperreal surfaces, and fetishized consumer objects" (Wilcox 197). Wilcox argues that modern subjectivity is lost in the dissolution of reality in the mediascape and vice versa, signifiers detach from their referentials, "a media-saturated consciousness threatens the concept of meaning itself" (197). In this context, Murray acts as a semiotic mediator between Gladney and postmodernity, representing a kind of "New sincerity." In the postmodern world void of subjectivity, meaning is "brought to you in part by" television, simulacra, and the crowd mentality that has hitherto been denounced. Murray implores his

students to search for truth and meaning in simulacra, find the ethos hidden beneath television's elaborate distractions:

I tell them they have to learn to look as children again. Root out content. Find the codes and messages...It's like a myth being born right there in our living room...You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself up to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data...the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. '*Coke is it, Coke is it, Coke is it.*' The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently. (DeLillo WN 51).

Murray likens watching television to a religious experience, as if the vast array of pop images can offer veracity rather than empty simulacra, similar to Debord, "the spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion" (Debord 20). Murray enthusiastically embraces the bombardment of manipulated information in the same way that the media draws the framework for epistemological truths, simply because he realizes that rebelling against the aura is implausible.

In his 1993 essay, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," author David Foster Wallace argues for the importance of including pop culture in works of literary fiction, "what binds us became what we stood witness to...pop-cultural references have become such potent metaphors in U.S. fiction...because (1) we all recognize such a reference, and (2) we're all a little uneasy about how we all recognize such a reference" (Wallace 166). Wallace draws upon the same themes from Debord and Baudrillard that pertain to the *crowd's* construction of meaning through signs and symbols detached from reality, and expounds upon it through his assertion that pop-culture can serve as an efficient medium for conveying meaning. If Debord's notion that spectacle societies only think and communicate in spectacular terms is true, if the aura of the "most photographed barn" is truly inescapable and if, as Baudrillard argues, the simulacrum has replaced reality, then pop-images become valid referentials to be manipulated by artists. Ironic detachment from television offers no rewards, and Wallace concludes his essay with a prophetic declaration:

The next real literary "rebels" in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of "anti-rebels," born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values...These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Too sincere. Clearly repressed...Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk things. Risk disapproval...The new rebels might be the ones willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the "How banal." Accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Credulity. (Wallace 193).

David Foster Wallace's essay outlines the movement that has come to be known as "New Sincerity", which is clearly exemplified by the character of Murray, whose class on cinematic car crashes encourages students to "look past the violence" and appreciate the technological innovations that went into creating this particular simulacrum (DeLillo WN 219).

Although Murray seems comfortable with his postmodern condition, Jack remains bewildered by the cultural transition, reluctant to embrace the waves and radiation as easily as Murray. Peter Knight, referencing Frederic Jameson, suggests, "the traditional Romantic sublime...is now replaced by the technological sublime," and the author is not awe-struck by the incomprehensible splendor of nature but by the incomprehensible systems of digital networks that comprise the infrastructure of contemporary American society (Knight 38). In *White Noise*, the moments in which Jack experiences the same inclinations toward new sincerity as Murray occur when he is bewildered by technology to the point of reverence, moments of the postmodern, technological sublime. An awestruck Jack is seen again in the corresponding scene of a disorganized supermarket. The supermarket, the hub of the white American middle-class that once provided a "sense of replenishment" and "a fullness of being," is thrown into disarray (DeLillo WN 20). The disorganized store disorients its patrons, whose confusion can only be quelled by the "holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly" (WN 326). Technology takes on an all-knowing, authoritative position that society has come to depend on. In an

ironic twist, the technology that has dissolved our sense of self is the same technological that elucidates our identities for us. The statement in the epilogue of *Underworld*, "Nothing you can believe is not coming true," expresses the idea that the simulacrum replaces the real simply through the validation of its otherwise passive viewers (DeLillo *U* 802).

### TECHNOLOGICAL TRUTHS, DEATH, AND HEIDEGGER

Baudrillard writes, "it is TV that is true, it is TV that renders true" (Baudrillard 29). The images that contemporary news media broadcasts are typically those of violence, where Jack says, "Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping," where the images of death and destruction are appropriated, manipulated, and replayed by the media, absorbed by the simulation and thus removed from hyperreality. The character of Alfonse says, "Only a catastrophe gets our attention. We want them, we need them, we depend on them, as long as they happen somewhere else (*WN* 66). The repeated images depicting the death of others further separate viewers from the reality of death itself, for which no signs or symbols exist.

Death's absorption into the spectacle represents the loss of the most authentic experience to the simulacrum. DeLillo writes, "We consume social threats and problems as if they were breakfast food," which desensitizes us to the enormity of such an event (DeLillo "Blood" 5). Throughout his novels, DeLillo remarks on the incommunicability of death, since the formulation of a communicable signifier would require the direct experience. However, as stated above, in the Baudrillardian world of simulation, signs and symbols are part of an infinitely regressing chain of copies detached from any hyperreal referentials. Indeed, if death is removed from the hyperreal, so is the possibility for an individual to evaluate his or her own life from the perspective of finitude, a concept essential to Martin Heidegger's concept of authenticity.

In his seminal work on phenomenology, *Being and Time*, Heidegger sees *Dasein* (roughly translatable as being-there) as the only being that can inquire into its own existence and its relation to other beings, and asserts that the answers to *Dasein's* inquiries lay in its achievement of *authenticity*, its fully realized life in accordance with understanding of its existence. Approaching authenticity causes anxiety, a subversion of the norm, and we find it easier to conform to the crowd, to everydayness, since our mode of life is what we have been "thrown" into. DeLillo has Jack express this very thought:

"We have these deep terrible lingering fears about ourselves and the people we love. Yet we walk around, talk to people, eat and drink. We manage to function. The feelings are deep and real. Shouldn't they paralyze us...is it something we all hide from each other, by mutual consent?" (DeLillo 198).

Heidegger recognizes death as the most authentic and personal part of one's life, since only in the face of death is *Dasein* separated from the crowd and forced to reevaluate his or her life from the perspective of finite mortality, its end (Heidegger, *Being and Time*).

Despite television's incessant images of violence, it fails to simulate individual death. Indeed, it is impossible to manufacture images pertaining to a real experience that remains completely unknown to anyone still living. Michael Valdez Moses, in "Lust Removed from Nature", draws connections between *White Noise* and Heidegger's phenomenology to examine DeLillo's portrayal of "postmodern death." The ability to observe nature as a picture on the television screen as easily as one may access the home-shopping network subverts the formally phenomenal, superhuman view of nature that man has held throughout history, "nature ceases to exist except as a representation which man both produces and consumes" (Moses 65). Moses then applies Heidegger's concept of *Enframing* to DeLillo's treatment of television. According to Heidegger, in order for a thing to be understood and analyzed it must first be presented in a way for it to be seen, for the thing to be suspended in observation and not preconceived. Thus, is the essence of modern technology, and television specifically: to reveal to humanity that the environment that we inhabit is at our disposal, as a "standing-reserve" available for human manipulation (65).

Moses goes on to assert, "the technological media thus alienate the individual from personal death in at least two ways. First, they transform the deaths of all individuals...into yet another

commodity to intended for mass consumption," second, the media fosters the association of the individual television viewer with that of the camera eye, creating the illusion that the witness to events "is a permanent fixture possessing a transcendental perspective" (Moses 73). The alienation of an individual from his or her individual death has dire consequences on the possibility of achieving authenticity, a problem with which DeLillo is greatly concerned. The enframement of death on a computer screen dissociates the individual (Jack) with his own death, "modern medical technology distances the dying individual from the intensely personal character of his mortality" (Moses 74). In chapter 21, Jack sees his own mortality digitized, enframed on a computer screen, perfecting the separation of the viewer that Debord spoke of. Death is no longer an end to be feared, it is reproduced and quantified on computer screens, indecipherable to Dasein yet somehow measurable by machines. In the following passage, DeLillo has Jack express the technological sublime, Baudrillardian simulacra, Debordian separation, and a Heideggerian sense of enframing:

It is when death is rendered *graphically*, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie *separation* between your condition and yourself. A network of *symbols* has been introduced, an entire *awesome* technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying. (DeLillo WN 142; italics mine)

The spectacular separation between the individual and his subjective death arises from the fluidity of meaning in a reality composed of simulacra. Modern technology creates a false system of signs for death, and when the system of Jack's own death is illuminated on a screen, it too becomes part of the "standing-reserve" created by technological enframement.

The fear of death pervades each of the characters' lives since there is no simulated equivalent, no way to comprehend the hyperreal. The postmodern death, or lack thereof, that Moses refers to is undermined by the very nature of Nyodene D. Ironically, Jack must live to be around 80 years old before he can cease to worry that Nyodene D. will take his life. For Moses, the rendering of Jack's death's statistics on a screen is the equivalent of the postmodern camera eye: it distances Dasein from mortality and authenticity. However, I argue that Jack's notion that death is immanent actually pushes him toward authenticity rather than toward the clock-time of *das Man*. He may live his life as normally as he did before, but now the lingering anxiety from the knowledge that everyone must die has a name, a sign, Nyodene D. The inborn and inevitable death of Jack has been given a substantial form, a linguistic and numerical reference point for the end of his life. I argue that this knowledge actually brings Jack closer to authenticity, rather than Moses's claim that this would ultimately distance Jack from his own death.

Jack's ultimate attempt at asserting his authenticity is his plot to murder Willie Mink, as well as his conversation with Murray beforehand. Murray's thoughts on killers and diers express the Heideggerian concept of thrownness and Care: "We start our lives in chaos, in babble. As we surge up into the world we try to devise a shape, a plan...to plot, to take aim at something, to shape time and space. This is how we advance the art of human consciousness" (DeLillo 291-292). The essence of a person's life is defined by the actions that he or she takes, and by how he or she lives up to those actions, this is the basis for "authenticity." When Jack grabs the pistol and is about to shoot Willie Mink, he explicitly states, "I knew who I was in the network of meanings" (DeLillo 312). Jack has taken action in life, deviating from normal everydayness, and has become a potential dealer of death, as opposed to Moses's conception of the "postmodern illusion of an infinite horizon for consciousness" (Moses 75). Jack transcends the impersonalized death that Moses discusses, becoming more conscious of his mortality when he intends to take the life of another human being. The fact that Jack takes Willie Mink to a hospital shows him accepting the decisions that he has made as an authentic individual. Moses's implications that modern technology reifies inauthenticity and distances the characters in *White Noise* from mortality, finitude, and the natural environment around them has many valid and interesting points. However, Moses' claims are hasty, and neglect the finer points of DeLillo's fiction, where his characters often confront the simulation and become aware of hyperreality in scenes of intense violence, as if mortal awareness is the only thing that can transcend the simulacrum.

**CONCLUSION: TV VIOLENCE: AUTHENTIC, HISTORIC, AND REIFYING**

Postmodernity has given rise to extreme doubt, and since the simulation has itself become real, only that which passes through the omniscient lens of television is taken as factual since it is consumed by the crowd. DeLillo comments on John Hinckley in "American Blood":

The Reagan shooting was pure TV, a minicam improvisation...a self-created media event. [Hinckley] is media-poisoned...They are familiar now, men who choose victims based on their current popularity and accessibility...Hinckley sees the act on television even as he commits it...This is a self-referring event. The man who performs the act comments on it at the same time. He knows in advance what our reaction will be...His own sense of the crime is based on what he knows the world will say about it. (DeLillo, "Blood" 5)

DeLillo views Hinckley's assassination attempt as a desperate example of simulacrum preceding reality, where the media spectacle holds more significance than the actual event. DeLillo sees the assassination of President Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald as the first media event to substitute the real for the fake (DeLillo "Blood" 1). Oswald's sense of self "has come to be channeled through media representations" and with his final glare seen in his repeatedly televised death, "he is commenting on the documentary footage even as it is being shot. Then he himself is shot, and shot, and shot" (Knight 32; DeLillo *L* 447).

The American desire to be immortalized on television for committing horrific acts of violence is a direct result of simulacra preceding reality: since the news reel reifies real events, someone's individuality can be reified if that someone's image is transmitted to the public for consumption. In *White Noise*, Heinrich's convict pen-pal had been hearing voices on TV "telling him to go down in history," but "there is no media in Iron City" so his dream of infamy is never fulfilled, "he says if he had to do it all over again, he wouldn't do it as an ordinary murder, he would do it as an assassination...kill one famous person, get noticed, make it stick" (DeLillo *WN* 44-45). Here, DeLillo makes allusions to Lee Harvey Oswald (Tommy Roy Foster even has three names), whose assassination of President Kennedy marks a significant shift—according to DeLillo—in the American mediascape: "We seem from that moment to have entered a world of randomness and ambiguity...the public's belief in the secret manipulation of history. Documents lost, missing, altered, destroyed, classified...The simplest facts elude authentication" (DeLillo "Blood" 1-3). The media coverage of the event, the Zapruder film, the Warren commission, the news footage of Oswald's death, all surface as simulacra since there is no single cohesive narrative of the events that took place in Dealey Plaza. The simulacra works to depersonalize Oswald from his own sense of self, while also being the only medium through which Oswald can comprehend and validate his sense of self.

In his 1988 novel, *Libra*, DeLillo explores the effect of the simulacrum on the narrative history of America, and could also be called a work of "historiographic metafiction." According to postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic metafiction manages to satisfy such a desire for "worldly" grounding while at the same time querying the very basis of the authority of that grounding" (Hutcheon 5). Hutcheon's claim finds its basis in the concepts of simulacra and postmodernity laid out by theorists like Jean Baudrillard. As David Ferrie frantically expresses in the novel, "there are things they aren't telling us. This is always the case. There's always more to it. Something we don't know about. Truth isn't what we know or feel. It's the thing that waits just beyond" (DeLillo *Libra* 333). A true explanation of what occurred in Dallas is no longer plausible, not with the overflow of files comprised of trivial information. Literature since the 1960s "appears willing to draw upon any signifying practices it can find operative in a society. It wants to challenge those discourses and yet to milk them for all they are worth," just as DeLillo's ambivalent fiction manages to sketch the bars of simulation's confinement while also providing the key, the transcendence of the simulation in "new sincerity" (Hutcheon 16). DeLillo's fiction fits with Hutcheon's statement: it is contingent on the simulation while also challenging the simulation. In a world where evidence can be composed of simulacra, DeLillo's novel *itself* could theoretically serve as evidence for the fictive Nicholas Branch. DeLillo is conscious of the ways in which he manipulates history to construct his novel; it serves as evidence to the idea that history is a narrative story composed of symbols, a representative retelling of events that happened.

Nicholas Branch acts as a double for DeLillo, a postmodern satire on the futility of bureaucracy. He is presented with gruesome information relating to the actual moment of violence, the bullet to the head: "This is the true nature of the event. Not your beautiful ambiguities, your lives of the major players, your compassions and sadnesses. Not your roomful of theories, your museum of contradictory facts" (DeLillo *Libra* 299). Only the event itself exists in history, the brutal homicide, followed by the death of Oswald himself, and the subsequent socio-political effects. The brutality, the reality of the "shattered bone and horror", is all that is left despite the attempts to explain the chain of events leading up to the death of president Kennedy, and this abrupt reminder of mortality through violence is the only occurrence that reveals the simulation, forcing the spectators to acknowledge the hyperreal, become self-aware, if only for a moment. Ironically, DeLillo's novel may be the most convincing document of the assassination to date, combining historical facts and persons with the conspiracy theories and conjecture that followed the actual event.

Violence appears throughout DeLillo's fiction as a way to transcend the realm of signs and symbols and achieve physical human contact, a re-acquaintance with mortality and finitude, and thus authenticity. Whether it's Lee Harvey Oswald's historic and immortalizing assassination, Jack Gladney assaulting Willie Mink (the human embodiment of consumer media's "white noise"), or Benno Levin murdering his social counterpart, each act of violence is an attempt at transcending the simulacrum, "for the sympathetic contact" rather than the perfected separation of the spectacle (Don DeLillo *C* 58). For DeLillo, Oswald prefigures the simulacrum of an American murderer whose public image becomes their sense of self-identity. The simulacrum makes people lonely and separates them from the physical, hyperreal connections to others. Murder allows the individual to affirm his existence in the "network of connections" and return to a physical awareness of the hyperreal world that he has become detached from. DeLillo's following statement offers an exegesis for the murderers in each of his works:

Stalking a victim can be a way of organizing one's loneliness, making a network out of it, a fabric of connections. Desperate men give their solitude a purpose and a destiny...Self-aware men, men alert to their own failed instincts. Self-watchers, dwellers, in random space. In the world is where we hide from ourselves, what do we do when the world is no longer accessible? We devise mental formulas, intricate systems of ritual, repetition, inward spying. We invent false names, invent a destiny, purchase a firearm. (DeLillo "Blood" 6).

Whether the killer is immortalized by the media or not, his actions still serve as existential validation in the simulated reality, since the individual is allowed to create his own, *subjective* network of connections. The loss of subjectivity in the postmodern era, as stated above, is regained only in an act of extreme violence captured by the media. This concept is exemplified by the Texas Highway Killer in part II of *Underworld*, "Richard had to take everything outside, share it with others, become part of the history of others," which he successfully accomplishes when he calls the news anchor and has his voice broadcast by the media (DeLillo *U* 266). DeLillo again notes the repetition of violent footage by news media, "they show it because it exists, because they have to show it, because this is why they're out there, to provide our entertainment" (*U* 160). Ever since the news coverage of Oswald's shooting, the commodified repetition has become the standard of media; the victim "had it coming in a sense, for letting himself be caught on camera," the camera gaze enframes a plot, and all plots tend to move toward death, "this is what the context requires," the public consumes these violent images until they become desensitized and distanced from their own personal deaths (*U* 160).

The fiction of Don DeLillo draws heavily upon the theoretical framework of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, which provide the foundational concept of simulacra that DeLillo uses to construct his fictional realities. Television and radio project images that his characters use to construct their personal identity, which can also be detrimental hindrances to authenticity, yet DeLillo seems to embrace this aspect, marveling at the complexity of the system and even advocating for the embracement of simulacra as potential vehicles of new knowledge. DeLillo seems to adopt a kind of "new sincerity" toward postmodern reality, and his usage of simulacra throughout his novels is vast and fluid, as if his personal beliefs change with society and within the fictional networks he creates.



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