TRACING THE NETWORKS OF POSTMODERNITY:
MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE NOVELS OF
MARTIN AMIS AND DON DELILLO

by

DAVID THOMSON

B.A., McGill University, 1989
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1991

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 2001

© David Thomson, 2001
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 9 October 2001
Abstract

This study discusses works by Martin Amis and Don DeLillo in the context of several key scientific and technological transformations that occur in the aftermath of the Second World War.

I begin by revisiting one of the most-discussed aspects of DeLillo's work: the currents of conspiracy and paranoia that recur in his novels and, he claims, pervade the wider culture. By demonstrating how paranoid narratives strive to accommodate contemporary technologies, I create a context in which the paranoia addressed in works such as *Libra* and *Underworld* becomes intelligible as a response to the specific technological character of surveillance and control in the post-War period.

The sciences of information and cybernetics also cohere in the years following the War, and the second chapter explores the creative tension between metaphors of entropy and information in Amis's fiction as well as DeLillo's.

The third chapter focuses on television as a constitutive element of postmodernity, and traces how DeLillo and Amis adopt narrative strategies that enable them to represent subjects who have grown accustomed to living within an environment mediated, to an unprecedented degree, by visual imagery supplied by or formatted for television.

Another product of postmodern technology, commercial air travel reconfigures relationships to place and to time for inhabitants of industrialized countries. Both the liberating and limiting consequences of living in the latter half of the century of flight are addressed in the fourth chapter.

The final chapter offers an assessment of the role contemporary media and technology play in establishing the characteristics associated with postmodernity, and concludes with a brief discussion of the role the internet might play within the context of the specific technologies discussed in the body of the thesis.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................... iv

**INTRODUCTION**  The Technology in the Text .............................................. 1

**CHAPTER ONE**  Chief Shaman? Don Delillo's Paranoia ............................... 27

1.1 Paranoia and Interpretation ................................................................. 31
1.2 Paranoia and the Paranoid Style ....................................................... 38
1.3 The Consequences of Conspiracy ..................................................... 53

**CHAPTER TWO**  The Logic of Decay and the Promise of Renewal:  
Amis and DeLillo Considered as Systems Novelists ................................. 67

2.1 "Everything Is Winding Down" ......................................................... 73
2.2 Order and Ordure ........................................................................ 81
2.3 Literature and Open Systems ........................................................... 86
2.4 Don DeLillo: Chaos and Renewal .................................................... 92
2.5 "When You Deal with Crowds, Nothing's Predictable" ... 108

**CHAPTER THREE**  Novelists on Television:  
Amis and DeLillo and Postmodern Theory ................................................. 117

3.1 Worst-Case Scenarios .................................................................... 128
3.2 The Author as (Film) Producer ....................................................... 146
3.3 Artists in the Marketplace ................................................................. 157

**CHAPTER FOUR**  "Somebody Somewhere Else" ....................................... 172

**CONCLUSION**  The Network of Networks ............................................... 196

**WORKS CITED** ....................................................................................... 210
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been completed without the strong support and encouragement of my supervisor Michael Zeitlin. I owe him a great debt of thanks for making sure I saw it through to completion. I would also like to thank John Cooper and Adam Frank for agreeing to join the thesis committee at a late stage, and for providing intelligent and illuminating commentary on the dissertation draft.

Graham Good and Patricia Merivale contributed valuable insights and suggestions in the early stages of my research, and Wilhelm Emilsson provided timely advice and assistance regarding the preparation of the final product.

I gratefully acknowledge financial assistance in the form of graduate fellowships from the University of British Columbia and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council.
Introduction

The Technology in the Text

"Post-1945 life is completely different from everything that came before it. We are like no other people in history."
(Martin Amis [quoted in McGrath 188])

"What I try to do is create complex human beings, ordinary-extraordinary men and women who live in the particular skin of the late twentieth century."
(Don DeLillo [quoted in Begley 304])

Martin Amis and Don DeLillo, authors of the novels discussed in this thesis, are primarily concerned with representations of, respectively, contemporary British and American society. What initially drew me to their work was the connection between the stories they told through their fiction and the stories unfolding in the world around me. It seemed as though each author was attempting an unsystematic analysis or patchwork sociology of the postmodern world through his fiction. Each seemed particularly attuned to the wide range of contemporary discourses that, in the words of Arnold Weinstein, make up "the private jargons and codes of today's technocratic society" (289).

Though I will argue DeLillo and Amis write fiction specifically concerned with capturing their particular historical moment, each writer can, without difficulty, be positioned within various literary traditions as well. James Diedrick finds Amis's Money to be an updating of the Russian skaz novel, of which "Dostoyevsky's Notes From Underground is the master-text" (70). Douglas Keesey finds DeLillo following "the
distinguished tradition of Henry James" (117) in *The Names*. For his part Amis cites Vladimir Nabokov as a literary influence, while in interviews DeLillo routinely refers to James Joyce as a model. Without seeking to detract from the importance of literary influences, this thesis examines influences of a different kind. Specifically, I argue that the particular historical conditions and developments a novelist confronts and responds to in creating a work of contemporary fiction are crucial to a critical understanding of the work. To that end I focus on certain technical innovations that, in my opinion, work to define the current environment Amis and DeLillo write about.

This thesis in no way forecloses alternate approaches. I am not proposing it as an exhaustive or necessarily complete interpretation, but rather as an investigation growing from a long-standing interest in the cultural consequences of new technologies. Such an interest in the way certain contemporary novelists developed a narrative vision informed by contemporary technology could easily lead to discussions of writers other than the two I have chosen here. Thomas Pynchon and James McElroy are obvious American examples of authors whose work is deeply informed by contemporary technological issues, while JG Ballard and Ian Sinclair could serve as British writers in this vein. Younger writers like Iain Banks and David Foster Wallace, Will Self or Kathy Acker: there is no shortage of writing about the impact of technology on contemporary life.

My decision to focus on Amis and DeLillo is motivated by the productive comparisons to be made between them as well as by the way each is individually suited to my project. By choosing a writer from each side of the Atlantic I want to stress that literary works which engage contemporary forms of technology are not limited to the United States. Additionally, I choose these particular novelists because they inhabit a gray zone
between practitioners of experimental, avant-garde literature and the formulaic conventions of genre fiction writers. They are accessible yet remain distinctive stylists and original writers.

Martin Amis demonstrates a consistent interest in the impact of post-War social and political change on the way individuals live, think and feel in current society. In one interview he alludes to the way novelists attempt to trace such changes when he observes "that when a writer of twenty-five puts pen to paper he's saying to the writer of fifty that it's no longer like that, it's like this" (Rivieri 115). As a novelist for over twenty-five years (and now himself "the writer of fifty") Amis has spent a career trying to come to terms with "what the contemporary moment feels like" (Rivieri 115). This interest is even more evident in his journalism and other non-fictional works. A short book from 1982 called Invasion of the Space Invaders, for example, combines a brief essay on the video-game phenomenon with a straightforward survey of the most popular games of the period. The 1984 short-story collection Einstein's Monsters opens with a non-fiction essay that explores the psychological effects of nuclear weapons and their proliferation, and this topic along with another inescapable postmodern technology, television, is a central concern in the 1986 novel London Fields.

Across the Atlantic, his contemporary DeLillo has produced an equivalent volume of work in almost precisely the same period of time (Amis's first novel appeared in 1973, DeLillo's in 1971). Like Amis, DeLillo has set each of his eleven novels within the timeframe of his own experience, and in their totality they suggest "some giant composite

---

1 Excluding Ratner's Star, which is set at an unspecified time and place somewhere in the near future.
plan . . ., an all-encompassing scheme that, when completed, will bear witness to how we lived, worked, played and sounded in the second half of the twentieth century" (Weinstein 288).

Due in part to my engagement with these themes through the novels of Amis and DeLillo, I became interested in the influence specific technological innovations might exert on contemporary culture, especially those created or promoted in the "long postwar boom" (Harvey 124) of economic development and consumer demand following the end of World War II. This dissertation is largely an attempt to understand the impact of these technologies on the act of producing fiction about this "contemporary moment," about living in our "particular skin." It is my belief that works of contemporary literature can shed light on the extent to which the products and discourses of our current technologies determine the way in which, as Amis suggests, "it's no longer like that, it's like this" (Rivieri 115).

A standard strategy for separating "that" period of the twentieth century literature from "this" period is to use the Second World War as a dividing point. For example, in his encyclopedic Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism Fredric Jameson aligns the shift from modernism as the cultural dominant to postmodernism with the emergence, in the period following World War II, of a third stage in capitalism's development. He quotes from Ernest Mandel's Late Capitalism in identifying the "machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century" as the latest "general revolu[tion] in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of

---

2 Weinstein's comments are somewhat prescient, as his description of DeLillo's work up until Mao II is echoed in many of the comments made by reviewers upon the publication of Underworld, which
production" (35). Certainly Jameson's thesis, both in its initial form as a 1984 article published in *New Left Review* and in the extended form of the 1991 book, received wide critical attention and commentary. The ensuing debate focused less on the validity of the periodizing principle than on Jameson's historical materialist claims that the economic order after 1945 accounted for the emergence of postmodernism as a new "cultural dominant" (4). The validity of the central point Jameson borrows from Mandel, namely that economic developments after World War II represent a new stage in the history of capital, seems to meet with a kind of general consensus. Put another way, the question of 1945's significance is *epistemological* rather than *ontological*: that the war's consequences represent something important is universally conceded; what it represents continues to be the subject of considerable debate.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey disagrees with the equation Jameson draws between postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon and late capitalism. His book argues that postmodernism is a later development, emerging in the aftermath of a general crisis that affected Western economies around 1973. Still, he seeks to amend the "late capital" thesis rather than reject it outright. Timing aside, Harvey's account of the cultural consequences of his version of postmodernity echoes Jameson's in two important ways. First, the economic transformations he identifies are explicitly linked to "the rise of a series of industries based on technologies" (132) that come out of the post-War period. Second, Harvey shares with Jameson a pluralistic strategy in the way he appropriates cultural objects from a range of sources and subjects them to a critical gaze. In each case "span[s] fifty years and the entire continent" (Begley 29).
their observations regarding late capitalism's implications range across fiction, architecture, film, art, television, and philosophy.

By addressing a range of cultural products, these two critics suggest that the effects of the kind of economic organization identified as postmodernity are generalized across the cultural sphere. For Harvey the primary effect is the wholesale commodification of cultural products under postmodernism; for his part, Jameson observes, "the intervention of the machine, the mechanization of culture, and the mediation of culture by the Consciousness Industry [culture packaged as a commodity, in other words] are now everywhere the case" (Jameson 68).

Postmodernism has forced us to become aware, Jameson says, of the "fundamental materiality" of culture, and as a result we have adopted

a word that has tended to displace the older language of genres and forms — and this is, of course, the word medium, and in particular its plural, media, a word which now conjoins three relatively distinct signals: that of an artistic mode or specific form of aesthetic production, that of a specific technology, generally organized around a central apparatus or machine; and that finally, of a social institution. (Jameson 68)

In this formulation, then, literature becomes one kind of medium amongst others, including cinema and television.

The reinscription of literature as a medium in the wake of technological developments is a fundamental part of the work of the German critical theorist Friedrich Kittler. In Discourse Networks 1800/1900, he polemically identifies historical transformations in both the theory and practice of language with developments in specific
technologies. He defines a discourse network as "the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and produce relevant data" (389), and argues that "the discourse network of 1800 depended upon writing as the sole, linear channel for processing and storing information" (Gramophone xxiv).

Around 1900, Kittler believes, three technical innovations served to differentiate information processing and storage and consequently transform that era's understanding of the nature and function of speech and writing. He describes how the inventions of the typewriter, gramophone and film camera introduced new possibilities for the storage and processing of information, and suggests that these possibilities undermined writing's privileged position and reduced its importance within the reconfigured discourse network. In addition Kittler has discussed the role military research played on the development of media technologies after 1945. Virtually all the media technologies that proliferated after the war, he finds, owe their existence to technology developed during it: FM radio from the VHF technology of Germany's Panzer divisions, tape cassette machines from war technology developed by BASF and AEG, and so on (Gramophone 107-109).

Kittler has not proposed that post-World War Two technologies have effected as radical a transformation of the discourse network as those of 1900, but his analysis is necessarily incomplete. As John Johnson explains, "methodological constraints determine that an event inaugurating another discourse network can only be identified retrospectively" (Johnson 6). Still, in the shift from analog to digital signal processing, from film to video technology, and from typewriters to computer workstations there seems to be the outline of a comparable "discourse network of 2000" though it cannot yet be described, according to Kittler ("Interview" 736). For the present moment, I am content to
borrow Kittler's emphasis on media technologies in drawing attention to a number of postmodern media forms that find their origin in the research and development programs of the Second World War. Though he exhibits a similar materialist bias and pays close attention to historical context, Kittler's position is distinct from Jameson's or Harvey's in that his analysis is not grounded in anything resembling a Marxist narrative. He is, in a sense, expounding a form of technological determinism in order to situate aesthetic and philosophical discourse within a horizon bounded by materialist considerations — namely, the irreducible materiality of literary works.

The demystification of literature described in Discourse Networks 1800/1900 is associated with and compounded by the development of other media, in Kittler's view. There is ample evidence that the proliferation of media technologies after the war reduced the status of literature, already diminished within the discourse network of 1900, to that of one media channel among many. John Johnston suggests the process has intensified when he observes that,

Whereas the modernist novel arises in a context defined by the appearance of new recording and storage media (film, phonograph, typewriter), [post-War novels] register the effects of these media more directly, even as their own context is being transformed by the mass media, global communications networks, and computer technologies. (13)

In contrast to literature's situation within the relative monopoly of print media in the 19th Century, its relative stature was diminished within the post-War cultural environment by the incredible success of television and the continued presence of radio and film. In addition, perhaps as a corollary of the previous point, the ascendancy of the primarily
commercial form of television strengthened the popular identification of cultural products as just another kind of commodity, and further undermined the artistic (as opposed to commercial) claims of literary texts.3

From this relatively diminished position the novelist gains the benefit of perspective and, ironically, a privileged location to observe the spectacle. This at least is the view of DeLillo, who "doesn't think that the increasingly marginal status of the serious novelist is necessarily awful . . . . [I]f the social novel lives, but only barely, surviving in the cracks and ruts of the culture, maybe it will be taken more seriously, as an endangered species" (quoted in Remnick 48). Although his tone seems pessimistic, DeLillo goes on to insist that "we need the writer in opposition, the novelist who writes against power, who writes against the corporation or the state or the whole apparatus of assimilation" (290). Certainly Bill Gray, the novelist DeLillo creates in Mao II, seems to embody the image of a writer as an oppositional, reclusive figure operating on the margins.

Amis too has commented on the effects of the market economy and consumer culture on the author. His conclusions are similar to DeLillo's, judging from his short story "Career Move." This brief piece, published in the June 29, 1992 issue of the New Yorker (and subsequently reprinted in the short story collection Heavy Water [1999]) inverts the normal hierarchy of writers to contrast the jet-setting lifestyle of Luke, a highly-paid poet whose works are made into motion pictures, with Alistair, an obscure young screenplay writer trying to get his latest work, "Offensive from Quasar 13," published in a small journal called the Little Magazine. The entire piece parodies the idea of a literary work as a

3 Andreas Huyssen traces this anxiety in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmoderism.
commodity and a writer as a celebrity, ideas that are worked out in much greater depth in
his 1997 novel *The Information*. There, the contrast is between a serious, "difficult," and
entirely unsuccessful novelist and a pandering, commodity-friendly author who achieves
fame and fortune.

Despite the apparent critical stance towards the effects of commodification Amis
and DeLillo present through their fiction, they are inevitably implicated in the process. As
Joe Moran reveals in *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America*, it is no longer just the
books that have become commodities; authors themselves are "inescapably caught up in a
process by which the 'sign-exchange value' of their name circulates competitively as part of
marketing and publicity" (67). The author's function now extends past the composition
process, and participation in the marketing of the 'product' is expected — often as part of
the publisher's contract. DeLillo received a large advance for his novel *Underworld*, and
when the book was published in 1997 he agreed for the first time to participate in a world­
wide book tour, explaining that he wanted to do his part to help sell the book. Amis
describes "the peculiar pleasures of the contemporary American book tour" in an article for
the 26 June 1995 issue of the *New Yorker*. His book tour was organized in support of the
novel *The Information*, which itself contains a lengthy and satirical account of an
unsuccessful British author's experiences on a contemporary American book tour.

In themselves reading tours are not, of course, postmodern phenomena. Yet the
contemporary author’s relationship to the commodity he or she has created — or more
accurately, helped to create — is mediated by a constellation of cultural and technological
factors that influence the reception of the work (an entire promotional tour spanning
several continents can be completed in less time than it took Dickens to travel across the
Atlantic to commence his reading tour of America and Canada in 1842). The complex ironies that develop from the intersection of Amis's own literary celebrity and the extended treatment literary celebrity receives in *The Information* brought critical attention in the form of two recent journal articles on the subject. In "Artists and Verbal Mechanics" Joe Moran suggests the novel seems to touch on "anxieties about the survival of authorship as a meaningful activity in an age of the corporate ownership of ideas and images" (316). Juliet Gardiner considers the marketing of the paperback edition of *The Information* in similar terms in "What Is An Author," concluding, "the author has no performative role in the publication of paperbacks. His or her function has been commodified into the book and totalised in its design" (74). Moran and Gardiner adopt the perspective of the publishing industry in their analysis, and conclude that the author serves as an adjunct to the marketing process from this perspective.

From a marketing perspective Amis has a much higher profile than DeLillo, but in academic terms he is very much a junior partner to DeLillo when it comes to critical attention. Published material on Amis is limited to two book-length studies, a monograph, several dozen articles in academic journals and a large number of newspaper reviews and stories. In contrast, there are eight book-length studies of DeLillo's work, along with over fifty chapters within larger works, three special issues of academic journals, in excess of a hundred academic articles, and several hundred newspaper reviews. Part of this discrepancy can be attributed to the disproportionate interest paid to post-War American literature in general, but the lack of critical attention paid to a figure routinely identified as

---

4 These figures are taken from the Don DeLillo Society's on-line bibliography, compiled by Mark Osteen and maintained by Phil Nel at <http://www.ksu.edu/english/nelp/delillo/biblio/litcrit.html>
one of the leading writers of his generation is slightly mysterious. Perhaps Amis's fascination with sex and violence and his dyspeptic view of contemporary culture is, within academic circles, less palatable than DeLillo's more clinical prose. Whatever the reason, there is currently a clear imbalance in the academic interest directed at the two novelists.

New technologies have played a role in fostering attention to each author's work. Currently the World Wide Web, representing the high water mark of the ideal of instantly accessible, interconnected information, provides a wide variety of resources for scholars, critics and other readers interested in Amis and DeLillo. Sites devoted to their work provide exhaustive information and are updated almost daily.

Sitting at a computer typing these words, I have Don DeLillo's voice speaking in my ear. This is not a coy metaphor; it's literally true. The New York Times On the Web provides a link to a digitized recording of DeLillo's conversation with NPR radio host Terry Gross from 1997. Accessible in a "streaming audio" format, the sound file is being fed from a central computer somewhere in the United States to the speakers on the monitor in front of me. In the interview, DeLillo has just stated that he doesn't spend much time on the Internet, but that he sees it as a logical symbol of "the vast number of systems connections that takes place beyond our comprehension and the direct connection in this decade between technology and paranoia." The New York Times web site also offers samples of DeLillo reading from Libra and Mao II in New York ("Featured Author: Don DeLillo" np).

---

5 In a typical review piece, for instance, Amis is characterized as "by far the most talented and daring English writer of his generation" (Foreman 64).
Why am I listening to audio and not watching video? The answer comes in two parts, and each part is related to much of the preceding discussion:

1) Sending video signals over the Internet is possible but bandwidth issues make it a complex and unsatisfying process. This will change in the future, but currently the manner of DeLillo's visitation is controlled by the technological limitations of the medium;

2) There is only one recorded instance of DeLillo appearing on a TV show to discuss his or any other writer's work (Moran 130). Martin Amis, a more visible public figure by many orders of magnitude, has appeared on television a number of times, but the preponderance of his readings and interviews for the electronic media is likewise audio-only.

Writers, or more specifically novelists, are thus positioned by the consumer market at a certain echelon where their cultural value is dictated by their ability to sell airtime to commercial advertisers on the various media outlets. The relationship of novelists to other media forms is an important indicator in the more abstract consideration of the "role" of literature in contemporary culture. The impact of mainstream media on literature is acknowledged by the admission that a book's success is almost guaranteed by a positive review in the New York Times Book Review (Moran 40), or in the way Oprah's Book Club has become the novelist's version of Who Wants to be a Millionaire? The situation of literature as a historical object of study is another important motivating force behind this thesis. Amis's case in particular lays bare the strange intersection of media celebrity and

---

6 Curt Gardner maintains "Don DeLillo's America" (URL: http://www.perival.com/delillo); the "Martin Amis Web" (URL: http://martinamis.albion.edu/) was started by James Diedrick.
literary reputation. Don DeLillo may have dramatized the figure of the novelist against the backdrop of consumer culture and mass media in *Mao II*, but Amis lived it.\(^7\)

Thus the twin topics of technology as it relates to literary production and what it means to be a novelist — or what it means to be a novel — on this side of the second millennium organize much of the work of this dissertation. It should be taken as an attempt to participate in the discussions taking place about these large, messy issues — messy in the sense that the boundaries of the discussions endlessly blur into one another.

The writer approaching either DeLillo or Amis must be prepared to practice a form of reflexive criticism. The novels in each writer's *oeuvre* come from a place where the writer is already anticipating the response of both the future reader and the future critic of the work. Charles Highway, the protagonist of Amis's first novel *The Rachel Papers*, studies literature and keeps his literary pretensions on (self-conscious) display: "Don't I ever do anything else but take soulful walks down the Bayswater Road, I thought, as I walked soulfully down the Bayswater Road" (73). One would expect this, as the author is the son of Kingsley Amis and was at the time of the novel's composition the literary editor of the *London Times Book Review*. Amis would have harboured few idealistic notions about the mechanisms of book publication. From the first the complicated process of publishing a book was demystified. DeLillo, on the other hand, claims to have come to fiction with his naivete and idealism intact. The romanticized image of the artist coloured his perception of what it meant to be a writer, at least initially. In an interview from the mid-80's, he recalls the conditions under which he wrote his first novel (*Americana*, published in 1971) in the following way:

\(^7\) See Jonathan Wilson's "A Very English Story" for a full account of "The Amis affair."
I was hurling things at the page. At the time I lived in a small apartment with no stove and the refrigerator in the bathroom and I thought first novels written under those circumstances ought to be novels in which great chunks of experience are hurled at the page. So that's what I did. (LeClair 80)

Evident in this quotation is an ironic reflection on this earlier, romanticized self, and even by his third novel, *Great Jones Street*, the character Fenig is a caricature of the romantic image of a struggling writer. Certainly *Mao II* suggests few illusions about the commercial nature of the book trade. The progression from Fenig the writer for hire, to the corporate communicator James Axton in *The Names*, to Bill Gray's convoluted relationships with his novel, his publisher, and his archivist-cum-literary executor (Scott), suggests a repositioning on DeLillo's part of the writer from the center of some magic circle to a link in a technical process.

The knowingness of the authors\(^8\) sets the stage for a secondary level of reflexive caution. Each writer is aware of his position as commentator on a general social environment. During a public reading in Seattle, for example, DeLillo was asked what he would have done if he hadn't turned to writing. He responded that he probably would have been an anthropologist or sociologist (DeLillo pers. comm. 20 October 1997). Amis has a long career as a journalist writing on issues ranging from AIDS to American politics to nuclear strategists. Given their interest in the contemporary, both writers work in the knowledge that their medium is constantly in competition — or at least seeking

\(^8\) And at the same time there are lapses in the author's control. When, in an article for the *London Observer*, Maureen Freely pointed out "the stream of lost or wandering daughters" that flows through Amis's novels, the insight seemed to take Amis by surprise: "I felt there was something almost embarrassing about the neatness and obviousness of the Freely interpretation." (*Experience* 280)
coexistence — with other, more glossy narrative forms like television and film. In DeLillo's phrase, "the novel itself, the old, slow water-torture business of invention and doubt and self-correction, may seem to be wearing an expiration date that takes effect tomorrow" ("The Power of History" np).

The argument that American or British novelists might themselves be an endangered species seems untenable given the enormous number of new works of fiction that continue to appear each year in those countries. Still, the sense that novelists and novels might be losing relevance within the wider culture maintains a general currency. The essayist and critic Sven Birkerts invokes this contemporary conceit in the title of his 1995 book *The Gutenberg Elegies*, while in a 1988 speech to the International Publisher's Association Congress George Steiner concludes with the observation that "[i]t may well be that the 'age of the book' in its classical sense is now coming to a very gradual end. That age spans, very roughly, the period from the 1550s to the 1950s: 400 very short years" (41). Steiner bases this claim on his observation that "the relationship between books and literature, as we have known it in the European-American communities, arose from an exceedingly complex and inherently unstable concatenation of technical, economic, and social circumstances" (41), and on his belief that this concatenation has been undone in the wake of technological, economic and social change in the post-War period. As social documents, novels register contemporary changes within their narratives, and as "media assemblages" (Johnston 4) they may also register such changes materially within the context of competing media forms. The Darwinian implications of this rhetoric of competition are unfortunate, as I do not believe the novel is in imminent danger of extinction. How novels might function within the discourse network that constitutes
postmodernity does seem to me to be an important issue, however, and in this dissertation I try to address it by discussing four kinds of "networks" and describing how Amis and DeLillo's fictions respond to and circulate in each of them.

In the first chapter the idea of a symbolic network that describes the circulation of political power is discussed in the context of insistent themes of paranoia and conspiracy that run through DeLillo's fiction from *Running Dog* to *Underworld*. DeLillo's use of paranoia is particularly interesting against the backdrop of Richard Hofstadter's influential essay, "The Paranoid Style," which traces a specifically rhetorical strategy through several centuries of American political discourse to suggest the persistence of a particular narrative. What makes paranoia fascinating is the manner in which its articulations shadow larger social and technological developments. As with the perpetual big-budget remakes of *Hamlet*, the storyline remains essentially unchanged even as the scene and the stars are constantly updated to suit the latest fashions. Indeed, it is not too far from the mark to credit practitioners of the paranoid style as "early adopters" of social and technical innovation. This point is brought to light most comprehensively in Friedrich Kittler's analysis of the ur-text for theories of clinical paranoia, Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Mental Illness*. Kittler questions the psychoanalytic reading of Schreber's *Memoirs* that Freud published in 1911, seeing the text instead as a persistently overdetermined account of clinical psychiatry at the moment of Schreber's incarceration. Kittler's analysis suggests how the intimate relationship between paranoia as a comprehensive rhetoric and the constantly updated agents and methods it invokes allows a paranoid narrative to function as a weathervane for contemporary fears and desires. By identifying culprits and victims operating within a given social context and attempting to provide an exhaustively coherent...
narrative structure necessary to maintain the integrity of the social body, the paranoid narrative becomes peculiarly sensitized to the appearance of new elements. Examples of such narratives abound in popular culture to such an extent that they can be plucked almost at random from the shelves of a local video store. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* metaphorically signaled the Red Menace, *The Terminator* inscribed fears of automation as a threat to human labour power within a "textbook" paranoid plotline, and recently *The Matrix* updated the mechanical dystopia to encompass the paranoid potentials of virtual reality.

In DeLillo's hands, the paranoid narrative dances to a slightly altered tune. Most obviously in *Libra*, the paranoid style is interrogated and shown to be a form of wish-fulfillment or daydream. Nevertheless, I find the prevalence and contemporeneity of DeLillo's deployment of paranoid strategies interesting, and find the double movement, the simultaneous use and frustration of paranoid closure, indicative of his particular conception of an alternate "system-formation" from the hermetic, totalizing strategies found in the clinical paranoid style and its social counterpart, conspiracy theory.

In the second chapter the network at issue is a conceptual one, responsible for the circulation of ideas. In particular, I am interested in the way ideas from science are implicated in the narrative structure of works of fiction. Amis's use of entropy as a theme and narrative principle, for example, must be read in the context of the historical trajectory of that particular scientific discourse: the evolution of nineteenth-century statistical thermodynamics into the contemporary discipline of systems theory. Amis's focus on entropy as metaphor has consequences for social, psychological, and even environmental aspects of his fiction. From the standpoint of the overall periodizing hypothesis proposed
in this dissertation, it is intriguing to note the manner in which the nineteenth-century ideas about entropy develop and give rise to a formidable and productive convergence of twentieth-century scientific fields. Systems theory integrates numerous insights to form some of the core scientific and technical disciplines that characterize the post-War period as "the information age." From the use of information theory in molecular biology to the packet-switching relays in the global communications network, the information model that replaces the entropic universe of Victorian science is born, as Katherine Hayles outlines in *How We Became Post-human*, from the application of statistical thermodynamics to problems of communication. The watershed event in the reconfiguration of entropy's relationship to information is now widely held to be Warren Weaver and Claude Shannon's "The Mathematical Theory of Communication," published in 1949. This short article is regarded as the foundational interpretation of information as a function of the degree of randomness ("entropy") in a system. The previous year, Norbert Wiener published a book outlining his study of communication and control in automated systems, a study for which he coined the term "cybernetics." In 1950 he published a revised version of *Cybernetics* entitled *The Human Use of Human Beings*, a text that suggested the wider ramifications of his "theory of messages" including "the study of language, the study of messages as a means of controlling machinery and society, the development of computing machines and other such automata, certain reflections upon psychology and the nervous system, and a tentative new theory of scientific method" (15). In this volume Wiener discusses living organisms as products and participants in a communications network, and arguably anticipates some of the consequences of modern molecular biology, itself a fundamental reordering of the scientific understanding of the process of organic life using DNA as the
central motor of an information engine. Following the identification of the structure of DNA in 1953, the earlier, industrial metaphors of cell assembly and organism growth are supplanted by systems-rich models that stress the information processes and networks that enable cell reproduction.

As Hayles makes clear, scientific models are neither value-neutral nor politics-free. The entropic view of universal processes had — and has — tangible consequences when it is invoked in cultural discourse. For Wiener, writing in the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and in the earliest days of nuclear proliferation, the consequences of the second law of thermodynamics are depressing and inevitable: "it is a foregone conclusion that the lucky accident which permits the continuation of life in any form on this earth . . . is bound to come to a complete and disastrous end" (41). Such a pessimistic assessment of entropy's effects surfaces repeatedly in the novels of Martin Amis, most evidently *Time's Arrow* and *London Fields*. As Richard Menke notes, *Time's Arrow* "betokens a certain postmodern falling-off of distinctions. Indeed, the very logic of postmodernism, like claims that at the end of the millennium we have reached the end of history, may postulate a thermodynamics of history in which entropy now predominates" (977).

Thus one can trace the use of entropy as a metaphor and a rationale for the winding down — the 'decline and fall' — Amis stages in many of his novels. The cultural pessimism that commentators identify in his writing (Adam Mars-Jones refers to Amis's tendency to look "on the blight side" of life [19]) finds justification in his tactical use of thermodynamic principles and related references to astronomy and nuclear physics. With
entropy as a guiding principle, Amis's narratives weave their spiraling patterns of urban
decay, physical decrepitude, literary exhaustion, and moral collapse.

As I have discussed, information theory makes clear that the effects of entropy are
locally reversible, enabling what Wiener calls "local and temporary islands of decreasing
entropy" (36) in situations where an energy supply exists to offset the local increases in
entropy. After 1945 much of the work involving information theory was concerned with
understanding such local reversals. When Amis's work is redefined in terms of the open
systems models discussed in Hayles and elsewhere, a more up-to-date interpretation of
culture emerges. The cultural activity of writing can be described in terms of an open
system, where the local exchange of information and the creation of new works continually
forestall the general effects of entropy. Such a reinterpretation of the entropic metaphor, in
light of post-entropy models that resituate the issue in terms of open systems — of
literature as an open system — enable a discussion of the sense of an ending in Amis's
novels and what the open-ended narrative possibilities of his more recent works might
suggest.

A clear illustration of the way a systems-view of culture might address the
pessimism of an entropic account can be found in DeLilo's novels. The first book-length
study of DeLilo, Tom LeClair's In the Loop, proposed precisely this thesis. For LeClair,
systems theory suggest[s] that in an open system, such as literature or language,
the arrow of change not only point[s] toward exhaustion but could also be
reversed or bent. Relativity could become saving mutation, and deconstruction
might become reconstruction. (10)
In DeLillo's novels LeClair locates in detail the productive, negentropic circulation of information within the contemporary cultural environment. Whereas Amis's primary strategy describes a center that cannot hold, things falling apart, and anarchy loosed upon the world (the end of *Dead Babies* enacts this rather graphically), DeLillo seems to be working towards a consideration of the generative possibilities of an open system, where local exhaustion or maximal entropy is offset by the incorporation of entropic systems within generative systems — cultural, informational, linguistic. The possibility of a creative resynthesis is never foreclosed. The tone is not explicitly celebratory, but against the rigidities of an entropic order much of DeLillo seems to be seeking deeper patterns in contemporary chaos and flux. The debate I stage between Amis and DeLillo operates within a discourse network bounded by entropy's limitations and information's possibilities.

What place does literature occupy within the wider horizon of the cultural system? The question cannot be avoided in a consideration of the novels Amis and DeLillo have produced over the last thirty years. In their work television becomes something of a cultural *bête noire* for literature. Both make use of television, the easiest of targets for comic relief and satirical commentary, but in their negative evaluations one can easily discern a different kind of anxiety of influence. Television's ability to provide endless narratives to a global audience underscores literature's marginal status within the contemporary media system. The network I discuss in the third chapter is at one level a technological system that allows for the global transmission of images, but at another level this global communications system embodies the idea of a postmodern discourse network in Kittler's sense, that is, "the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given
culture to select, store, and produce relevant data” (*Discourse Networks* 369). Television, a medium that had barely crawled out of the development stage prior to 1939, has become the dominant force in the discourse network as it is constituted through the latter half of the 20th century.

What is the effect of television? How does it function in their novels? In Amis’s work as a corrosive force, always associated with yob life. In *Money* the crass, uncultured narrator John Self is, fittingly, a producer of television commercials. TV as a cultural force makes both authors uneasy. For DeLillo the television is implicated in the fundamental epistemological rift he believes divides "the American century" in two. The event of JFK's assassination was filmed, DeLillo points out, "but if you wanted to see the Zapruder film you had to be very important or you had to wait until the 1970s when I believe it was shown once on television" (Begley 300). Oswald's murder, on the other hand, took place on television, so "you could watch Oswald die while you ate a TV dinner, and he was still dying by the time you went to bed" (300). Television, with its "panting lust for bad news and calamity" (301), dictates "the world narrative" (302). My third chapter discusses the ways Amis and DeLillo use their fiction to comment upon and critique the narrative emerging from a global television network.

Televised images can now circulate among the broadcast networks in a way that enables an effectively instantaneous global narrative, but the post-War years saw the rise of a second form of unified global network which involved the circulation of people, not data. In the fourth chapter the routinization of air travel is discussed as another founding characteristic of postmodernity. I will argue that commercial air travel, a product of the economic affluence and technological advances in the "long boom" after the Second World
War, has an effect on the way we conceptualize space and time. In conjunction with the advances in data and communication networks, the global range of air carriers has initiated "another fierce round in that annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism's dynamic" (Harvey 293). The compression of time and space has consequences for economic relations, as Harvey mentions, but it has potential consequences for social and cultural relations as well. Though the collapsed boundaries of the globe inaugurated by routine, accessible travel at speeds in the neighborhood of 1000 km/hr led to the idea of a "global village," that cozy formulation is scrutinized in the fiction of DeLillo and Amis. There, the enabling technologies of travel produce a profound sense of dislocation in subjects no longer at home — physically or psychologically — in their environments. Facilitating air travel on a massive scale does not turn the world into a home, rather it fosters a generalized sense of estrangement. Paradoxically, the numbers of political and economic refugees put in motion by the upheavals associated with and following the mid-century mark enable the formation of expatriate communities that, according to the essayist Pico Iyer, might become the source of a truly global culture that transcends the fixities of nationalism or geography ("the best thing about contemporary writers — and Canadians in particular — was that no one seemed to know where they were from" [169]). Within and between industrialized countries, a peculiar subset of constant travelers can themselves be said to comprise a community, a society of like-minded individuals fluent in what DeLillo calls "the esperanto of jet lag" (Mao II 23). Space and place are attenuated in the face of migrations of people, capital and culture that occur on a larger scale and more frequently than ever before (Harvey 285).
The experience of air travel — that is, the combination of existential dread (DeLillo) and spatial disorientation (Amis) — has important consequences on an individual level, but more generally commercial air travel accelerates many of the processes of commodification routinely ascribed to postmodernism in its most unattractive formulations. Chief among these is the "disneyfication" of everything brought about by air tourism. Just as the truly insidious effects of television are more obvious once televisions are everywhere, the time-space compression occasioned by airfares affordable by the (Western) masses creates a changed (Western) conception of the social and cultural environment. One sign of the change is implicit in the altered connotation of 'travel-writing' from the nineteenth century to the present time. No longer offered as a report of a personal journey to an exotic locale, contemporary travel-writing is largely commercial in nature, and functions to prepare the traveler-consumer in the manner of a restaurant review. In the postmodern world, it is implied, the reader of a travel piece can easily reproduce the experiences of the travel writer. Once again I'm arguing that at a certain point the intensification of a particular feature of culture is brought about through the adoption of and adaptation to specific technologies — first in the shock of the innovation and then in the way it is accommodated and made commonplace. As examples of what DeLillo calls "social novels" the novels discussed in this dissertation are simultaneously (and necessarily) reactions to and descriptions of the effects of specific encroachments by forms of technology.

As a kind of coda to the first four chapters, in the conclusion I turn to the most recent manifestation of communication systems, the "network of networks" (Gaffin np) known as the Internet. In its current form the Internet represents a synthesis of many of the
key systems discussed in this dissertation, but as the youngest of the technological forces discussed its effects remain the hardest to gauge. From its postwar roots in the nascent science of computer systems (Schriger 119) to its current role in the crisis of intellectual copyright, this most recent network throws into turmoil many of the assumptions — hidden and otherwise — upon which the culture industry rests. The Internet does not yet figure in the novels of DeLillo or Amis to any great extent, but in their published works each has speculated on the role such a technology might play in postmodern culture. In addition to discussing their responses, I will conclude by offering some speculations on the effect such a massive and decentralized discourse network might have on the production and distribution of literary texts, and the consequences for the practice of literary scholarship.
Chapter One

Chief Shaman? Don DeLillo's Paranoia

One aspect of DeLillo's fiction that has drawn considerable commentary from critics is the repetitive theme of conspiracy that runs through his novels. DeLillo himself traces his fascination with this subject to the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the consequent confusion and uncertainty that have attached itself to this event, claiming that the assassination's aftermath has led to a "deeply unsettled feeling about our grip on reality" (DeCurtis 48). He acknowledges "a lot of the tendencies in my first eight novels seemed to be collecting around the dark center of the assassination" (DeCurtis 48). Despite the considerable body of scholarship dealing with DeLillo's use of paranoia, I believe one important aspect has been overlooked — an aspect that is similarly under-represented in discussions of paranoia in general. In conversation with Gerald Hower, DeLillo asks, "[w]hat is the relationship of high technology to the way we think and feel?" (np), and in the manner in which his novels respond to his own question I believe DeLillo sheds considerable light on the function and structure of the secret systems, conspiracies, and conspiracy theories circulating both in his texts and in the larger culture.

The label "chief shaman of the paranoid school" was applied to DeLillo by Robert Towers in his 1988 review of Libra for the New York Review of Books (6). Perhaps because it is suggestive of something quite fundamental in DeLillo's novels, the label has been
picked up and repeated by a variety of interviewers and critics since then. I want to suggest that the phrase is misleading, especially in the context Towers provides, which sees DeLillo inheriting the title from Thomas Pynchon. Conspiracy and paranoia clearly fascinate DeLillo, but nowhere in his work does he suggest the kind of malevolent global power Pynchon describes in, for instance, *Gravity's Rainbow*. While Pynchon's narratives function as paranoid systems that overwhelm the characters trapped inside, DeLillo ultimately frustrates the secret desires of his conspiracy theorists and paranoids by refusing to align his texts with the careful plottings of their elaborate systems.

For DeLillo forms of paranoia — at both the social and individual level — are symptomatic of a desire to engage with history. Lee Harvey Oswald's attempts to make a place for himself within the world narrative illustrate this desire, but as Thomas Carmichael points out, Oswald's "efforts to enter history [are] bitterly ironic, as he embraces the tyranny of structure and conspiracy in his frustrated desire for an autonomous subjectivity" (248). In a similar manner the political and economic complexities that DeLillo registers in his fiction overwhelm the conceptual grasp of his characters, who are left adrift in what Fredric Jameson describes as "the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (38). In DeLillo's fiction this leads to the prevalence of characters who imagine the existence of conspiracies and clandestine organizations in order that they may continue to believe in a coherent and comprehensible world:

The point is that a paranoid world is the opposite of an 'absurd' or meaningless one: in the former, every detail, every sparrow that falls, the make and model of every car that passes you, people's expressions — all that is programmed in advance and part of the basic conspiracy; the world is if anything too
meaningful, and there is undoubtedly a deeper consolation here which translates itself into formal pleasures such as those of the theological spy story (good vs. evil) or of fantasies of sophistication and ultimate knowledge such as this one.

(Jameson, "Review" 118)

By engaging with the manifestations of paranoia that appear in America, particularly those that follow John F. Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, DeLillo is able to approach the unrepresentable space of postmodernism Jameson equates with "late capitalism." In describing the recourse to conspiracy, however, DeLillo is not adopting it himself. He makes it clear that paranoia and conspiracy operate in the culture to provide an illusory coherence. The conspiracies DeLillo describes are peculiarly postmodern in that, while they recall the forms of older paranoid narratives, they are focused on specific, contemporary subjects.

Viewed as exercises in the paranoid style, DeLillo's plots and their obsessive return to the subjects of conspiracy, espionage, and hidden systems of power make sense. His fascination with secret agents and terrorists is not a capitulation to paranoid logic — in an interview he insists "you don't have to be paranoid to write [it], or to understand it" (Connolly 266) — but an exploration of the culture of paranoia as it permeates popular consciousness. From this perspective it becomes clear that there are three levels of paranoia operating in DeLillo's fiction. First, there is no shortage of clinical paranoids, characters whose words or actions reveal a serious and debilitating pathological condition. The street preacher in Underworld (352-354) and a nameless drunk mumbling about FBI surveillance (Running Dog 88) are examples of this type. In addition, there are numerous practitioners of the "paranoid style," that is, individuals such as Richie Armbrister in Running Dog or
General Ted Walker in *Libra* who are engrossed in a conspiracy theory that serves tactically to further their social or political agendas but who are clearly capable of moving effectively through society on a day to day basis. Finally, DeLillo's fiction is populated with numerous characters who at times exhibit what Eve Sedgwick calls "narrow-gauge, everyday, rather incoherent cynicism," or (borrowing the term from Peter Sloterdijk) "enlightened false consciousness" (21). Marvin Lundy (*Underworld*), Moll Parker (*Running Dog*), the radio DJ Weird Beard (*Americana*): each stands in an uneasy relationship to the conspiracy narratives they recite. Of course, not all characters fit unproblematically in just one of the above categories, but in general the forms of paranoia that appear in DeLillo's novels can be identified as one of these three forms. In many instances in DeLillo's texts it is not absolutely clear if characters properly belong to just one of the categories proposed above, or if they participate in a couple of them.

This chapter proceeds through three stages. In the first section, I will revisit the historical context which determined paranoia as a psychoanalytic category and draw attention to its central characteristics. The second section explores instances of conspiracy and paranoia in DeLillo's novels according to the three types identified above, and foregrounds their relationship to a specific articulation of bureaucratic power and to specifically modern methods of surveillance. In the third, I argue that DeLillo creates paranoid narratives and conspiracy theories in his novels not because he seeks to convince us of their truth, but because he is attempting to account for their prevalence in a culture where, increasingly, "it has come to seem that paranoia and conspiracy theories are everywhere" (Knight 811). In this respect the paranoid narratives operating in *Libra, Great Jones Street* and *Players*, for example, are embedded within DeLillo's larger interpretive
project much as Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Mental Illness* (discussed below) is embedded within the contemporary structures of neurophysiology with which he had to contend (Kittler 304).

1. Paranoia and Interpretation

The term "paranoia" ("from Greek meaning wrong or faulty knowledge or reasoning" [Macalpine and Hunter 13]) came into existence as a recognized medical condition around the middle of the eighteenth century. Its main characteristics, megalomania and delusions of persecution, are clearly identifiable in Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Mental Illness*, a privately printed book which appeared in Leipzig in 1903. In it he recounts his experiences as a patient in psychiatric clinics, and claims that during these times his body "was gradually being transformed into a female body . . ., [and that] if confirmed and established as a fact by men of science, new evidence would be provided about . . . the nature of God. . . " (5). "Believing himself the sole object of these divine miracles, Schreber felt it was his duty to spread this knowledge" to the world at large (*Memoirs* 5). Elements of persecution and megalomania run throughout Schreber's narrative, along with a delusion that he is constantly watched by a cruel, omniscient, yet curiously aloof deity.

This strange document formed the basis for Freud's major work on paranoia, which appeared in 1911 as "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)." Freud never met or corresponded with Schreber, and consequently his entire analysis is based on the narrative contained in Schreber's memoirs. In "Psychoanalytical Notes" Freud defends this atypical methodology by claiming that
analysis of paranoid subjects cannot proceed from a verbal interview anyway because "paranoids . . . only say what they choose to say":

The psychoanalytic investigation of paranoia would be altogether impossible if the patients themselves did not possess the peculiarity of betraying (in a distorted form, it is true) precisely those things which other neurotics keep hidden as a secret. Since paranoids cannot be compelled to overcome their internal resistance, and since in any case they only say what they choose to say, it follows that this is precisely a disorder in which a written report or a printed case history can take the place of personal acquaintance with the patient. (104)

From its initial incorporation within modern psychoanalysis, then, paranoia is characterized not only by delusions of persecution and megalomania, and fantasies of constant surveillance, but by an irreducibly textual nature. Paranoia is best observed by the early Freud as a text, a written narrative to be examined and deciphered. In a later work, Totem and Taboo, he writes that the paranoid system (or narrative) "is best characterized by the fact that at least two reasons can be discovered for each of its products: a reason based upon the premises of the system (a reason, then, which may be delusional) and a concealed reason, which we must judge to be the truly operative and real one" (96). Following this strategy of detecting the latent meaning of a paranoid narrative such as Schreber's Memoirs beneath the manifest delusions it describes, Freud argues that the tremendously complex edifice of Schreber's delusional beliefs arises from a relatively simple inability to cope with repressed homosexual desires. Applying his theory of libidinal development to Schreber's case, Freud offers a reading of the Memoirs which translates it into an allegory of sublimated desire for the father (Freud 150).
Freud describes the mechanism for the return of the repressed in a paranoid's psychic makeup, a process that "requires that internal perceptions, or feelings, shall be replaced by external perceptions" (166): the unacceptable (repressed) internal proposition is thus projected out onto the external world. This repressed proposition returns "in a distorted form, it is true" (104), and the subsequent analysis consists in reconstructing, from shadows and fragments present in the paranoid text, the image of what the patient refuses to represent. In "Psychoanalytic Notes" Freud proposes that the homosexual basis of paranoia takes the unacceptable proposition "I [a man] love HIM" as the repressed content and effects its return in a) the negated form "I hate HIM," b) the transferred form "I love HER," or c) the projected form "HE hates me." This last, "the most striking characteristic of symptom-formation in paranoia" (Freud 169), is given particular attention by Freud and subsequent commentators because it neatly accounts for the way in which an astute interpretation of the external delusions can point towards the problematic core of the paranoid's condition. The delusional system is, according to the principle of projection, "the result of an internal perception that is suppressed and . . . its content, after undergoing a certain degree of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception" (169). It is therefore possible to access the real content of the paranoid's delusions, provided one can perform the correct translation.

With its textual underpinnings, the narrative of clinical paranoia already resembles the texts produced by practitioners of the paranoid style, full of convoluted scholarship and the obsessive recuperation of details within a single narrative framework. But as Eve Sedgwick notes, the "methodological suspicion" used by the analyst in breaking the textual code of the paranoid's delusional content becomes a case of "the man of suspicion double-
bluffing the man of guile" (5). She quotes Freud's own observation that "the delusions of paranoiacs have an unpalatable external similarity and internal kinship to the systems of our philosophers" (5).

The importance of Schreber's *Memoirs* to twentieth-century theories of paranoia cannot be overstated. According to Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, "Schreber is now the most frequently quoted patient in psychiatry" (8). Furthermore, the quotations are largely filtered through Freud's own writings; in other words, as the introduction to the *Memoirs* explains, only those passages from the *Memoirs* that are reprinted in Freud's original study have been referenced in subsequent commentaries (*Memoirs* 11). Any attempts to interpret Schreber's paranoia as something other than a repressed homosexual wish-phantasy must either correct Freud's interpretation or return to Schreber's original work to develop the basis for an alternate interpretation. Anthony Wilden and Friedrich Kittler are two theorists who have both offered interpretations of the *Memoirs* to challenge Freud's account of Schreber's paranoia as a nervous illness.

They draw very different conclusions, yet each approaches paranoia from a perspective indebted to Freud's previous work. In each case their analysis insists on the primacy of Schreber's writing and relies on a careful interpretation of Schreber's work, resulting in findings that are clearly indebted to the concept of projection and maintain the latent/manifest opposition Freud proposed even as they attempt to refute his original diagnosis.

Anthony Wilden interprets the manifest dualism of Schreber's conception of gender as a form of rebellion against the rigid patriarchal order and the "related male obsessions with growth, efficiency, performance, and production" (289). The conventional opposition
of thinking man to feeling woman is transcended by Schreber's delusions, Wilden argues, as Schreber claims to possess "nerves of voluptuousness" (Memoirs 204) all over his body whereas ordinary men have them only in their genitals. In his narrative Schreber imagines the possibility of a fully-eroticized male body, Wilden claims, but in reality this possibility is precluded by the imperative to be masculine Schreber, as an agent of patriarchal order in his culture, is subject to (296).

Schreber's desire to be transformed into a woman is for Wilden a distorted wish to escape the rigid confines of the masculine order, and he finds evidence in the Memoirs to suggest that Schreber believes that to become a woman is to become more fully human: "Woman for him means something quite different from the 'woman' of his time. To be a Woman, for Schreber, does not mean to exchange one set of genitals for another. To be a Woman means to be totally in touch with the source of human life. TO BE A WOMAN MEANS IN FACT NOTHING LESS THAN TO BE A HUMAN BEING" (299, emphasis in original). In reading "Schreber as a Social Philosopher" (295), Wilden abandons Freud's emphasis on libidinal drives as the source of Schreber's delusions, emphasizing instead external social forces confronting (and confounding) Schreber. At the same time, however, Wilden continues to employ the idea of a division between the latent and manifest meaning of Schreber's narrative. His analysis (interpretation) ignores the surface text, with its insistent claims of "miracles," "soul-murder," and "divine rays"; instead, he posits these terms as merely elements of a coded "metacommunication" (296) which, properly decoded, constitutes the incisive and emancipatory philosophy latent within Schreber's ravings.

Friedrich Kittler's interpretation of the Memoirs, like Wilden's, proceeds from a dissatisfaction with Freud's conclusions regarding the causal connection between repressed
homosexuality and paranoia. In their place Kittler reveals a fascinating connection between the curious "nerves of voluptuousness" Schreber describes spreading through his body and the historical emergence of the field of neurophysiology, one of whose earliest theorists, Paul Flechsig, was responsible for Schreber's treatment.

For Kittler, *Memoirs* is a concise, allegorical history of late nineteenth-century psychiatric practices, presented as a narrative of one individual's desperate struggle against the institutional power of the burgeoning psychoanalytic establishment. To support this claim, Kittler suggests that "the imaginative copyright to [Schreber's] theology, developed from the notion of the epistemological advantages of being a corpse, belongs to [pioneering neurophysiologist] Paul Flechsig" (*Discourse Networks* 295). According to Kittler, Schreber's paranoid fears have at their root the very rational observation that his psychiatrist's experiments were confined to corpses; Flechsig's contention that "the brain contains 'the key to every natural conception of mental activity'" (*Discourse Networks* 295) meant that only detailed examination of the cerebrum could shed light on the mental processes of paranoia. Such an examination, of course, could only be performed on dead subjects. (William Niederland makes an analogous point regarding the castration "fantasies" Schreber recounts in the *Memoirs*. Flechsig's writings included a paper describing "the use of actual castration in his hospital as a method to be employed for the cure of serious nervous and psychological ailments" [104, emphasis in original]). Thus, for Kittler, Schreber's insistence that "within the Order of the World, God did not really understand the living human being and had no need to understand him, because, according to the Order of the World, He dealt only with corpses" (*Memoirs* 75, emphasis in original), is a clear indication that Schreber's delusional relationship with God has as its source his actual
relationship with his psychiatrist. Schreber's opening statement in his *Memoirs*, that "[t]he human soul is contained in the nerves of the body . . . [and] the total mental life of a human being rests on their excitability by external impressions" (45), recapitulates Flechsig's materialist stance and suggests the influence his theories have in the narrative that follows.

Like Wilden and Freud, Kittler reads Schreber's text in search of clues to a deeper meaning. His conclusions are different from theirs because his interpretation is different, yet like them he emplots the "false knowledge" of paranoia against a roughly isomorphic outline of real facts and occurrences. Kittler's analysis is directed at the way in which Schreber's account reads like a distorted, mythologized rendering of the transformation in the early part of this century from mechanical metaphors for human functions to informational metaphors. When Schreber creates a mythology with Flechsig as chief deity he is reformulating his encounter with psychiatry within a deluded yet logical narrative. Properly decoded, according to Kittler, *Memoirs* narrates the historical process of resituating the soul within the materiality of the human nervous system, a development that is itself part of the general inscription of the once-metaphysical human subject within a discourse network of material texts and codes. Kittler's reading is particularly important for my understanding of DeLillo's use of paranoia and conspiracy because of the way he identifies the material conditions of the paranoid's experience as constitutive elements in the narrative. The network of nervous connections Flechsig investigated in a rational, scientific way (and Schreber adopted for his paranoid text) forms the basis for a new understanding of the way the brain communicates with the body. Subsequent examples of paranoid narratives will similarly focus on communication systems as mechanisms for covert control.
2. Paranoia and the paranoid style

From the example of Schreber's *Memoirs* and subsequent commentators it is evident that, along with structural elements of paranoia such as mechanisms of persecution and delusions of constant surveillance, the narratives of paranoid individuals derive their content from their immediate social, economic, and technological context. Paranoia, written out as coherent narrative, can be mapped back onto the social text whence it came.

According to the historian Richard Hofstadter, paranoid texts are common in political discourse as well as psychiatric discourse, and in his "seminal article" (Hantke 241) "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," he transposes the clinical methods of assessing paranoia in individuals to the task of identifying, in a range of religious and political texts from the 17th to the mid-20th centuries, the manifestations of paranoia in the corpus of American political rhetoric. In documents taken from the public record he identifies exactly those elements Freud locates in the text of the paranoid Doctor Schreber: projection, persecution, and delusions of grandeur.

Two complementary characteristics of Hofstadter's examples need to be emphasized. The first is the startling continuity in their tone and form. Compare these brief extracts from the examples he cites:

How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. . . . What can be made of this unbroken series of decisions and acts contributing to the strategy of defeat? (Hofstadter 7)
As early as 1865-66 a conspiracy was entered into between the gold gamblers of Europe and America. For nearly thirty years these conspirators have kept the people quarreling over less important matters, while they have pursued with unrelenting zeal their one central purpose. (8)

It is a notorious fact that the Monarchs of Europe and the Pope of Rome are at this very moment plotting our destruction and threatening the extinction of our political, civil, and religious institutions. We have the best reasons for believing that corruption has found its way into our Executive Chamber, and that our Executive head is tainted with the infectious venom of Catholicism. (8)

Secret and systematic means have been adopted and pursued, with zeal and activity, by wicked and artful men, in foreign countries, to undermine the foundations of this Religion, and to overthrow its Altars, and thus to deprive the world of its benign influence on society. (9)

In these extracts one can see a singular rhetorical tone that remains constant across the two hundred-year span of their composition. Along with this continuity, however, there is a marked shift in the location of the threat identified in each example. In the first example the threat to the nation is identified as communism; in the second, international bankers and gold speculators (a category which in context suggests a thinly-disguised anti-Semitism) are the enemy; the third example positions Catholicism as the pervasive and insidious enemy; the last excerpt depicts the Masons as being on the verge of overthrowing the social and
religious order. In each case the writer purports to have discovered the existence of a committed group of individuals operating at the very highest levels of power to engineer the downfall of an existing order. And in each case the writer has identified a threat that has only recently developed relative to the writer's historical moment. Sedgwick provides an elegant explanation for the acuity of the paranoid style in identifying threats in new social or political developments. Her claim that "Paranoia is anticipatory" leads to the corollary proposition "[t]here must be no bad surprises" (9-10, emphasis in original).

The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because to learn of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known. (10)

The recuperative framework of paranoia requires that any new information be consistent with the pre-existing narrative. "Surprises" or data that do not fit with the pre-existing model threaten the stability of the entire conceptual edifice.

Hofstadter's examples suggest that, despite its clearly irrational hyperbole, the paranoid style resonates with peculiar power because it responds to the dominant forms of political and economic power circulating within a given social matrix. Hofstadter acknowledges that the paranoid style always departs from hard kernels of real political (and social, and religious, and economic) developments, from "certain defensible judgments" (36). But unlike more moderate forms of political rhetoric "[t]he distinguishing thing about [practitioners of] the paranoid style is . . . that they regard a 'vast' or 'gigantic' conspiracy as the motive force in historical events" (29). The narratives Hofstadter considers as examples
of the paranoid style are thus similar to those of clinical paranoids because, in their drive to contain all events within a single interpretive framework, they rapidly outstrip any realistic evidence for their claims and become irrational or at best wildly improbable fantasies. Fringe holocaust revisionists and alien-abduction believers, two contemporary groups that conform to the outlines of the paranoid style, both insist on a seamless façade maintained for over fifty years, initiated and perpetuated by several governments, with tens of thousands of ordinary citizens acting as willing accomplices in the deceit. In the face of evidence countering claims about extra-terrestrials or some enormous Holocaust hoax, the paranoid narrative must grow and the conspiracy seem to widen to maintain a coherent structure. Like the narratives of true paranoids, the paranoid style possesses both a latent and a manifest meaning, the latter composed of a delusional, distorted projection of the content of the former: anti-Semitism as the repressed truth at the heart of Holocaust denial, displaced religious faith underlying the belief in extra-terrestrials, fear of espionage necessitating ever-greater surveillance countermeasures, etcetera. Just as steam engines have replaced dragons in dreams, and UFO sightings function as the secular equivalent of angelic visitations, the paranoid style is remarkably adaptable when it comes to incorporating new developments within its master narrative.

One of the signs that the paranoid style proceeds by the mechanism of projection is evident in the interesting feature whereby the paranoid text exhibits grudging admiration for its implacable opponent. Often, Hofstadter points out, paranoid tracts insist upon the necessity of becoming more like the threatening enemy in order to defeat him, even to the extent of replicating to a large degree the organization and symbols of the system it views as a menace. Thus the object of paranoid scrutiny is both reviled and marked for
Chief Shaman?

annihilation, and emulated or identified with. Hofstadter uses the example of the John Birch society, a radical right-wing group in the U.S. that duplicates the cell-structure of communist insurgent groups, and the Ku Klux Klan, which expresses pathological anti-Catholic views even as it emulates the organization and hierarchy of the Catholic church, borrowing from its iconography and styles of dress (32-33).

While Hofstadter does distinguish the "paranoid spokesman in politics" from the "clinical paranoiac" (4), in his analysis he has repeated what I take to be the two central premises of the psychoanalytic approach to paranoia. In the first place he concludes that the external enemy in paranoid discourse is a projection of an inadmissible libidinal desire, and second, by asserting "the possibility of using [paranoid] political rhetoric to get at political pathology" (6), he suggests that the real content of the paranoid text lies embedded within the laborious account of conspiracy and persecution that makes up the manifest narratives he examines.

Hofstadter's idea of a "paranoid mode of expression" (4) available as a rhetorical style creates a context in which paranoia in novels like DeLillo's can be read symptomatically. Instead of deciding to accept or dismiss the contradictory truth-claims among the layers of conspiracy that become ubiquitous in DeLillo's novels after End Zone (1973), we can read them as reflections of the paranoid style, and ask with DeLillo why such paranoia continues to flourish in a society purportedly dedicated to free and easy access to ever-greater quantities of information.

In Libra there are many paranoid voices, all of them telling different and incommensurable stories. The Texan reactionary General Ted Walker is perhaps the clearest representative of the paranoid style; his speculations concerning the "Real Control
Apparatus" representing "every modern advance that saps the nation's will to resist" (282) are entirely consistent with Hofstadter's thesis. According to Walker, the lack of evidence for the Real Control Apparatus⁹ is precisely the proof of its existence, since "[t]he Apparatus is precisely what we can't see or name" (283). Aspects of a similar paranoia preoccupy the character Guy Banister, who in "his file on the Red Chinese" keeps the "same old rumors and suspicions" about tens of thousands of Red Chinese troops massing along the Californian border (352). Straddling the distinction between paranoia proper and the paranoid style, there is Marguerite Oswald, demanding an investigation into her son's past and insisting that the plot to implicate him in the President's assassination goes back to his high school year book: "The point is how it goes on and on and on. That's the point. The point is how far back have they been using him?" (451). Jack Ruby, on the other hand is ultimately characterized by DeLillo as clinically paranoid. Ruby's delusions are the most extreme expressions of paranoia in the novel and establish a horizon for the intimations of conspiracy that precede them:

A guard reads the Bible to him. Jack believes this man has a listening device in his clothes. They safely store away all his incriminating remarks and then erase all the remarks that prove his crime was unpremeditated . . .

He believes people are distorting his words even as he speaks them. There is a process that takes place between the saying of a word and when they pretend to hear it correctly but actually change it to mean what they want.

---

⁹ Timothy Melley points out that, given Walker's description of the Real Control Apparatus as "a network of powerful men 'we can't see or name...infiltrating our minds' and controlling our actions," the acronym of this determining apparatus, RCA, "seems more than coincidental" (142).
He believes the Jews of America are being put in kill machines and slaughtered in enormous numbers.

He begins to merge with Oswald. He can't tell the difference between them. All he knows for sure is that there is a missing element here, a word they have canceled completely, Jack Ruby has stopped being the man who killed the President's assassin, he is the man who killed the President.

This is why the Jews are being stuffed in machines. It is all because of him. (444-45)

Right at the novel's end, DeLillo inserts a catalogue of Ruby's paranoid delusions. After over 400 pages of meticulous historical reconstruction, Ruby's tirade annihilates whatever faith remained in the value of the accumulated testimony.

Oswald's voice too is at the last pitched in increasingly paranoid tones. In Libra Oswald is initially portrayed as a rational figure, albeit one obsessed with the seemingly unbridgeable divide between himself and history. As the 22nd of November approaches, however, DeLillo implies that Oswald's grasp on reality begins to weaken. Reacting to a newspaper story about assassination plots in early September, Oswald becomes obsessed with the idea that "They had plans for him, whoever they were. It was easy to believe they'd been watching him for years, working things around him, knowing the time would come" (329). The sensation is even stronger in a scene from mid-November, when Oswald, watching movies on TV, has "an eerie sense he was being watched for his reaction . . . . It was like secret instructions entering the network of signals and broadcast bands . . . . They were running a message through the night and into his skin . . . ." (369). These episodes, simultaneously indications of paranoid reasoning and examples of the contemporary
technological specificity paranoia exhibits, appear in the closing section of *Libra*, and raise an interesting question: if DeLillo is the "chief shaman of the paranoid school," why does he spend the final pages of the novel trying to undermine the credibility of JFK-conspiracy theorists by creating caricatures of conspiracy?

The author-surrogate Nicholas Branch, an expert in the topic with access to secret CIA files on the assassination, rejects the idea that "a conspiracy is everything that ordinary life is not[,] ... the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted, forever closed off to us" (440); instead, Branch reaches the conclusion "that the conspiracy against the President was a rambling affair that succeeded in the short term due mainly to chance. Deft men and fools, ambivalence and fixed will and what the weather was like" (441). In *Libra* paranoid interpretations do not succeed in explaining the events surrounding November 22nd, 1963. Instead of a coherent, linear narrative with no alternatives, we are given Branch's version — a version of branches.

DeLillo finds in the assassination of John F. Kennedy the defining moment of the postmodern condition, the "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" (*Libra* 181). In the aftermath of the event, a "sense of a coherent reality most of us share" comes unraveled ("American Blood" 22), DeLillo believes, not just because of the event itself, but also because of the epistemological uncertainty that grows up around the event. Belief in the adequacy of linear narrative to explain history is henceforth reserved for the paranoid mind. Paranoia becomes a way of projecting some form of coherence on the uncertainties that spill out from the Kennedy assassination. The cultural hysteria surrounding the event is, according to DeLillo, a symptom of the sense that provisional
truths, made persuasive by our own perceptions, have supplanted any assurances of ultimate Truth.

If DeLillo is right in saying that the assassination "in the end is a story about our uncertain grip on the world" ("American Blood" 28), then the subsequent proliferation of conspiracy theories in the wake of Kennedy's assassination represents a pathological response to the "world of randomness and ambiguity" ("American Blood" 22) resulting from this one event:

The massiveness of the official investigation itself, the very scope of the inquiry, its willingness to 'answer, specifically, every . . . theory and rumour', indicates an uncertainty, or even paranoia, about how far causality might extend — about how to separate a single incident from the unwritten mass history of everyday life. (Melley 137)

In forcing a consistent set of narrative elements together to account for the messy and unresolved details of the assassination, the paranoid narrative forces an uneasy sense of closure.

When, in the postwar era, a different form of bewildering diversity is occasioned by the "daily ephemera and vast entanglement of multinational consumer capitalism" (Knight 820), the hermetic logic of the paranoid style operates in this context as an integrative force to counteract the explosive decompression effected by the machinations of capitalism. In a sense, the paranoid narratives of overarching conspiracies can be interpreted as signs of displaced desire for coherence and order. "[T]he public's belief in the secret manipulation of history" ("American Blood" 25) is a recuperative faith aimed against the even greater fear that ultimately there is no controlling agency, no "Central Intelligence" (Begley 303). The
Kennedy assassination qualifies as a peculiarly postmodern moment precisely because it serves as a showcase for all of the elements that make up the mediated experience of postmodernity: "... vast spy systems, the literal and symbolic transgression of U-2 planes, electronic devices, 'orbiting sensors' and the like" (Aaron 79) as well as, among other things, the Zapruder film, the videotape of Oswald's murder, and dictabelt recordings of police radio transmissions in the minutes before and after the assassination. The twenty-six volumes of the Warren Commission Report, "the megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred" (Libra 181), stand as testimony to the scope and volume of information bureaucratic institutions record and collect concerning even seemingly inconsequential citizens in the postmodern era. And yet DeLillo points out that the sheer wealth of data available in the Warren Report has brought the event no closer to a final resolution; in its complex interconnections the narrative surrounding Kennedy's assassination continues to frustrate all attempts at rational analysis until even the most basic facts are placed in doubt.

As I have indicated, Nicholas Branch's role in Libra is to distance the author from the paranoid versions of the Kennedy assassination and provide a narrative frame from which to reflect on the conspiracies and conspiracy theories that flourish before and after the killing. Through this framing device DeLillo can develop paranoid characterizations of Ruby, Oswald, and even Oswald's mother Marguerite without appearing to embrace their positions. Ruby's final days are spent in an asylum, his mind tormented by persecution anxieties and delusions of grandeur. Marguerite Oswald is shown at the end of the novel to be building her own paranoid system, calling into question her son's over-representation in a high-school yearbook as evidence that "they" have had an interest in him for years.
Oswald himself, DeLillo contends, was in a very unstable frame of mind by November 1963, finding a network of intricate coincidences that spoke to him of an enormous conspiracy to implicate him in the attempt on Kennedy's life. Near the end of *Libra*, Oswald's obsession with Kennedy, his fixation in their similarities and certainty of their shared destiny suggests a paranoid transference. The idea that "they" are speaking to him through TV movies is a more obvious indication of Oswald's mental deterioration. The structure of the novel reinforces this sense of the inevitability of Oswald's actions; as DeLillo remarks, it recapitulates Oswald's sense of his destiny converging with Kennedy's in the way "the Oswald chapters and the conspiracy chapters [which alternate for the balance of *Libra*] converge at the end of the long New Orleans chapter" (*Brick Reader* 266).

Real (i.e. clinical) paranoia and the paranoid style are both in operation in *Libra*, with the debilitating delusions of the former suggestive of the dangers inherent in the pursuit of the latter. Yet the conspiracy theories of many of the novel's characters are attempts to forge a relationship with history in which they play an active role. Oswald's involvement in the conspiracy is a response to his sense of irrelevance in the narrative of history, a sense he describes as being "a zero in the system" (106). His desire to enter into the narrative is not very different from that of the conspirators who to plan the attempt on the President's life. One character describes his previous undercover existence as living "in a special society that pretty much satisfied the most serious thing in my nature. Secrets to trade and keep, certain dangers, an opportunity to function in tight spots, wave a gun in people's faces . . . . You don't want theory and debate. Just impact. Two or three men to do serious things" (63-64). The conspirators affirm their status as historical "agents" through their sense of participating in covert operations. Nicholas Branch's concern that the Agency
is withholding information from him reveals the contradictory logic of "a theology of secrets" (442): the comfort of being in on a secret is always balanced by a fear that there are still more secrets one is excluded from. Within the CIA as DeLillo describes it this spiraling logic fosters universal paranoia and demands interrogation and surveillance be carried out on other members of the agency (22-24). The former operative Win Everett, forced into retirement through an investigation of this type, nevertheless admits to his conflicted feelings towards the institution that disgraced and expelled him: "I don't like the kind of double-minded feeling I have about this thing. Despise them on the one hand; crave their love and understanding on the other" (21).

Oswald himself occupies a contested space wherein his sense of being watched and his desire to be part of the surveillance apparatus collide. As a marine stationed at the Atsugi naval air base in Japan, he is given a first-hand look at the government's most advanced surveillance technology in the form of the U-2 spy planes operating from the base. The cold war paranoia that drives the demand for surveillance technology like the U-2 provides in turn Oswald's access to a world of espionage and conspiracy (109-16). If DeLillo is right in identifying the Kennedy assassination as "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" it can hardly be incidental that these seconds occur during a period when conspiracy theories and secret organizations are spreading across the United States (Libra 63-64) and indiscriminate governmental use of surveillance strategies — on enemies and citizens alike — facilitates the adoption of a paranoid style that romanticizes the intersection of an individual life with great historical events. In the context of institutional paranoia, the sheer volume of FBI and CIA material on Oswald, to say nothing of the 26-volume Warren Report, reveals the kernel of truth at the heart of paranoia's worst
fears. Fredric Jameson suggests that "conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen to be a degraded attempt — through the figuration of advanced technology — to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (38).

Engaging with, but not adopting, the paranoid recuperations of Kennedy's death, DeLillo evades "the nostalgia for a master plan, the conspiracy which explains absolutely everything" that he discerns in Oliver Stone's JFK (Nadotti 94). Instead, he adopts an attitude that is considerably more ambiguous. Steffan Hantke offers a useful distinction between DeLillo's position and the nostalgia evident in, for example, Stone's film by differentiating between 'conspiracy fiction' and 'conspiracy theory':

Reigning in . . . heterogeneity and reinstating the logic of 'us versus them,' conspiracy theory generally tends to trace power to a distinct origin, an evil presence. It personalizes and allegorizes conflict, opening it to the specific ideological inscriptions of any given culture, and thereby makes it tenable. It allows us to reduce politics to personal hostility and, in the process, conceptualize one form of political conflict by utilizing an outmoded earlier form. Whereas conspiracy theory structures, familiarizes, and naturalizes this bewildering diversity, imposing an order that recreates the Manichean simplicity of good versus evil against all better and more rational political judgment, conspiracy fiction . . . attempts to undermine and subvert the unchallenged assumptions of these theories, expose their political objectives for what they are, and reflect the role they play in the complex networks of cultural and social practices. (Hantke 222)
Problems and troubling evidence is contained in the Warren Report, but for DeLillo its size and complexity are indicative of a degree of uncertainty, not security, present in American culture in the aftermath of November 22, 1963.

The spread of paranoid beliefs through the seams of popular consciousness parallels the expansion of centralized governmental control in the years following the Second World War, and in the context of Hofstadter's exploration of paranoia as a rhetorical style, it is interesting to note the new culprits tracked in *Libra*. Unlike the quotations from Hofstadter's text provided above (see pp. 37-38, above), the hidden men behind the scenes are no longer identified by ideological or religious affiliations. They are, as part of the CIA, officially agents of the government itself. At the same time, however, the monolith of centralized authority seems to dissolve upon close inspection. The description of a typical CIA operations meeting given in *Libra* presents an "inverted pyramid structure" that "ensures . . . the Agency will not do the will of any one person and that no single individual has control or even knowledge of the entire structure" (Melley 157). As a consequence, according to Melley, "DeLillo's story suggests that the plot against Kennedy develops because the CIA has no central command and control" (157). The vast array of conspiracy theories that arise to account for the assassination — even the "lone-gunner" explanation — are for Melley evidence of what he calls "agency panic": the response of a belief system that "cannot dispense with the notion of centralized control" to an event that seems to evade such an explanation (156, emphasis in original). *Libra*’s unsettling specter of a command structure that can make strategies and decisions without reference to an individuated human subject is contrasted by the centralizing authority of J. Edgar Hoover, presented in *Underworld* as the ultimate decision-maker within the FBI.
Yet even here paranoia continues to operate, as Hoover is shown to be driven by a sense of paranoid fear that exactly mirrors the conspiracy theories arrayed against him and his FBI colleagues by the counter-culture, a doubling or echoing of the discursive currents at play "in the endless estuarial mingling of paranoia and control" (559). Though at the end of the 1950s he is the personification of central command and control with his "massive dossiers" filled with surveillance reports, wiretaps, and transcripts, by the time of Truman Capote's Black and White Ball his control is shown to be slipping, as his forces fail to identify or intercept a group of agitators who, significantly, have eluded the FBI to the point where they have yet to be named (576). Hoover's paranoia about the protestors is exactly matched by that of the young woman protestors who dances with Hoover's aide, Clyde Tolson. Her comment that "The state, the nation, the corporation, the power structure, the system, the establishment" are "all part of the same motherfucking thing" (575) is inverted almost immediately by Hoover's claim that "It's all linked. The war protesters, the garbage thieves, the rock bands, the promiscuity, the drugs, the hair" (577). The two formulations mirror one another in erecting equivalent paranoid systems where complex and varied phenomena are lumped together into a coherent, malevolent whole. In this respect the two sides mimic each other "by erecting the fantasy figure of a hidden agent, 'the Other of the Other,' secretly pulling the strings, a move which posits a hidden order behind the visible chaos . . . ." (Willman 410). At the Black and White Ball the figures associated with the dominant culture and the counter-culture are shown to be part of a mutually reinforcing cycle of paranoia, an implied mirroring/inversion that is maintained to the end of the section as the nameless protestors follow Hoover back to his hotel in an ironic reversal of the term "government surveillance."
3. The Consequences of Conspiracy

*Players* (1977) is a novel about the psychological effects of routinized paranoia, tracing the activities of Lyle Wynant, an unexceptional stockbroker, as he becomes involved both with a terrorist group plotting to blow up the New York Stock Exchange building and with the FBI agents trying to capture the terrorists. Although *Players* is clearly working within the conventions of conspiracy thrillers, DeLillo drains away the expected suspense and the heroics associated with the genre. What is most notable in the presentation of terrorism in *Players* is the degree to which it is encoded in clichéd, mass media terms: "Gunman, obscure background, dum dum dum, carrying, get this, a bomb on his person, dum dum. Suspected terrorist network. Confusion over identity. Links being sought, dumdy dum. The guy refuses to talk, see a lawyer or leave his cell" (65).

The easy cynicism of this report, composed of prefabricated phrases and the fill-in-the-blanks "dum dum dum" suggests a level of cynicism in which conspiracy is so prevalent it has ceased to be worthy of serious attention. One of Lyle's terrorist contacts (Greg Kinnear, who is himself a double agent, feeding information and disinformation to both sides) places blame for this attitude squarely on the shoulders of government, especially within the triple context of JFK, Vietnam, and Watergate:

It's everywhere, isn't it? Mazes, you're correct. Intricate techniques. Our big problem in the past, as a nation, was that we didn't give our government credit for being the totally entangling force that it was. They were even more evil than we'd imagined. More evil and much more interesting. Assassination, blackmail, torture, enormous improbable intrigues . . . . This is all so alien to the liberal
spirit. It's a wonder they're bearing up at all. This haze of conspiracies and multiple interpretations. So much for the great instructing vision of the federal government. (104)

The expanded presence of the American government, both in the lives of its citizens and in international affairs, the introduction of powerful new surveillance technologies, and a growing public awareness of the role of the CIA and FBI in monitoring the activities of private citizens: these are the "certain defensible judgments" (Hofstadter 36) that become magnified and foregrounded by paranoid narratives. Lyle's offhand comment to an FBI agent, "Don't you have my phone wired into the computer that runs the world? " (153), summarizes the new, postmodern orientation of the paranoid style.

In an interview with Paris Review, DeLillo admits that conspiracy entered his work with Players because "[i]t was in the air. It was the way people were thinking. Those were the days when the enemy was some presence seeping out of the government, and the most paranoid sort of fear was indistinguishable from common sense" (286).

DeLillo's subsequent novel, Running Dog (1978), continues to play with the trope of paranoia as a response to political forces. The paranoid figures in Running Dog are (as Friedrich Kittler's analysis of paranoia would suggest) shown to be in tune with the technological and administrative forces arrayed against them. A drunk in a bar, for example, "mumbl[es] something about his landlord working for the FBI. The FBI had placed cameras and bugging devices not only in his apartment but everywhere he went" (62). The wife of a senator spends most of her time in bed, obsessively reading and rereading the 26 volumes of the Warren Report, an activity she has been engaged in for nine years. These examples suggest the development of a specifically postmodern form of
paranoia, tailored to meet the specific social and cultural conditions of a late-capitalist state. In "American Blood" DeLillo claims, "[i]t is possible that technology helps create the clandestine mentality. We all go underground to some extent. In an era of the massive codification and storage of data, we are all keepers and yielders of secrets" (27). *Running Dog* is a novel upon this theme, and clinical paranoia seems the logical limit-case of responses to such an environment. In the novel a young pornography entrepreneur, Richie Armbrister, descends into paranoid fear of assassination: "There was a sniper somewhere, waiting for the right moment . . . Dallas, Richie would say. What am I doing in Dallas . . ." (188-89). His paranoia concerning an assassination plot is compounded by his belief that there would be a police coverup of the murder.

What Armbrister and others in *Running Dog* are responding to is the growing knowledge that covert organizations are a constitutive element of the modern state apparatus — more than this, these covert groups extend beyond the limits of governmental control. In Melley's terms undercover operatives are now "renegades and free agents who are regularly subcontracted and often act on their own" (157-58). His description seems to describe the agents in *Running Dog* who control "Radial Matrix," "a legally incorporated firm in Fairfax, Virginia" that is "in fact a centralized funding mechanism for covert operations" (74), yet Radial Matrix itself recalls the activities of Air America and anticipates Oliver North and the Iran-Contra hearings by a full decade.

Glen Selvy succumbs to paranoid logic late in the novel, and it is instructive to see how his behavior is transformed. Anthony Wilden writes that Daniel Paul Schreber's paranoid delusions were a response to his inability to live as a human within the stringent confines of his role within a patriarchal order. Selvy, secret agent, government assassin, and
"a soldier without a war" (Osteen 102), abandons contingency for the simpler, linear narrative of sacrifice:

What it meant. The full-fledged secrecy. The reading, the routine. The double life. His private disciplines. His handguns. His regard for precautions. How your mind works. The narrowing of choices. What you are. It was clear, finally. The whole point. Everything.

All this time he'd been preparing to die . . . .

We are teaching you how to die violently. This is the only death that matters, steel or lead or tungsten alloy, death by hard metal, taking place in secret. To ensure the success of the course, we ourselves will kill you . . . .

All conspiracies begin with individual self-repression. (182)

From the moment of this revelation, Selvy's actions become intentionally linear. He drives in a straight line to "the Mines," a secret government training ground where he was transformed into a killer. His physical journey reflects a mental state that has abandoned contingency and "[a]ll that incoherence. Selection, election, option, alternative" (192), instead adopting a paranoid stance from which every detail is aligned within an inexorable linear narrative. Selvy's trip to the Mines is also a literal 'return of the repressed' to the site of initial trauma, a homecoming rendered palpable by the arrival at the Mines of an assassination team of ARVN rangers who descend in a U.S. government helicopter. In this gruesome inversion of Vietnam played out on American soil, Selvy's death at the hands of the Vietnamese soldiers completes the fatalistic narrative he embraced when he realized the purpose of his training. Through his characterization of Selvy given over to the singular
goal of his programming, DeLillo demonstrates the fatal consequences of the search for the absolute:

All behind him now. Cities, buildings, people, systems.

All the relationships and links. The plan, the execution, the sequel. He could forget that now. He'd traveled the event. He'd come all the way down the straight white line.

He realized he didn't need the blanket he was wrapped in. The cold wasn't getting to him that way . . . . It was perfect cold. The temperature at which things happen on an absolute scale. (192)

Paranoia is an escape from contingency and into the comfort of certainty. Contemporary paranoia fixates on the repositories of power and information (largely interchangeable terms at the present conjuncture) in the global system and projects their monstrous images into narratives of conspiracy. If my reading of Richard Hofstadter's examples is correct and the focus of the paranoid style always locates the site of power in a given society, then it makes sense that present-day paranoia identifies the source of power in covert agencies, multi-national corporations, and sophisticated surveillance systems. And indeed all these elements are incorporated (literally, embodied) in the all-encompassing delusions of the paranoid figures who populate DeLillo's fiction.

The clinically paranoid and practitioners of the paranoid style zero in on this government-corporation-technology nexus. Whereas an earlier rhetoric would point to Masonic Lodges, the Rothschilds, or the Papacy as the figure of some near-omnipotent adversary, postmodern paranoia discovers its aggrandized Other in the postindustrial form of social power. "Our faulty representations of some immense communicational and
computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present day multinational capitalism" (37), writes Jameson, sounding a few paranoid notes himself. He identifies the Other of postmodern paranoid delusions with "a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself" (37). The effort to imagine one's individual existence in relation to the immense and unthinkably complex global system is presented in DeLillo's novels through the intervention of plots and conspiracies. Allusions to the unrepresentable, Jean-Francois Lyotard might say. There is, after all, a totality — "the world is everything that is the case" — but in its intricate complexity it cannot be grasped. Paranoia rejects true complexity, however, and replaces it with a logical and consistent narrative that subsumes all details, no matter how contradictory, to a single explanation. Apparent complexity is revealed by the paranoid style to be a deception concocted by the powerful to obscure their influence. Thus the fascination with conspiracies apparent in DeLillo's texts represents a debased effort on the part of his characters to comprehend the narrative they inhabit.

Conspiracy theory, along with its allied technologies of surveillance and intelligence-gathering, figure in all DeLillo's novels from Players to Underworld; that the theme of secret organizations penetrating the ordinary, domestic world has appeared in each novel since End Zone indicates the extent to which paranoia has become routinized, "something you [buy] into, like Club Med," according to DeLillo (Begley 287).

Yet at the same time that DeLillo invokes paranoia as a readily available narrative strategy, he resists succumbing to the totalized vision of a "plan for all mankind" (Mao II 193) or a "computer that runs the world" (Players 153); unable to endorse the concept of
"Central Intelligence" he is nonetheless sensitive to the profound influence powerful
governmental and corporate structures can exert on individuals. If contemporary paranoia
merely assembles a caricature of the global system we inhabit, DeLillo's novels The Names
and Mao II sketch a plausible and compelling narrative about the forces of global capital
and their local effects in ordinary lives.

The Names is probably DeLillo's most ambitious attempt at representing the
interactions of individuals within the larger context of late capitalist culture. The world
James Axton inhabits is saturated with the interests of global corporations, government
dealings, and the actions of covert agencies. Axton's belated discovery that he has been
unwittingly working for the CIA merely confirms a relationship that has been implicit from
the moment he provides details about his job as a "risk analyst" (34): his work involves
travelling around the Middle East, gathering information on economic and political
activities in countries with Western business interests, and synthesizing the data to calculate
the probability of security risks to Western corporations operating in those countries. In
other words, he is a corporate intelligence agent operating out in the open. That the
information he collects should be of equal use to corporations and military intelligence
offices merely highlights the affinities between the two. Axton recognizes these affinities
early in the novel when he considers the vocabulary shared by business and the military,
although he fails to connect this observation to his own situation:

Curious, I thought, how all the regional accents converged on the same set of
words. The language of business is hard-edged and aggressive, drawing some of
its technical cant from the weapons pools of the south and southwest, a rural
nurturing in a way, a blooding of the gray-suited, the pale, the corporate man.

It's all the same game, these cross-argots suggest. (47)

Axton's inadvertent involvement with the CIA stirs up faint echoes of paranoid fears and recalls, in an attenuated form, the conspiratorial plots of *Running Dog*, *Players*, and *Libra*. Axton's position as a risk analyst is a peculiar extension of a technological system that has linked the globe ("I flew a lot, of course. We all did" [6]), and represents a form of pure Western rationality that tries to reduce the interactions of entire nation-states to a set of discrete variables, and subjects their future to statistical analysis. Ironically, as James McClure points out,

the 'rationalizing' systems of the West have indeed spread across the globe . . .

but in doing so they have generated, in a kind of *deus ex machina*, hitherto unimaginable new forms of intricacy, danger, and mystery: the unthinkable complex web of global capitalism, the covert institutions designed to extend, protect, and control it. (119)

This irony is brought home to Axton when the façade of his objectivity and rational mastery is shattered, first when he learns that his risk analyses are used by the CIA, and then by an assassination attempt that nearly kills a close friend and may — or may not — have been intended for him.

Here *The Names* carefully provides all of the elements of generic conspiracy fiction, but refuses to assemble them into a paranoid narrative. Axton's sources and contacts, his facts, statistics, and numbers, fail to alert him to the immediate threats to his own security: he works for a conspiracy without knowing it; he is unaware that he has become (perhaps)
the target of a different conspiracy. Axton's response to the shooting of his friend recalls the defensive role of paranoid logic in the face of contingency:

I want to believe they plotted well. I don't like thinking I was the intended victim. It puts all of us at the mercy of events. It's one more thing to vex me with its elusiveness, its drift — a fading into distances of human figures and whatever is real and absolute about the light that falls around them. (328)

If he was the intended victim then the wrong man was shot: the possibility troubles Axton less because he might have been the target than because, as a risk analyst, he recognizes that if the shooting was simply the result of a case of mistaken identity, all his careful calculations and statistical projections are washed away in the flux of unpredictable events.

A more conventional paranoia exists in *The Names* in the form of the cult Axton first observes on the Greek island of Kuoros. Composed of a handful of displaced Europeans, the members of the cult, which they call *Ta Onomata* ["The Names"], wander across the geography from which the European languages originated (Greece, Syria, Jordan, Northern Iran). Their literal return to origins complements their desire to force a return to the mythical origin of language, the point at which a thing and its name were coterminous. The cult performs ritual murders when it learns of individuals whose initials match the initials of their geographical location. In this respect they are the antithesis of Axton's technological modernity, and in their mystical devotion to an idea of language that does not suggest but merely is there is a profound madness. They take the convergence of the two names to possess a mystical significance, though they cannot articulate it (208-09). Yet for Axton's friend Owen Brademas, the cult's ritual suggests a brute correspondence: "These killings mock us. They mock our need to structure and classify, to build a system against
the terror in our souls. They make the system equal to the terror. The means to contend with
death has become death" (308). Brademas's account of the group's function recalls Freud's
description of the paranoid's tendency to project. The system of beliefs erected by the
paranoid to defend against, and repress, the inadmissible truth is inevitably a source of as
much psychic torment as the original, inadmissible fact. For the cult the purity of the
original alphabet represents a negation of history, and a guarantee of timeless persistence
threatened by the proliferation of connections and meanings. As a repudiation of the
intricacies of contemporary life the cult's fixation on reducing connections spirals inevitably
to dissolution and death. Here, as elsewhere in DeLillo's fiction, the quest for origins and
the elevation of the One over the many leads to violence and death.

The ranked crowds of Moonies in the opening scene of Mao II represent a more
unsettling version of the effects of a paranoid narrative. The founding belief of the
Unification Church is the divinity of its founder, the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and
while there are many critics and many questions surrounding the Church, it effectively
indoctrinates its members with a paranoid narrative that turns all dissenting voices into
agents of a powerful, evil force dedicated to destroying both the Church and the world. A
similar cult-like attitude seems to operate within the terrorist organization whose leader
Brita photographs at the novel's conclusion. What the terrorist group in Mao II has in
common with the cult in The Names or the group in Players is (to put it mildly) a
dissatisfaction with the contemporary formlessness. Mao II is staged as a confrontation
between the values of autonomy, contingency and complexity, and the simplified, totalized
visions of the Moonies or the Marxist group in Lebanon whose leader requires his followers
to wear hoods over their faces and t-shirts bearing an image of his face.
Karen's experience with the Moonie cult is similarly positioned as a conflict between individuality and faceless conformity. However, *Mao II* similarly destabilizes the cult of individuality, critiquing the over-elaborate shielding of the private self from entanglements with the world. For example Bill Gray's reclusive lifestyle has rendered him incapable of writing, while his seclusion has only magnified the cult-like aura that surrounds his published books.

The proliferation of conspiracies and cults as reflected in DeLillo's fiction seems to be a response to larger social forces of economic and political fragmentation, the stable structures of the East Bloc versus the West, for example. In spiritual terms, according to one character in *Mao II*, "when the Old God leaves the world . . . the unexpended faith" persists, leaving the faithful to seek new certainties and end up "pray[ing] to flies and bottletops" (7). In political terms, the breakdown of the central opposition between East and West, between Communism and Capitalism, deprives conspiracy theorists of a credible threat upon which to develop their paranoia. Discredited, the paranoid style becomes a way of dismissing political realities without having to engage with them on a practical level (Fenster 219). Conspiracy theory as play, or as "a temporary and strategic form of self-reflexive paranoia" in which not even the speaker can be said to believe the plot he or she is describing (Knight 821), reduces the paranoid style to little more than a rhetorical device.

In "Everything Is Connected" Peter Knight provides a partial list (818-821) of the many conspiracies and plots described in *Underworld*, but most are no longer operational in the way conspiracy theories compel the actions of characters in *Libra*. Instead,

a self-conscious and sophisticated expectation of a conspiracy comes both to be taken for granted and held at arms length. One can never be paranoid enough,
but a secure, single-minded faith in paranoia — either in the form of a McCarthyite political expediency or a countercultural reaction against such abuses of power — is no longer an option. (822)

Knight ascribes the shift to the evaporation of the monolithic Other that balanced Cold War paranoia for fifty years, an observation supported in the novel by the casual remark made by a young volunteer on Klara Sax's art project, "the whole thing is a joke to trick the West" (81).

The textual nature of paranoia, its peculiar reliance on narrative, makes it easily parodied as a rhetorical style. Underworld "tunes in to the transition in American paranoia over the last four decades from an inflexible and monolithic belief structure in a personalized cabal, to a contradictory, ironic, and self-reflexive appropriation of the language of conspiracy theory as a populist way of making sense of larger social and political changes" (Knight 822). Once again the paranoid style responds to its contemporary environment, but in Underworld the conspiracy theories have grown attenuated and self-mocking.

If simplistic theories seeking to explain all events from a single interpretive stance are dismissed by the postmodern inhabitants of Underworld, the novel does reintroduce the troubling truth of economic interpenetration and interconnectedness. This concern appears most explicitly in the concluding section, "Das Kapital": "Capital burns off the nuance in a culture. Foreign investment, global markets, corporate acquisition, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuating influence of money that's electronic . . ." (785). Beyond the collapsed political binaries and beneath the fragmentation, DeLillo points to a new subterranean movement towards integration in the increasingly unrestricted global
movements of capital. He does this not from the narrow perspective of paranoia, but from a perspective that moves beyond earnest tracts denouncing the Trilateral Commission and beyond ironic and dismissive allusions to "the computer that runs the world." In Underworld, as Peter Knight points out, "[s]ometimes the subterranean connections are indeed sinister, combining with other facts and rumors to suggest how decentered and intentionless forces conspire to control people's lives. But these connections also exceed the inexorable stranglehold of power and surveillance" (829-31). The complex web of connections that make up "the people's history" exceeds both rational control and the irrational narratives of paranoia.

The prevalence of paranoid voices in DeLillo's novels has caused him to be aligned with conspiracy theorists and opened him up to accusations such as Robert Towers's, yet such accusations seem to be based on an unproblematic decision to equate the author with his texts and situate DeLillo himself alongside the paranoid narratives he creates. Yet to describe a situation or a state of mind is not necessarily to advocate it. Writing about paranoia and conspiracy, DeLillo can assume the paranoid style without embracing it, and articulate the quest for coherence and some semblance of order and purpose his characters express without adopting it as his own. The truly paranoid person, the one who believes in "the master plan, the conspiracy that explains absolutely everything" (Nadotti 94), is always in DeLillo's fiction a deluded figure and often a dangerous one. At the same time, the paranoid voice is a valid articulation, albeit in a debased and distorted manner, of a desire for some unifying, coherent force that DeLillo frequently alludes to but is never able to present in its immediacy within his fiction.
The tendencies toward paranoia and conspiracy DeLillo identifies in American culture find corresponding prominence in his novels. While these tendencies are part of a tradition at least as old as America itself (as Hofstadter's examples demonstrate), the way their narratives mobilize contemporary innovations in surveillance and control coincides with DeLillo's abiding interest in technology, and serves as an example of his tendency to write "about movements or feelings in the air and in the culture around us, without necessarily being part of the particular movement" (DeCurtis 66). Through ultimately not credulous itself, his fiction demonstrates how technologies of control and surveillance and proliferating modes and channels of paranoid narratives interact, each amplifying the effects of the other and informing the contemporary moment.
Chapter Two

The Logic of Decay and the Promise of Renewal: Amis and DeLillo Considered as Systems Novelists

"By studying literature as an informational system, using a language that comes from science, we both theorize the necessity of interdisciplinarity for literary studies and begin to create the conditions for concrete interdisciplinary work" (Paulson 185).

"Systems novelist" is a term coined by Tom LeClair to characterize the work of a small group of contemporary American novelists including Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, and William Gaddis. For LeClair, an understanding of the fiction produced by this group requires an appreciation of systems theory, itself an interdisciplinary mix of theories of communication, organization, cybernetics and thermodynamics. Though vast in scope and highly technical, systems theory is, LeClair claims, enormously important in that it provides a way of understanding the shift from an industrial mode of production, with its emphasis on materials, processing and transportation, to a post-industrial mode that focuses on energy, information and communication. Writers searching for the outlines of postmodernity in the changes to underlying social structures following the Second World War are forced to confront the reinvention of each of the discourses identified by LeClair according to a new set of assumptions that abandons metaphors of production for metaphors of communication (LeClair 9-12).

A new emphasis on communication and exchange at every level operates within the rhetoric of post-war technological disciplines. Molecular biology, after Crick and Watson's
discovery of the role of DNA in genetic inheritance, is a science of communication deeply inscribed with textual metaphors; biologists in turn adopt a language of cybernetics and systems to explain the complex feedback and control mechanisms that govern individual organisms as well as ecosystems; the collective actions of organisms, up to and including human societies and their products, are subjected to systems analysis, given that "biology supports population fluctuations, and masses of population create traffic, communications systems, and cultural systems, such as literary texts" (Porush 293).

What results is a reformulation of the material world as an interlocking hierarchy of systems, one that entirely displaces those biological theories of the nineteenth century which proposed a qualitative break between mechanical and organic systems (the theory of "vitalism"). According to William Paulson, this erosion of the theoretical barriers separating biological from mechanical structures has consequences for literary theories, themselves reliant on notions of textual autonomy derived from biological models (Paulson 115-124). Theories of literary production can, in the wake of an equivalence between social and literary systems, become sensitive to the social construction of the discourse called 'literature': "To call a text a text asserts that it is now an informational structure cast into complex circuits of communication and dissemination" (Paulson 184). Patti White makes use of the vocabulary of systems in her study of textual lists in American narratives, Gatsby's Party, and uses a theoretical system that equates the physiological ordering of information in the brain with the textual encoding of print upon a page. In this way information theory is invoked to account for storage and transmission of information in both organic and nonorganic systems.10

10 The analogy between memory and structured information is an accepted fact in the discourse of science. For instance, at the end of an article about entropy, entitled "The Direction of Time," Stephen Hawking writes: "If you have remembered every word in this article, your memory will have recorded about 150 000 bits of information. Thus, the order in your brain will have increased by about 150 000 units. However, while you have been reading the article, you will have converted about 300 000 joules of ordered energy, in the form of food, into disordered energy, in the form of heat which you lose to the air around you by convection and sweat. This will increase the disorder
Within an environment dominated by a systems paradigm, the writers LeClair terms "systems novelists" construct elaborate narratives that attempt to impart a sense of the underlying unity within seemingly differentiated systems, emplotting characters within a network of discourses:

'Systems man' is more a locus of communication and energy in a reciprocal relationship with his environment than an entity exerting force and dictating linear cause-effect sequences. If character is constituted primarily as information or communication, transaction rather than action, the novelist can resituate himself in the world, climbing out of the inwardness to which self-referring postmodernism tended. The novel, like a character or any living system, could be a store of shifting, self-regulating information about man and his environment, 'man-planet.' (LeClair 10-11)

From a systems theory perspective, a homology exists between the position of an individual with respect to the intersecting networks of family, community and society, and the position of a literary work with respect to its specific literary context, a more general media context, and in the widest sense, a cultural context.

DeLillo and the other novelists LeClair writes about are notable in that they foreground contemporary technology, making it the explicit subject in many of their texts. At first glance Martin Amis's fiction seems quite out of place in this group, as he tends to stress literary influences and privilege conventional novelistic concerns (his literary masters are Bellow and Nabokov, after all). Still, in writing about the contemporary world Amis cannot avoid writing about the influence of technology; it is therefore possible to characterize Amis as a reluctant systems novelist in at least two senses.

of the Universe by about $3 \times 10^{24}$ units, about 20 million million million times the increase in order because you remember my article" (49). Here stable units of meaning expressed in terms of bits are shown to correspond to biothermal units; apparently the terminology of information/entropy is sufficiently abstract that it need not distinguish between biological and textual systems.
First, as a novelist he is always alert to the interference patterns of competing media; his novels are richly intertextual both in terms of references to other works of literature and in terms of references to the dominant media of his time (this engagement is reflected in the cover art on my Penguin paperback copies of *Money*, *London Fields* and *The Information*. The covers feature representations of, respectively, a reel of celluloid, a pixelated television screen, and the frontispiece of a novel, slightly archaic in design).

Second, his texts present a social critique derived from a fundamentally entropic understanding of time and society. *Time's Arrow*, a novel composed as a variation on the second law of thermodynamics, is the most obvious example of this concern, but there are other novels, notably the three volumes (*Money*, *London Fields*, and *The Information*) that make up the 'London trilogy', which contain explicit references to entropy.

Within the context of the term as defined by Tom LeClair, Amis is a reluctant systems novelist in that he draws disproportionate attention to the effects of entropy on closed systems. Systems principles come into play in the thermodynamic analogies underlying an important part of Amis's social critique, and they are equally useful for a careful analysis of Amis's (mis)use of thermodynamic principles. It becomes evident that Amis, by overemphasizing the effects of entropy and more seriously, by neglecting the existence of 'anti-entropic' or negentropic processes, constructs in texts like *London Fields* and *Dead Babies* an effectively deterministic narrative universe where immutable laws of decay predominate. While such a narrative universe corresponds conveniently to the pattern of social decline Amis alludes to in a number of interviews, it represents a problematic simplification of systems theory, a failure to differentiate adequately between closed and open systems.

---

11 While the novels lack "continuous characters or an overarching structure," they are similar enough in "tone and territory" to be considered as a complementary set, according to Adam Mars-Jones (TLS 19).
In thermodynamics a system is closed if it is considered in isolation from its surroundings, or in other words unable to exchange energy with any other source. In such a system the available energy is finite and, over time, the system will inevitably tend towards a state of maximum disorder (called the equilibrium point) in accordance with the second law (Eigen and Winkler 154). So for example a drop of coloured dye introduced into a beaker of clear water will diffuse through the liquid until it has reached a constant concentration throughout the solution, and distinct words formed from Scrabble letters will dissolve into random sequences of letters when the tiles are returned to the box at the end of the game.

An open system, on the other hand, is one in which additional energy is brought in from outside, and while this may speed the entropic process (heating the solution, setting fire to the Scrabble box), the influx of energy — the interaction with external systems — can also be harnessed to maintain order and delay the arrival at the equilibrium point, and even to create new ordered structures from the disordered material. Thus the random Scrabble letters can be arranged into meaningful words by the intervention of a human hand, whose sorting actions represent the addition of energy to the system represented by the Scrabble box.

Thomas Pynchon's early short story "Entropy" demonstrates the difference between closed and open systems, and does so using social and cultural analogies. In "Entropy" two apartments are contrasted. Meatball Mulligan's apartment is the scene of a frenzied, two-day party. It is an open system in that the energy to maintain the party is continually brought in from outside: throughout the narrative guests arrive (some invited, some not) and depart, usually through a door but sometimes through one of the windows. Nearly overwhelmed by the energetic participants, Mulligan considers absenting himself from the party and allowing it to "deteriorat[e] into total chaos," but instead he takes action to
increase the level of order and keep the party, "on the threshold of its third day" (84), from falling apart.

The other apartment in "Entropy" is a closed system, designed to minimize interactions with the surrounding world: "Hermetically sealed, it was a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos" (68), designed to ward off the inevitable depredations of entropy through careful maintenance of balance and order. Downstairs, Meatball Mulligan's party contains a wide variety of cultural and ethnic mixes, music from Mussorgsky to Mozart to Charlie Mingus, guests from all over the globe, and range of multicultural, multilingual activities, including "a two-handed, bilingual morra game over by the icebox" (83). Upstairs, there are only two characters, Callisto and Aubade, and Pynchon keeps the cultural references specific to Europe and High Modernism: de Sade, Djuna Barnes, Faulkner, Stravinsky (79). Through the opposition of the two locales, Pynchon suggests that Mulligan's party, inasmuch as it attempts to engage constructively with a disparate and highly unstable set of social and cultural systems, holds more promise than Callisto's attempts to perpetuate a pre-existing order by resisting change and minimizing influences from the outside. Callisto's attempt to impose an artificial, rigid order is, in his own words, a response to the entropic process conceived "in social terms, [envisioning] a heat-death for culture in which ideas, like energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy; and intellectual motion would, accordingly, cease" (74) His attempt to postpone the moment of equilibrium is ineffectual and ultimately futile, as Pynchon contrasts the deathly sterility of the upstairs apartment with the vitality of Mulligan's 'open house' (including the ludic, and ludicrous musical experiments of the Duke di Angelis quartet).
1. "Everything Is Winding Down"

A closed system has no potential for renewal. It admits to no outside influence and is therefore inevitably directed towards heat-death: "the isolated system — galaxy, engine, human being, culture, whatever — must evolve spontaneously toward the Condition of the Most Probable" (Pynchon 73-74). The logic of entropy makes a strong claim for universality, just as the vocabulary of systems theory becomes applicable equally to a galaxy, a person or a culture. Jean-François Lyotard's essay "A Postmodern Fable" employs the universal terminology of systems to construct a single grand narrative of evolution, from the birth of the Earth through to the emergence of the first self-replicating organisms on its surface, to their development into more complex species including humans, and our creation of language and society; even beyond the limited life of our sun, Lyotard's fable continues as the principle of systems differentiation leads to further mutations — humans are themselves superseded by some as-yet unimaginable evolutionary development.

In the fable, a single explanatory principle suffices to comprehend the span of the universe. A similar logic is at work in the narrative universe of Dead Babies, Amis's 1975 novel, but the regenerative possibilities of the open system are carefully avoided. Instead, the novel obeys the entropic tendencies of the closed system. Lyotard writes, "The life span of a star is scientifically determined. A star is a burning ember in the void which transforms its elements while being consumed. It is also, thus, a laboratory. The ember ends by going out . . . " (237). Dead Babies is also structured like a laboratory, a narrative experiment in which the permissive society of the late 60s and early 70s is projected into a satiric future in which order has given way to unmanageable levels of disorder. The structures holding the narrative together break down to nothing, finally reaching a point of exhaustion at the
novel's conclusion, at which point, not coincidentally, the principal characters are all dead or dying. From the title of the opening chapter, "Let's Go," through to the closing image of "green eyes flash[ing] into the dawn like wild, dying suns" (224), the novel catalogues the process of degradation, decay and exhaustion within the restricted narrative system Amis constructs. Like the dying sun of Lyotard's fable, Dead Babies obeys the law of closed systems and, having exhausted its narrative resources, winks out.

In many respects, some thematic, some structural, Dead Babies is organized as a closed system; it is allowed finite narrative resources which, once consumed, spell the inevitable collapse of the narrative system. Amis's author's note establishes the isolationist mentality which recurs in the novel: "Not only are all characters and scenes in this book entirely fictitious, most of the technical, medical and psychological data are too" (9). Beyond the routine assurance that the novel is a work of fiction, the note also stresses the autonomy of the narrative from other discourse systems, social, scientific, or otherwise. Similarly the final phrase of the novel, "dying suns," puns on the book's title to suggest a form of closure in the narrative, joining the beginning with the end to enclose it within a hermetic circle of language. The sense that a pattern is being completed is also due to the organization of the novel into a pattern of almost geometric precision: six sections encompassing three days, seventy-two chapters corresponding to the seventy-two hours of the narrative frame. Furthermore, there is an exhaustive combinatorial logic in operation, as the names of each of the six main characters serve as headings for the divisions which occur at the ten-chapter marks of the novel. Such exhaustive sequencing is appropriate to the lab-like conditions the characters inhabit.
These characters form an interactive system documented in the act of consuming itself. The metaphor of scientific experimentation is explicitly realized in the novel by Marvell Buzhardt, one of the visiting Americans, who advocates scientific drug-taking:

I want you all to give this drug thing some genuine thought. I don't want to get too mechanistic about it but I've done this sort of project before, in controlled conditions . . . . (71)

. . .

I don't want to get too straight about this but we'll be all out of whack if we do it unscientifically. (100)

Each character is invited to construct a desirable persona, which will be realized through the judicious mixing of a number of pharmaceutical products. Marvell himself elects to ingest a concoction called a "Prospero" whose effect is to make him "feel in control" (103).

Amis's own control extends to every detail of the novel to the point that it begins to act as an elaborate mechanism ticking through a finite sequence of possibilities. In addition to the mathematical rigor with which the narrative progresses, the action is almost totally confined to the Appleseed Rectory, a building Amis endows with quite remarkable properties. For instance, it is described as a singularly remote and inaccessible place, tending to recede out of (or into) its surroundings to the point where it could be said to occupy its own private dimension (30). Certainly its isolation is of primary importance to the analogy with a closed system; by excluding the intervention of outsiders, the possibility that new forms of energy could be injected into the entropic equation is eliminated. Appleseed Rectory's remoteness ensures that there is no danger of the closed system opening up.

The building, furthermore, is a site of temporal and spatial instability; it seems to operate by its own physical laws, and these laws are shown to fluctuate and break down as the novel enters its terminal phase. Time telescopes to the point where "everyone is always
blacking out at Appleseed Rectory, and they can't remember farther back than a few days" (33). While Amis does provide us with a sense of each character's past, the narrative remains strictly focused on the seventy-two hours of the Dead Babies experiment.

Appleseed Rectory is an architectural model for entropic time, emulating the effects of a system approaching maximum disorder. Spatial and structural stability begin to collapse, resulting in a building where perspective itself is unreliable: "the rooms are without bearing and without certainty . . ., Appleseed Rectory is a place of lagging time and false memory . . ." (33-34).

Another feature of closed systems in their final stages of entropic decay is the absence of change observable in the system. The characters in Dead Babies are static in that they remain unchanged throughout the weekend. Although their personalities are explained through flashbacks (we know how they came to be the way they are as they enter the narrative process of Dead Babies), they are locked into that state for the duration of the novel. This is signaled from the very first by Amis's unusual inclusion of a 'cast list' which includes for each of the Appleseed gang a brief character description that obtains throughout the text; their inability to change or develop reflects the terminal nature of the closed system in which they are trapped. Andy Adorno typifies this characteristic in his choice of mood-altering concoction. He tells Marvell, "I want to feel sexed-up, big-rigged, violent and strong," which is an accurate assessment of his character without any chemical modification (100). The same, only more so, in other words.

In Dead Babies there is a sense that despite the frantic pace, with all of its excess and flamboyant gestures, time is running out and everything is coming to an end. The curious phenomenon of "lagging time" cuts the Appleseed inhabitants loose from normal temporality:

lagging time, with its numbness and disjunction, its inertia and automatism, its lost past and dead future . . .
Now they were all moving to no effect — just moving, just switching things off and switching things on, just picking things up and putting things down and picking things up and stroking the cat and counting the mugs and fighting for air. It seemed that everything they did had already been done and done, and that everything they thought had already been thought and thought, and that this would never end. (150)

Amis presents an extreme, pessimistic account of a culture running down, empty of innovation, and bordering on exhaustion or, to borrow another term from systems theory, heat death. The end of time and references to death become overwhelmingly present in the final stages of the Appleseed weekend. In its extreme form, entropy suggests that a system in an entirely undifferentiated state, at its point of maximum randomness, is without information and outside of time — Stephen Hawking describes this eventuality in his discussion of what he calls the thermodynamic arrow of time and the psychological arrow of time; he points out that in the absence of change the psychological sense of time has no referent (151). Indeed, without heat exchange, consciousness itself becomes impossible (the "weak anthropic principle" [Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* 124]). When Lucy asks Quentin how much of the day remains, he looks at his watch to discover it has stopped: "'Not long,' he said, 'Not long'" (177). The early energy the group takes from reckless sexuality fades too: Keith's "cock doesn't work any more" (188), Andy "hardly wants to fuck anyone these days. I've done all that now" (191). According to the narrator, even their body temperatures are dropping (177). Andy senses "things are beginning to slow down . . . I haven't got that far to go" (191). None of them have. The potential energy available to them has been used up, and order gives way to disorder, even to the point where the visible spectrum begins to dissolve, frequencies of light fading into one another: "The blue-and-yellow tiles on the ceiling had receded and blurred so that its pattern was no longer distinct.
Even the plain white of the walls appeared to have become something more washy, more neutral. Colour had begun to drain from the house" (212).

What is being set up in the narrative is the eschatology of a closed system. While the Christian doctrine of Revelation holds out the promise of a divine influx of negentropy, a sudden and catastrophic (in the etymological sense of a 'sudden turn') imposition of universal order, secular systems theory holds that the fate of a closed system is that which Lyotard ascribes to the burning ember of a star that consumes itself. Running out of fuel, it cools, slows, contracts; its ordered structure degrades and disperses across the cosmos. *Dead Babies* emulates these processes of a dying sun. Andy again: "In a curiously gentle manner . . . his body seemed to be melting, rendering down to a weaker and less robust version of himself" (216).

The process of entropy is unidirectional and irreversible. Right before the narrative reaches its conclusion and the characters are snuffed out one by one, the narrator pauses to consider alternatives: "— yes — it would demand small ingenuity to restore peace [order] to Appleseed Rectory. Unfortunately, though, there is no 'going back' on things that in a sense were never meant, things that got started too long ago" (235). To restore peace would require an influx of information, of energy, of negentropy — it would entail breaking open the closed system. Instead, the narrative is permitted to run on to its terminus. Andy's observation that "We're all dying here. We're all dying!" (233) is realized almost immediately by the deaths, in quick succession, of Marvell, Celia, Diana, Andy, Roxanne, Skip, Giles, and (presumably) Keith (250-54). In a sense, Quentin is the first casualty, as his identity is effaced by the resurgence of "Johnny," a suppressed personality who explodes like a 'dying sun,' destroying everyone around him.

Reducing a fictional narrative to the parameters of systems theory is an inexact, partial process. While there are clearly points of contact between Amis's narrative and the narrative of entropy (summarized by Pynchon as "you can't win, things are going to get
worse before they get better, who says they're going to get better" [72]), such a reading ignores aspects of the novel better understood in the context of literary or social history, or psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, entropy is a fundamental organizational principle within the novel: not in the explicit, programmatic manner Tom LeClair identifies with the work of Don DeLillo, Robert Coover, and others, but as a necessary consequence of the overt cultural critique contained within Dead Babies.

In forming a judgment against a society he perceives in decline, Amis loads the dice against the productive interference of outside sources. Achieving much of its satiric intensity by exploiting the effects of entropic processes, Dead Babies can be read as an allegory of cultural entropy in its terminal phase, "a conservative howl of obscene rage at moral decline" (Diedrick 37). As James Diedrick points out, the decision to name one of the characters Andy Adorno suggests a connection to the cultural critiques of Theodor Adorno (10). Along those lines, the character Quentin Villiers can be seen as an embodiment of the Dialectic of Enlightenment as conceived by Adorno and Horkheimer: cultured, erudite, and refined, but also savage, merciless and calculating.

Dead Babies is Emma written in the shadow of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, in the sense that it "is a perverse variant on the British genre of the country house novel" (Diedrick 32) updated to account for perceived nihilism and erosion in the social order; Amis appropriates this literary form only to demonstrate its radical inadequacy in the face of postmodern social realities. He uses a similar strategy in London Fields, as Samson Young parodies the opening section of The Rainbow to contrast contemporary urban squalor with the robust, rural organicism described by D.H. Lawrence (114). Entropy is a suggestive metaphor for cultural critique, offering a theory of decline that is universal and
irreversible; as Norbert Wiener has commented, it vindicates the philosophy of the pessimist,\(^\text{12}\) providing objective support for the argument that things are getting worse.

In *Dead Babies* not even language is immune to entropic decay: at the end of the novel there are patches in which grammatical structures begin to unravel. Each character experiences moments of confused images, words thrown together without subordination or conjunction, offered without explanation or comment. With the degeneration of language into undifferentiated noise, the novel seems to claim, communication — and with it all literature — is at an end. Entropy, especially as it relates to closed systems, suggests a cultural pessimism very much in keeping with the fatalistic tone of *Dead Babies*, as well as the later novels *Time's Arrow* and *London Fields* (which contains a chapter on the entropic theme "the Death of Love").

In addition to providing a specific narrative logic to closed narratives such as *Dead Babies* and *Time's Arrow*, the principle of entropy carries larger implications for the application of systems theory to literature. In entirely different contexts the physicist Stephen Hawking and the literary critic Patti White point out that the act of reading is at once a negentropic and an entropic process, one that situates the text within an array of systems constellated within an elaborate circuit of exchange and feedback. While it may seem trivial to consider the act of reading from the point of view of information exchange and entropy, it does have the effect of 'materializing' the reading process, which, after all, is never carried out outside of complex organic and social networks. *Time's Arrow* attempts to emplot concepts of entropy within a cultural framework to suggest continuities between its own tiny universe and the immeasurably larger — but still finite — world of human interaction. The correspondence reveals, in Amis's view, a social narrative characterized by moral decline and a loss of innocence.

\(^{12}\) "The best we can hope for the role of progress in a universe running downhill as a whole is that the vision of our attempts to progress in the face of overwhelming necessity may have the purging terror of Greek tragedy" (Wiener 41).
2. Order and Ordure

Entropy is explicitly a theme of *Time’s Arrow*, a short novel predicated on the experience of a life lived in reverse, against the arrow of time. The novel stands as an ironic answer to Stephen Hawking's question, "why do we remember events in the past, but only dimly foresee what is going to happen" (Hawking, "Direction of Time" 46)? The dilemma of the unnamed narrator in *Time’s Arrow* is that while he can remember the future, it is the past that is unknown territory. Born at the instant of "his" body's death, his universe is one in which entropy is constantly decreasing, disorder giving way to order, the future giving way to the past. Amis exploits the idea of reversed time to provide moments of insight and humour in the first part of the novel, but the function of this narrative device is to habituate the reader to a reading strategy that is consequently exploited in the later sections, especially "Here There Is No Why," as he or she must participate in actively reconstructing the crimes of Auschwitz by inverting the temporal processes to decipher the atrocities taking place in the death camp.

In many respects *Time’s Arrow* is an ideal example of a closed system in that, just as the physical book is bounded by the front and back cover, the text is tightly bound by the 'birth' and 'death' of the narrator. For this reason the formal structure is resolutely closed, a narrative as isolated as the consciousness of the narrator, who can neither communicate with nor influence his environment. In addition, however, *Time’s Arrow* functions as an autonomous text in William Paulson's sense, suggesting "the presence of as yet unknown codes or levels of meaning at work within the text . . . . what cannot be integrated under a
known law of the text is presumed to be operating under another law, as yet unknown, of the same text" (Paulson 135). *Time's Arrow* foregrounds the unknown law early on, after the mysterious 'birth' of the narrator in hospital: "Wait a minute. Why am I walking backwards into the house? Wait. Is it dusk coming, or is it dawn? What is the—what is the sequence of the journey I'm on? What are its rules? Why are the birds singing so strangely? Where am I heading" (14)? The unknown law governing *Time's Arrow* is, it transpires, the inverse of the second law of thermodynamics: the narrator perceives a universe running from a lesser to a higher state of order.

*Time's Arrow* is a narrative which, in a perverse sense, literally reflects the world: everything in it is back to front. Once decoded the social critique, as in *Dead Babies*, links aging with corruption and therefore privileges the innocence of youth. When, with comic precision, the narrator explains that "[a]ll life, for instance, all sustenance, all meaning (and a good deal of money) issues from a single household appliance: the toilet handle" (16), the reader who follows the textual logic and inverts the narrator's experience is informed that, in our entropic universe, eventually everything ends in shit. The problem of causality that leads to the narrator's frustration with his world is finally reconciled in the Nazi death camps, locations the narrative carefully abstracts from ordinary temporality — ours and the narrator's — and ordinary space. The first sign of abstraction is implied by the huge clock at the Treblinka railway station, where the hands are painted on. A second is implied by a phrase from "the Auschwitz universe" (132): "Hier ist kein warum. Here there is no why. Here there is no when, no how, no where" (128). Later the narrator adds, "It covered 14,000 acres, and it was invisible. It was there, and it wasn't there" (147). Just as the closed system of *Time's Arrow* functions according to a logic alien to us, the death camps function
according to a logic that is doubly unreal, as distant from our comprehension as it is from
that of the narrator. The Holocaust in reverse becomes a mythical metamorphosis of ordure,
as and fire into a race of people: the Nazis' task, to the negentropic eyes of the narrator, is
"to dream a race" (128) into existence.

It is left to the reader to undo this involution of *Time's Arrow*, and confront a
separate truth, that Odilo Unverdorben and other medical doctors willingly participated in
the attempt to dream a race out of existence. To the narrator's perception, shit is a mystical
substance, "from which . . . all human good eventually emanates" (123) but at "fiercely
coprocentric" (132) Auschwitz, the sheer quantity of excrement suggests to the narrator the
scale of the project Unverdorben is involved in: "now . . . we'll get a chance to find out
what this stuff can really do" (153).

It bears repeating: for the narrator, the arrow of time points from ordure to order.
The shattered cup leaps from the floor to sit intact on the table, letters are born from the
flames in a fireplace. The nighttime bowel movement leads inexorably to the elegant
dinner. In Central Park, the narrator witnesses a game of chess, and comments on the
progression from a state of randomness to ordered rows: "One final tug on the white pawn,
and perfect order is restored" (77). The chess game functions as an emblematic moment in a
more general pattern of renewal ("After the Moon-shot, I remember, a light went out in
everybody's head . . . . Everyone becomes more innocent, constantly forgetting" [98-99])
that, when reinterpreted in the normal forward flow of events, suggests the progression
towards greater corruption and decay that lies in the direction of time's arrow.

The cultural pessimism dominating *Dead Babies* and *Time's Arrow* derives support
from the second law of thermodynamics: the sum total of entropy always increases; in
universal terms any local increase in order is offset by a larger increase in disorder (the information/heat tradeoff Stephen Hawking mentions). These two novels, structured as closed systems or narrative universes unto themselves, enact the process and, in *Time's Arrow* especially, stress the parallels between narrative entropy, social entropy, and individual entropy: the collapse of social order and the decay of the body are for Amis merely aspects of a single process.

This tone hardly wavers in his other novels, and, though they are less stylized and more realistic than either *Dead Babies* or *Time's Arrow*, the more recent *London Fields* and *The Information* continue the theme: a life, a world, a universe trapped in a downward spiral from energy to exhaustion, from health to sickness, from order to chaos. At one point near the end of *London Fields* Samson Young recalls visiting his estranged girlfriend in America, where (he believes) they conceived a child. The next morning he takes a boat out on a nearby pond:

> At first, the sky looked like one of Darwin's warm little pools, sugary blue, where life would ineluctably form; but the pond itself was tired. It didn't have too long to go now, with the ocean smashing at the dunes to the east and getting yards closer every week. The oars slid through the surface tracery of dead waterskaters. I gave a shout as I saw that the clan of snapping-turtles was still in occupation, huddled up among the reeds. In their heyday, when they had discipline and esprit, they looked like the ranked helmets of Korean riot police. Now these survivalists wallowed loose and exhausted: soiled bowls in the soup kitchen. . . . For an hour the sky was Cape Cod true blue, with solid clouds
grandly gleaming like statuary. After that, just heat, with the sun and the sky slowly turning the same colour. (411)

The paragraph is laden with images of entropy; from the encroaching ocean to the "loose and exhausted" snapping-turtles to the merging of the sun and sky, the erosion of order into a disordered, undifferentiated state supersedes, according to the narrator, Darwinian, evolutionary, order-generating processes. Every aspect of the environment participates in a conspiracy of decline as perceived by Samson Young.

Initially the narrative of *London Fields* is presented as a closed structure, with the murderous conclusion announced on the opening page ("And I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to. The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can't stop people, once they start" [1]), and the inevitability of what follows a constant source of anxiety for Samson Young. The angst Amis admits to in the prefatory author's note works to bring together a series of escalating crises, including the personal apocalypse Keith suffers, the geo-political standoff that runs through the novel, and the astronomical 'crisis' of a full solar eclipse; and these synchronous developments are, for Samson Young, signs of a deeper pattern, an inescapable principle linking everything:

Everything is winding down, me, this, mother earth. More: the universe, though apparently roomy enough, is heading for heat death . . . . Who stitched us up with all these design flaws? Entropy, time's arrow — ravenous disorder. (239)

The continuity of Amis's critique of culture, communicated through the form of the novels — 'comedies' that end in murder and suicide — as much as by the ubiquitous running commentary on social decay, exploits the universality of the second law of thermodynamics to create such broad correspondences. Ironically, in *The Information* the narrator accuses
Gwyn Barry of using astrology to pander to the self-obsessions of his culture (329), but in a similar manner Amis universalizes his own intimations of mortality to encompass the cosmos. Literature is recast according to Amis's awareness of entropy in two ways. First, as Amis put it in a 1988 interview, "literature used to be about gods, then it was about kings, then it was about heroes, then it was about you and me. And now it's about them" (21; a slightly expanded version of this observation appears twice in *The Information* [92, 328-29] linked to the premise that correlates literature's focus with the position of humanity in the universal order). Second, the strict order of genres is subjected to mixing, just as discrete solutions in proximity tend to blend into one another: "Among the many mysterious processes under way in this century is a breakdown of genre, so that comic novels can take on pretty rugged stuff. It seems clear to me . . . that comedy is a much looser form than it once was" (Haffenden 10).

In these two statements Amis is appealing to a form of cultural entropy to defend his own practice as a novelist. The fascination with the worst of humanity at its least admirable is defended as the logical progression in literature's interests; the savagery and despair that go unremedied in Amis's 'comic' novels result from the breakdown of boundaries, inevitable transgressions of generic order.

3. Literature and Open Systems

In one sense Samson Young is correct in equating his own private heat-death (also promised on the first page of the novel) with the end of the universe, but this sense only obtains within a narrow, highly literary conception of the novel as an autonomous, self-referential and above all closed system. As soon as *London Fields* is considered in relation
to a larger cultural network, the rhetoric of closure (as containment, as ending) is exploded; the text must be reconsidered as a communicative act within a discourse network that is far from the equilibrium point characteristic of heat-death.

There is a structural consequence to this rupture in the hitherto closed text. In *Dead Babies* and *Time's Arrow* there is a profoundly artificial symmetry to the narrative, one that is linked to the motif of death that dominates the conclusion of each book. *London Fields* features a more ragged, 'open' conclusion, with the suicide of the narrator counterpoised by the troubling but undeniable continuation of other characters. A similar 'softening' is evident in *Money*, whose subtitle "A Suicide Note" eventually proves exaggerated when John Self becomes that rare figure, a narrator who survives an Amis novel. The author's note to *Money* begins, "This is a suicide note. By the time you lay it aside . . . John Self will no longer exist. Or at least that's the idea" (i). In this respect it promises the same narrative closure that characterizes the other novels discussed here, but Self survives the narrative, albeit in greatly reduced circumstances.

What the novels in the London trilogy concede but cannot come to terms with is the negentropic forces at work within their decaying universe. Entropy figured as a sociological axiom results in a model of gradual collapse, and in Amis's novels the social order is indeed shown to be falling apart. But while entropy is a compelling theory of decline, it is entirely inadequate to account for the existence — and, more important, the creation — of complex structures from microbes up to and including human beings and cultural products such as novels. The conflict between entropy's pessimism and the force of Darwinian evolution — a scientific theory that underwrote a very different social vision (Porush 284) — was reconciled in the concept of open systems that maintained their structures by absorbing
energy from their environment. In this new synthesis, according to Porush, "the biosphere is an island in the entropic stream, or better, a raft swimming autonomously, inexplicably upstream, gathering flotsam and organizing it into the flotilla, against the intractable laws of physics" (285).

A cultural product such as a novel can be seen as a similar aggregation of flotsam. In its production, the literary text is formed by the intersection of several systems, each of which in itself appears autonomous: the author's intentions, the social context, cultural traditions, generic expectations, and so on. But it cannot be assumed that the creative process out of which the text arises ever attains complete autonomy. The work may become part of an autonomous system at a very general level, say, a given culture, but nothing in the theory of autonomous systems authorizes the step of taking the individual work as itself wholly defined or delimited by the interactions of its own laws and processes.

"The cultural hypersystem" (8) is a term Patti White uses to refer to the system of systems of which literature is but a single component. Like DeLillo and other postmodern writers, Amis gives us a narrative account of a cultural system in transition, and the savage irony of his prose can be attributed in part to his recognition that the transition marks the end of literature's role as the dominant vehicle of cultural tradition. Thus Money is about the absurdities of the television and movie trade, and London Fields and The Information present fiction as a worn-out form superseded by television and celluloid. Entropy conceived as an allegory of the systems of culture in decline inevitably results in a pessimistic assessment of literature's place in the social order, as Samson Young's comment
on the illusion of form ("writers always lag behind the contemporary formlessness. They write about an old reality, in a language that's even older" [238]) reveals.

Returning to the context of Pynchon's "Entropy," Amis's novels after Success appear to suffer from a split personality. In their thematic insistence on systems in decline and culture in ruins, they appear to conform to Callisto's fears of "a heat-death for culture." At the same time, they are clearly informed by an understanding of the debased features of popular culture that were shown to energize the fluid social space represented by the inhabitants of Mulligan's apartment. There is a strong sense that, especially in the London trilogy, Amis's narrative is reliant upon precisely those cultural forms that represent culture's decline.

Just as John Self's character exists because of, rather than in spite of, the conflicting voices in his head (Diedrick 73), Money, along with Amis's other fictions, exists as the positive product of Amis's entanglement with money, with movies, with the unredeemed excesses of consumer culture Self so assiduously explores. If, as David Porush argues, the fundamental transition from simple entropy to complex interactions can be summarized as a movement from the science of being to the science of becoming (287), then Amis's structurally closed novels are differentiated from the looser, structurally open novels in that the latter are increasingly aware — one might even say threatened — by non-literary culture. Though Amis's thematic and structural emphasis foregrounds the process of decay at work in an entropic universe, Money, London Fields and The Information are systems novels in LeClair's sense in that they reflexively examine the material conditions of their

13 Kittler's Discourse Networks 1800/1900 makes the argument for the media fragmentation that reduces literature's cultural influence within the context of literary modernism; media developments
own formation. *Money* is about "Good Money" and "Bad Money," alternate titles for the film project that occupies John Self for the bulk of the narrative (and eventually for which the character "Martin Amis" writes the script); *London Fields* is entirely concerned with documenting its own self-genesis (in systems theory the equivalent term is autopoeisis), while it also records the dubious process of television production through Keith's darts experience; *The Information* is, as Amis says "an awful lot about the subsidiaries of writing, rather than writing itself." In other words, "giving interviews, being photographed, talking to TV crews, everything that gets in the way of writing" (Morrison 99). But far from being distractions, these secondary processes form the core of *The Information*.

In a similar sense the 'distracting' voices in John Self's head actually constitute his character. The plurality of voices in his head indicates that Self's character is not constructed as a closed system (Diedrick 73), and *Money* is metafictional and intertextual in the way the title recurs within the tale and also in the way the production of a piece of art (the plot device upon which the novel rests) is shown to be (parodically, of course) not so much an hermetic act by an isolated producer as a complex process involving many social and economic (and artistic) sub-systems. Literature is not a closed system isolated from the wider culture, *Money* insists; rather, it is a commodity that can be produced, distributed, consumed, and exchanged for other commodities, including money.

In a narrative insisting that contemporary consumer culture has overwhelmed the possibility of art, an aporia develops in considering the position of the narrative making such claims. In *The Information* literature itself looks very sick indeed: Gwyn Barry and Richard Tull are at opposite ends of the commercial scale, while beneath them lies ever
more puerile "trex" and vanity-published "anti-literature" (54). Clearly, *The Information* asks to be taken as serious literature, but just as clearly, it is adamant that this category has been effaced from the contemporary scene: militantly, it negates its own conditions of existence. When the alternatives allowed are the banal mediocrities Gwyn Barry creates, and the flawed, torturous novels of Richard Tull, Amis's entropic vision finds expression in cultural terms. Literature still exists, but only in reprinted classics.

Tull's book reviews reveal another form of exhaustion, as literary criticism has run out of literary figures of note and is reduced to biographies of one-shot Victorians and other obscure writers. Gwyn's ego, though huge, is finally defeated by another effect of entropy, the sheer volume of publications he must read to find references to himself. A brief parable of systems theory, this scene undoes the narrow band of referentiality in the interconnected system of literature and literary reviews, as Gwyn discovers a mention of his name in an article about property values and begins to read publications on a variety of subjects looking for references to himself. "Pretty soon — and you could see this coming — he was reading everything about everything" (300). Searching for relevant information in an increasing tide of irrelevant noise, Gwyn exemplifies the postmodern frustration with quantities of information so plentiful they function instead as the noise of culture.

While Richard's stubborn refusal to abandon literary modernism guarantees his irrelevance within the wider culture and "separates him from the world of readers" (Dern 139), Gwyn's relative success is also compromised: within an environment of diminishing standards and endless textual proliferation, his books are fated to lose currency and fade into obscurity. By adopting the principles of entropy and the closed system as organizing principles for his fiction, Amis is forced to confront the paradox that "authors need to
transmit information to achieve immortality, but if readership is decaying, then authorship is also doomed" (Dern 137). The irreversible trajectory of decline proposed in his fiction does not allow for a solution within the confines of the novels. If a narrative other than that of decay is to be found, it must come from elsewhere.

4. Don DeLillo: Chaos and Renewal

"What we are reluctant to touch often seems to be the very fabric of our salvation." (*White Noise* 31)

In contrast to Amis's focus on the instability and potential for breakdown inherent in cultural entropy, DeLillo seems to accept the challenge of writing about a culture obsessed with novelty and the production of ever-greater quantities of commodities (be they material objects, images, or narratives). Within the cluttered cultural environment he finds connections and significance where Amis identifies only "trex."

In what follows I will offer a reading of a range of DeLillo's fictions that attempts to account for two striking features of his work: repeated references to elements of experience resistant to representation and allusive of forces and energies that escape perception, and an ironic but genuine fascination with the forms and objects that constitute popular culture. While these aspects may appear unrelated, I shall argue that they are closely linked, and follow from a rejection of the conceptual opposition of high culture and low culture and an effort to reconstitute what DeLillo has called "the people's history" (*Underworld* 60).

In his analysis of contemporary culture Jean Baudrillard claims that in the period following the Second World War we have witnessed a revolution in the nature of the sign. Mass media saturation, ubiquitous information technology and the exponential growth of
the commodity-form are conspicuous elements in a process that has destroyed the sign's mediating relationship with objective reality, carrying us into what Baudrillard terms the "era of simulation" (2). With the proliferation of images comes a crisis in the representational nature of the sign: "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting signs of the real for the real . . . " (2). The linguistic sign has moved from a phase where it represented "the reflection of a profound reality" through a phase where "it masks and denatures a profound reality" to its present (and for Baudrillard permanent) phase in which "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (6).

Such an analysis is hyperbolic and, Baudrillard freely admits, nihilistic, yet in his aversion to the cultural products that characterize our modernity he is expressing prevalent critical attitudes about the impact of commodification on culture. Ours is a society without depth, it is claimed; we have lost — or sacrificed — a genuine relationship with the authentic experience and exist now within the vacuous play of empty signifiers. "... [T]he whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum — not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say, never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (5-6). Trapped within a moebius-loop of signs endlessly referring to signs, we are cut off from any possible access to mystical or transcendental (irrational) dimensions to language, as the imperative of commodification comes to regulate every aspect of our existence. While all discourse is affected, Baudrillard singles out the language of advertising as a particularly virulent example of the devastating effect of the sign become pure commodity:
All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantly forgotten.

. . . This unarticulated, instantaneous form, without a past, without a future, without the possibility of metamorphosis, has power over all the others. (87)

While extreme, Baudrillard's position is far from unique. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that "the culture industry" had successfully subordinated art and literature to the dictates of commodity exchange and that all but a few esoteric, austere cultural forms were entirely subsumed by the logic of capital. "Works of art are ascetic and unashamed, the culture industry is pornographic and prudish" (140). More moderate in his assessment, Fredric Jameson nevertheless endorses the critique of contemporary culture's commodified "depthlessness," or what he calls the "waning of affect" (17) in contrast to the art works of modernism. Discussing the superficial aesthetic signs and "pseudohistorical depth" (20) of Lawrence Kasdan's film Body Heat, Jameson claims that "this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborate symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (21). In general, critical theory has concluded that products of mass culture possess none of the heroic, oppositional qualities associated with the 'authentic' artistic products of an earlier modernism.

For many years, DeLillo has been exploring in his fiction the complex relation of contemporary language and images to forms of cultural memory and referentiality. A character from Underworld, Sister Grace, could almost be quoting Baudrillard when she speaks of the media: "It's how the news becomes so powerful it doesn't need TV or newspapers. It exists in people's perceptions. It becomes real or fake-real so people think they're seeing reality when they're seeing something they invent. It's the news without the
media" (819). In this assessment the dictates of mass-media have grown so powerful that they have been fully internalized by a subjugated population which is complicitous in the generation of an illusion; in *Underworld* this opinion is only one view, however, and it is undermined within the narrative precisely because of its inherent cynicism.

Aware of the co-opting, corrupting influence of media, of advertising, of the sheer inertia of commodities in the American cultural landscape, DeLillo nevertheless rummages through the trash of tabloid news and consumer goods to discover *significance*, traces of complex ritual and magic, resonating in the abject objects. His version of the cult of the commodity is never celebratory and often ironic, yet he rejects the charges of superficiality and irrelevance culture theory levels at products of consumer culture. *White Noise* asserts that magic and dread remain constants, even if their articulation is a matter of historical contingency, and that in their confrontation with the forces of Enlightenment — science, capital, secularism: what Horkheimer and Adorno called Instrumental Rationality — they are not extinguished but driven underground, perhaps out of consciousness yet always perceptible as subtle distortions in the topography of a rationalized landscape.

Precisely those debased cultural forms that represent the nadir of signification for Baudrillard are recuperated in DeLillo's narratives as sites of transcendence. In *Underworld* an advertising billboard becomes the scene of a possible manifestation of the divine: the image of a murdered girl's face appears in an ad for 'Minute Maid' orange juice when it is illuminated by the headlight of a passing commuter train. A crowd gathered to witness this event reacts to the glimpsed image with "a gasp that shot into sobs and moans and the cry of some unnamable painful elation. A blurted sort of whoop, the holler of unstoppered belief" (821). The "empty form" (Baudrillard 93) of advertising is, in DeLillo's text, literally
transfigured into a token of fleeting mystical power, activating a deep reservoir of belief in the crowd that has been 'stoppered' (not exterminated, as Baudrillard argues) by the dictates of 'Enlightened' modernity. This fictional episode has innumerable analogues in the present culture, instances ranging from onstage miracles of healing to psychic hotlines on syndicated television programs, and regardless of their authenticity they present strong evidence of a subterranean belief system at odds with the doctrine of science and rationality. In *The Reenchantment of the World*, Morris Berman views such phenomena with trepidation, fearful that when modernity "discounted a whole landscape of inner reality because it did not fit in with the program of industrial or mercantile exploitation and the directives of organized religion," a "spiritual vacuum" was created that "is being filled with all kinds of dubious mystical and occult movements..." (132). When *Underworld* contrasts the dry rationalism of Sister Edgar's systematic Catholicism with the powerful spontaneity of the crowd's belief, it is the latter that comes to the rescue after Sister Edgar's faith in "form and proportion," "the serenity of immense design" (817), is shattered following Esmerelda's brutal murder. The reality or falsity of Esmerelda's manifestation is not DeLillo's concern; instead he is careful to demonstrate that the event before the billboard fulfills deep expectations in the crowd. He delineates too the inevitable cooptation of the event by forces of capital eager to exploit the spectacle for profit (823-24). The phenomenon ends when the advertisement on the billboard is taken down. The removal of the sign coincides with the disappearance of Esmerelda's phantasmal image.

The same appreciation for the sublime, or that which escapes representation, flows through *White Noise*; in this novel, a mysterious energy which does not proceed from notions of rational utility is ascribed to language, as well as to commodities. The character
Murray Jay Siskind may be presenting an exaggerated version of the author's viewpoint when he speaks of the supermarket as a place that "recharges us spiritually . . . , a gateway or pathway . . . full of psychic data" (37), but in an interview DeLillo himself asked that we

Imagine someone from the third world who has never set foot in a place like that suddenly transported to an A&P in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. Wouldn't he be elated or frightened? Wouldn't he sense that something transcending is about to happen to him in the midst of all this brightness? So I think that's something that has been in the background of my work: a sense of something extraordinary hovering just beyond our touch and just beyond our vision. (De Curtis 63)

And, DeLillo suggests, the extraordinary something hovers just beyond our language (De Curtis 64). In its narrative structure *White Noise* develops an analogy between an economy of objects and an economy of language. Such an analogy has its own history, of course, most obviously in Saussure's general linguistics, which provides us with an early example of language theorized as 'rationalized'("language is a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms" [80]) and communication theorized as a transparent operation involving the exchange of tokens. But an equivalence of a different kind is at work in *White Noise*: in place of the hermetic closed circuit of commodity-relations and the analogous self-referentiality of linguistic signs, there is an area in which communication does not function according to a strict logic of exchange. This is the zone of "Toyota Celica," that episode in which Jack Gladney, Professor of Hitler Studies at the University-on-the-Hill, is watching his daughter sleep (a seemingly unremarkable activity he calls the "secular equivalent of standing in a great
spired cathedral with marble pillars and streams of mystical light slanting through two-tier Gothic windows . . . " [147]):

I sat there watching her. Moments later she spoke again. Distinct syllables this time, not some dreamy murmur — but a language not quite of this world. I struggled to understand. I was convinced she was saying something, fitting together units of stable meaning. I watched her face, waited. Ten minutes passed. She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.

Toyota Celica.

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. (154-155)

In a recent interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo claims,

when you detach one of these words from the product it was designed to serve, the word acquires a chantlike quality . . . . If you concentrate on the sound, if you disassociate [sic] the words from the object they denote, and if you say the words over and over, they become a sort of higher Esperanto. This is how Toyota Celica began its life. It was pure chant at the beginning. (291)

Such assertions indicate DeLillo's belief in a deeper level of signification, approachable by language but ultimately not directly accessible — leading to, obviously, the need for a transcendental mode of knowing. In the above example, words are imbued with a mysterious power that resonates in a manner impervious to rational analysis.
Reminiscent of Baudrillard's sign-system devoid of referents, DeLillo's commodity-signs can be abstracted from one order of representation, but this does not signal the "superficial transparency of everything" (Baudrillard 87, emphasis in original). On the contrary, in a context of ritual and magic Toyota Celica, like the Minute Maid billboard, is shown to transcend the banal limits of the commodity system and signify "a language not quite of this world." In *White Noise* the air is full of helpful and informative voices, yet repeatedly it is the sounds and rhythms of speech, rather than the words themselves, that Gladney finds peculiarly evocative or significant. Conversely, he often experiences an overwhelming sense that what is most urgent lies beyond speech. In either case, the rational utility of language is put in question.

*White Noise* and *Underworld* are texts trying to demonstrate that contemporary consumer consciousness is not a spiritual void or a psychically impoverished wasteland; rather the energy which circulates far beneath the superficial strata of object-relations and commodity exchange continues to erupt and take what form it can, despite the most concentrated efforts of an industrial system that insists upon translating everything it finds into commodities.

These energies surface like weeds through artificial turf, resilient because their roots are buried too deep to be deracinated. It might be too programmatic to call such tendencies of mind subversive, yet simply by enduring they mock the confident rhetoric of a technologized Enlightenment. Thus during the evacuation of the town of Blacksmith, when Gladney's wife Babette is reading aloud from a newspaper tabloid to a huddled mass of refugees, there is a strong sense that the illusions of progress have been dispelled by a single disaster, and in their place primitive fear and superstition quickly become dominant.
Even as the crisis of the airborne toxic event develops, the town is subjected to a series of conflicting radio reports, each authoritative, each couched in terms of certainty and positivism, and each different from the previous messages. In the refugee camp, knowledge, belief and information are scrambled in a chaotic melange: supernatural pronouncements drawn from Babette's tabloids are accepted without dispute by her audience, while Heinrich, Gladney's son, points out that with the seeming collapse of a scientific and technical infrastructure, contemporary men and women are on an intellectual level with people of the Stone Age:

[Radio signals] travel through the air. What, like birds? Why not tell them magic? They travel through the air in magic waves. What is a nucleotide? You don't know, do you? Yet these are the building blocks of life. What good is knowledge if it just floats through the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of every day. But nobody actually knows anything. (149)

*White Noise* delivers a subversive message that seems obvious yet merits repeating: faith in science is ultimately just another kind of faith (or, as Michel Serres phrases it, "there is no pure myth except the idea of a science that is pure of all myth" [162]). In calling attention to the persistent echoes of pre-modern elements in an ostensibly modern environment, *White Noise* and texts like it redefine the postmodern moment and "challenge the hegemony of secular rational discourse with unprecedented power," seeing it "not simply as a moment of disintegration but also as one in which certain long-discredited (or residual) ways of seeing and saying — both Western and non-western — stage a complex kind of comeback" (McClure, "Postmodern/Postsecular" 148).
Certainly, inasmuch as modernity effects what Max Weber called a "disenchantment of the world" (quoted in Berman 17) by replacing natural, organic systems with artificial, rationalized ones, it promotes the processes of objectification and reification that obsess Baudrillard and other critics of culture. Nevertheless, as DeLillo indicates, the penetration of the process of rationalization is far less successful than pessimistic critics of the mass market suggest. The force of the irrational continues to exert its influence on the system. In the words of Michel Serres, "the more one tries to exclude myth, the more it returns in force..." (163).

To take one example from *White Noise*, supermarket tabloids traffic in the paranormal and the "cults of the famous and the dead" (326), creating a commodity from a fundamental human desire for access to something transcendent. It is this irrational force, operating at the limits of language and representation and conventionally identified with mysticism, that *White Noise* explores. The connection between trash and transcendence is alluded to throughout the novel (including a playful reference to "Mystic mints" — transcendent junk food? — which appears as the last item in a long list of standardized consumer products in the first paragraph of the novel) but the connection finds its most extended analysis in a scene in which Jack Gladney must confront his family's garbage:

I unfolded the bag cuffs, released the latch and lifted out the bag. The full stench hit me with shocking force. Was this ours? Did it belong to us? Had we created it? I took the bag out to the garage and emptied it. The compressed bulk sat there like an ironic modern sculpture, massive, squat, mocking. I jabbed at it with the butt end of a rake and then spread the material over the concrete floor. I picked through it item by item, mass by shapeless mass, wondering why I felt guilty, a
violator of privacy, uncovering intimate and perhaps shameful secrets. It was hard not to be distracted by some of the things they'd chosen to submit to the Juggernaut appliance. But why did I feel like a household spy? Is garbage so private? Does it glow at the core with personal heat, with signs of one's deepest nature, clues to secret yearnings, humiliating flaws? What habits, fetishes, addictions, inclinations? What solitary acts, behavioral ruts? I found crayon drawings of a figure with full breasts and male genitals. There was a long piece of twine that contained a series of knots and loops. It seemed at first a random construction. Looking more closely I thought I detected a complex relationship between the size of the loops, the degree of the knots (single or double) and the intervals between knots with loops and freestanding knots. Some kind of occult geometry or symbolic festoon of obsessions. I found a banana skin with a tampon inside. Was this the dark underside of consumer consciousness? (258-59)

Amidst the manifold allusions to mysticism and transcendence in this scene I want to draw particular attention to the way the items in the garbage encode powerful secrets. In teasing apart Gladney's "ironic modern sculpture" DeLillo implies a depth-model of signification that stands utterly opposed to Baudrillard's moebius-loop transparency. Yet the opposition is not one of naive celebration, for White Noise remains highly critical of modernity. What reverberates through this scene and through all of DeLillo's work is the insistence that there is a "dark underside of consumer consciousness," that it manifests itself as much in the most inconsequential cultural products as in the anointed icons of high culture, and that the "underside" persists despite the high gloss of modernity. Against the streamlined linear
vision promised by Instrumental Rationality (the same "operational" master code [2] Baudrillard must ironically hyostatize in order to launch his critique) DeLillo repeatedly invokes culture's materiality and the weight of its complex history. In *Underworld* Sister Edgar's experience in front of the 'Minute Maid' billboard is explicitly linked to religious transfigurations witnessed in medieval times. Even her presence, like that of the robed Franciscan monks she finds within the South Bronx landscape of vacant lots filled with years of stratified deposits — "[m]any ages layered in waste" (102) — seems to assert the accretion of history that, compacted and distorted though it is, composes the substance of our cultural modernity.

We deny this history at our peril, DeLillo suggests, and nowhere is the peril greater than when we acquiesce to the totalizing claims of modernity. In questioning the ideological basis of modernity DeLillo attempts to peel away the mask of confidence and rational control to reveal the latent irrationalism beneath: "As technology advances in complexity and scope, fear becomes more primitive" (quoted in Begley 286).

The seductive simplicity of linear processes is explicitly questioned in *White Noise* as the narrative subverts the value in narrative of order, process, linearity — all the hallmarks of modernity's rationalized worldview. When, towards the end of the novel, Gladney begins to plan the death of the adulterer Willie Mink, he is unconsciously fulfilling the earlier dictum he gave his Advanced Nazism class: "All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot" (26). At about the same time as his decision to track down Willie Mink, Gladney also tries to clarify his life by throwing away possessions, embarking on a process of austerity and simplicity:
"The more things I threw away, the more I found. The house was a sepia maze of old and tired things. There was an immensity of things, an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality" (262). The final phrases are sneaked in, exposing the human quality of junk, contrasting the organicism of clutter as opposed to the technical, sleek order of the inorganic. Moving in the direction of murder, Gladney himself comes to resemble a machine. He is "[e]legant . . .watch[ing] [him]self take each separate step" (304).

Much of Gladney's behavior following his discovery of Babette's adultery is symptomatic of the ordered mind, or of overly-rational thought patterns which deny complexity in favour of linearity. His 'plot' to kill Willie Mink is representative of a mental system that segments, creates hierarchies, and limits potentialities, a pattern DeLillo parodies in Gladney's obsessive rehearsal of the murder scenario. Earlier in the novel, Gladney had the thought, "May the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to a plan" (98) — an expression of a philosophy clearly at odds with calculated efficiency. When he begins to plot, however, he reverses this logic, and goes against his earlier insight. With the gun that has come into his possession, Gladney's relationship to his environment undergoes a dramatic transformation: "It was a reality I could control, secretly dominate" (297).

Needless to say, he botches the murder attempt. He forgets a crucial part of his carefully-rehearsed plan and is himself shot. At the moment of the bullet's impact he experiences a collapse of the ordered clarity and simplicity which, I have argued, is representative of a profoundly modern, machinic intelligence, and is returned to a properly human realm of contingency and complexity, a "visual clutter, a whirling miscellany, meaningless" (313). Gladney goes on to recount that, "With the restoration of the normal
order of matter and sensation, I felt I was seeing [Willie Mink] for the first time as a person. The old human muddles and quirks were set flowing again. Compassion, remorse, mercy" (313). What is relevant about this characterization is the stress on the connections between clutter, muddle, and humanity.

As a text, White Noise is constructed as a narrative clutter, with many orders of discourse clamouring for attention, and many utterances appearing divorced from their context. Patti White alludes to this muddle when she calls White Noise "a metasystemic restructuring of chaos, a recycling of precisely those dispersed and disordered elements which the characters experience as noise" (8). For instance, inserted at random points in the novel are paragraphs consisting of one sentence, the sentence in turn made up of trios of technical terms or product names. Throughout the narrative, voices break into dialogue, voices which originate without context from radios, televisions, and hidden loudspeakers. This reflects the aural clutter of the voices and sounds, especially of advertising, that invades our everyday lives. Such chatter is usually denigrated as noise pollution, but it has the ability, within the narrative metasystem Patti White describes, to add complexity and to enrich, through unexpected juxtapositions and illogical leaps, our discourse.

The conflict between the ordered and efficient ideals of modernity and DeLillo's revitalized, valorized irrationalism is staged in a set-piece in the final chapter which functions as a kind of allegory of the imperiled yet tenacious presence of the irrational within a rational environment: Gladney's infant, Wilder (who is literally in-fans, "speechless"), pedals his tricycle across a busy six-lane expressway. It is a sublime moment, and consequently the witnesses are described as "awe-struck," the boy himself "mystically charged" (322). He enters the "broad-ribboned modernist stream" (332-33) of
traffic as a little piece of disorder, of noise, in the "serial whoosh" (332) of cars. Wilder's presence is something the drivers "could not quite comprehend . . . . In speed there was sense. In signs, in patterns, in split-second lives. What did it mean, this little rotary blur?" (333). Wilder does not have access to language, which makes him the ideal candidate for this crazy stunt that challenges and disrupts the powerful linear forces in their ordered rows. Speechless, he literalizes the metaphor of primal irrationality intersecting modern rationality and escaping, almost miraculously, out the other side. Wilder's presence on the highway, transitory and imperiled as it is, suggests that disruptions of modernity's imperatives continue to occur.

Gianni Vattimo, writing against modernity's ideal of a 'transparent' society, argues that as "it no longer seems possible to regard history as unilinear" (2), modernity has reached an impasse. For Vattimo, the serial nature of modernity has been superseded by cultural forces that operate in parallel, precipitating "the intersection and 'contamination' (in the Latin sense) of a multiplicity of images . . . circulated by the media in competition with one another and without any 'central' coordination" (7). The clutter and chaos guaranteed by such a decentralized proliferation of media images frustrates the drive for self-transparency that Vattimo attributes to the universalizing — and therefore dominating — imperative of modernity. Instead the multiplicity of interpretations characteristic of postmodernity enables us to "emphasize the plurality of 'tales' and put it to use in freeing ourselves from both the inflexibility of monological tales and the dogmatic systems of myth" (26).

It is in this spirit that DeLillo's suggestive irrationalism presents itself. The drive for purity/ rationality associated with the Enlightenment project is absorbed and dispersed in the multiple channels and outlets of media and popular culture. In this cultural context it is
important to reiterate that DeLillo's delight in junk is genuine. Tidying up, cleaning house — in White Noise these are banal suburban metaphors for a far more insidious process of rationalization which for DeLillo, as for (in a very different register) Adorno and Horkheimer in Dialectic of Enlightenment, forms a link in a causal chain that ends in violence and a fascistic drive for reductionist uniformity. Gladney the Professor of Hitler Studies makes, after all, his murder attempt with a Zumwalt automatic, "German-made" (253), in the region of the city known as "Germantown" (300). What thwarts the nightmare vision suggested in Gladney's lapse into an aesthetic of domination (fully outlined in Dialectic of Enlightenment) is an appreciation of the emancipatory potential in the media and commodities of mass culture (an unthinkable development for the authors of Dialectic of Enlightenment).

Unlike the austere criticism of the Frankfurt School and its followers, the critique in White Noise treats the sign-system of commodities as an ambiguous product of the process of modernity rather than as the telos of that process. The accumulated household objects Gladney begins compulsively to throw away are clearly worthless in themselves, but in their density they constitute a holistic economy in which higher orders of complexity are generated by the accretion of so many simple objects and their resultant relationships, such a holistic economy is also operative within DeLillo's language, ensuring that in its fragmentation and complexity the potential for transcendence emerges and makes imaginable what he calls "a kind of radiance in dailiness" (De Curtis 61), as opposed to the bleak, reductive poverty of simple, linear systems.

In this context the effects of the drug Dylar symbolize the manifest dangers of the quest for reduced complexity; it is a substance that resonates with Edenic overtones.
Developed to relieve humans of their fear of death, it promises to deliver to the user a return to innocence and an illusion of immortality (recalling promised features of both the pre-lapsarian and post-apocalypse dream). This is not the achieved effect, however; the most notable effect of Dylar is to render the user incapable of distinguishing between words and things. Such a linguistic system is seductive in its simplicity, but the violent use to which it is put and the debilitated condition of Willie Mink suggest that what Arnold Weinstein calls the "magic language, turn[ing] words into deeds" (310) is "the very pith of violence and terror" (311), and represents the realization of a nightmare contrasted to DeLillo's "commitment to the network of human players, the clowns who use and misuse the verbal codes" (311) presented elsewhere in *White Noise*.

Don DeLillo has said that his task as a writer is to work toward "making a simple moment complex, and this is not the way to gain a large audience" (Begley 295). In *White Noise*, that trashy novel, he asks that we too re-examine everything, right down to the garbage in the trash compactor, and be alert for possible "signs of our deepest nature" (259).

5. "When You Deal with Crowds, Nothing's Predictable."

In *Underworld's* opening section "Pafko at the Wall," the complexity of a single moment expands to fill an entire culture. The story presents the events at the Polo Grounds, the New York Giants's baseball stadium, on October 3rd, 1951. The narrative describes a cross-section of individual, cultural, and political histories, posited neither as a causal chain nor as a hierarchical system. Though John Duvall in "Baseball as Aesthetic Ideology" attempts to inscribe "Pafko" within a reductive Marxist narrative of class struggle and sport
as ideological mystification, his claim that DeLillo "evokes American nostalgia about baseball and the early 1950s to critique both" (287) elides the celebration of community in "Pafko." As always in DeLillo there is an aspect of critique, most obviously when the white businessmen Bill Waterson lets slip his egalitarian mask in his attempt to claim a prized baseball souvenir from the novella's protagonist, the black fourteen-year-old Cotter, but this personal confrontation is but one element in the complex material presented in "Pafko."

On the first page of the "Pafko" section the narrator asserts, "[l]onging on a large scale is what makes history" (11), and from that moment the reader is asked to consider history less as a series of willed acts by rational individuals than as an amalgam of "small reveries and desperations, the unseen something that haunts the day" (11). In the context of Underworld 'trash' comes to signify not just the physical substance of what is discarded but also the abstract idea of waste, detritus and clutter. Jack Gladney confronted by his family's compressed debris becomes a kind of archaeologist of the present, sifting through a random assortment of defamiliarized objects that begin to take the form of a primal and ambiguous narrative. "Pafko" (and to a greater extent, Underworld as a whole) is composed the same way, the narrative a matrix of individuated histories.

Free from a strict logic of coherence, DeLillo can assemble at this one event the avatars of an unfolding cultural hegemony in the figures of Frank Sinatra and Jackie Gleason, and show too the symbol of American political force in J. Edgar Hoover, while presenting the crowd in its totality as a living, responsive entity in its own right. In their coexistence these public figures, along with the figure of the public 35,000 strong, create a frame that speaks of the latent truth in baseball's claim to be 'America's pastime.' Through
this democratizing institution DeLillo is able to do with history what the *Life* magazine described in *Underworld* has done to notions of culture:

> The pages kept falling. Baby food, instant coffee, encyclopedias and cars, waffle irons and shampoos... And the resplendent products, how the dazzle of a Packard car is repeated in the feature story about the art treasures of the Prado. It is all part of the same thing. Rubens and Titian and Playtex and Motorola. (39)

Hoover and Sinatra and Cotter and Bobby Thomson. The decontextualized pages of *Life* raining down are shards of America's cultural matrix in the 1950s, at the moment when the full impact of commodities and advertising was beginning to emerge. However, as I tried to demonstrate in the previous section, commodity proliferation does not signify, for DeLillo, a tragic narrative of culture's demise, but rather suggests source material for new cultural forms. In Arnold Weinstein's words,

> he is scrupulously attentive to the ways in which belief and passion are displaced, renamed, formatted, and commodified in a materialist age... perceiving the peculiar poetry of everyday rituals and services, chronicling the muffled spiritual impulses concealed within our mundane comings and goings. (290)

'It is all part of the same thing' expresses a recognition that to introduce hierarchies of authenticity or autonomy, to imagine one can abstract the purer elements from "the whole enormous rot and glut and blare of...culture" (*The Names* 266) is to "insist on the adversary function of *écriture* and of breaking linguistic codes when every second ad bristles with domesticated avantgardist and modernist strategies" a pose caught, as Andreas
Huysssen points out, "precisely in that very overestimation of art's transformative function for society which is the signature of an earlier, modernist, age" (210).

DeLillo's texts respond to the postmodern condition of fragmentation and complicity with the market that has come to characterize the cultural and social formations of America. Rather than grieve the passing of hegemonic modernism and modernity's faith in progressive emancipation, his narratives are dispassionate testaments to the adaptive skill of human beings faced with the peculiar demands of contemporary life — "the currents, the electric stuff of the culture" (Begley 304). In *Underworld* narratives of positivist history (such as Marxism), objectifiable and explicable, are undermined by DeLillo's levelling narrative; moving in and out of the perspectives composing the story, he renders them all equal in value, paralleling for example Cotter's fear of the consequences of identification with the black peanut vendor with Hoover's fear of being subjected to cruel comparisons to a midget baseball player.

In *A Chorus of Stones* Susan Griffin remarks that in conventional historiography there is hierarchy of experience, that "[i]n the steady continuum of history we meet a divide between public and private events. Shifting from one to another, the discourse changes. Even the tone of voice, when entering the world we call private, slows down, drops a scale, and perhaps softens" (32). Or perhaps we could say, as a corollary, that writing in a different register can signal that the subject is part of a private history rather than a part of public history. DeLillo ruptures this continuum by focusing on private moments in public events, or identifying the motive forces of history with the private ("longing on a large scale"). Paul Civello explains this shift as a response to "the postmodern 'built' environment that has grown in complexity beyond humanity's comprehension . . . . DeLillo's material
world is not one of linear causality, but one of interconnecting systems" (4). Personal actions and public forces blend into one another; in their plurality they constitute another kind of holistic economy as a narrative emerges from the random play of social interactions. The complexity of the interactions frustrates any attempt to reduce events to a causal chain, however, and each subject "is part of [the] all-encompassing system of mutually interacting systems" (Civello 123):

Connected by the pulsing voice on the radio, joined to the word-of-mouth that passes the score along the street and to the fans who call the special phone number and the crowd at the ballpark that becomes the picture on television, people the size of Minute Rice, and the game as rumor and conjecture and inner history. (Underworld 32)

In this short passage there is a density of connections, a network of interacting networks of communication including individual conversations, radio broadcasts, telephone systems, and also television, itself reflecting the crowd back out into the street converted in the image of a mass-market commodity. In the welter of relations the grammar of the sentence blurs, the subordinate clauses at the beginning tailing off to a string of conjunctions; the result is a sentence with no apparent subject except itself.

To respond to such a passage with the claim that what is being described is nothing more than a meaningless diversion, or to argue, as Duvall does, that the auratic power of the event is generated by the media spectacle, manipulated by a ruling elite to pacify an underclass — such responses are founded on a premise that significant history can be differentiated from purely personal experiences, that history is a discrete machine responding to the rational, cynical control of privileged subjects who remain distinct from
the objective experiences they manipulate: in short, cultural criticism phrased as conspiracy theory.

The systems model of human interactions Tom LeClair describes, on the other hand, does not acknowledge the subject aloof from the object in his or her control. At the opening of *Underworld* the baseball stadium is revealed as a nexus of histories where the distinctions between private and public blur. The announcer's cough, Cotter's souvenir baseball, the visionary images of Hieronymous Bosch, the crowd's delirium when the ball goes in: all these events inform the narrative of the event. They are "all part of the same thing:"

Isn't it possible that this mid-century moment enters the skin more lastingly than the vast shaping strategies of eminent leaders, generals steely in their sunglasses — the mapped visions that pierce our dreams? . . . This is the people's history, and it has flesh and breath that quickens to the force of this old safe game of ours. (60)

History works this way too, according to DeLillo. The plurality of events described immediately before and after the game-winning home run to left field cannot be subordinated within some valid, universal narrative. For the community of Giants fans, the miracle hit in the ninth inning presents itself as an ordering principle for the events of the day, the moment immortalized by the media in the grandiose phrase "the shot heard 'round the world" (itself an ironic echo of the term associated with the opening skirmish of the American War of Independence). For others, perhaps for Hoover, the coincidental news that the Soviet Union exploded a nuclear weapon the previous day becomes the dominant episode in the day's events. Indeed, as Duvall points out, Thomson's home run and the
Soviet nuclear test share the front page of the October 4th, 1951 edition of the *New York Times* (293). Despite this equal exposure, Duvall immediately asserts that "if October 3, 1951, exists as part of American consciousness, it is for Bobby Thomson's heroics, not Russia's atomic bomb" (294); his reasoning can only be a further example of the dictates of a unilinear historical model (in this case Duvall's Marxist theoretical orientation) as the copresence of these events in the *New York Times* and in DeLillo's text suggest that both remain part of the American consciousness. Where an historical metanarrative might seek legitimation for selected, 'significant' elements in constituting a specific history, "Pafko" presents a montage of incommensurable experiences, "the sand-grain manyness of things that can't be counted" (70), that constitute a moment in history but do not cohere in their totality.

With their interest in the human and material fragments remaindered by the processes of modernity, DeLillo's texts are engaged in a dialogue with the negative critiques of commodity culture on the one hand, and the positivist, secular ideology of Instrumental Rationality on the other. Throughout his fiction beleagured figures suffer in their isolation but often escape to the confusing, fluid community of human agents. As McClure points out,

redemption consists not in a program of escape and individual immortality, but in one of compassionate identification with a creaturely community that suffers, enjoys, and endures. Thus DeLillo's privileged protagonists — Pammy in *Players*, James Axton in *The Names*, even J. A. K. Gladney in *White Noise* — make their ways down out of isolation, crippling anxiety, and illusion into
concrete, communal spaces that are simultaneously carnal, incomplete, and profoundly, if obscurely, consoling . . . . (“Postmodern/Postsecular” 157)

The crowd becomes a refuge for Sister Edgar when her faith in transcendent order is threatened; Jack Gladney's fall is a fall away from a sense of human solidarity, and his return is signaled by his return to his fractious and voluble family. At the conclusion of *The Names*, James Axton finds some solace in the crowds when he makes his long-delayed pilgrimage to the Parthenon. His observations sum up DeLillo's response to modernity's pressures:

[This is what I mainly learned up there, that the Parthenon is not a thing to study but to feel. It wasn't aloof, rational, timeless, pure. I couldn't locate the serenity of the place, the logic and steady sense. It wasn't a relic species of dead Greece but part of the living city below it. This was a surprise. I'd thought it was a separate thing, the sacred height, intact in its Doric order. I hadn't expected a human feeling to emerge from the stones but this is what I found, deeper than the art and mathematics embodied in the structure, the optical exactitudes. I found a cry for pity. This is what remains to the mauled stones in their blue surround, this open cry, this voice we know as our own . . . . This is what we bring to the temple, not prayer or chant or slaughtered rams. Our offering is language. (330-331)

Paul Maltby's claim that DeLillo's "Romantic metaphysics" derives from a "politics of vision" that "serve[s] to affirm an autonomous realm of experience and to provide a standard by which to judge the spiritually atrophied culture of late capitalism" (275) needs to be reassessed in light of the emphasis on community and communication DeLillo's
emphasis on language presupposes. Examples from DeLillo's fiction such as Axton's experience at the Parthenon, or Gladney's belief that his family is "a magic act, adults and children together, sharing unaccountable things" (*White Noise* 34), privilege messy complexity and the protean interactions of many voices talking at once.

The productive potential of complex systems and their interactions accounts for the scope of DeLillo's novels and, I'd argue, explains his fascination with waste, trash (in all its forms), and the material excesses of his culture. Entropy, which in biological terms is just another word for death and in cultural terms is a metaphor for decline, is never far from his texts, but moving through the cluttered landscape of postmodernity DeLillo is always capable of making new connections.
Chapter Three

Novelists On Television: Amis and DeLillo and Postmodern Media

"Television is cretinizing me..."  "Were people this stupid before television?"
(Money 27)  (White Noise 249)

Certainly one of the vectors of postmodernism's trajectory since the end of the Second World War is the explosive growth of what Horkheimer and Adorno labeled the "culture industry." In the years leading up to 1940 a series of media technologies had enabled the material of culture to be processed and commodified in new and (from the perspective of Horkheimer and Adorno) very dangerous ways. Writing about the effect of commercial radio, film and popular print media, they conclude,

the most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions. (Horkheimer and Adorno 167)

Even if one does not agree with their diagnosis, the cultural symptoms they ascribe to the impact of media technologies are undeniable. Writing prior to the start of World War II, Walter Benjamin describes the effects of "mechanical reproduction" as forces that could prove to be leveling, perhaps even democratizing (Benjamin 221). In opposing the classical
painter with the contemporary film-maker, for instance, Benjamin draws attention to the evaporation of a privileged aura, an aura that is dispelled in two ways: the social relationship existing between the audience and the cultural object is changed, and the object itself loses status as a thing-in-itself and is largely — and visibly — embedded in the technologies of production and reproduction that bring it into existence (Benjamin 232-33). Such a cultural artifact no longer functions as an icon both because — according to Benjamin — the process of assemblage is laid bare in the artificial movements and shot composition of a motion picture, and because the lack of an original object — a fetish, to use Benjamin's term — prohibits the creation of a mystified, cult-like relationship between object and viewing audience.

As the critical essays by Benjamin and others in this period demonstrate, the consequences of "mechanical reproducibility" and the large-scale industrialization of cultural production were well-known and much discussed in the earlier part of the century. What needs to be understood is the extent to which the process of cultural commodification they describe underwent a massive intensification and acceleration after 1945, and that the material catalyst and figural embodiment of this transformation is the television. Mass media as represented by the popular press, cinema and radio were targets of extensive debate and criticism through the 1920s and 1930s, but the stakes in the debate about culture and commodity rose dramatically in the period after the Second World War, when European and American societies were "[i]ncreasingly defined by sophisticated information technologies and communication networks and by a vast expansion of entertainment and service industries" (Johnston 11).
Though it is currently almost synonymous with the term "media," television could barely be called a marginal technology prior to 1945. The technology's pre-history can be traced back to the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, with the patent issued in 1884 to Paul Nipkow for his mechanical device called the Nipkow disk. Mechanical television transmitters did not function reliably (when they functioned at all), but a later invention by Karl Ferdinand Braun, a German inventor, advanced the possibility of a functioning electronic version of TV: the electronic cathode ray tube. In one sense, then, the technology is arguably already one hundred years old.

There were a number of other developments in electronics needed to push a working model of a television system towards reality, however. It took almost thirty years, substantial capital investment and a number of technical innovations by two competing American radio manufacturers, RCA and Philco Corporation, to bring a fully functioning system into existence (Stephens 42). Working for Philco Corporation, Philo Farnsworth demonstrated a television transmitter and receiver in 1927 and received a patent for the device in 1930 (Lubar 245). It was Philco's competitor RCA, however, which first developed a model for the public market and presented the device at the World's Fair in New York in 1939. In Britain a parallel series of developments led to the BBC transmission of the royal procession following the coronation of King George VI in 1937, but in each country the technology for transmission remained in the developmental stage and, more crucially, a consumer market for television receivers had not been developed.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, all the major industrial producers turned their attention to war materials; as a result, the development of commercial television was placed on standby. RCA's commercially viable system languished from 1939 to 1945, but
immediately following the end of the war the demand for television receivers and television programming began to grow at an exponential rate:

Six [American] television stations remained on the air through the war, broadcasting sporadically to about seven thousand receivers by war's end. By 1950 the United States had 104 television stations broadcasting regularly to more than ten million receivers. (Stephens 46)

The adoption of the new technology continued at this exponential pace through the 1950s. Half of American homes had television by 1953, and ninety per cent had them by 1960 (Lubar 248). It is a critical commonplace that the first televised debates in a U.S. Presidential election demonstrated the power of the new medium when John Kennedy's image bested Richard Nixon (while radio listeners generally felt Nixon won the debate), but the observation tends to overlook the technical reality that part of the medium's power was due to its ubiquity in American homes by 1960. Televised debates in 1948 or even 1952 would have had little impact on the general public, as a mass television audience had not yet developed.

Even as the means of receiving television broadcasts spread to virtually every dwelling in America and Britain, the basic machine, the cathode ray tube (CRT) in its wooden or plastic enclosure, came "unhinged," in Peter D'Angistino and David Tafler's phrase:

An omnipresence now pervades every facet of daily life; CRTs . . . dot the landscape and occupy the halls of all human activity, from the office to the ballpark, from transportation platforms to transporting vehicles, from libraries to supermarkets, from ATMs to research laboratories. Television has now become a bank machine, security monitor, information terminal, computer interface. (xiii)
It is not difficult to find examples of the ubiquity of television screens. Within the last year some Vancouver branches of the VanCity Credit Union installed banks of 26" monitors above tellers' desks. The monitors are tuned to 24-hr news and sports stations with closed captioning instead of sound. Similarly, TVs appeared at the baggage carousels at the Vancouver International Airport, complementing the monitors showing arrivals and departures with news and sports programming. In each case the sets seem to be provided as a courtesy, a compensation for the waiting around customers are forced to do. The televisions soothe and distract the crowds. They give them something to do.

Walter Benjamin wrote about the increasing power of mass media and the forms of popular culture in the 1920s and 30s, but the insertion of television into all corners of everyday life exacerbates the process. In John Johnston's words, "the manner in which human sense perception and the medium in which it is accomplished are no longer determined only by nature but also by history and technology" (35). As the presence and effects of media technologies become routinized, their influence becomes harder to isolate and thus harder to perceive. In a paradoxical fashion, the ubiquity of television serves to make it less visible. It becomes less and less noticeable, and certainly in terms of private homes it is now the absence of a television that is remarkable, rather than the presence of one. Aided by technical advances in miniaturization, the television set recapitulates the history of its emergence and subsequent withdrawal from the technological spotlight. Writing in *Electronic Hearth: Creating an American Television Culture*, Cecelia Ticchi traces television's arrival, colonization, and normalization within American homes. She points out that the earliest sets were consciously modeled after the large radio receivers that had dominated living rooms in the first half of the century. The early televisions were physically imposing and meant to be
displayed as centerpieces. Later, advertising shifted the focus to the need for smaller sets in other parts of the house, and the earlier position of privilege granted to television as a rare commodity and marker of a certain economic status gradually fades as the device is demoted to the status of mere appliance and finally just another piece of furniture. In fact, Ticchi's book includes a 1972 advertisement for Sony televisions that suggests placing a new Sony TV on top of the older console monitor because, after all, the latter "is a beautiful piece of furniture" (33).

The proliferation of televisions as physical objects makes it increasingly difficult to grasp television as a theoretical concept. Television slips beneath our notice even as it comes to dominate our attention: "Although the term 'television' seems specific in a way 'capitalism' and 'modernity' (not to mention 'postmodernity') do not, it definitely belongs to the same plane of abstraction, the same scope of materiality, and hence to the same theoretical hesitation" (Dienst 3-4). To work with the idea of television is to plunge into a thicket of associations, definitions and connotations. In one sense, television is obviously a technology, a way of transmitting images to remote locations virtually instantaneously. In this trivial sense the technological potential was recognized almost immediately: Richard Dienst refers to the definition provided by the television pioneer Dziga Vertov in 1925, "a method for broadcasting images by radio" (6). But clearly this is just the beginning of what we mean when we talk about television.

The technology has spawned an entire industry on a scale comparable to that inaugurated by the internal combustion engine. Empires of a global scale have been created

---

14 This trajectory is not unique to television, of course. Radio receivers went through a similar arc, especially with the advent of portable transistor sets in the mid-1950s. Similarly, telephones used to be kept in separate rooms
to oversee the production, distribution and consumption of television broadcasts, with a maximum potential audience measured as some multiple of the estimated 600 million televisions in circulation worldwide. Even the oldest of these empires is presiding over a ubiquitous media network developed within the last fifty years, one should recall. There is something fundamentally unsettling about the speed and size of television's growth, and the unease is only heightened by the increasing number of mergers and acquisitions that have concentrated media power in fewer and fewer hands. Globally, national governments tacitly acknowledge the power and potential threat of television networks by imposing stringent controls on the electromagnetic frequencies used in television transmission. Such regulation recalls the governmental controls that were once directed against an earlier communication technology: the printing press. At the time, the licensing of presses acknowledged the revolutionary power of the new medium; however, the waning power of print in the age of the televised image can be measured by the lack of interest Western governments show in regulating the printed word. The perception of a shift in the locus of importance within the forms of media is suggested by their careful regulation of the electromagnetic spectrum.

It is worthwhile to take the time to expand the term "television" because its comfortable position within almost every domestic setting in Britain and North America has led to an easy familiarity between the device and the audience. Television conceived as a technological 'given' renders all but invisible the labyrinthine complexity of even a simple 15 second public service announcement. The images on the screen attain the status of a found object that appears to the viewer as a finished and comfortably familiar artifact. In this
respect television is extremely good at promoting what Guy Debord (paraphrasing Marx) describes as commodity fetishism: "the domination of society by things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses" (Debord II.36). Television's impact, and by extension the impact of all the machinery of commodity consumption, is largely felt through the ways it successfully occludes the very mercenary imperative behind all of its narratives and directs the viewer's attention to the narratives themselves. A novelist attempting to come to grips with contemporary culture would need to address the competing claims on consumer attention made by television; inevitably, novelists need to incorporate television into their own narratives. Not to do so would be as perverse as writing a novel about a contemporary urban situation in Britain or America without reference to cars or electricity.

There is, however, an important distinction to be made between having to write about television and having to write about cars or refrigerators. Books and television are competing forms of media, vying in the cultural marketplace for the attention of consumers. Confronted by the most successful communications medium in history, what sort of approach should fiction writers take? David Foster Wallace suggests that for writers for whom "TV's as much a part of reality as Toyotas and gridlock" (43) pop culture (read: television) references serve "(1) to help create a mood of irony and irreverence, (2) to make us uneasy and so 'comment' on the vapidity of U.S. culture, and (3) most important, these days, to be just plain realistic" (42-43). DeLillo, born in 1936, can at least refer back to a childhood untouched by television — hardly pre-lapsarian, this world, but definitely prior to television's arrival upon the American cultural scene. Amis was born in 1945, and his grasp of a culture that does not include television is considerably more tenuous: before he was ten years old, televisions had
appeared in the majority of British homes (Williams 23). As such he barely qualifies as one of those writers "whose ganglia were formed pre-TV," as Wallace puts it (43). Is the distinction of pre- versus post-TV significant? Clearly it is only as significant as television's impact on the collective and individual consciousness of those for whom it is the primary form of media: "We're not different from our fathers in that television presents and defines our contemporary world. Where we are different is that we have no memory of a world without such electric definition" (Wallace 43).

For DeLillo, one way to measure television's impact is by examining a moment of popular culture that takes place prior to television's media dominance. The opening scene of *Underworld* embodies just such a moment. The final game of the National League pennant race in 1951 and the jubilation that followed take place as spontaneous, irreducibly public events, as he explains in an essay published in the *New York Times* subsequent to *Underworld*'s release:

> I found myself thinking about the event in a different way, broadly, in history, as an example of some unrepeatable social phenomenon, and I couldn't shake the impact of the game's great finish — the burst of jubilation in the old Polo Grounds and throughout much of the city when Bobby Thomson of the Giants hit the game-winning home run. ("Power of History" np)

One of the central characters DeLillo uses in his recreation of the game in *Underworld*'s opening chapter is the radio announcer Russ Hodges. Hodges is given a voice and personality, while the television crew working in the same broadcast booth remain anonymous and marginal (25-26). DeLillo's emphasis on Hodges ("he is the voice of the Giants" [15]) is a reminder of the relative importance of the two forms of media in 1951,
though the arrival of the television crew from KMOX intimates in rather literal terms TV's encroachment on radio's turf.

The emphasis on Hodges foregrounds the fact the game is taking place in real time — live rather than on tape. Thus the event's status for DeLillo as an "unrepeatable social phenomenon" is the result of two purely contingent historical facts: 1) that television had not yet reached the critical mass required to dominate media, and 2) that broadcast technology did not yet allow for recording and playback of televised images.\(^ {15}\) The social impact of the final game of the Giants-Dodgers series, DeLillo suggests, is due to the fact that the moment cannot become diluted through constant repetition in the media.

The period around 1951 is a transitional moment in television's history. DeLillo makes this point in another way by writing Jackie Gleason into the opening chapter of *Underworld*. In 1951 Gleason is already a TV celebrity, but he is about to increase his fame and create a cultural landmark thanks to the success of a comic skit called "The Honeymooners," to be shown for the first time in exactly two days" (24). His presence at the game suggests the growing prominence of the new medium that, for DeLillo as well as for Amis, is a fixture of the contemporary urban environment.

Within their novels each writer develops extended descriptions of specific characters linked to television in a variety of ways. The lowest common denominator, for both DeLillo and Amis, is the passive consumer of televised imagery — or rather, the individual who actively, even aggressively, consumes television. Characters whose relationship to television is defined by naive acceptance and simple compliance are shown to be contaminated by the

\(^ {15}\) Recordings of Thomson's home run survive as flickering images transferred from kinescope reels, but video recording technology would not become available to television networks until 1956, and consumer products based on the technology became commercially viable in the early 1970s (Lubar 268-70).
commodified, fragmented and decentering discourse of TV. Their absorption is effected by the effacement of the frame or screen. In this context naive acceptance equals an innocent belief in the unmediated presence, a confusion of immediate presence with the artifice of mediation that is an irreducible component of televised images. Yet there is another kind of television consumer identifiable in their fictions. This second figure is empowered, to some extent, by an insider's familiarity with the medium. In *Money* Amis turns the narrative over to John Self, a director of television commercials who becomes involved in a project to film a movie in New York. DeLillo's first novel, *Americana*, is the first-person narrative of a television producer, David Bell, who defects from his network position and attempts to find some personal and artistic progress through the creation of an autobiographical film. The transposition of privileged media terms, film for television, invokes a suggestive media hierarchy but offers no resolution of the internal conflicts John Self and David Bell experience. Both exhibit a naive belief in the redemptive powers of film against the corrupt and counterfeit world of television, though they have extremely different concepts of "redemption." And there is yet a third perspective provided by writer-figures who appear in works by each novelist. Authorship itself is a subject of investigation, again explicitly situated in the larger network of contemporary media systems that overlap with the process of writing and publishing fiction. In *Mao II* the reclusive writer Bill Gray is gradually drawn into the image-world. *The Information* similarly stages a confrontation between a stubborn author clinging to modernist ideals and the hypermediated experience of an American book tour. At the same time, *The Information* presents a figure of the successful writer in this milieu — the popular, populist hack, Gwyn Barry. Barry's example demonstrates, in a
satirical form, the condition of literature as it jockeys for position against the encroachment of competing media forms: movies, TV, the popular press, the Internet.

1. Worst-Case Scenarios

What impact does television have on the mind of the viewer? Over time, what happens to the person who spends a typical five to seven hours a day in front of the TV screen? In an essay on the effect of television on younger American writers, David Foster Wallace argues that television can be "toxic for writers because it leads us to confuse actual fiction-research for a weird kind of fiction-consumption" (Wallace 20, his emphasis). Television invites the confusion of experience with the representation of experience, or in Wallace's terms invites us to mistake the observation of real-life with its dramatic simulation. If toxic for fairly well-educated and self-conscious individuals like writers, what impact does television have on the less sophisticated consumers of mass media?

In London Fields Martin Amis tries to find the lowest common denominator in the character of Keith Talent. Keith is introduced by the narrator of London Fields, an American writer named Samson Young, as an uneducated street crook, "a cheat" (London Fields 6), whose primary ambition is to achieve success through competitive darts or more accurately, through "a televised final, a £5,000 cheque, and a play-off, also televised, with his hero and darting model, the world number one, Kim Twemlow" (8). Television is the absolute measure of success for Keith; in certain respects it is what gives him definition. The narrator goes so far as to report that Keith's eyes "held a strange radiance — for a moment it reminded you of health, health hidden — sleeping or otherwise mysteriously absent . . . . His eyes were television" (9).
Against the background of millennial disintegration Samson Young describes Keith as a proletarian everyman whose horizons are measured — and mediated — by television. Keith's eyes are television, and they "[shine] with the tremendous accommodations made to money" (9). What television represents for Keith is simply a window into another, better world:

Television was all about everything he did not have and was full of all the people he did not know and could never be. Television was the great shopfront, lightly electrified, up against which Keith crushed his nose. (8)

The world displayed on the television screen is shown to be corrosive for Keith in that it suggests that an endless gratification of desire is an attainable goal while placing it simultaneously beyond his grasp. Crucially the world of television is constructed for Keith as an alternate reality, equally real yet parallel to his own squalid existence. The television screen is an essential figure in this doubled conception, providing the reassuring images of this realm of gratified desires as well as establishing the physical barrier that separates Keith from it.

In London Samson is staying in an apartment he swapped for his own New York apartment with another writer, Mark Asprey. When they arrive at the up-market address, Keith is initially skeptical that a writer could earn the kind of money to afford the location. "Mostly for theatre and television," I said. Now all was clear. 'TV?' he said coolly. For some reason I added, 'I'm in TV too'" (13). The equation reassures Keith in his sense of how things work. Television is the locus of material wealth and within its world the characters are all acquaintances: "Of course [Keith was thinking], TV people all know each other and fly to and from the great cities and borrow each other's flats. Common sense" (13). At a rough
average of six hours a day, the television viewer is invited to watch — but not to participate — in a world that seems to be all about wish-fulfillment.

In terms of attributing to them true supernatural assets and desiring to emulate them, it's fair to say we sort of worship them. The characters may be our 'close friends,' but the performers are beyond strangers: they're imagos, demigods, and they move in a different sphere, hang out with and marry only each other, seem even as actors accessible to Audience only via the mediation of tabloid, talk show, EM signal. (Wallace 26)

In the 1980s the television show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* achieved considerable success simply bringing television cameras inside the homes of media celebrities. Almost without comment and certainly without analysis or criticism, the show celebrated materialism, celebrity, and conspicuous consumption for an audience who, like Keith, pressed its nose against the great shopfront.

The consequences of television saturation, of constant exposure to an artificial, parallel universe transmitted by the flow of television programming, become apparent in the gradual degeneration of Keith's mental state over the course of the novel. The manipulation of Keith effected by the novel's 'femme fatale' Nicola Six is primarily televisual in nature. Largely through a series of videotapes, she seduces him and keeps him pliant and obedient, beginning with a set of brief excerpts of her from theatre productions and commercial advertisements and progressing to increasingly graphic home-made sex videos. As he sits on a couch beside Nicola and watches her image on the box in front of him, Keith's initial response to "this collision or swirl of vying realities" is one of nausea: "it might have overloaded him entirely if the electric image hadn't clearly belonged to the past" (175). It is
as if Keith needs to keep his fantasies and desires constantly close but always at a distance, and Nicola's ability to traverse the barrier of the television screen and be in both worlds at once unbalances him. As the images become more sexually explicit and, crucially, begin to intersect with Keith's present moment, his sense of confusion increases, culminating in the interruption of a private screening for Keith of a video featuring Nicola dressed as a witch by her actual appearance in the same costume she is wearing on-screen (427).

On this occasion the consequence of the doubling of television with reality leaves Keith sexually impotent. Nicola's doubled physical and virtual presence proves unsettling to Keith, a fact she ascribes to his "difficulty switching from one medium to another. That's what this whole thing is really about" (429). "This whole thing" refers to Keith's dream of leaving behind his life on the streets for the televised wealth and fame of competitive darts. In preparation for the semi-final match, the television producers behind the darts tournament try to incorporate Keith's life into the simulacrum, but here as well the intersection of his life with the flow of images on television proves an intellectual challenge for Keith. Qualifying for the darts final brings him to the attention of Dartworld executive producers, who phone to arrange "a short docu" or feature they create for participants in the match. "You've seen them. Couple of minutes each. So we want to do you, Keith" (398). In response, surveying the "stinking ruin" of his domestic situation, Keith can only say, "... But that's TV" (398).

In creating an unblinking addict to the promises of television, Martin Amis also carefully delineates the mechanism of deferred wish-fulfillment and complicity between the producers and consumers of the beautiful, illusory world on the other side of the screen. As
David Foster Wallace recognizes, there is a dangerous underside to TV's unreflective fetishism of facsimiles of experience:

[T]he downside of TV's big fantasy is that it's just a fantasy. As a Treat, my escape from the limits of genuine experience is neato. As a steady diet, though, it can't help but render my own reality less attractive (because in it I'm just one Dave, with limits and restrictions all over the place), render me less fit to make the most of it (because I spend all my time pretending I'm not in it), and render me ever more dependant on the device that affords escape from just what my escapism makes unpleasant. (75)

*London Fields* is about a lot of things, but one strand that winds through the novel and knots up tightly with other elements is Amis's carefully staged concluding scene that engineers, among other things, the destruction of Keith Talent by forcing him to confront the reality that television's simulated world has no existence apart from his own.

Early in the novel the narrator describes in a brief vignette how one of Keith's many extra-marital affairs begins when a woman obsessed with television personalities, Aniliese Furnish, mistakes him for "Rick Purist, of TV-quiz show fame" (49). Keith exploits the resemblance, and the fiction is only revealed when Aniliese appears in a tabloid news story under the banner "MY STOLEN HOURS WITH TV'S RICK." Despite her discovery that Keith is not, in fact, Rick Purist, Aniliese continues to see him, and on one occasion his unannounced visit surprises her in bed with Rick Purist.

Aniliese was making amends (she later explained) for the disruption she had brought to Rick's marriage. On came the bedside lamp: Keith and Rick looked
quite alike. Keith stared. He'd seen Rick on the telly! It was one of the strangest moments in Keith's strange life. (50)

This minor (though to Keith still unsettling) instance of transgressive metalepsis is a foreshadowing of Keith's experience at the novel's end when his own world and the world on television are forced into contact. As he tries to imagine himself on television for the brief establishing documentary aired before the darts match there is a suggestion of the problems to come: "He was actually in great difficulty here. Himself on TV: he couldn't work out how the two worlds overlapped. Try as he might, bring all his powers to bear, he just couldn't work it out" (417).

Inevitably it is Nicola Six who steps in to provide a solution. Her influence ensures the brief "biodoc" programme elides any mention of Keith's real social circumstances: his wife, baby daughter, and dingy council flat. Instead the television camera discovers a pastiche of clichés to do with money and power. Nicola's apartment and her presence as his "trusty girl Friday" provide Keith with the conventional signifiers of material success, and as a consequence Keith is allowed to project onto the television screen a fantasy-version of his own life that is broadcast to "27 1/2 million people — in the UK, in Scandinavia, in the Netherlands, in the rockabilly states of America, in Canada, in the Far East, and in Australia" (423). Nicola compliments him on the impression the biodoc leaves, but continues, "I only wonder slightly what your wife will make of it" (424).

The transfer through the looking glass, the transition to the other side of the "lightly electrified" shopfront Samson describes at the beginning of the novel is completed at the

---

16 In Gerard Genette's sense of a blending of the diegetic and extradiegetic levels of a narrative [Narrative Discourse, 228].
novel's conclusion. Keith's fascination with television, its locus as a repository of his material desires, is at first seriously threatened by the appearance of his own image on the screen:

"Keith was in a state of near-psychotic confusion at this point . . . [H]e was still clinging to the notion that the biodoc would be screened only at those locations where it had been filmed: [Nicola's] flat, and, of course, [his pub] the Marquis of Edenberry" (424-25). But the parallel universe has at last fully intersected with his own. Keith Talent is shown the background against which his fantasies screen. The darts final takes place in a soundstage meant to simulate a noisy pub. A sign on the wall off camera reads "NO SMOKING" (487) yet the set makes use of "a cigarette-smoke simulator" to help provide atmosphere during the actual taping (489). Against this background of simulation and disillusionment, Keith is betrayed by Nicola and humiliated in the darts match by his "cheat" rival, Chick Purchase.

In constructing the arc of Keith's downfall — along with those of the other major characters in *London Fields* — Martin Amis implicates television as a powerful contributor. In a fundamental way television has altered Keith's relation with reality. The persistent illusion of access to goods and services is complicated by its importance as illusion to Keith: confronted by the truth behind television's promise he winds up unfulfilled and betrayed.

Amis makes clear that Keith's relationship to his real world is mediated by television on a number of levels. The image of Keith alone in his living room, screening six hours of pre-recorded television on his VCR, suggests a man with a curious sense of time, an impatience with the bits between the specific scenes of sex, money and violence he searches for within the taped programs. Keith condenses the already intensified dramatics of television with the "Rewind, Slo Mo, Freeze Frame" (165). "The female body got chopped up by Keith twenty times a night: . . . Now the great thumb moved from Fast Forward to Rewind to
Play . . ." (165). Keith's taped six hours is often condensed into twenty minutes of viewing pleasure, according to the narrator.

It is significant that only a couple of pages later in *London Fields* Keith imagines forced sex with Nicola Six in identical terms: "My speed. With the Fast Forward and the Freeze Frame and a bit of the old Slo Mo near the end" (169). While it is true that Keith is consistently characterized as a caricature or grotesque literary type, the caricature is not so extreme as to make Keith entirely foreign; he remains recognizable to the reader. There is something Dickensian about Keith, as if Dickens had written a novel featuring Bill Sykes as the hero rather than Oliver Twist, but in every respect the setting of *London Fields* is unmistakably contemporary. The narrator insists that Keith is "modern, modern" (90) and that his venality and cruelty are products of his modern environment.

"His eyes were television," the narrator says. Television teaches Keith about values — or at least about the value of things — and it provides him with a convenient mirror reflecting and validating his shallow fantasies. The content and form of TV — the images and the technology — offer him a gratifying if illusory control: the ability to focus his attention on images of sex, violence and money by manipulating situations with the Fast Forward and Slo Mo. The fantasies of control do not carry over into his real life, however, so pursuing an opportunity to engage with the seductive illusions destroys him.

Television "told him what the world was" (155). Asked to list his hobbies for the biodoc, Keith struggles and eventually comes up with TV. It is what he does. "TV,' he thought, or 'Modern reality' or 'The world'" (55). Samson Young's condemnation of the effect of television on someone like Keith who "[can't] grade or filter it" (55) is, I'd argue, a more generalized swipe at all forms of media. The impact of tabloid journalism is indicated in
Keith's monotone rendition of a soccer match and suggests a colonization of his conscious mind by dead metaphors and pre-packaged formulations:

After the interval Rangers' fortunes revived as they exploited their superiority in the air. Bobby Bondavitch's men offered stout resistance and the question remained: could the Blue translate the pressure they were exciting into goals? In the seventy-fourth minute Keith Spare produced a pass that split the visitor's defense, and Dustin Housely rammed the equalizer home. (91)

Initially the narrator supposes this and similar descriptions are memorized segments from tabloid accounts, but upon further reflection and further exposure to Keith's take on the world, Samson concludes this is "absolutely wrong": "Remember — he is modern, modern, despite the heels and the flares. When Keith goes to a football match, that misery of stringer's cliché's is what he actually sees" (97-98, emphasis in original).

In creating a television personality (that is, a contemporary character whose personality is formed by television), Amis imagines a state of affairs similar to the condition described by Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, the copy that has no original. For Amis part of "a genuine idea about modern life [is] that it's so mediated that authentic experience is much harder to find. Authentic everything is much harder to find" (quoted in Morrison 100). Keith's experience of a football match, as an example, is already a cliché-ridden tabloid account. According to Samson Young, Keith sees the representation of the event instead of the event itself. The simulation precedes the event. Increasingly in London Fields Keith is affected by the insinuation of pre-formatted categories of success or wealth which begin to erupt through his speech. The following examples from the novel indicate Keith's substitution of objects of consumer desire for expressions of belief or desire:
BMW. Mercedes 1905. 2.5-16. Uh, it's up there, mate. (144)

'Seychelles,' said Keith half-absently . . . . 'Bali,' Keith added. (173)

'Prestigious, said Keith, shuffling stockily across the road with his bag.

'Eurobank. Motorway contraflow. Intercooler.' (252)


These are examples of what passes as dialogue for Keith. Samson Young's characterization suggests that Keith is unable to filter the inputs, so he represents the worst-case scenario of media-saturation. And for Keith, "media" is practically synonymous with television. The images and phrases I've singled out suggest the extent to which Keith's mind has been colonized, his perception of—to say nothing of his response to—reality modified by the effects of relentless exposure to television and other media.

In a later novel, Amis alludes to this process of colonization in similar terms. The narrator in Night Train, Mike Hoolihan, continually returns to the precession of simulacra as it applies to her career as a police detective. Like Samson Young in London Fields, Hoolihan remains slightly above the scene she is describing, but influenced by it nonetheless. In her investigation of the inexplicable suicide that forms the center of the novel's plot, what emerges is a search for a pattern in the face of a totally unmotivated suicide.

Hoolihan's preoccupation with patterns and process appears tangentially in her observation, early in the novel, of the changing nature of autopsy: "When it's time to get around to you there, you will be trolleyed out of the walk-in freezer, weighed, and rolled onto a zinc gurney under an overhead camera. It used to be a microphone, and you'd take
Polaroids. Now it's a camera. Now it's TV" (34). Television intrudes on this terminal scene, but its impact is registered all along the police procedural path. Patterns of behaviour are absorbed from the constant drama of television, and certain expectations provoked by TV's filter into the general population. The efficacy of the familiar good cop–bad cop routine, for example, is abandoned by Hoolihan partly because "Joe Perp is on to it, having seen good cop–bad cop a million times on reruns of Hawaii Five-O" (57), once again invoking television to account for the devolution of police procedure to cliche.

In the context of a police thriller the effects of television drama – or more generally the ubiquitous cops and robbers dramatic narrative – are particularly appropriate as a means for Amis to foreground the way an individual's actions can become imitations of a dramatic simulation. As in Money, his goal seems to be to show "that an individual's consciousness is discursively constituted to some degree, that one's values and perceptions are colonized by dominant cultural values that may be in conflict with one's identity . . ." (Edmondson 146). A non-fictional example from a recent issue of Harper's Magazine shows the reflexivity of this mode of self-dramatization. The piece consists of part of the transcript of an FBI wiretap of two suspected Mafia members. Their discussion focuses on the popular television series, The Sopranos, which is about the quotidian affairs of a low-level member of the Mafia. The wiretapped conversation, which sounds like the script from a second-rate Godfather imitation, reveals the two real-life Mafia members discussing the accuracy or fidelity of the dialogue in the show ("La Drama Nostra" 16, 18). As a transcript, the document functions as a kind of simulacra when the voices of the real mobsters are mediated by the audience's sense of what gangster dialogue should sound like, a mediation of which the mobsters are critically aware.
In an essay for the *New York Times Magazine*, Don DeLillo makes a similar point regarding this reverberation between actual crime and its mediation through television and film. Near the end of this 3000-word essay he abruptly shifts into the second person to mimic the immediacy of a viewer before a specific televised moment. He summarizes a video sequence of a botched armed robbery, describing the robbers as "moving with a certain choreographed flair, firing virtuoso bursts from automatic weapons" ("Power of History" np). The language and the adjectives instantly transform the criminal act into a dramatic spectacle, performed as much to entertain the viewers as to achieve some criminal end. The passage continues, "[y]ou wonder if they are repeating a scene from a recent movie," further undermining the transgressive nature of the act by equating it with a self-conscious, mediated rerun: "the culture continues its drive to imitate itself endlessly — the rerun, the sequel, the theme park, the designer outlet....." In the second paragraph written in the second person, the reader/viewer is specifically implicated in the mediation process as the videotape shot by a convenience store surveillance camera records the "commonplace homicide" of a clerk by "a shuffling man with a handgun." The complicity of the viewer, already suggested in this section of the article by the switch to the second person, is further strengthened by the repetition of the image in successive newscasts. "Your" complicity in the fact that you "want and need and get sick of and need nonetheless" such sets of images makes you a "passive variation of the armed robber in his warped act of consumption." Violence, money and media consumption come together here just as they do in Amis's image of the inside of Keith Talent's brain, only here the figure on the couch with the Freeze Frame and the Slo Mo is "you." With uncharacteristic pessimism DeLillo ends the brief second-person vignette by
warning that such a display of media violence "separates you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape."

DeLillo employs the second person in a similar manner in *Underworld* in a section entitled "Videotape." The passage is also shifted into the present tense, giving it a sense of directness and immediacy in the novel that is only echoed in the opening section, "Pafko at the Wall." The identification is intended to heighten the juxtaposition between the two moments scrutinized by these two sections of *Underworld*: the rebroadcast of a random homicide, and the moment of jubilation that erupts following Bobby Thomson's home run. By using the present tense and second person in "Pafko," Mark Osteen contends, "DeLillo indicates a shared history — as if implying that the game continues to take place in the minds of Americans" (219). The narrative strategy invites comparison with "Videotape," but DeLillo has been unequivocal in contrasting the impact "the shot heard 'round the world" (as Thomson's home run was dubbed by sports journalists) had on the American consciousness with the "debasing process of frantic repetition that exhausts a contemporary event before it has rounded into coherence" ("Power," np). The immediacy of the game the young character Cotter watches from a seat in the Old Polo Grounds on October 4th 1951 is sharply contrasted with the anonymous murder shown repeatedly on television that features in "Videotape."

Though Mark Osteen identifies the unnamed figure identified as "you" as Matt Shay, a minor figure in *Underworld*, the use of the second person implicates the reader in the scene, which itself explores, in terms that recall DeLillo's essay, the way a video recording of a crime implicates the viewer: "not only does the act of taping inure us to the violence; it also encourages reruns, 'copycat'-crimes — but of course even the first murder is already in some sense a copy of all the cinematic and televised murders previously shown" (Osteen 235).
The terms of Osteen's analysis recall the "mediated" behaviour of the police in *Night Train*, and this is part of the effect television's constant presence has on the culture, at least in the view of Amis and DeLillo. A further similarity can be adduced between Amis's manipulation of Keith Talent and the career of the Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld*, who acts as the absent cause of the videotaped murder. In a later section of *Underworld*, DeLillo introduces the Texas Highway Killer in the flesh, sharing with the reader his empty life and his need to kill as a means of connecting with the wider world through the media. Like Amis, DeLillo identifies television as a fantasy-channel for the disenfranchised. The medium seems to provide a way out of insignificance, but for Frank Gilkey as much as for Keith Talent, it presents a dead end in actuality. For Keith, crossing over to the other side of the television screen coincides with the complete disintegration of his social and personal life. For Gilkey, his 'appearance' on TV is only as an absent cause: the shooter whose anonymous actions are caught on anonymous videotape. As Osteen remarks, Gilkey "commits his murders not to take revenge, but to take shape, to create the social life that he otherwise lacks." Ironically, his crimes require that he be anonymous, as discovery would mean his certain destruction (especially in execution-happy Texas). As a consequence, "he remains unfulfilled, ghostly, ineffectual, absent; meaning dodges him" (235-36).

*White Noise* is DeLillo's sardonic take on what he calls the "around-the-garden-and-in-the-house" novel ("Talk" 26); it ostensibly focuses on the uncomplicated pleasures of suburban living but rapidly expands to accommodate industrial disasters and confrontations with death and dying. The Gladney household seems entirely unremarkable from a distance, but the ordinary features of the family give way to levels of strangeness as the novel progresses.
Television has a central place in the Gladney home, dominating the living room but also present in a smaller set that travels around the house and into the bedrooms of various members of the family. This physical ubiquity is coupled with the intrusive voice of television, explored literally in the manner in which television assumes a voice in the narrative, and symbolically in the way television's undifferentiated flow of disconnected information resembles the casual dialogue of the Gladney family — or, more accurately, the way their dialogue has come to resemble television.

It is not only television that enters the narrative in *White Noise*, however. As they travel through the suburban landscape, the Gladneys encounter voices emanating from the radio and from supermarket intercoms. While the fact of the interruptions seems unremarkable, the overall effect replicates within the novel the cumulative effects media saturation has on consciousness. For instance, when two paragraphs of a description of a supermarket are interrupted by a four-word paragraph that reads, "Dristan Ultra, Dristan Ultra" (122), there is no identifying marker for the interjection, but it is clear that the voice emanates from the supermarket loudspeaker system. That the interjection requires no explanation suggests that it is simultaneously registered and ignored, a fragment of language that enters the general narrative without context, absorbed yet undigested.

Voices on the radio perform a similar function, interrupting and fragmenting the conversations and activities of the characters in the novel but not in any way that prompts a reaction from them. While media in general operate in this way in *White Noise*, television is the exemplary mechanism for the delivery of contextless information for at least two reasons: its technological voice is the most insistent, and the images and stories it transmits tumble out
in an undifferentiated flow that resists incorporation in the larger narratives operating within the family:

Steffie came in wearing Denise's green visor. I didn't know what this meant. She climbed up on the bed and all three of us went through my German-English dictionary, looking for words that sound about the same in both languages, like orgy and shoe.

Heinrich came running down the hall, burst into the room. "Come on, hurry up, plane crash footage." Then he was out the door, the girls were off the bed, all three of them running along the hall to the TV set.

I sat in bed a little stunned. (63-64)

In this instance a domestic scene (albeit a strange one) is interrupted by the presence of the television, as images of a plane crash in New Zealand take precedence over family interactions. While in another novel this scene could have been the start of a diatribe against television, here judgment is suspended; Jack Gladney merely recounts the incident — then goes down the hall to watch the spectacle along with his children.

Interior narratives and the substance of a character's consciousness are similarly influenced by the mediated information bombardment. Characters swap trivia, subjects change rapidly, and even their unvoiced thoughts register the effects of media, as the often-cited "Toyota Celica" passage (155) or the following exchange indicate:

Steffie walked in saying, "I'm the only person I know who likes Wednesdays."

Wilder's absorption seemed to interest her. She went and stood next to him, trying to figure out what attracted him to the agitated water. She leaned over the pot, looking for an egg.
A jingle for a product called Ray-Ban Wayfarer began running through my head. (212)

When even an interior monologue pauses for a commercial announcement, it is safe to say that mass media have, as the quotations from David Foster Wallace suggested earlier, moved into a new position of prominence within the culture.

While there is an objective, detached quality to Jack Gladney's narrative, the extreme example provided by the character Willie Mink presents the limit case of television's tendency to efface the difference between things. The cultural critics Gladney works with delight in questioning the relative importance of phenomena (consider Murray Jay Siskind's comment that "a forest fire on TV is on a lower plane than a ten-second spot for Automatic Dishwasher All. The commercial has deeper waves, deeper emanations" [67]), but they retain a sense of structure, of first- and second-hand phenomena, with which to orient themselves. When Gladney finds Willie Mink, he meets a character who has deteriorated to a point where his own speech has assumed the fragmented, disconnected quality of the discourse of television. Mink's conversation is peppered with out-of-context snippets of information identical to the pronouncements of radio and television scattered throughout the novel. It isn't surprising, then, that television oversees Gladney's confrontation with Willie Mink: a muted TV, high in a metal brace in a corner of the motel room, casts its light on the scene (305).

---

17 The ability to accommodate commercial interruptions in network television is discussed in Wallace's essay "E Unibus Pluram." He points out that the audience's passive response to commercials is exploited by, for instance, Saturday Night Live, which creates detailed parodies of commercials and inserts them into the regularly scheduled commercial slots. For the audience the mock commercial is initially disruptive, but as Wallace points out, the strategy ultimately leads to the audience paying greater attention to commercials in an effort to decipher possible parodic intent. A further twist saw advertisers purposely designing ads that resembled SNL parodies, heightening the impact of the commercial message.
In bringing together Mink, Gladney and television, DeLillo demonstrates again his ability to force the intersection of abstract, theoretical concerns by inventing a dramatic situation that embodies the abstract elements under scrutiny.\textsuperscript{18} *White Noise* is primarily a novel about the fear of death and the avoidance of both the fear of death and death itself in contemporary culture. Dylar, a drug invented by Willie Mink to suppress the fear of death, has the curious side effect of eradicating a subject's capacity to differentiate between words and things, a breakdown in the order of phenomena analogous to television's tendency to efface distinctions. The combination of these influences seriously disrupts Mink's mind, leading to utterances like this:

I see you as a heavyset white man about fifty. Does this describe your anguish? I see you as a person in a gray jacket and light brown pants. Tell me how correct I am. To convert Fahrenheit to Celsius, this is what you do. (308)

The effect is that of dialogue from a mind that is constantly changing channels.

The argument presented by the motel room scene is that Dylar's effects on the individual reproduce in miniature the wider effects of television on culture. Television, and by extension mass media, acts to unfocus perceptions. Distinctions between what is real and what is simulated are eroded and effaced by the egalitarian nature of the medium. As Wallace observes, in this regard television embodies the principles of postmodern theory, though it clearly lacks the latter's subversive claims. Willie Mink is a limit case of television's impact on consciousness, but his exaggerated characteristics must be considered in the context of

\textsuperscript{18} See the discussion in chapter 1 of the relationship between paranoid power and the equally paranoid counter-culture in DeLillo's "The Black and White Ball" for another example of abstract concepts brought into tangible contact.
Wallace's insistence that a person cannot expect to engage with television for an average of six hours each day and escape unchanged.

2. The Author As (Film) Producer

The character Murray Jay Siskind is the devil's advocate in *White Noise*. Charming and earnest in his celebration of supermarkets, television, and car crashes in cinema, he becomes a sinister figure as he advises Jack to consider murder as a means of self-assertion. His celebration of television is resisted by his own students. He advises them to study the medium as children, uncritically, but in response they insist TV is "[w]orse than junk mail. Television is the death throes of human consciousness. They're ashamed of their television past. They want to talk about movies" (51).

The comment reveals a curious divide that operates as an economic, social and cultural truism (no more than that). Film is often equated with the consumer-culture excesses of television, but in the years following Adorno and Horkheimer's attack on "the Culture Industry" the media constellation itself has shifted. Television suffers from an inferiority complex in relation to film; the movie industry operates as a slightly more respectable relation to its dissolute kin, mass-market television. DeLillo has suggested a specific historical moment to theorize the gap: in an interview with Adam Begley for the *Paris Review*, he asks, "Kennedy was shot on film, Oswald was killed on TV. Does this mean anything? Maybe only that Oswald's death became instantly repeatable" (299-301). DeLillo points out that the Zapruder film was withheld from the public for over a decade. Only a select few were allowed to watch it. Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby, in contrast, took place on television and was immediately packaged and rebroadcast over and over again.
Film versus television. The technological origins of these media are distinct and their shared history often finds them in conflict, but over time the technology has come to overlap and the industries themselves have become co-dependent. Two moments in *Underworld* demonstrate the slippage in the opposition DeLillo poses between film and television in his reference to the murders of Kennedy and Oswald. First, the artist Klara Sax attends a party in New York where an unauthorized print of the Zapruder film has been transferred to film and plays and replays on banks of television sets (488-496). Second, the technical function of home movies is itself transferred to video, as the echoes of Zapruder carried into the anonymous videotape of the Texas Highway Killer's victim suggest (155-160). As media technologies, film and television can only be truly differentiated in their modes of distribution, reels versus electronic broadcast. Distinctions based on anything more abstract are unstable and difficult to maintain.

In *Americana*, DeLillo's first novel, the main character David Bell is a dissatisfied television producer who breaks away from the network to explore, through a vanity film project, his own complicated family history. David Bell's personal history is a microcosm of the larger economic forces shaping the culture industry in the 1950s and 60s. His grandfather and father are both minor celebrities in the advertising industry. It is through the efforts of his father (with his powerful advertising contacts) that Bell finds himself working for the network. His attempts at subverting and resisting the corporate imperatives of network television production are carried out with reference to icons of cinema — both its stars and directors. Despite being 'in television,' Bell seeks escape through the icons of heroic masculinity promoted by American films of the period and seeks countercultural authenticity through emblematic directors of the European avant-garde.
As critics from Tom LeClair to Mark Osteen have argued, *Americana* is a novel about a man searching for authenticity in the media-saturated cultural landscape of America. Bell is a painfully self-conscious narrator, but this self-consciousness is a burden in that it reveals to him the problem that his "whole life was a lesson in the effect of echoes" (*Americana* 58). Bell revels in cliché, cheap stereotypes and the simplistic narratives of popular entertainment. In response to a dinner invitation from an old friend, he replies, "You know I go bowling with the fellas on Friday night, Wendy" (25). His account of meeting, marrying, and eventually divorcing Merry, his wife, is similarly stylized: "it was all there but the soundtrack and I could imagine a series of cuts and slow dissolves working in Merry's mind" (36).

In the early pages of *Americana* this ironic distancing is contrasted with similar passages such as the text of a Christmas letter from Bell's sister (44) or a brief monologue from one of Bell's office colleagues (19). In these cases the words seem to reveal attitudes reminiscent of the simple false consciousness of Keith Talent and the characters in *White Noise*, but Bell is more sophisticated. He is deeply troubled by the emptiness of his profession and the sense that there is nothing original or purposeful in his actions and words or those of his colleagues:

There were times when I thought all of us at the network existed only on videotape. Our words and actions seemed to have a disturbingly elapsed quality. We had said and done all of these things before and they had been frozen for a time, rolled up in little laboratory trays to await broadcast and rebroadcast when the proper time-slots became available. And there was the feeling that somebody's
deadly pinky finger might nudge a button and we would all be erased forever.

(23)

Two pages later this conceit is repeated when Bell says, "there are no old times, Wendy. The tapes have been accidentally destroyed" (25). Bell's horror at the simulated, pre-recorded quality of his existence is certainly linked to expressions of alienation one might find in industrial or even pre-industrial narratives, but here, crucially, his frame of reference explicitly links his alienation to the specific technology of television.

The time frame encompassed by the novel underscores Bell's situation, as Tom LeClair points out. "Between the time of Bell's childhood and his career, America was transformed by the centralized power of mass communication" (48). Bell's central position with "the network" forestalls any possible naïve beliefs he might entertain about the potentially redemptive force of this medium, but in his quest for some form of escape from the life he is living 'in television' he merely shifts media and looks to film as a guiding principle.

Bell's early infatuation with popular culture leads him to label Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas "the American pyramids," icons of masculinity (12). At a particular dull moment in a routine office day, he tries "to remember if Burt or Kirk had ever acted in an office film, one of those dull morality tales about power plays and timid adulteries" (20). Their heroic on-screen accomplishments seem to minimize Bell's office existence even further.

But additional references to Burt and Kirk later in the novel suggest Bell's self-consciousness has eclipsed the shallow identification of American masculinity with these archetypal figures. Talking to his ex-wife, he thinks of "all the old Burtian and Kirkesque
characteristics, the clenched emphatic fist, majestic teeth, angry hand brushing the hair..." (59), but he concludes with the comment that "[i]t was a comfortable feeling to be back in the simpleminded past" (59). Osteen argues that, in DeLillo's early work, "characters look to film images for the icons and ideals that will permit them to rise above their alienation, but these images merely model for them the very aimlessness and fear from which they are trying to escape" (8). Osteen carefully itemizes DeLillo's references to Godard and other contemporary directors who worked outside the Hollywood system, but he suggests the account of Bell's quest for an authentic identity is exposed "as a chimera, and originality as merely the echo of an echo. Film is revealed not as a magical solution, but as a mirror that reflects the distortions of personal and national identity" (8-9). Bell's autobiographical film is a failure in that it represents an attempt to reach some transcendent insight into his personal history through techniques learned from Godard, Antonioni, Kurosawa, and others (in American Magic and Dread Osteen provides a detailed analysis of DeLillo's allusions to these and other filmmakers [21-27]). The substitution of film for television, and of alternative, anti-commercial directors for empty Hollywood icons, suggests a progression of a kind, a suggestion echoed in the montage of images beginning with "Burt Lancaster toweling his chest" followed by "Bell looking at the poster of Belmondo looking at the poster of purposeful Bogart," and ending with the "old man on the swing, Watanabe [from Kurosawa's Ikuru], singing to his unseen infancy" (Americana 287). Bell's autobiographical film involves scenes with a younger self, who at one point admits that an earlier short film that had given him some pride had come to mean something much less attractive: "I had not celebrated that brother and sister [in the film]. I had mocked them. I had exploited their sorrow. I had tried to make them part of a hopeful message on the state of the Union. To be
black is to be the actor. To be white is to be the critic" (286). Through his physical journey across America and a psychological journey through his film experiment, Bell can be seen as a person learning and gaining understanding. At the same time, the novel is carefully structured (as LeClair argues) to defeat any simplistic celebratory message.

We can ask with Osteen, "What does DeLillo think?" and agree with his response, "[h]e remains elusive" (25). What is undeniable is the care DeLillo takes to immerse David Bell in the media environment of his time. DeLillo has indicated films of the sixties, especially Godard's, are as much an influence on his early work as any literary influences (Anything Can Happen 84). Despite David Bell's attempt to escape the gravitational pull of the consumer culture that nurtured him — of his "twenty-eight years in the movies" (287) — the TV producer/movie consumer remains trapped within the image-culture he tries to reject, returning to New York on a ticket paid for with his American Express card. The final line of the book recalls one of the earliest episodes Bell relates in his narrative: "Ten minutes after we were airborne a woman asked for my autograph" (377). The repetition suggests that for David Bell nothing has changed.

Something unspecified has occurred between this closing scene and the composition of Bell's narrative, however. At the opening of the second and fourth sections of the novel's four parts the narrative abruptly shifts into the first person as a significantly older David Bell comments on the action of his younger self. In seclusion on a remote island from which he can see "the coast of Africa, the great brown curve of that equatorial loin" (347), the older Bell contemplates the impending millennium (347), the stacks of pages that compose his narrative, and the film reels of which the autobiographical segments that are described in Americana are only a portion — "[t]he whole thing runs nearly a week" (346). The fourth
part of *Americana* leaves film behind, concentrating instead on literature, a noun Bell inserts three times into the last twenty-five pages. Beginning as a TV producer, attempting to find redemption as a film-maker, David Bell ends as an author.

John Self, the narrator and main character of Amis's *Money*, is, like David Bell, a "child of Godard and Coca-Cola" (*Americana* 269), but he is a distant cousin to Bell and something of a prodigal son as well. Though vastly different in tone, *Money* and *Americana* share a number of characteristics. Both are first-person narratives, both are about the fortunes of a figure who gives up a successful career in commercial television to make a film with clear autobiographical elements, and both narrators are working to resolve an Oedipal conflict with a hated father and an absent (dead) mother.

Unlike David Bell, John Self embraces the artificial world of media culture. He is a media huckster (Diedrick 71) who admits to being "addicted to the 20th Century" (*Money* 91). Self sees himself as an outsider, desperately trying to solidify his position inside the media system. He has none of Bell's pretensions or his sense of entitlement. Where the narrator of *Americana* is the "extremely handsome," "blue-eyed David Bell" (*Americana* 11), Self describes himself as "200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout and fast food" (*Money* 32). Lacking Bell's ironic detachment, Self also escapes the layers of self-denial that prevent Bell from finding a creative or genuine artistic solution to his crisis in *Americana*. Indeed, Self's inability to deny himself anything is one of his biggest problems in *Money*. He exists somewhere along a continuum bounded by Bell at one end and Keith Talent at the other. Self is aware of the essential unreality of television, in marked contrast to the media innocence of Keith. In this sense he is a television insider, aware of the dangers of identifying too closely with television:
Television is cretinizing me — I can feel it. Soon I'll be like the TV artists. You know the people I mean. Girls who subliminally model themselves on kid-show presenters, full of false melody and joy. Melody and Joy. Men whose manners show newscaster interference, soap stain, film smears. Or the cretinized, those who talk in buses and streets as if TV were real . . . . (27)

People like Keith Talent, for instance. It is unlikely that Self would end up as a "TV artist" of this sort, as his familiarity with the inner workings of the medium — its essential inauthenticity — serves as a kind of inoculation against its power. Self is also inoculated against illusions related to cinema, however. In this respect his capacity for self-delusion seems smaller than that exhibited by David Bell, who despite his disgust with the commercialized distortion of television seems enraptured by the power of the image when it is packaged as "Burt and Kirk" or "Belmondo looking at purposeful Bogart." For Self, film is nothing but another industry, a process for creating a product that will generate money. The book is called Money but it is really about making movies. But making movies, at least in Money, is really about making money.

I agree with James Diedrick's belief that at least part of the inspiration behind Money came as a result of Martin Amis's involvement with a film entitled Saturn 3 (Diedrick 95). The clearest — and unkindest — consequence of this observation is to turn the novel into a kind of roman à clef with the movie stars in Money standing in for the actors in Saturn 3. As Diedrick notes, "Amis's wickedly comic portrait of Lorne Guyland owes something to Kirk Douglas" (103), a portrayal that provides a serendipitous point of contact between Americana and Money, and one which loops back to challenge the hero-worship Bell indulges in. From
John Self's perspective, the real person behind the movie-star persona is a pathetic and ludicrous figure.

Bell's attempt to escape the artificiality of life at the television network through self-expression in film fails because the younger David Bell cannot acknowledge that his use of film is just another form of imitation — another kind of echo. Self suffers no illusions behind the camera about the complicity between film and consumer culture, but he is obsessed, nonetheless, with using money to recreate himself in the image of the media figures he denigrates. Money is an agent of physical transformation, in Self's eyes, a ticket to an elevated plane of being. He hates who he is, and believes money will provide the means to achieve his self-transformation:

I can see me now. I'm in the design department over at Silicone Valley [sic]. The sun shines but no dust stirs. I move confidently among the technicians, the idea-men and creative consultants, the engineers and fine-tuners. Someone shows me the rough of my new ears and nostrils. The heart boys double check on my detailed specifications . . . . We move on to the gene pool, DNA programmers, the plasma bank . . . . "Okay boys, now I want to make this absolutely clear. I'm paying top dollar and I expect the best. I don't care what it costs. I want it blue, I want it royal, I want the best blood money can buy. Go on, God damn it, and give me the right stuff this time around. (170-71, emphasis in original)

Like Bell, and perhaps like Keith Talent, in his way, Self dreams of effecting a transformation, but it remains a transformation of appearance, not any deep change in the nature of his character.
The first draft of *Good Money*, the film Self wishes to make, threatens to be something more than appearance: "a dream script, wonderfully coherent, with oodles of rhythm and twang. The dialogue was fast, funny, and seductively indirect. The pacing was beautiful" (223). Self's producer, Fielding Goodney, insists that "*Good Money* will be the only film in the year, the decade, the era that will show the real delirium of film, the nakedness of actors, what it does to —" (226). He does not finish because Self interrupts him to say, "You've got the wrong guy. I can't work like this" (226). The problem for Self is that he has no interest in exposing the illusions of film-making. His career has revolved around selling junk to people, and the goal is to make enough money through this film to escape into the fantasy-land money promises.

*Money* is, in Diedrick's words, "a satirical novel, attacking the dehumanizing influence of capitalism and the specific forms this has taken in the postwar West" (74). Specifically, capital has created the "society of spectacle" described by Guy Debord in order to mobilize the necessary patterns of spending and consumption that characterize commodity culture. Self is a satirical embodiment of both the cause and effect of commodity culture. He is instigator and victim. A producer of the images that perpetuate the system of commodity consumption, he is not able to resist the allure of the images himself.

The satire leveled against film and television in *Money* could easily be interpreted as the kind of superior dismissal David Foster Wallace warns about in "E Unibus Pluram" — the kind that is made possible by an easy opposition of popular (read commercial) culture to serious (read non-commercial) culture (44). *Money* confuses the issue by introducing into its plot, again through what Gerard Genette terms "transgressive metalepsis," a writer of "serious" fiction: a character named "Martin Amis." Diedrick is quite persuasive in his claim
that Self's opening words to "Martin Amis" — "Sold a million yet?" (87) — immediately establish the writer and filmmaker as competing figures who must both "make their way in the cultural marketplace" (UMA 97). By situating himself near the centre of the action in Money, Amis implicates himself and his craft in "the money conspiracy" (262) whether the character "Martin Amis" likes it or not. Indeed, in the hands of "Martin Amis" the incisive and potentially illuminating script Good Money is watered and down and sugared up to appease the egos of the actors involved ("'You have to give him credit,' Fielding conceded. 'It's the perfect snowjob. It's almost pornographic' " [283]), a reversal and betrayal of the first version signaled in the shift in title to Bad Money (283). As Diedrick notes, "[t]he Amis character's presence in the novel highlights the predicament of the serious writer in a commodity culture where artistic value is often confused with gross receipts" (98). In fact, as the final section of this chapter will discuss, Amis's exploration of "the predicament of a serious writer in a commodity culture" reaches something of a postmodern apogee in 1995, with the publication of his novel The Information.

In Americana, Bell seems to have disengaged from the culture industry by withdrawing to the isolation of a remote island. Self's disengagement is involuntary and personally devastating. Following a failed suicide bid he writes a lengthy postscript that describes the aftermath of his failed movie project. Financially ruined and unemployed, he contemplates an eventual return to a career in television advertising, but for the first time in the novel he experiences a (brief) pang of remorse:

They'll have me back in the end. But sometimes I think, no, I'm not going back.

When I watch the ads on the television I feel nausea, right in my soft core. TV
being here, TV being the religion, the mystical part of ordinary minds, I don't
want to be working in this sensitive area, I don't want to be selling it things. (384)
Given Self's extensive track record of ethical reversals, there's no compelling reason to read
this as some kind of final revelation (note the "sometimes") and repudiation of his role in the
economy of commodity consumption, but it is a start, a hint of a new way of conceiving
media.

3. Artists in the Marketplace

So far I have attempted to show how Amis and DeLillo respond to the challenge of
creating fiction in a culture increasingly dominated by images from popular culture and mass
media. Chief among the host of forces making up a "society of spectacle" or the "regime of
the image" (Johnston 181), I have argued, is television. Its unprecedented growth and
comparatively recent arrival suggest a fundamental cultural shift would be an inevitable
consequence, just as the development of cheap and reliable printing presses inaugurated a
cultural shift in Renaissance Europe. Issues of representation and self-representation
associated with postmodernism follow naturally from the dominance of television as a
communication medium, according to David Foster Wallace. As a technology employed to
package and market commodities ("The TV set is a package and it's full of products"
[Americana 270]) the pernicious effects on certain segments of the population are explored
by Amis and DeLillo, as I discussed in Section 1. As much as the products themselves,
however, television dramatizes the deployment of the goods into illusory constellations —
lifestyles — that create entirely packaged existences valorized and preapproved by TV. What
is interesting is that even those involved as producers within the media system are shown to
be vulnerable to the effects of the whole-scale impact of image culture. Considered as a network in the fullest sense, the contemporary media system has recently begun to extend its reach in order to include and overlap with the publishing industry. That is, the system of production that creates, markets and distributes fiction is as much a part of the process of commodification as the film and television industries. The truth of this statement is revealed on the material plane by the chains of ownership that bind major publishing houses like Simon and Schuster and Viking Penguin to media conglomerates like Viacom and Pearson PLC that operate in the spheres of television and film as well.

If the consumers and the producers of this advertising-driven media economy are inscribed within its effects, what about those who claim observer status, the critics and commentators? What about the novelists themselves? How are they influenced by the society they inhabit and describe? One of the aspects of Amis and DeLillo that drew me to them originally was their engagement with the wider culture, and their emphasis on the contemporary moment. In return, how has the contemporary moment engaged them? Certainly *Money* makes clear that Amis understands that a novelist exists within the money economy and novels are commodities in a competitive marketplace. Similarly DeLillo addressed the condition of the artist caught up in the world of celebrity in *Great Jones Street*. More recently, each has examined in fictional terms the position of novelists in the face of postmodern culture, and the role of the authors themselves in cultural production, as well as their fictional avatars, has been the subject of recent critical discussion. The publicity surrounding the 1995 publication of Amis's *The Information* certainly focused as much attention on the publishing industry producing the book as it did on the literary merits of the book itself. *The Information* suggests Amis had in any event been considering the question of
the novelist's status in a culture increasingly dominated by visual rather than textual media. The plot of the novel centers on the attempts of Richard Tull, a failed novelist at forty years of age, to ruin — perhaps even kill — his longtime friend Gwyn Barry, an untalented writer who nonetheless has met with considerable commercial success. The novel Amis once tentatively described as "a light novel about literary envy" (Morrison 99) turns out to be far from light.

The plot of *The Information* is clearly indebted to George Gissing's 1891 novel *New Grub Street*, as Joe Moran details in "Artists and Verbal Mechanics" (308), but it is a contemporary novel in tone and specifics. Furthermore, Amis's position as a celebrity author within the contemporary system of literary production complicates any discussion of *The Information* by heightening the self-reflexive quality of the novel. Both Moran's article and a similar analysis of *The Information* by Juliet Gardiner discuss this dimension of *The Information*, and each concludes that the position of a literary writer such as Amis in contemporary image-culture is at a far remove from the economics that concerned Gissing in the late Victorian era.

The book industry currently produces more titles annually than at any previous point in history. Gardiner reports 100 000 new books appear each year in the UK (np). Along with the increase in production, starting in the 1980s the United States, Britain and most recently Canada have undergone an unprecedented series of mergers and acquisitions in both the publishing and retail book businesses. Fewer publishers, fewer (but much larger!) bookstores, and the vast array of titles have forced the book industry to appropriate, to a greater and greater degree, two key marketing strategies of other media industries: the blockbuster and the celebrity. In Britain this process has led to a backlash against the "the American future of
British fiction" (quoted in *Star Authors* 150), but as the marketing of literary figures such as Martin Amis demonstrates, the process continues unabated. From a marketing perspective, the "Americanized" strategies make economic sense: promoting individual titles is expensive and labour-intensive, as the process must be repeated for every book. More efficient and effective, in marketing terms, is the creation of a brand that can be used to provide continuity between products. One implementation of branding can be seen in the creation of highly visible imprints. Moran singles out the *Vintage Contemporary* series, developed for Random House by Gary Fisketjon, as an influential example of this form of branding (*Star Authors* 43). Even more effective, in that it is identifiable/analogous to the marketing strategies of the film and television industries, is the creation of literary celebrities. This method packages the individual writer as a recognizable brand name. The name of the writer is given greater promotional weight than the specific title on offer. Thus the book-tour, interview, and magazine profiles that attend the publication of a heavily promoted book; indeed, the book-tour, interview, magazine profiles, etcetera often constitute the book's promotion.

In the context of this promotional strategy it is unsurprising that the reader's first glimpse of Gwyn Barry in *The Information* is during an interview and photograph shoot. In fact, as Moran notes, "[w]e often encounter Richard trying (and largely failing) to write, but we never see Gwyn doing the activity that has made him famous; he is a 'mediagenic' facade, not a 'real' author" (312). An important target of the satire in *The Information* is the shift in emphasis from "artistic value" to "gross receipts," to use terms from Diedrick's discussion of *Money*. For the novelists in *The Information* the emphasis has shifted from the primary activity of literary authorship to secondary activities: profiles, reviewing, interviews, book
tours, etcetera. As noted, Gwyn is never shown writing, while Richard spends the bulk of his writing time on editing projects for a vanity press, reviewing, for a minor literary journal, biographies on increasingly marginal literary figures, and failing to make progress on a number of non-fiction writing projects.

What makes *The Information* such an exemplary text for understanding the new economics of book publishing is not so much the narrative itself but the publicity that entirely swamped its publication — the book (as commodity) was rushed into print to capitalize on Amis's notoriety in the wake of what Moran terms "the Amis affair" (151). The events leading up to the publication of the novel included the author's attempt to secure a £500,000 advance from Harper Collins, his long-time publisher. The fallout from this decision included switching to a different literary agent and eventually leaving Harper Collins for Jonathan Cape. At the same time, Amis's personal life went through a period of intense upheaval: he left his wife for an American heiress, had costly dental surgery, his father died, it was revealed that his cousin had been a victim of serial murderer Frank West in 1973, and he publicly recognized an illegitimate daughter born after an affair in the early 1970s. The melodrama of this "annus horribilus" (Walsh np) is far greater than anything a self-respecting novelist would visit on a character, and led to Amis's wry comment about being "caught up in some post-modern joke" (quoted in Self 72). As Adam Mars-Jones observes, "[i]t's as if Martin Amis was writing a novel about a mid-life crisis, and then had a mid-life crisis" (20).

Tabloid interest and the attention of the popular media in such a 'literary' author demonstrates the validity of Moran's thesis regarding the rise of a 'star-author' system. The literary star emerges as a result of dual pressures to establish a recognizable brand that will
facilitate public recognition and enhance sales, and to compete effectively in response to the fact every book is a commodity competing with other media products raising the profile and differentiating their product sufficiently from others in the marketplace:

It has been a commonplace for publishers to assert that their competitors are not now other publishers with competing books, as was the perception a decade ago, but manufacturers of other leisure products — videos, media books, CD ROMs — and that these have thus set an agendum [sic] for marketing that publishers fail to emulate at their peril. (Gardiner, np)

Thus Richard Tull is advised to start smoking a pipe by his new, upmarket publisher Gal Alpanalp: "Writers need definition. The public can only keep in mind one thing per writer. Like a signature. Drunk, young, mad, fat sick: you know. It's better if you pick it rather than letting them pick it. Ever thought about the young-fogey thing? The young fart" (95). One section of The Information follows Richard and Gwyn across the Atlantic on a publisher-sponsored U.S. book tour. Gwyn is promoting his latest novel, Amelior, while Richard is expected to continue research for the profile of Gwyn commissioned by their publisher. If Gwyn is exposed as a talentless literary fraud coasting on the wings of an effective marketing campaign, Amis's portrait of Richard is almost as unflattering. His fiction is never presented directly, but he is portrayed as a "marooned modernist" (125) completely at odds with the contemporary literary marketplace. His prose style might be termed uncompromising, but in effect his fiction is unreadable. A running joke through The Information is the tangible physiological trauma — ranging from temporary blindness to mild meningitis — suffered by anyone attempting to read his latest novel, Untitled. The only character shown to have read his previous books (aside from Richard himself) is the career criminal and dangerous
psychopath Steve Cousins. According to the narrator, Richard believes in talent novels and genius novels. Possibly gifted enough to write successful talent novels, Richard struggles to write genius novels. The problem, the narrator suggests, is that "even the best genius novels are a drag half the time. Richard was arguably a drag all the time" (125). Richard's form of fiction is shown to be as unappetizing, in its way, as the facile bestseller Gwyn has written.

In America a scheduling conflict forces Gwyn to cancel a radio talk show because it conflicts with a scheduled television appearance, so Richard is invited to take his place at the radio station. In the course of the interview the host attempts to engage Richard with the routine strategies of packaging a literary work for an early-morning mass audience, but Richard refuses to cooperate. His thoughts in response to the question, "What's your novel trying to say?" summarize his attitude:

The contemporary idea seemed to be that the first thing you did, as a communicator, was come up with some kind of slogan, and either you put it on a coffee mug or a t-shirt or a bumper sticker — or else you wrote a novel about it

   It's not trying to say anything. It's saying it.'

'But what is it trying to say?'

'It's saying itself. For a hundred and fifty thousand words. I couldn't put it any other way.' (252-53)

*The Information* does not, as might be expected, valorize this uncompromising position as the romantic resistance of a literary genius against the encroachments of mass culture. On the contrary, Richard is explicitly characterized as a non-genius: pompous, arrogant and, the narrator admits, "an asshole" (95).
Reviewing the book for the TLS, Adam Mars-Jones correctly identifies the twin character assassination of Gwyn and Richard as contributing to the difficult impasse the novel creates. Only the ghostly narrator, introduced in the second clause of the first sentence of the novel and often linked to Amis himself, gives some focus against the book's exhaustive and exhausting negativity (Mars-Jones 19). Far from being "a light novel about literary envy," The Information is a dark, pessimistic rant against the profession of writing, against writers in general, and above all, against the shallow, facile culture that surrounds them. That this culture subsequently appropriated Amis the celebrity-author for its tabloid pleasure only raises the stakes. In the conflict staged in The Information between Richard's high modernist stance and Gwyn's easy complicity with the incorporation of authorship into the market mechanisms of commodity capitalism, no third figure emerges to successfully negotiate the middle ground between the two extremes.

Amis's own position in the literary star-system continues to highlight the tensions and ironies brought out in The Information. His most recent work, Experience, is a memoir that carefully works through the events surrounding the publication of The Information, including a discussion with a cab driver about his home address ("—Notting Hill? I thought you lived in Camden Town. —Not yet. —I was reading somewhere you lived in Camden Town. —I'm moving next month" [253]). Of course, the novel's publication was accompanied by numerous profiles, interviews, and a publisher-sponsored U.S. book tour, inviting further commentary on the confusion between Amis's life and his fiction. Commenting on the relationship between Amis and the media hype that surrounds him, journalist Brendan Bernhard concludes a profile/interview on Amis by reporting on the author's appearance on the American television program 20/20:
It was emotional pornography. Bill Ritter, Amis' virile interlocutor, smiled greasily at the camera and gestured with enormous hands, as if he might just strangle the author rather than interview him. Cowering in a corner, eyelashes palely blinking, Amis looked as if he hoped to get through his 15 minutes of network fame by going entirely unrecognized. Well, one likes to think of it that way. In fact, he quietly played his part. There was footage of Kingsley with his children. There was footage of Martin with his children. There was footage of Kingsley with his second wife. There was footage of Martin with his second wife. In front of one's eyes, the book was reduced to the skeleton of its message: The son is the father, the father is the son. (np)

This description echoes the terms of Richard's abortive appearance on an American radio station, during which he refuses to provide a reduction of his book's "message." But Amis, unlike Richard, obliges. The response to such a situation is less clear-cut for the media-aware writer who recognizes the need to register in the marketplace in order to be read at all. Amis comments on the speed with which the new procedure has become mandatory when he compares his literary career with that of two younger novelists:

At thirty-something Will Self and Lawrence Norfolk are already old hands at doing the media circuit. For them, the current arrangement — whereby your personality (whatever that might be) undergoes public processing — is simply the air they breathe. I had ten years of quiet; but they were born into noise. ("Buy My Book, Please" 97)
Though he refuses to exonerate Amis for his complicity with the television show's banal host, Brendan Bernhard concludes his article by acknowledging the difficulties facing a contemporary author who must "negotiate all the ambiguities wrought by synergy":

As we were reminded at the end of the show, Talk-Miramax, Amis' publisher, is owned by the same company that owns [20/20's parent network] ABC-Disney. And it was a few days before Father's Day . . . The realization came that the publication date for *Experience* might actually have been set with Father's Day in mind. Rather like a greeting card. (np)

Books, after all, are commodities, published for profit. The realities of a market economy do not spare authors in the face of an imperative to squeeze the maximum return from the initial investment made in publishing a writer's work.

In DeLillo's *Mao II* these realities are explored with subtlety and precision. The character Bill Gray, an eminent novelist whose "two lean novels" (20) met with considerable success upon publication twenty years ago, has withdrawn from the world to escape, among other things, "the machinery of gloss and distortion" (45) that attends the successful writer in America. In response much of the early commentary on *Mao II* assumed the novel was vaguely auto-biographical and focused on the similarity between Bill Gray and DeLillo. In interviews DeLillo indicates he drew inspiration for the character from the famously reclusive J.D. Salinger, especially after publication of the 'stolen' photograph of Salinger "taken in, I think, 1988" (Passaro np). Nevertheless, for those critics who feel DeLillo identifies strongly with the ideas expressed by the Bill Gray character, the novel embodies a reactionary attack against the alien and absorbing masses who threaten the tradition of Western individualism symbolized by the figure of the lone author.
More recently readings of the novel have identified problems with the wholesale identification of Gray as a mouthpiece for the author. Once the author and his character are disentangled, moreover, it becomes evident that *Mao II* contains an implicit critique of Gray's "slightly self-romanticizing" (45) attitudes. While there is no doubt some of Gray's pronouncements find expression in public statements DeLillo has made, in general the fictional author is in the thrall of a romanticized image of authorship that seems almost as clichéd and trite as the vision offered by David Bell's friend Brand in *Americana*:

> ‘I see myself in a big stone house on the Oregon coast,’ Brand said. ‘I'm exactly sixty years old. I built the house myself, rock by rock. I see myself as one of those unique old writers who's still respected for his daring ideas and style. Young disciples make pilgrimages to visit me . . . . There are no roads in the area. It's like Big Sur, only more lonely and remote.’ (290-91)

Gray's circumstances are not quite so overblown, but *Mao II* makes clear the considerable effort he has expended to isolate himself from the wider culture. A very faint aura of ridicule seems to hover around DeLillo's characterization of Bill Gray. Perhaps the most significant consequence of his total retreat from the larger world is the coincidental loss of faith in his own writing, which has grown shambling and shapeless (in contrasted to his earlier "lean novels"), a "shitpile of hopeless prose" (159). Existing on the residual success of his former self, Gray is trapped on his remote property by his own celebrated decision to withdraw from the culture. He is haunted by the image of his own work-in-progress as a misshapen monster, a freak from out of a gothic horror story (92-93).

Ultimately his emergence from seclusion has tragic consequences, but in his own estimation Bill — as a novelist — interprets his re-engagement with the world in positive
terms. In contrast to the disgust he feels for the "shitpile" he leaves behind, the few pages he writes on the plight of the Swiss hostage held in captivity in Beirut seem to offer promise: "There was something at stake in these sentences he wrote about the basement room. They held a pause, an anxious space he began to recognize . . . . He thought he could trace it line by line, the shattery tension, the thing he'd lost in the sand of his endless novel" (168). Bill's initial formulation opposing the productive loner to the absorbing crowd is critiqued also by his emphatic rejection of the very similar stance George Haddad, the media spokesman for Abu Rashid's terrorist group, proposes between terrorists and the masses (157-59).

At the same time, the pent-up demand for Bill Gray is characterized as the absence of product. His conversations with his editor, Charles Everson, both articulate the change in the publishing industry since Bill's first books were published and point to the need for more product from the celebrity/commodity/author Bill.

Then there's the problem of the novelist against the figure of the terrorist. Their relationship is portrayed as antithetical, from Bill's perspective, and in Athens he vehemently rejects George Haddad's attempts to link their motives and methods. There is also a sense that George Haddad's perspective on terrorism bears some trace of the commodity-fixated attitude of Charles Everson. Certainly the conversation in Athens reveals that the value of hostages to the terrorist organizations is easily expressed as exchange-value (Osteen 207), a detail that seriously undermines their anti-Western claims, especially in regards to Abu Rashid's faction, which is supposed to be ultra-Marxist. Mark Osteen further argues that Abu Rashid's credibility is entirely undermined during his photo session with Brita (210-211).

The images that are interspersed between sections of Mao II further argue against Bill Gray's position. In a novel in which the power of the image is a topic of much discussion, the
photographic reproductions within the text suggest a productive tension or alliance between the words and the images, which are carefully selected to reflect specific moments in the narrative.

Finally, the marriage scenes that open and close the novel seem important from several perspectives. First, in the opening mass wedding the conventionally private ceremony is transformed into a spectacular event, in Debord's sense. The replication transforms the meaning of what had been a foundation of bourgeois social relations. Certainly the crowd of onlookers at the event feel threatened by the depersonalized nature of the event. Second, the mass marriage takes place under the auspices of the Unification Church, which exists as a challenge to the orthodoxies of mainstream Christianity and also serves as a spiritual adjunct to a powerful and effective business empire. The Unification Church has extensive business interests throughout the world, including a controlling interest in United Press International and the *Washington Times*, money-losing operations that nevertheless serve useful legitimizing and propaganda purposes. Third, the tragedy of Gray's anonymous death is followed by the wedding scene Brita witnesses in Beirut at the close of the novel, creating a final chapter that is closer to the spirit of comedy's generic conventions. In my reading, the symbolism of the improvised marriage celebration in the streets of Beirut responds to the stifled regimentation of the Moonie ceremony in the opening scene and suggests the continuance of anarchic forces that appear again and again in DeLillo's fiction as spontaneous irruptions from crowds that threaten regimentation and challenge uniformity. Read this way, the conclusion of *Mao II* sheds the pessimistic, even reactionary tone ascribed to the novel by commentators such as John McClure.
The publication situation for DeLillo's novel *Underworld* suggests he has negotiated a space somewhere between Gywn Barry's pandering and Bill Gray's tragic/heroic resistance. News that the publication rights for the manuscript had sold for over $1,000,000 certainly suggested that DeLillo has, as Joe Moran claims, joined the celebrity system. In response to the unprecedented publicity and attendant interest surrounding this book, DeLillo agreed to a book tour across North America and abroad and to radio appearances on the National Public Radio program *Fresh Air* and CBC's *This Morning*, among others. He continues to refuse television appearances.

Writing about the novels of Amis and DeLillo I feel a certain trembling of bad faith each time I resort to biography, but as I hope the preceding few pages have made clear the author has become a part of the process of publication in ways that need to be addressed. DeLillo and Amis occupy positions along a continuum that is marked by Richard Tull and Bill Gray at one end and Gwyn Barry at the other. Researching the reception to their work has led me to issues of *Vanity Fair* and the British edition of *Esquire* as well as through special issues of *Modern Fiction Studies* and *Contemporary Literature*. Especially in those instances where the writers themselves foreground the novel as a commodity in the fiction, it seems perverse to exclude the accompanying machinery of commodification from the process of analysis and discussion.

The existence of a mass media system precedes television, but in intensity and saturation potential TV has spearheaded the overwhelming expansion of the range and power of these systems. The media conglomerates that form networks of capital facilitate the pervasive spread of commodity capitalism, and the effects of this culture borne of images are explored through various means by Amis and DeLillo. From the infantilized desires of Keith
Talent and Willie Mink, seeking to merge with the libidinal promises of television, through the self-deluded artistic projects of David Bell and John Self, to the fictional and actual condition of writers in this society, media remains a constant source of disturbing yet productive material for the narratives these two writers construct in their ongoing dialogue with contemporary culture.
Chapter Four

"Somebody Somewhere Else"

In *Valparaiso* Don DeLillo explores the consequences of celebrity culture on an unremarkable American. The pressures of media exposure, notably television's incessant demand for 'human interest' content to fill the programming day, are satirized in the transformation of Michael Majeski from ordinary citizen to TV-talk show guest in a manner that recalls the process explored in the previous chapter. In *Valparaiso*, Majeski is forced to repeat his account of an accidental trip to Valparaiso, Chile over and over again until the event comes to embody the emptying-out of the experience or "ritual arrangement of these serial replays" DeLillo identifies as a feature of the contemporary mass media ("Power" np). To satisfy the topical interest in his experience, Majeski recites the basics of his adventure in "sixty-seven interviews in four and a half days in three and a half cities" (35-36). Majeski's appearance on a talk show hosted by Delfina Treadwell, an Oprah-like television personality, represents the culmination of this particular media-driven form of celebrity, but even prior to this event his encounters with the media are seen to take place, as DeLillo remarks, "through the instruments of broadcast technology, microphone, cameras, videotape and film" (Corbett np). DeLillo draws attention to these instruments of mediation to suggest how completely "[p]eople in this world have needs and desires shaped by technology" ("Looking for Valparaiso" np).
While *Valparaiso* is staged as an investigation into the effects of contemporary media, it is interesting to me for another reason. Majeski's experience, played out as an easily-digested news item that circulates incessantly through the global news network, focuses on his entry into a network of another kind: the complex interconnections and layered systems that comprise air travel. The implicit connections between the two kinds of networks are made explicit in *Valparaiso* through the double roles assigned to a trio of actors who appear as a camera crew in the first act and function as a kind of Greek chorus in the second, dressed "in stylish civilian versions of flight-crew uniforms" (68), and sporadically interjecting commentary in the form of chanted phrases that recall the international language of aviation safety:

Did you pack your bags yourself

Has anyone had access

In the event of an evacuation

Has anyone ever said to you

In the fullness of fading time

Pull the mask toward you

Ausgang / Sortie / Salida

Then place the mask (69)

The presence of the "flight-crew" chorus suggests the importance of the exact nature of Majeski's claim to his moment of celebrity. A cascade of errors and misunderstandings seems to result in his departure from his intended flight plan as he is told at the check-in counter that his ticket to Chicago should be for a flight bound to Miami. Valparaiso, Indiana is confused with Valparaiso, Florida, and when the mistake is revealed in Miami it is
accidentally compounded when he is put on a flight headed for Valparaiso, Chile by way of Santiago. Even the possibility of such an error can only be imagined in the uniquely postmodern context of an interlocking network of airlines, computerized reservation systems, and airports, and in this technology-enabled potential for severe geographic dislocation DeLillo finds the tangible complement to the deeper psychic destabilization Majeski describes as the play progresses. The uncertainty of the journey immediately suggests the extent to which a global system of routinized commercial air travel has made it possible for an individual to become completely disoriented once he is inside the network of airports and air carriers. Air travel finds its place in the network of technological systems that have, in Fredric Jameson's words, "finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (*Postmodernism* 44). In this passage Jameson is speaking particularly of an inability to locate oneself spatially in urban landscapes or built environments, but it is clear that the remarks relate to the uninflected spaces of airports and the undifferentiated interiors of aircraft. From the inside of either it is very difficult to find reliable cues as to where you are or where you are going.

Majeski's inability to organize his immediate surroundings while in transit reflects a similar disarray regarding his sense of selfhood. The trip is initiated so that he can "substitut[e] for a colleague" (27), indicating that he is already a stand-in for somebody else. When he learns of the mistake en route to Santiago he describes a feeling of being "cut off from everything around me. And from myself as well . . . . [As if s]ome stranger had crept inside, like surreptitiously, to eat my airline food. Or someone had been superimposed on me, a person with my outline and shoe size but slyly and fundamentally different" (15-16). The
internal sense of dislocation matches an external reality. Majeski undertakes a journey without knowing how to get to his destination. He is literally a traveler who does not know where he is going, and entrusts his safe passage to systems and networks he does not understand. Majeski's existential crisis, his sense that he exists as "somebody somewhere else" (15, 92) extends beyond the simple inability to map himself onto his surroundings, yet his spatial dislocation and disorientation are themselves figures for the deeper sense of an absent identity, one that begins to take coherent shape only in the context of his media appearances, where he begins to see himself as a "complete man" (52).

The conclusion of *Valparaiso*, though it seems forced and unsatisfying, does follow the play's inner logic through to its inevitable conclusion. Since the media attention has provided Majeski with the sense of an identity, and we learn that at the extreme point of his airplane journey he attempts suicide because "there was nowhere else to take [his] sorry life" (98), the end of his celebrity will return him to the state of identity-confusion and uncertainty. The consequence is that following his appearance on Delfina's talk show (a moment she calls "the apex of your experience. Followed of course" [105]), there is no point in continuing to live (as her incomplete phrase suggests), and Delfina enacts a ritual murder on air by suffocating Majeski with a microphone. The play ends with a litany of phrases chanted by the 'flight-crew' chorus, the most persistent of which is "place the mask" (109). In the context of DeLillo's allusion to classical Greek theater through the inclusion of a chorus in the first place, this phrase conflates the oxygen mask of modern aircraft with the formal stage prop used in drama to replace the actor's features with those of another person; again the crisis of identity is explicitly linked to the displacement and disorientation of a contemporary air passenger who has grown tired of his role as a "kind of glancing man" yet
"[i]n the seams of being, nobody. In the final spiral strand, nobody, soul-lonely, smoke"
(101-02). *Valparaiso* concludes with a videotape of a man in a confined space with a plastic bag on his head — recalling the manner of Majeski's attempted suicide and Delfina's comment that there are security cameras in airplane toilets. Thus his moment of despair with his "naked shitmost self" as the plane nears the terminal in Santiago is caught on tape and made available to the audience. In this sense the final image suggests the depth and complexity of interlocking technological systems that ensure, in DeLillo's words, "[t]he way nothing is allowed to go unseen. The way nothing is left unsaid. The way things exist solely as footage waiting to be shot" (*Looking for Valparaiso* np).

An emphasis on air travel as a phenomenon of the postmodern world appears in many of DeLillo's texts prior to *Valparaiso*. The figure of the frequent flier suggests an individual engaged in a particular kind of relationship to the world, one made possible by the expansion of air travel as a viable and efficient means of transportation after World War Two. Just as the post-war growth in media systems results in a reformulation of ideas of what constitutes the self and its relationships to other individuals, so the widespread use of air travel by the general public in North America and Europe can be said to reconfigure an individual's sense of space and place. To borrow a term from the writer Pico Iyer, air travel has facilitated the development of a "multiculture" (115) by fostering a radical acceleration in the circulation of ideas, customs and beliefs across physical space. It is important to recognize that these ideas and customs are *embodied*, not virtual. They do not cross borders as media communications but in the embodied form of migrants, refugees, and immigrants. Human movement and the spread of cultures has been a constant throughout human history, Iyer admits, but with each
technological revolution in the means of transportation the process has leaped ahead in terms of volume and velocity:

The century just ended, most of us agree, was the century of movement, with planes and phones and even newer toys precipitating what the secretary of the UN's Habitat II conference in 1996 called the 'largest migration in history'; suddenly, among individuals and among groups, more bodies were being thrown more widely across the planet than ever before. (10)

Elsewhere Iyer refers to a million border crossings each day (29), while figures from the International Aviation Transport Association reveal that the global air fleet carried 1.3 billion passengers to their destinations last year, which works out to slightly more than 3.5 million air travelers every day ("2000 W.AT.S." np).

The consequences of this aerial migration can be described from a number of perspectives, I will argue. First, the existence of a commercial network of air carriers changes the way distance is conceptualized as travel to distant points becomes feasible. It results in a new round of time-space compression from the perspective of business and industry operating in a multinational context. Air travel on a massive scale constitutes a technology that has a tangible impact on a large proportion of the population within industrialized countries. Second, the mobility and facility of air travel alters the relationship a traveler has with his or her environment, as the example of Michael Majeski demonstrates. Both the sense of belonging to a particular place and an idea of what constitutes one's immediate environment change in the face of a form of transportation capable of speeds close to one thousand kilometers per hour. Finally, the postmodern potentials inherent in air travel as a mode of transportation have an irreducible materiality that resists the frictionless,
instantaneous rhetoric that accompanies discussions of telecommunications and its most technologically sophisticated articulation, telepresence. Air travel imagined as a mode of material communication reinscribes the body in the process of discovery and locates a kind of horizon or limit for transporting a human being from one location to another.

The function of a particular technology within the novels of DeLillo and Amis can reveal aspects of its penetration into the wider culture or merely reflect their individual interest (or lack of interest) in it. As in the TV chapter, my interest in air travel is not directed at its inception but at the point beyond which its effect on a general culture can be gauged. Motorized flight commenced with the Wright brothers in 1903, and reached a noticeable milestone with Lindbergh's transatlantic flight in 1927. Yet despite these powerful symbols of the possibility of air travel and the significant technological advances they represented, transatlantic travel on a practical, commercially viable scale could be said to have started in 1957, with 1958 marking the significant moment where more passengers flew across the Atlantic than sailed across it (Heppenheimer 193). The fact that in 1957 more people used passenger liners than aircraft for transatlantic travel suggests the relatively recent adoption of air travel as a form of transportation for any but the elite.

The ascendency of television and the rise of air travel share a number of coincidental points in their historical development: inception in the years around the turn of the century, a significant breakthrough in 1927, important technical advances as a result of military research during the Second World War, and then a rapid, exponential growth in the commercial application of the technology in the years after 1950. Pico Iyer underscores both the legacy and discontinuity of the airline industry when he reports that Berlin's Templehof
"used to be the busiest air facility in the world, receiving eleven thousand passengers in 1925. Now Chicago's O'Hare sees that many in two hours" (44).

While I want to point out the undeniable way the technology of commercial aviation affects the social and cultural articulation of postmodernity, I am also wary of confusing local effects for global ones. In trying to address the importance of such a technology as a social force, its novelty must be balanced against its accessibility, and universalizing claims modified in response. Consider the global nature of the telecommunications revolution, in particular the claim for universal interconnectivity via the Internet. At the moment this "global" system is indeed planetary in scope, yet the industrialized nations are massively overrepresented and over half the adult population of the globe has never placed nor received a phone call (Iyer 26).

Such discrepancies call to mind Fredric Jameson's discussion of the various levels of economic development coexisting at the same time (Postmodernism 159). Some forms of technology have global impact without needing to reach everyone (the potent combination of long-range missile technology, nuclear weapons development, and computer guidance systems, for instance), while other technologies are only as powerful (influential) as they are pervasive. Telephones and televisions fall into this latter category, I would argue, as does air travel. Aircraft used extensively to ferry mail between distant points represented an incremental development in the history of communication, but the use of aircraft for travel purposes creates an overarching redefinition of the idea of travel and migration among a large population. The widespread use of jet aircraft by the military following the Second World War had little direct impact on the general public, while the introduction of wide-body
Somebody Somewhere Else

jets with room for ever-greater numbers of passengers altered the way an increasing percentage of the population in North America and Europe perceived their boundaries.

David Harvey writes of the period from 1960 to the present as representing the latest stage of consolidated "time-space compression" (292), "another fierce round of annihilation of space through time" (293). Specifically, satellite communications and jet aircraft precipitate this most recent round of compression, representing the limit case of, respectively, telecommunications (the speed of light) and physical transport (the speed of sound). In The Condition of Postmodernity Harvey attempts to convey this image of compression by presenting a series of globes arranged proportionally to indicate their size relative to the fastest form of transportation available. Prior to 1840 the maximum speed for sailing vessels and horse-drawn coaches was around ten miles per hour, while the jet aircraft used to ferry people and parcels since the 1960s operate at sixty times that speed. The corresponding shrinkage of the globe depicts the extreme alteration in the idea of the planet's boundaries. (Harvey 241). Even within the limited history of aviation itself, Lindbergh's flight-time of 34 hours from New York to Paris has been reduced to under four hours by the Concorde.

This, then, is the world in which Amis's and DeLillo's novels are set. For the most pragmatic of considerations a novel like Money could not exist without the ease and speed of transatlantic travel provided by aircraft. John Self's concept of the distance between New York and London is mediated by technology in this brute sense. The novel opens with him already in a New York cab, but within a page he is recalling his difficulties with immigration and customs (2). Aircraft and airports figure prominently in his narrative, yet in all the references to doubling in the critical material about the novel, no one has as yet mentioned the structural device that divides it into the sections "America" and "Britain." In the course of
the novel Self will cross the Atlantic eight times, and on each occasion the physical
displacement will correspond with a section break. The cumulative effect is to create a series
of discontinuous scenes bracketed by Self's arrivals in and departures from New York and
London.

There is little in the way of glamour in his description of this airborne lifestyle; it is
portrayed as simply a consequence of his professional life as a British film director working
on an American project. In *Money* the airplane is the most obvious material complement to
John Self's hyperactive, headlong plunge into the world of filmmaking and the world of
America. Self exemplifies a couple of characteristics that are certainly not unique to the idea
of postmodernity but are certainly exacerbated by it. His sense of self is attenuated by his
exposure to media, as I discuss in Chapter Three, but his sense of place is likewise reduced
through his hyperactive travel within London and New York and most especially in the
constant shuttling *between* London and New York. The film project that dominates the
narrative and leads to Self's undoing is itself the product of a previous trip returning from Los
Angeles to London, during which Self meets Fielding Goodney in First Class. The
importance of airplanes in *Money* can best be summarized by observing that they make the
transatlantic narrative possible. Plane travel is itself routinely recognized by Self as a symbol
of the speeded-up processes that he associates with modernity.

*London Fields* is similarly predicated on the simplicity of switching from one side of
the Atlantic to the other, as Samson Young's presence as an American writer living in
London comes about through an apartment swap with a British writer through an
advertisement in the *New York Review of Books* (2). Though the figure of an American writer
relocating to London and finding inspiration there might call to mind Eliot, Pound, or even
Henry James, for Young the move seems provisional, a matter of convenience rather than necessity. The airplanes in London Fields function as conduits between America and Britain, though for Young, trapped in the millennial shadows of the novel, the conduit is not as reliable as it might be. His attempts at a brief return to New York seem to come together when he concludes a section of his narrative with a directive to the reader, "Enough. I'm ready. Let's go to America" (236). Later, however, he admits to failing in his journey, only managing a six-day stay at Heathrow airport due to a breakdown in flights between the two countries (262-63). For the far more affluent Guy Clinch, the journey is not impossible but it does take time. His travel to America goes something like this: "A fourteen-hour wait in the VIP Lounge at Heathrow; the Mach II to Newark; the helicopter to Kennedy; the 727 to Middletown; the limousine to New London. America moved past him behind treated glass" (422). Guy, reinforced by wealth and privilege, succeeds where Samson cannot. It is during his return flight to London that Guy discovers he has been duped by Nicola Six, a revelation that centers on an airplane (the Enola Gay) and is carefully calculated to occur on another airplane (the Concorde). As in Money, travel between America and Britain — crossing the Atlantic, shifting between the cultures — is a routine matter, leading to a blurring of rigid national demarcations: this is not Samson's first visit to London; Guy's wife, Hope, is American; even proletarian Keith has ventured to New York.

The transition is not always simple, however. In The Information airplanes ferry Richard Tull to New York and across the country to Los Angeles. The experience catapults him out of his English element and into the accelerated media and cultural processes Amis equates with America, processes that force Tull to confront his own failure as a novelist. The acceleration effected by the book tour is largely media-driven, but it is also relentlessly
spatial, and Richard's encounter with the publicity machine that drives Gwyn's book tour can be seen as a microcosm of the English literary culture's encounter with the future. As John Dern observes, the "near-death experience" that befalls them on a flight from Boston to New York is, for Richard, "an appropriate metaphor; in America, he dies a slow, spiritual death" (134). There's nothing positive or celebratory about Richard's American adventure, while from Gwyn's perspective every step seems to bring greater heights of popularity and fame.

Before Money airplanes do not play much of a role in Amis's fiction. The novels he published in the 1980s are less ambitious in their range, most notable in their small cast of characters, constrained locale, and consistent length (they range from 200 to 225 pages). The novelist Will Self comments that while "the early quartet of novels, The Rachel Papers, Dead Babies, Success and Other People can be viewed as of a piece, cruel but essentially local satirical dissections of the English class system, with . . . Money, he seemed to go global — or at any rate transatlantic" (73). Each of the later novels is, in a literal sense, transatlantic, and the connections Amis makes between America and England are facilitated by airlines.

The extent to which the global reach of the airline carriers contributes to blurred national boundaries and mixed cultures is suggested by Amis's individual experiences, most notably as a journalist for a number of British newspapers. His 1981 article on the Frankfurt book fair signals, appropriately, the advent of a wider focus in its discussion of the globalized nature of publishing. The fair itself is held annually in "the biggest exhibition hall in the world . . ., a windy hangar where half-a-dozen Hindenbergs might have slept" ("Frankfurt" 129), and in its capacity as an international forum for publishers it represents the kind of
gathering that can only be made possible by the time-space compression afforded by air travel:

With 80-odd countries represented, and God knows how many hundred thousand books on display or stowed in boxes or as yet only twinkling in publishers' eyes, there is no gainsaying the superabundance of Earthling enthusiasms. Even before the opening it was a world tour in miniature to stroll through the half-completed stalls. (129)

Even as the market for book publishing began to be conceived in global terms, the period beginning in the early 1980s saw an unprecedented number of international mergers and acquisitions among publishing houses themselves. Larger conglomerates could afford to invest more in the marketing of books, and Amis himself was drawn into this process as a reviewer when he was sent from London to the New York offices of Time Warner to review Madonna's book *Sex*:

In the old benighted, pre-modern days, a new book was normally sent to the reviewer, encased in a jiffy-bag or, under exceptionally glamorous circumstances, a Federal-Express wallet. But Madonna is the most post-modern personage on the planet, so in this case the reviewer was sent to the book, by supersonic airplane. (256)

The publicity value aside, there is something quite extraordinary in the cultural conditions that allow a publisher to fly the reviewer to the book — on the Concorde — in the name of marketing.19 Amis uses airplanes more frequently both in his fiction and non-fiction after

---

19 In a different context it is Amis himself who is marketed in a travel piece on St. Lucia collected in *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov*. Trading on Amis's growing notoriety, the 1986 article was commissioned for
the "global" success of *Money*, shadowing on an individual level the globalizing forces acting on literature and the wider culture throughout this period.

Will Self's comment regarding the localized nature of Amis's early fiction could also be applied to DeLillo. His first four novels — *Americana*, *End Zone*, *Players* and *Great Jones Street* — feature characters who are from or have traveled to countries other than the United States, but only since *Ratner's Star* has his narrative horizon widened beyond America. While it is arguable that his fiction "went global" with the publication of *The Names* in 1982, DeLillo demonstrates in his earlier fiction an interest in the airplane as a cultural product. In *Players* the main characters are introduced in a set piece that takes place on a futuristic jet liner while an in-flight movie plays in the background. The enclosed environment of the jet reflects the self-contained nature of the section itself, which raises many of the themes to be developed in the novel and presents the characters, but does so without identifying any of them by name. *Ratner's Star* begins in a similar manner, with the main character joined in transit to an unnamed destination on a "Sony 747" (3). The simple device of naming the aircraft allows DeLillo to suggest both the near-future time frame of the novel and the present reality of corporate control and expansion within the context of a few global multinationals.

The main characters in *The Names* — James Axton and his circle of expatriate friends — are entirely postmodern creatures in the sense that their professional lives are ruled by air the entertainment of holiday travelers and appeared in *Departures*, an in-flight magazine. "The whole process — the commission, the piece, its subsequent enshrinement — seems to exemplify a peculiarly modern literary dilemma" (Hornby 5), namely the recycling of a literary celebrity's ephemera if there is felt to be any market for it.
routes. "I flew a lot, of course. We all did," Axton admits at the beginning of the novel. "We were a subculture, business people in transit, growing old in planes and airports" (6). As Axton describes the qualities that bind the group of travelers together, there is a sense that here is an answer to Jameson's implicit question regarding the possibility of developing a cognitive map that enables one to live within this "world space of multinational capital" (54), but it is at best a partial answer. The group is composed of first-world managers and consultants (Axton himself is a "risk analyst" for "a subsidiary of a two-billion-dollar conglomerate" [47]) who move among developing world countries without establishing lasting connections in the places they are stationed. They have mastered the codes and the strategies for travel and survival in the air, but to do so they have had to give up any deep sense of belonging. What they sense instead, according to Fredric Jameson, is

a certain experience of space itself, or rather the peculiarly American experience of space through which substantive, culturally different and other spaces are perceived. Our optic is one of separation, suspension, rather than ontic perceptual immersion — jetliners versus the Parthenon. ("Review" 122)

For Axton this is not at first a problem. He welcomes his role as "a perennial tourist" because "to be a tourist is to escape accountability" (43). Axton and the others maintain their own community, apart from the local culture and society, and they claim to function within the local environment as passive observers. John McClure has argued that this pose is maintained as a form of false consciousness that exculpates Axton's community from the exploitation waged in developing countries by the corporations that employ them, and indeed Axton seems to recognize the falsity of this distance when he confronts the assassination attempt
aimed at him or at David Keller. As Mark Osteen observes, Axton is "[o]usted from his obligation-free island," and with "[h]is passive neutrality destroyed, [he] must learn a new grammar" (134) in response to his new awareness of his entanglement with those communities he has tried to keep at a distance.

In White Noise Jack Gladney's daughter Bee seems to occupy a similar, detached position. He describes her as "both worldly and ethereal, as though in her heart she was ... a traveler, the purer form, someone who collects impressions, dense anatomies of feeling, but does not care to record them." Her presence seems to radiate "a surgical light" that makes the family "self-conscious," not least Gladney, who admits to feeling "as if she were not my child at all but the sophisticated and self-reliant friend of one of my children" (94). In this respect she seems to be similar to the community in The Names, not in itself surprising as Bee's mother and stepfather belong to a similar kind of group. For Bee's mother the ability to travel confidently by air is an important skill for a child, "like swimming or ice skating":

The sooner we get them in the air the better ... . I sent [Bee] to Boston on Eastern when she was nine. I told Granny Browner not to meet her plane. Getting out of airports is every bit as important as the actual flight. Too many parents ignore this phase of a child's development. Bee is thoroughly bicoastal now. She flew her first jumbo at ten, changed planes at O'Hare, had a near miss in Los Angeles. Two weeks later she took the Concorde to London. Malcolm [her step-father] was waiting with a split of champagne. (93)

But the confidence and assuredness this ability imparts may be inextricably tied to a sense of distance and detachment. Pico Iyer suggests that given the fact that "humans have never lived with quite this kind of mobility and uprootedness before ... [a] lack of affiliation may mean
a lack of accountability, and forming a sense of commitment can be hard without a sense of community. Displacement can encourage the wrong kinds of distance" (24). As an example of "the wrong kinds of distance" he imagines a "Global Soul" living "in the metaphorical equivalent of international airspace . . . . His memories might be set in airports that look more and more like transnational cities, in cities that look like transnational airports. Lacking a binding sense of 'we,' he might nonetheless remain fiercely loyal to a single airline" (19). Iyer's characterization recalls Axton's self-description, and suggests that people placed in this kind of environment will be forced to exchange one set of relationships for another.

At one point in The Names Axton's friend David suggests that they fly from Athens to Frankfurt in order to watch the College Bowl football games: "We can watch on a monitor at the Armed Forces studios. No problem. The bank will arrange . . . . We'll have a quiet New Year's Eve, then we'll all get on a plane to Frankfurt and watch the bowl games on TV" (194). At another point David, his wife Lindsay, and Axton devise a scheme to load a drunk, semi-conscious acquaintance on a flight from Athens to Tehran (this in the months immediately following the Revolution). Both ideas are frivolous, to be sure, but they are frivolous in a way that suggests a particular postmodern sensibility to space, place, and distance, one that is expressed in relation to a particular set of technologies.

By necessity the new set of relationships a lifestyle such as Axton's entails will be tenuous and provisional. The community will be fluid and the locus of community will no longer exist. As Bill Gray says in Mao II, "Home is a failed idea" (92). Uprooted by technology, the "global souls" Iyer speaks of find themselves in a technologized condition Martin Heidegger characterized as "homelessness"; in their technologized roles as dwellers in the sky they seem to destroy "the fourfold" he describes in the essay "Being Dwelling
"Thinking." The in-flight experience reveals with precision and economy the double movement of Ge-stell, or Enframing, discussed by Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology" and elsewhere. Flight opens forth an opportunity to confront the truth of Being with heightened (so to speak) sensitivity, yet at the same time the experience is managed through technological systems in such a way as to minimize awareness of the conditions of flight. Only when the systems fail in transit, as they do for a shaken group of passengers Gladney encounters on his trip to the airport to meet Bee (90-91), or as they do when Gwyn and Richard are trapped aboard a small plane caught up in a major storm (283-87), are the passengers forced to confront their condition. In flight they are enmeshed within a built environment, a layered cocoon of technologies and interconnected systems, to such an extent that they are capable of forgetting — indeed, they are encouraged to forget — that they (to borrow a phrase from "The Question Concerning Technology") "stand on the brink of a precipitous fall" (332). Strapped blind and helpless into a flying bomb at 30,000 feet, one should find it easy to conjure forth the anxiety that accompanies, for Heidegger, our awareness of the fragility of Being. But as DeLillo implies, that awareness is kept at bay except at those precise moments when the systems fail to function:

The lights inside the aircraft go dim. In the [onboard] piano bar everyone is momentarily still. It's as though they're realizing for the first time how many systems of mechanical and electric components, what exact management of stresses, power units, consolidated thrust and energy it has taken to reduce their sensation of flight to this rudimentary tremble. (Players 3)
The passenger in transit can be said to occupy a metonymic relationship to the inhabitants of the technologized culture as a whole. From this perspective the in-flight service is a reduction of the entertainment industry as a whole.

One is informed — mainly, unfortunately, thanks to jumbo jets. In the jumbo jet, media are more densely connected than in most places. They remain separate, however, according to their technological standard, frequency user allocation, and interface. The crew is connected to radar screens, diode displays, radio beacons, and nonpublic channels. The crew members have deserved their professional earphones. Their replacement by computers is only a question of time. But the passengers can benefit only from yesterday's technology and are entertained by a canned media mixture. With the exception of books, that ancient medium which needs so much light, all the entertainment techniques are represented. The passengers' ears are listlessly hooked up to tape recorders and thereby to the record industry. Their eyes are glued to Hollywood movies, which in turn must be connected to the advertising budget of the airline industry — otherwise they would not so regularly begin with takeoffs and landings. Not to mention the technological medium of the food industry to which the mouths of the passengers are connected. A multi-media embryonic sack supplied through channels or navels that all serve the purpose of screening out the real background: noise, night, and the cold of an unlivable outside. Against that there is muzak, movies, and microwave cuisine. (Kittler 32)

On board an aircraft the concentrated media ecology Kittler describes serves the practical purpose of keeping the passengers distracted from the terror and the boredom of air travel.
The struggle facing the flight crew is to occlude what they have made possible: the transport out of our element, into the unlivable outside of the sky.

Air travel is thus emblematic of technology's burden and technology's gift. The burden lies in the danger of a fully technologized environment: "The coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve" ("Question Concerning Technology" 323). The image of the world enfolded within a grid or network of air carrier routes, a globe in which every point is linked to every other point through the interlocking flight paths of international airlines, does seem to realize the ordering vision Heidegger warns against: "David was going to Beirut the next day. Charles was going to Ankara. Ann was going to Nairobi to visit her sister. Stahl was going to Frankfurt. Dick was going to Muscat, Dubai and Riyadh" (The Names 55). These Western representatives travel within a network that orders and obscures the non-Western articulations of space and place that precede it.

So much for the burden. The gift, according to Heidegger, is considerably more tentative: only an attempt to recognize the essence of technology, says Heidegger, enables one to think beyond the technological ordering — in the double sense of imperative and arrangement — and discern flashes of the truth of being. It will not escape notice that the goal of Heidegger's questioning appears enveloped in a language of mysticism. For the present, it is enough to observe that the danger technology poses when it is permitted to enframe human being is foregrounded and intensified in the activity of being-on-a-plane.

For DeLillo the aircraft brings to light constitutive features of technology. As such it serves as a symbol of technology's order, and, like Heidegger, DeLillo argues that
questioning this order is a form of necessary resistance. But, again as in Heidegger, this resistance cannot take the form of a simple rejection, for technology is a constitutive element of the postmodern world. Thinking outside of technology is not a viable option for those of us living in a post-industrial society, entangled as we are in a postmodern network where bodies and commodities circulate at a velocity that is partly a function of a global network of airports and commercial jets.

In a collection of pieces entitled *Stories from the Nerve Bible*, Laurie Anderson observes that

> In airplanes and in airports time and place start to merge . . . and everything's in this constant unstoppable motion.... [E]ver since the wall fell, it seems like half the world has been pouring from one side to the other, through the train stations, the autobahns, the airports, moving back and forth across the old borders. Like the world had suddenly tilted on its axis and was pouring people from one side to the other. Like an enormous plane, tilting and banking, looking for somewhere to land. (228)

The figure of aviation is an important constituent in the contemporary conceptual environment, in its commercial form it signifies the vortex of capital which is in the process of tearing down the borders that define nations, while military aircraft, fundamental for so many years in maintaining the balance of power or Mutually Assured Destruction, are decommissioned in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. In *Underworld* some of the American planes are recycled in an art installation project undertaken by Klara Sax, intended as a statement about the factory-stamped "great weapons systems" of the Cold War and the attempt to "unrepeat, find an element of felt life, . . . a graffiti instinct — to trespass and
declare ourselves ..." (77). At the other end of the novel and in the decayed remains of the other half of the Cold War binary, Nick Shay travels to a former nuclear testing ground in Kazakhstan in a decommissioned military cargo plane that departs from a military airfield. The plane was "designed for mixed loads of cargo and troops[,]" but now is "hollowed-out . . . There are dangling wires, fixtures jutting from the bulkhead" (788). The nuclear test site itself is being converted into a commercial waste disposal facility that will, in controlled nuclear explosions, destroy hazardous waste shipped from former enemy nations in the West (787-89). These images of decommissioned military aircraft at the opposite ends of the earth suggest the passing of one kind of order, but like the aircraft themselves, the future they point towards remains provisional and unfinished.

A powerful set of metaphors arises in conjunction with the dissolution of the old political binaries, the seemingly irresistible logic of globalized trade and the free flow of capital, and the resultant sharp rise in the phenomenon of economic refugees or economic migrants. The people Laurie Anderson describes as pouring "from one side [of the world] to the other" have released or have been forced to abandon connections and attachments through political or economic necessity, and in this geopolitical uprooting it is possible to discern one of the characteristic features of postmodernism: the rootless and fragmentary nature of much of contemporary experience. Against a naïve celebration of facilitated travel as inaugurating a global community structured along the kinship ties of traditional cultures, the reality of the intensified pace of relocation, the lived experience of the materiality of distance, is felt in the peculiarly postmodern intensity of alienation. Such a transitory anonymity characterizes James Axton but also seems to attend Nick Shay and, according to Tony Tanner, "nearly all DeLillo's characters" (211). While Tanner feels it is a regrettable
move on DeLillo's part to celebrate "a hard, self-dehumanising remoteness" (211-212), DeLillo seems to be merely responding to an aspect of contemporary technology that is in its essence a distancing mechanism.

Distance is not annihilated by accelerated modes of transportation, except perhaps metaphorically. John Self's transatlantic journeys do not bring London and New York together as one community for him; on the contrary, dividing his time between his New York hotel room and bachelor apartment in London accentuates his feeling of homelessness. In his flat in London, Self surveys his surroundings: "None of this is mine. The voile walls are not mine. I hire everything. I hire water, heat, light. I hire tea by the teabag. I've lived here for ten years now and nothing is mine" (64). His flat is as impersonal as his New York hotel room, and though he insists he is eager for intimacy, for a sense of belonging, nothing in his actions — least of all his ceaseless relocations and inability to invest anything other than money in his surroundings — allows such a thing to develop.

As an act of negation, then, the thoroughly postmodern phenomenon of commercial air travel reveals the material basis of community even as it exacerbates its dissolution. The frequent flyers may encounter many places and many people, but as long as they continue to circulate incessantly within the networks of commercial airlines, they are kept at a remove from the deeper interactions made possible by sustained contact. Furthermore, in the most basic sense the advent of jet travel introduces the human organism to a hitherto unknown dimension of its own materiality. John Self's account is typically extreme but illustrative:

I am a thing made up of time lag, culture shock, zone shift. Human beings simply weren't meant to fly around like this. Scorched throat, pimpled vision, memory wipes — nothing new to me, but it's all much worse these days, now that I ride
the planet shuttle... All day I am in my night self, spliced by night thoughts, night sweats. And all night, well, I am something else entirely, something else again, I am something overevolved, a salty slipstream thinning out and trailing over the black Atlantic. (264)

Extended travel at speeds only possible in jet aircraft can lead to a fundamental disruption in the body's circadian rhythms, its innate sense of time. Against those aspects of postmodernism that conceptualize the body as a play of signifiers, the visceral effects of jet lag speak to a biological im-mediacy and materiality that serves as a corrective to "this dream or nightmare of the body as information" (Hayles 47). Air travel, as technology and as metaphor, provides an extreme example of the degree to which technology mediates our experience of such fundamental categories as space and time. In a positivist sense, airplanes are an integral part of the accelerated culture that is equated with postmodernity. As negation, inasmuch as every minute of a flight is a potential disaster, a minor mishap can precipitate a moment of existential terror that brings about a heightened sense of the body. Amis describes the aftermath of one such encounter as akin to jet lag but more closely related to delayed shock: "For the next few days, although outwardly cheerful enough, I was pretty sure I was dying.... Chemically numbed at the time, my fear — of which there had clearly been plenty — had just burrowed deep and waited" ("Emergency Landing" 11-12).

Air travel features in the fictions of Amis and DeLillo as a marker of the contemporary moment and as a subject to be explored in the way it alters the lived experience of individuals inhabiting the contemporary landscape.
"Is it a fact — or have I dreamt it — that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time? Rather, the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is itself a thought, nothing but thought, and no longer the substance which we deemed it!"

(Nathaniel Hawthorne, *House of the Seven Gables*)

The concept of a networked intelligence is not itself a product of postmodernism, as the above quotation from Hawthorne's 1851 text demonstrates. Communications networks of a kind have always existed in tandem with human society, just as writing itself is rumoured to have developed as a way "to keep accounts" (*The Names* 35), to provide records for early traders. The histories inherent in communication processes serve to undermine or complicate an ideology of innovation that valorizes only the truly new (an affectation common both to advertising and the avant-garde).

What I have been calling postmodernism, then, cannot meaningfully be said to start with a single text or in the wake of one definable advance in media technology. Rather, as a concept allied with a notion of postmodernity that develops within a particular historical context, postmodernism appears partially in response to and partially as a result of shifts in social, economic and technical practices. David Foster Wallace alludes to one such practice when he ascribes the fascination demonstrated by his contemporaries for fragmented scenes
and insistent references to the products of consumer culture to their early, constant and ongoing immersion in the American televisual flow. Though he furnishes numerous examples, he does not attempt to identify the originary moment of this tendency, and so avoids turning to an ideology of innovation. My own approach, in a similar fashion, has been to focus on the way two particular novelists involve themselves and their work with issues of emerging technology. In a review of *Mao II* for *The Independent*, Amis comments that "[w]hereas his contemporaries have been drawn to the internal, the ludic and the enclosed, DeLillo goes at things the other way. He writes about the new reality — realistically. His fiction is public" (28). Amis too attempts to get at the new reality — realistically. The problem is that to be realistic in the postmodern world is to have to account for a mediated environment "fantastical and wised-up," where "image-management vies for pride of place with an uninnocent reality" (28). Not that reality has ever been innocent, but the forms of its corruption are linked to a particular history and mediated within a particular technological context. The uninnocent reality confronting postmodernity is of a specific kind. Recognizing this fact DeLillo insists, in conversation with Adam Begley, that he does not write the kind of fiction that offers comfort by suggesting "that our lives and our problems and our perceptions are no different today than they were fifty or sixty years ago" (Begley 304). His comment recalls Amis's observation that the younger writer is constantly challenging the older writer by insisting "it's no longer like that, it's like *this*" (Rivieri 115).

All of the elements of postmodern technology discussed in this thesis have complex histories that stretch back long before the Second World War, but studying the technological milestones without reference to the wider culture results in a simplified technological determinism. There is a great deal to be gained by studying the way ideas, expressed or
embodied in forms of technology, are picked up and absorbed in social and cultural practices. Language, and by extension literature, is one of the sensitive registers of such developments. A trivial yet illustrative example is provided by Pico Iyer, who points to the use of aviation jargon in colloquial speech as a linguistic index of the incorporation of this particular transportation technology into everyday life: "The language of airports has become the language of our private lives, as we speak of holding patterns and living on autopilot, fly-by-night operations and getting bumped" (58).

Thus it is less the moment of innovation that interests me than the more ambiguous process of acculturation. Not the first successful prototype of the light bulb perhaps, but the first appearance in an illustration of a light bulb over someone's head to signify a bright idea. Television's hundred-year history provides a similar example of the difference between the impact of a technology at its moment of inception and the unpredictable permutations that result in its expansion as a force within the cultural sphere.

The Internet develops as a consequence of a number of technologies developed and refined since the Second World War. Historians of the Internet trace its conceptual origins to an essay by American Vannevar Bush entitled "How We May Think." The essay appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in 1945, and in it Bush described the "memex," a conceptual hypertext system organized by mechanical means. Developments in digital computing made Bush's work in analog computational systems obsolete, but Bush pushed his interests in a different direction, imagining the combinatorial powers of the earliest computers applied to information not in the mathematical sense used by Norbert Weiner and Claude Shannon, but in the sense of written documents tagged and cross-referenced in such a way that a reader could move from a document to a reference within that document in a seamless and
instantaneous manner. The idea could not be realized in Bush's lifetime due to technological constraints on the storage of data, but his essay is credited as one of the first explorations of the idea of what would become hypertext. Douglas Engelbart and Ted Nelson, subsequent pioneers of hypertext systems, credit Bush's vision as their source of inspiration for developing computerized methods for linking documents electronically (Lubar 46). Linking documents across a distributed computer network was greatly facilitated after Tim Berners-Lee, a research scientist at the CERN facility in Geneva, developed the http protocol and a set of linking tags he called hypertext markup language, or HTML.

The phenomenon of the Internet is in fact more accurately seen as the consequence of a host of phenomena in a variety of disciplines, just as the monolithic concept "television" refers to a complex set of interacting technologies. As a communications technology and new media form, the Internet changes the shape of the previous media environment in that it, in Hayles's words, "affects the niches that older media have carved for themselves, so they change also, even if they are not directly involved with the new media. Books will not remain unaffected by the emergence of new media" (48).

Given Don DeLillo's sensitivity to effects of media in general, it should come as no surprise that the Internet is a topic of considerable interest for him (though he himself claims not to use it to any great extent [Gross, np]). In its structure the Internet seems to reflect a number of themes he explores in his fiction. On the surface it is radically fragmented, heterogenous and decentralized, yet the core technologies that create it, that work in the background to create the appearance of difference and fragmentation, are fundamentally corporate and standardized in nature. The underlying computer language that enables interactions between computers linked to the network of networks known as the Internet is a
set of protocols known as TCP/IP. All computers communicating over the Internet must send and receive data in a form governed by TCP/IP, regardless of hardware, operating system, geographical location, or the user's spoken language. In this regard what is often referred to as the "plumbing" of the Internet — its Underworld, so to speak — is a strictly regimented and uniform architecture. The disembodied virtuality of computer transmissions, the sense of data "out there" and of ephemeral signifiers flickering intangibly across screens, is a convenient fiction that ignores the basic fact of data shifting from one location to another through telephone lines, microwave relays, fiber optic cables, etcetera. Data is always embodied, as Katherine Hayles reminds us, and embodied transmissions require a medium (Hayles 49). The physical medium, the data highways or 'big pipes' used to ferry the bulk of the transmissions and interactions that make up the content of the Internet, are owned by telecommunications giants or leased from them by large corporations or governmental institutions. Internet traffic to and from the University of British Columbia, for example, is carried on fiber optic cables that are owned by Telus (formerly BC Tel).

DeLillo's sense of a deeper, hegemonic corporate force at work beneath the surface of contemporary life is an accurate analogy of the basic structure of the Internet, which has nevertheless managed to maintain a public image of libertarian idealism and individual creativity. The influence of corporate interests and governmental regulation (or outright ownership) that controls the operation within and between nations of television and telephone

---

20 Detailed information regarding UBC's Internet connection is available from the BCNet homepage (http://www.bc.net/architec.htm).
21 The materiality of digital communication can be seen in the attempts by established networks other than telecommunication providers to get involved with providing internet services. Cable television companies, with their distributed systems already in place, are obvious contenders, but utility companies are also developing technologies that will enable data and even voice transmissions to
networks and airlines seems to be elided in most discussions surrounding the Internet as a media and communications infrastructure. As a kind of speculative conclusion to my dissertation, I would like to discuss the cultural consequences of this latest facet of postmodern technology with respect to each of the major topics discussed so far. In doing so I will try not to succumb to the totalizing utopian or dystopian generalizations that characterize many discussions of the increased role of computer networks on social and cultural formations.

For a number of reasons the computer technologies that brought the Internet into existence have been indispensable elements in fostering the resurgence of paranoid thinking as a cultural phenomenon. Computers have played a prominent role in conspiracy theory since the Second World War because of their clear metonymic relationship to the massive centralization of government (a centralization already articulated as a cybernetic circuit, in that government financing paid for the development of computer technology even as computerized systems for data storage and retrieval facilitated the role of centralized government). Computers monitoring and tracking every aspect of behaviour from medical records to credit card purchases are powerful symbols for those seeking a paranoid account of current events. Timothy McVeigh "complained that the U.S. Army had implanted a computer chip in his buttock for the purpose of controlling him" (Melley 37), while Mark Fenster's account of a conspiracy theory involving the death of Danny Casolaro, a relatively unknown American journalist, focuses on Casolaro's links to Inslaw, a software company piggyback on the established networks of wires that make up the grid carrying electricity to their customers.
that designed computer surveillance software for American intelligence services (Fenster 188-198).

Surveillance and control, two of the most powerful characteristics of paranoid fears, are indeed articulated in contemporary form as consequences of computerized systems. If the increased complexity and range of computer systems is one cause of "agency panic" (Melley's term for the perceived threat to individual autonomy in postwar American culture [vii]), it is also an enabling technology for practitioners of the paranoid style. Fenster's account of both the "serious" and "ludic" forms of conspiracy theory refers repeatedly to the role USENET, e-mail and the World Wide Web play in providing venues for paranoid narratives (Fenster 184-85). The Internet, which is itself the very embodiment of interconnected and entangled information networks, provides a powerful resource for those who perceive themselves as disenfranchised, while the illusion of anonymity and omnipresence it fosters 'empowers' Internet conspiracy theorists with the same attributes as the malevolent conspirators the theorists are attempting to reveal.

Given its history as a technological project proposed by a RAND corporation think-tank and funded through its early development entirely by ARPA, a US military agency, it is not surprising that the Internet has become associated with many of the forms of paranoid narrative discussed in my first chapter. What is at least as interesting is the way the Internet has evolved in ways that suggest effects described by aspects of systems theory. For example, the Internet might be imagined as an instance of first-order emergence (discussed in Hayles 243) in the sense that "it" does not exist except as a consequence of the interactions of millions of connected computers.
The transformation of the Internet from an experimental military research project into a collaborative environment for researchers and academics and then again into a mass communications medium demonstrates principles of complexity theory, chaos dynamics and emergent properties. According to John Johnston, networked information gives rise to unanticipated and uncontrolled developments such as computer viruses and memes, patterns of information that are created and proliferate through the Internet in a manner similar to the movement of infections through biological populations:

This viral proliferation of information always brings about uncertainty, even making uncertainty itself a structural feature of the systems defining our world . . . . But information theory and cybernetics have also made possible new ways of thinking about basic concepts such as control, organization, machines, and life itself. Thus, while information has led to a new medium of control, it has also generated something that always exceeds control. (2)

In Ratner's Star the enormous centralized structure Field Experiment Number One and the scientific community housed within it attempt to "manag[e] science scientifically, by means of a specialized administrative apparatus, so as to increase the regular output of knowledge" (Siemion 40). The project, "[r]un like a boot camp for Nobel laureates, . . . stands for everything that went wrong with the grand project of the Enlightenment" (42). All the attempts to rationalize scientific inquiry within this administered and complex system fail, as would be anticipated by the tenets of complexity theory as applied to such a system. By contrast, the Internet has given rise to lesser projects that use a network of individual personal computers to form a massively parallel computing system. Loosely coordinated by a handful of individuals but carried out by a much larger group, projects like "SETI at Home"
and the recently formed Intel "philanthropic peer-to-peer"\textsuperscript{22} initiative involving pharmaceutical research represent successful attempts to harness the power of the Internet's decentralized structure. Cryptography challenges on the Internet are often solved in this manner as well. The open source software community also operates contrary to the hierarchical top-down model of bureaucratic management and more in the spirit of a systems-based organization.

Reflexive systems and feedback loops are in operation too in the way economic behaviour has been influenced by the analytical sources and on-line trading opportunities made possible by the Internet. The volatility of stock market prices has been blamed on an increasing number of smaller investors trading stocks on-line, with the most instability visible in stocks linked to the technology companies that provide the services and products that make on-line trading possible in the first place. The growing unpredictability of stock market behaviour is itself consistent with the principles of complexity theory, where a larger and larger number of independent elements serve through their interactions to complicate the potential of predicting the future behaviour of the system.

Attempts to graft the interactivity of the WWW with television have as yet met with limited success, but the distribution system embodied in the Internet's structure, added to the legacy of a strong textual bias in computer systems, make it a potentially powerful tool for delivering fiction in electronic form to a vast reading audience. Already a company called Xlibris has developed an alternate publishing model enabling print runs of a single copy for documents in its database. In 2000 Stephen King began "publishing" a novel, \textit{Riding the

\textsuperscript{22} Program descriptions can be found at, respectively, setiathome.berkeley.edu and www.intel.com/cure
Bullet, in serial form exclusively on-line, an experiment that was not original in itself but
generated a great deal of publicity for the concept of established authors bypassing
conventional publishing channels.

On the Internet the sense of separation between the observer and the image on the
screen is undermined just as it is for viewers of television images. In the idiom that has
grown up around the World Wide Web, searching though a series of documents is "surfing",
while viewing information from a specific computer is transformed into the physical
experience of "visiting the home page." Spatialized metaphors such as "accessing," "surfing,"
and "visiting" contribute to an ideology of disembodied instantaneity that, in its most extreme
expressions, makes claims for a form of telepresence in which the observer is virtually
transported to the distant site. In The Body Artist, Lauren Hartke experiences the distorting
effects of the web as "seeing over the world":

She spent hours at the computer screen looking at a live-streaming video feed
from the edge of a two-lane road in a city in Finland. It was the middle of the
night in Kotka, in Finland, and she watched the screen. It was interesting to her
because it was happening now, as she sat here, and because it happened twenty-
four hours a day, facelessly, cars entering and leaving Kotka, or just the empty
road in the dead times . . . . It emptied her mind and made her feel the deep
silence of other places, the mystery of seeing over the world to a place stripped
of everything but a road that approaches and recedes, both realities occurring at
once, and the numbers changed in the digital display with an odd and hollow
urgency . . . . (38-39)
The new discourse network arising in response to the proliferation of digital media presents a challenge to the separation of media Kittler describes in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, as the mediation of computer networks requires the transposition of all data into digital form in order to carry it over a network. The digital network is implosive in this sense, that text, sound and image must all be converted into an undifferentiated media format in order to travel through computer networks. If Kittler's claim that the media forms brought into play around the beginning of the 20th Century correspond to the realms of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real (245), what is the consequence of this implosion of the human essence in the new regime of digital apparatuses?

With the recent adoption of the Internet within the wider culture in mind, it is interesting to compare DeLillo's short story "The Angel Esmerelda," published in the May 1993 issue of *Esquire*, with the revised version that is incorporated into the final section of *Underworld*. The four-year gap coincides with the prodigious growth of the Internet, both as a technology and as a cultural product. E-mail and the World Wide Web became much more established parts of the lexicon of contemporary culture during this period. In *Underworld*, the framing device for Esmerelda's story becomes a web site devoted to miracles accessed by Nick Shay's son Jeff. The undefined connections linking sections in the final pages of the novel create a confusion of narrative levels, with shifts in perspective from Jeff to Sister Edgar and then to an ambiguous "you," in a way that is disorienting and emblematic of the lack of points of reference in "cyberspace" as DeLillo conceives it.

DeLillo's take on the Internet at the end of *Underworld* extends the sense of cyberspace as somehow altering the experience of space and time, a "real miracle . . . where everybody is everywhere at once" (808). At the end of *Underworld* "cyberspace" is presented
as an immaterial locus of connections: "There is no space or time out here, or in here, or wherever she is. There are only connections. Everything is connected. All human knowledge gathered and linked, hyperlinked, this site leading to that, this fact referenced to that, a keystroke, a mouse-click, a password — world without end, amen" (825). Sister Edgar's mysterious transcendence at the end of the novel is placed against an evocation of the quiddity of objects, yet the density of connections as a binding force, plus the instantiated fluidity of the passage itself, suggests the fluidity of categories: "Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around? Which contains the other, and how can you tell for sure" (826)? The rhetoric of simultaneity that exists within the popular conception of cyberspace continues the process of time-space compression Harvey identified as one of the constitutive features of postmodernity.

From the perspective of humanities research, the network of networks raises a number of practical issues, including the concept of authorship, ideas of canonicity, and research standards. The issues themselves are not precipitated by computer systems and networks per se, yet such technological developments make them more difficult to ignore. Allowing texts to be linked together by electronic means undermines ideas of authorship as an individual attribute, as a single text on a web site might contain links to a number of different documents authored by others. The integrity of the individual text and the integrity of the idea of authorship are both problematized as the limits of the former and the stability of the latter become harder to define. Another feature of the Internet considered as a textual database is the way it denaturalizes "authoritative" texts and reveals the institutional and ideological biases of authority considered as definitive or reputable information. Electronic versions of canonical works of literature proliferate without regard for precise
correspondence with the original source. The linking system of the World Wide Web does not provide direct validation of the reliability or caliber of Internet sources, leaving the reader to determine the competence of the source's author through more subjective, indirect means. Even when the reliability of a source can be determined, the sheer volume of electronic material available to a research project (such as this dissertation) raises questions relating to the kinds of filters and methodologies academics use to locate, select and organize their sources. Research is assisted by the ease with which on-line journal articles and other items from periodicals can be obtained. DeLillo and Amis do not rate journals (yet), but appreciative readers have created very extensive online reference sites dedicated to the authors. Academic journals provided through services such as Ebsco and Project Muse become accessible to a wider audience without problems of distance, borrowing restrictions, or availability. Such developments are not that surprising considering the original purpose behind the Internet was to foster communication, and its initial growth was driven by the academic community, but it is interesting to observe how the evolution and proliferation of online sources begin to change the way research is carried out and presented within humanities disciplines.

An attempt to relate literary works to the technological conditions that exist during their composition is going to seem reductive when it seeks to provide technology as the sole or motive factor. Blake's factories, Dickens's industrialized London, the role automobiles play in *The Great Gatsby*: taken as causal connections the material conditions of textual production, considered exclusively in technological terms, are not likely to reveal much of interest in relation to the literary text. Technologies considered reflexively as always already cultural forces, on the other hand, can help to situate literary texts within a particular moment
and help to explain the specificity of the works. An appreciation for the forms of technology that affect the production and reception of a literary text acknowledges the tools in the hands of the writers as well as the readers of contemporary fiction. In charting the course of literature at the start of a new millennium both the readers and writers benefit from understanding the function of the technology in the text.


---. "St Lucia." In *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov and Other Excursions*. 60-68.


<http://www.isg.sfu.ca/~duchier/misc/vbush/>.


---. "Looking for Valparaiso." American Repertory Theater Website.

2 April 2001 <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~art/valpo1.html>. 212


---. "Being Dwelling Thinking." In Basic Writings. 343-364.


Works Cited


