FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

DOCTORAL THESIS

Submitted for International PhD Mention

The Desert Embodied: Don DeLillo and the Chronotopic Imagination

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2021

INTRODUCCIÓN

La crítica literaria sobre la obra de Don DeLillo, autor americano del Bronx neoyorkino, ya aborda hoy un amplio rango temático. Esta variedad en enfoques críticos se debe sin duda a la naturaleza de la ficción de DeLillo, ya que su obra – que actualmente incluye dieciocho novelas, con una trayectoria que supera las cinco décadas – invita a múltiples reflexiones por su riqueza temática. Los títulos de una selección de las monografías dedicadas al autor ilustran perfectamente esta diversidad en la crítica dedicada a su obra: *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (LeClair 1987), *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Osteen 2000), *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Cowart 2002), *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief* (Kavadlo 2004), *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (Boxall 2006), *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (Martucci 2007), *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo's Novels* (Laist 2010), y *The Language of Self: Strategies of Subjectivity in the Novels of Don DeLillo* (Pass 2014). Desde su tratamiento de la teoría de sistemas y la transcendencia de la cultura del consumo hasta su exploración de los problemas de subjetividad a través del lenguaje, la fe, el temor existencial y la tecnología, la atribución de dicha variedad en cuestiones temáticas es particularmente meritoria de atención, ya que todas estas perspectivas se sostienen bajo escrutinio. La afirmación de Jesse Kavadlo que "DeLillo ha superado prácticamente a todos los demás escritores vivos en cuanto a su creatividad, agudeza cultural, visión, alcance y relevancia" (3, traducción propia) se encuentra reforzada por esta variedad amplia de crítica literaria previamente mencionada, la cual incrementa aún más si se atiende a los cientos de artículos publicados en revistas especializadas y que abordan la obra de DeLillo. Sin embargo, a pesar de esta considerable cantidad de análisis crítico, sigue siendo cierto que, como ha argumentado Randy Laist, "además de ser uno de nuestros escritores más admirados, él a su vez es discutiblemente nuestro escritor menos entendido" (*Technology* 2, traducción propia).

Si me viera obligado a simplificar, podría decirse que el desacuerdo más notable dentro de la crítica sobre DeLillo se produce entre aquellos que leen en su obra una exaltación de lo posmoderno y aquellos que ven en ella una defensa del sujeto Romántico. Como suele ser el caso, la prevalencia de tales argumentos aparentemente opuestos en realidad subraya la riqueza multifacética de la ficción de DeLillo, la cual explora consistentemente ambos extremos de este cisma. La obra de DeLillo encuentra un camino intermedio en varios sentidos, abordando cuestiones de subjetividad al tiempo que se hace eco de las tesis de pensadores que van desde

Heidegger a Derrida o Baudrillard, y explorando sentimientos tanto de alienación como de la pertenencia a la comunidad. La obra de DeLillo, además, fluctúa entre el modernismo alto y el posmodernismo, entre lo sagrado y lo profano, y entre la inmanencia y la transcendencia. Siguiendo esta misma línea de pensamiento, es precisamente este camino intermedio que la presente tesis doctoral subscribe, haciéndolo, además, a través de un acercamiento innovador a un aspecto poco explorado en la obra de DeLillo.

A pesar de la innegable variedad temática de la obra de DeLillo, los estudios existentes sobre este autor, incluyendo las aún escasas monografías y el más extenso número de artículos y capítulo de libros, dejan entrever un vacío reseñable en cuanto a la manera en que la obra de DeLillo explora dichas cuestiones a través de un estilo de representación fuertemente *espaciotemporal*. Un argumento central del presente análisis es que la grandeza de la obra de DeLillo podrá apreciarse de una forma más completa y global si se atiende a su sensibilidad a – y su modo de expresión a través de – el tándem formado por el espacio y el tiempo. En otras palabras, la hipótesis defendida y argumentada en este estudio se basa en un enfoque innovador a la obra de DeLillo, distinto de anteriores estudios, que demostrará que, de manera consistente, este autor se inclina por unos modelos literarios que le permiten abarcar en su totalidad el poder figurativo del espacio y tiempo – del *lugar* – dentro del texto literario. El análisis de su obra en esta tesis parte de un énfasis primario en el papel del concepto de "lugar" (*place*, en inglés) en la experiencia humana y la subjetividad. Al traducirse a la literatura, este énfasis ha sido definido con más exactitud como *cronotopo*: la fusión del tiempo y espacio en una totalidad figurativa dentro del texto. Originalmente desarrollado por el filósofo Mikhail Bakhtin en los años treinta, el cronotopo es un concepto que ha experimentado un uso esporádico desde su introducción al mundo anglosajón en los años ochenta. En el cronotopo identifico una herramienta conceptual sólida cuyo máximo potencial ha sido raramente apreciado, especialmente en el análisis de la literatura contemporánea. De esta manera, tomando como punto de partida el concepto de Bakhtin, tal y como él lo propone, uno de los objetivos principales de esta tesis es poner en práctica un análisis cronotópico que, crucialmente, se base en un entendimiento del concepto como *originado en* la experiencia humana de *lugar*. "Lugar", en este sentido fenomenológico, solo ha sido conceptualizado en las últimas décadas, y por lo tanto la primera tarea esencial de esta tesis es discutir y defender una versión actualizada del concepto cronotopo, para lo cual es necesario revisar a su vez cuestiones filosóficas y sociopolíticas recientes acerca del concepto *lugar*.

Este marco teórico se desarrolla en dos secciones en el capítulo 1, el cual empieza abordando en más detalle los diferentes hilos de pensamiento que confluyen en el énfasis primordial en la experiencia como eje central en cuanto a la percepción del mundo. Este enfoque parte de nuestra integración en el espacio y el tiempo y, como consecuencia, percibe la ontología humana como cuestión del ser en constante cambio frente al ser como ente estático. Tras esta primera aproximación teórica, la segunda sección del capítulo 1 versa sobre el concepto original del cronotopo de Mikhail Bakhtin con el fin de revisar y actualizar su fundamentación teórica. Principalmente, esta discusión defiende que la raíz del impacto del cronotopo en la imaginación humana nace de nuestra experiencia (integrada y vivida) del mundo. Podría decirse que el motor de este proyecto es el convencimiento de que si no es posible concebir la existencia humana sin los elementos primordiales y unidos del espacio y tiempo, tampoco es posible concebir la representación sin ellos, incluyendo tanto la narrativa como la memoria en si misma. En este contexto, cuanto más sensible sea un autor a este aspecto fundamental de la experiencia, más matizada será su representación del mismo en la ficción. Esto último es cierto en dos sentidos, ya que se aplica tanto al efecto que tiene el lugar ficticio (el cronotopo) sobre los personajes, como el papel estructural que tiene el cronotopo en un texto determinado, lo que a su vez afecta al lector. Lo que sostengo en esta tesis doctoral es que Don DeLillo es precisamente un autor que goza de dicha sensibilidad y, por lo tanto, la escasez de crítica en torno a este aspecto constituye un vacío importante dentro de este campo de estudio.

De hecho, Don DeLillo es un caso práctico ideal para este acercamiento cronotópico actualizado a la ficción, algo evidente en primer lugar por el hecho de que el autor mismo ha expresado reiteradamente su fascinación por los conceptos del espacio y el tiempo. Es cierto que a lo largo de los años, y de manera esporádica, se han visto estudios que partían de este interés de DeLillo por el tiempo y el espacio, pero donde el vacío es innegable es en cuanto a su tendencia a representar *a través de* estos elementos. Algunos críticos han abordado con éxito su interés por y su diálogo con los diferentes conceptos de espacio y tiempo, incluyendo Alberts (2016), Boxall (2012), Coale (2011), Dill (2017), Gourley (2013), Leps (2015) y Maslowski (2017). Estos especialistas se han centrado en distintos aspectos sobre cómo la obra DeLillo presenta la temporalidad – desde la física cuántica hasta el tiempo cinemático y geológico – destacando principalmente la manera en que los personajes de DeLillo están sometidos a experiencias subjetivas distintas de la temporalidad. El núcleo de mi argumento, sin embargo, es que este tratamiento de la temporalidad debe entenderse en la ficción como inseparable de

lo espacial, y que además es crucial entender la manera en que los elementos fusionados se convierten en una fuerza representacional dentro de estos textos. La forma en que los especialistas han discutido el espacio en la obra de DeLillo es en cierta forma similar a la forma en que se ha tratado el tiempo. Existen análisis excelentes, aunque aislados, de los distintos espacios narrativos de DeLillo, incluyendo los de Barrett (1999), Harack (2013), Leps (2014), y Spencer (2006). Se observa en estos críticos cierta tendencia además a discutir el uso repetido de "habitaciones y, particularmente, hombres enclaustrados en habitaciones pequeñas determinados a encontrar la lógica de la historia y su lugar en ella" (Liste Noya 240, traducción propia). Análisis como éste suelen concentrarse en la asociación que estos hombres tienen con la conspiración y los distintos tipos de complot – un crítico hace referencia a las "numerosas habitaciones pequeñas que engendran problemas en el mundo ficticio de DeLillo" (Bieger 12, traducción propia). Estos análisis tienden a centrarse en el personaje, atendiendo menos al concepto de la habitación como cronotopo e implicaciones más profundas. En otras palabras, se debe entender el resultado como un flujo representacional de dos sentidos, entre personaje y habitación: es este sentido de la habitación como cronotopo que analizo en el caso de *Great Jones Street* (1973) para a su vez delinear el aparato teórico en el capítulo 1.

De los críticos que sí abordan el tratamiento del espacio o tiempo en la obra de DeLillo, muy pocos lo han hecho de una manera que se aproxime al argumento que señalo como crucial en esta tesis. Tanto la monografía de Elise Martucci sobre la "conciencia medioambiental" en la obra de DeLillo como su capítulo del 2017 sobre "Place as Active Receptacle" en la ficción corta de DeLillo constituyen la aproximación más extensa al concepto de *lugar* en su ficción, ambos llevando a reflexiones interesantes, como su argumento sobre el hecho de que, en *Americana* (1971), el personaje David Bell encuentra que "el paisaje desorienta su entendimiento del tiempo y lugar y, como consecuencia, su sentido de identidad" (*Environmental* 39, traducción propia). Es sorprendente que Martucci sea la única académica que se haya centrado específicamente en el concepto del lugar en cierta profundidad, dado tanto el contenido de las novelas de DeLillo como algunos comentarios por parte del autor, como sus declaraciones en una entrevista en 1982 en las que confesaba que a él le "interesan demasiado los lugares reales y sus nombres" como para escribir "ficción sin un sentido real de lugar" ("An Interview" 31, traducción propia). En cuanto a la traducción de este sentido de lugar en los mecanismos internos de la narrativa en sí, pocos críticos de DeLillo han buscado abordar el estilo de representación altamente cronotópico que atribuyo a su obra en esta tesis. Algunos de los más destacados que sí lo tratan son Robert Kohn y su uso, aunque sin desarrollo,

del concepto en su artículo sobre *Great Jones Street* (2005), Jacqueline Zubeck y su planteamiento en la introducción a la colección *Don DeLillo After the Millenium* de un "cronotopo del siglo XXI" (3) delineado por DeLillo y, finalmente, Paul Smethurst y su tratamiento de las novelas de DeLillo *Ratner's Star* (1976) y *The Names* (1982) en su delineación general del *Postmodern Chronotope* (2000). Sin embargo, y como desarrollo en mayor profundidad en el contexto de mi explicación teórica del cronotopo, la lectura cronotópica de *Falling Man* (2007) y el *Paradise Lost* de Milton por Rachel Falconer es el único análisis que realmente trata la obra de DeLillo de una manera similar al análisis propuesto en esta tesis, aunque debe subrayarse que se trata únicamente de un solo artículo que versa sobre una única novela. Por lo tanto, podría decirse que, transcendiendo la atención esporádica prestada al espacio, el tiempo, el lugar y el cronotopo mencionados anteriormente, en esta tesis se lleva a cabo un análisis profundo sobre la manera en que distintos espacios literarios funcionan en la obra de DeLillo, para demostrar que la representación a través del cronotopo – sea de escala micro o macro – es un aspecto esencial de la ficción de DeLillo.

Aunque este enfoque cronotópico sería revelador en cuanto a cada una de sus novelas, con el fin de trazar una continuidad en torno a su larga carrera como escritor, esta tesis presta particular atención a las cuestiones temáticas que se agrupan en base a un tipo de lugar ficticio en concreto: el desierto. Desde su primera novela, *Americana* (1971), hasta la reciente *Zero K* (2016), el desierto resurge en varias formas a lo largo de su carrera, y un argumento principal de esta tesis es que solo tiende a hacerlo cuando se encuentran en juego cuestiones temáticas específicas. Contraponiendo el desierto a otros espacios que surgen para crear un diálogo cronotópico – a menudo la famosa habitación pequeña – defiendo aquí la validez de un cronotopo del desierto que evoluciona con el tiempo, un lugar que los personajes de DeLillo suelen buscar por su (supuesto) estatus como una *tabula rasa* ontológica, aunque pocas veces les beneficie el hecho de encontrarlo. De hecho, este enfoque sobre el desierto coincide con la ficción compuesta por DeLillo en primera persona, ya que cinco de las siete novelas escritas en primera persona incluyen desiertos – las únicas dos que no son *Great Jones Street* (1973) y *White Noise* (1985). Además, a pesar de su falta de paisajes desérticos, estas dos últimas novelas se asemejan en lo que concierne a la exploración de las principales cuestiones que identifico como asociadas con la recurrencia de este cronotopo en particular. En juego está el interés continuo de DeLillo de experimentar con las posibles respuestas a las distintas fuerzas que presionan a un individuo en un contexto contemporáneo y globalizado (y especialmente americano). En esta tesis doctoral trazo un paralelismo entre esta recurrencia del espacio

desértico y la evolución de la representación de personajes de DeLillo que luchan por desarrollar una postura ontológica adecuada de cara a una creciente sensación de alienación, cuyo origen frecuentemente se encuentra en la unión de las fuerzas del capital y la guerra. Trazando una continuidad en mi análisis de dichas novelas a través de los cronotopos que éstas emplean, establezco la indispensabilidad de este enfoque crítico para así poder comprender en su totalidad el modo en que DeLillo presenta cuestiones temáticas de vital importancia en la actualidad; el cronotopo facilita una forma innovadora de entender cómo los personajes de DeLillo (y como consecuencia los lectores de sus novelas) pueden buscar estrategias para lidiar con el rango de problemas asociados con el momento contemporáneo, desde un sentido desorientador de la compresión del espacio-tiempo hasta un sentimiento incipiente de alienación social, y desde el estrechamiento del horizonte de posibilidades hasta los impulsos varios hacia lo transcendente e inmanente.

En términos de los textos principales de DeLillo que se han seleccionado para su análisis en esta tesis doctoral, la selección incluye su segunda novela, *End Zone* (1972), tres textos de lo que denomino su "Periodo Griego" en los ochenta (*The Names,* "Human Moments in World War III" y "The Ivory Acrobat") así como su vuelta posterior al desierto en *Point Omega* (2010) y *Zero K* (2016). Más allá de algunos análisis más breves de otras novelas pertinentes a este estudio, como *Underworld* (1997), *The Body Artist* (2000) y *Cosmopolis* (2003), el énfasis temático que articula la selección deja de lado alguna de las novelas más aclamadas (y estudiadas), especialmente *White Noise, Libra* (1988) y *Mao II* (1991). No muy diferente a sus novelas de los setenta como *Players* (1977) y *Running Dog* (1978), estas novelas son las preferidas por los críticos que buscan validar las tesis posmodernistas, ya que en general se centran más en los grandes sistemas de la sociedad y la manera en que un personaje es influenciado por tales sistemas. El hecho de que estos enfoques temáticos coincidan con su narrativa escrita en tercera persona no es casualidad, ya que la mayor distancia entre tanto lector como autor del personaje que este tipo de narración conlleva es más adecuada para llevar a cabo una exploración de esta clase de fuerzas sociales. Aunque esto no signifique que las novelas mencionadas aquí no sean aptas para un análisis cronotópico, un enfoque sobre su uso de lugares ficticios nos llevaría más hacia lo que Laura Barrett indica en su aproximación a los "centros urbanos laberínticos [y] la arquitectura fastidiosa" de *Mao II* ("Here" 789, traducción propia). En general (y dejando de lado numerosos matices), a pesar de que todas sus novelas reflejan una fuerte conciencia sociopolítica, estos textos compuestos en tercera persona muestran un mayor enfoque hacia lo epistemológico, mientras que aquellos compuestos en

primera persona – con su prevalencia de los desiertos – señalan un enfoque más ontológico, ya que los personajes se encuentran en dichos paisajes como parte de sus distintos proyectos de búsqueda de un método razonable que les permita navegar la caótica inestabilidad de la vida contemporánea.

Por lo tanto, en términos de la estructura de esta tesis doctoral, después de establecer el aparato teórico previamente descrito del lugar fenomenológico y el cronotopo en el capítulo 1, el capítulo 2 presenta la tendencia de DeLillo a lo largo de su carrera a emplear el desierto con el fin de representar los intentos de sus personajes de desarrollar posturas ontológicas adecuadas para los distintos tipos de crisis a que se enfrentan. Tomando como caso de estudio su segunda novela, *End Zone* (1972), este capítulo explora la relación que el desierto presenta tanto con la historia del pensamiento occidental (judeo-cristiano) y su tendencia ascética, como con el sentido de temporalidad abierta que el desierto ofrece para aquellos que lo busquen. Aunque esta obra trata ostensiblemente sobre el fútbol americano, los personajes jóvenes de la novela acaban en una ubicación remota como parte de sus intentos varios de asumir el sentido de alienación y crisis provocado por la combinación del sistema capitalista y la amenaza inminente de una guerra mundial. Prestando especial atención a la interacción entre los cronotopos de las habitaciones y el borde del desierto en que se encuentran, el capítulo demuestra la manera en que tal enfoque revela las respuestas variadas que los personajes de la novela barajan en su intento de enfrentarse el sentir creciente de atomización social en los EEUU de los años setenta.

Los capítulos 3 y 4 se centran en creaciones literarias de DeLillo en los ochenta y, vistos en conjunto, incluyen lo que propongo debe entenderse como el "periodo griego" de DeLillo. Para esto, delineo una expansión trazable de la sensibilidad cronotópica como resultado de la experiencia real del autor al residir como extranjero en Atenas durante tres años. Basándome en mis argumentos en relación con la explicación fenomenológica del lugar y el cronotopo literario, ambos capítulos destacan aspectos distintos de esta creciente sensibilidad del autor al concepto de lugar y lo cronotópico. El capítulo 3 es la única divergencia de esta tesis en cuanto al enfoque global sobre el cronotopo desértico, explorando dos de los relatos breves de DeLillo ignorados por la crítica con el fin de elucidar la manera en que el formato breve permite al autor resolver los mismos problemas que por otro lado lo llevan al terreno del desierto. Tanto en "Human Moments in World War III" (1983) como en "The Ivory Acrobat" (1988) hay una exploración íntima del individuo intentando hacer frente a las presiones ejercidas por el eje formado por el capital y la guerra, cuyos efectos conjuntos llevan a un sentido del espacio-

tiempo acelerado o comprimido. Mientras el cuento de 1983 lo representa a través del prisma más abstracto de dos hombres flotando en la órbita del planeta, el de 1988 hace lo opuesto en su presentación de crisis al navegar por un prisma más íntimo de la corporalidad.

El capítulo 4 examina en detalle *The Names* (1982), el ejemplo principal del periodo griego, demostrando a través de una atención rigurosa al texto la suma importancia del enfoque cronotópico para entender esta novela. Mientras la mayoría de la crítica existente sobre este texto se concentra en su tratamiento del papel del lenguaje en la construcción de la subjetividad, este capítulo defiende el brindar la misma importancia a lo cronotópico en *The Names*, una importancia destacada por sus propios subtítulos de "The Island," "The Mountain" y "The Desert." Sosteniendo la existencia de una clara progresión de cronotopos desde el principio hasta el fin, exploro la manera en que este progreso prescribe las acciones de los personajes y el significado general que el lector se lleva de esta novela. Específicamente, se delinean una serie de transiciones: desde la ontología aislacionista (temporal) de "The Island," hasta la reincorporación de la historia en "The Mountain" y la *tabula rasa* ontológica de "The Desert," lo cual llama a los personajes en sus búsquedas personales de transformación. Cabe destacar que este capítulo trata la manera en que el cronotopo funciona en esta novela de una forma macroestructural, influyendo el texto dentro de cada sección aún si la acción no tiene lugar en el espacio nombrado en cada subtítulo (la isla, la montaña, etc.), lo cual representa una ampliación del uso del cronotopo por parte del autor que se normaliza a partir de este punto de su carrera.

Después de tratar brevemente la etapa intermedia, el capítulo 5 se centra en *Point Omega* (2010), la novela posterior a *The Names* que vuelve al desierto con fines parecidos. El análisis de esta novela enigmática desvela que el interés de DeLillo en las cuestiones fundamentales de la ontología, el tiempo y el espacio siguen vigentes, reapareciendo aquí en lo que sostengo es una manera sorprendentemente innovadora. En su intento de representar el trauma continuo de los eventos que se iniciaron con el 11-S – y que incluye las guerras sin fin que lo siguieron – *Point Omega* dialoga con teorías del universo, desde la temporalidad de ciertas interpretaciones de la física cuántica hasta la cosmología especulativa del jesuita francés Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. La novela demuestra el peligro continuo e incluso creciente que es inherente a los procesos de abstracción, lo cual se ha conectado en capítulos previos con la búsqueda tanto del capital como de la guerra. La combinación de este problema con el trauma de los ataques del 11-S se representa en esta novela a través de lo que mantengo se entiende mejor como un agujero negro representativo; DeLillo convierte el concepto astrofísico de la

singularidad en el principal elemento metafórico y estructural de su novela, ofreciendo solo líneas de fuga imprecisas para que sus personajes puedan escapar su llamada inexorable.

Incluso con su novela más reciente *The Silence* (2020) en mente, el capítulo 6 sostiene que *Zero K* (2016) constituye una cumbre en la obra de DeLillo en lo que se refiere a la representación cronotópica del autor en los términos referidos en esta tesis. De forma similar a *The Names*, la novela destaca la importancia del cronotopo en sus dos subtítulos, "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" y "In the Time of Konstantinovka." Sosteniendo la oposición de un cronotopo de crisis existencial (a nivel de especie) a uno de lo cotidiano (de la inmanencia), este capítulo presenta al narrador Jeffrey Lockhart como una figura liminal que busca una vía intermedia, en términos ontológicos, en el contexto de un mundo de respuestas extremas. Dejando atrás el enigmático tratamiento de tales temáticas en *Point Omega*, en *Zero K* DeLillo vuelve explícitamente al contexto sociopolítico de la alienación. En esta novela el autor contrarresta el proyecto llamado irónicamente "The Convergence" con una convergencia de otro tipo, la que ocurre en el umbral entre la mente y el cuerpo, entre la naturaleza y la cultura.

Finalmente, en las conclusiones destaco la progresión trazada a lo largo de esta tesis, concretando a la vez la visión única que proporciona el enfoque cronotópico para un autor tan estudiado como DeLillo. Haciendo referencia a otras posibilidades tanto dentro de la obra de DeLillo como en otros autores, abogo por el gran valor del cronotopo como herramienta de análisis para abordar un texto literario, preparando el terreno para exploraciones futuras más allá del corpus de DeLillo y de sus desiertos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conversations and support which have collectively enabled the writing of this dissertation over the past four years are a transcontinental affair. I first and foremost owe a debt of gratitude for the continued support and guidance from both Noelia Hernando Real and Matt Kavanagh, whose varying perspectives and fields of expertise have synergized well together in the context of directing this thesis. I must also extend additional thanks to Noelia for her tutorship and the extra effort required in supervising a non-native in the Spanish university system. I am grateful to the DeLillo Society for the opportunity to join the conversation, especially to Laura Barrett for her kindness and to Crystal Alberts for her willingness to discuss her research at the DeLillo Archives, which the arrival of COVID-19 prevented me from visiting personally.

Thanks are due to the librarians at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, in particular Teresa Domingo, who always found a way to provide the interlibrary loans I requested. I also am grateful to the UAM's doctoral research program (PIF) for their help with tuition and, especially, the funding of both a summer research stay at Trinity College Dublin as well as the trip to Boston, MA for participation in the ALA conference with the DeLillo Society; both experiences were highly formative in the process of writing the thesis. I must thank Luke Gibbons for his recommendation and insightful conversations, Jarlath Killeen for his sponsoring of my time reading and writing at the Trinity library, as well as Liv and Hugh Gibbons for providing me with a home in Dublin those three months.

While more people in my life than I care to admit have been subjected to talk of Don DeLillo in the last few years, I owe special thanks to inspiring conversations on space, time, DeLillo and beyond with Simon Pritchard, Loukia Mano, Bob Shepherd, Manuel Aguirre, Belén Piqueras, the members of the LIMEN Group, as well as all the equally literature-obsessed scholars I have had the pleasure of meeting at conferences over the years. Special thanks goes to Andrés Guilló for his encouragement and company in the unique pains and joys of the doctoral process. Friends on both continents also deserve special mention, for both the consistent support as well as the mere fact of not abandoning our friendship in my absence. In a more abstract sense, the childhood trips to mountains and deserts with my family laid the groundwork for the thesis' focus, so beyond their support I am grateful for those opportunities.

Without a doubt, however, the most love and gratitude I can give is owed to Katerina, whose belief in and support for me has been unwavering, and whose helpful comments have often spurred crucial insights of my own. Without you this would not have been possible.

Solitude is a key factor in the silence of the desert,
a solitude that can be profoundly exhilarating or terrifying.

Rebecca Solnit, "Scapeland"

Those who wage war against chaos will be defeated because chaos feeds upon war.

Franco Berardi, *The Second Coming*

Go as far as you dare in the heart of a lonely land,
you cannot go so far that life and death are not before you.

Mary Austin*, The Land of Little Rain*

We can know a country through its fiction, often a far more telling
means of enlightenment and revelation than any other.

Don DeLillo, "An Interview"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION i

CHAPTER 1 Towards a Revised Chronotope: Place, Space, and Time in Fiction 1

Part 1: Philosophical Place and the Human Experience 2

1.1 Preamble: On Space vs. Place in Philosophical Thought 2

1.2 Phenomenology and the Defining of Place 9

1.3 Drawing Contemporary Baselines: Casey and Malpas 14

1.4 Towards Literature: Time and Memory in Implaced Experience 22

Part 2: The Chronotope, or the Function of Literary Places in Fiction 29

1.5 Bakhtin and the Origins of the Concept 29

1.6 The Chronotope in its Sociopolitical and Dialogical Contexts 34

1.7 The 'Concluding Remarks' and Expanding Chronotopic Possibilities 39

1.8 On the Threshold: DeLillo's *Great Jones Street* 43

1.9 Clashing Worldviews and the Gates of the Chronotope 49

CHAPTER 2 The Desert, the Ascetic, and the Angel of History: *End Zone* 60

2.1 A Thematic Overture 63

2.2 Monotheism and the Desert 67

2.3 Religious intertexts: The Early Ascetics and the Desert 73

2.4 Emergent Ontologies on the Desert's Edge 78

2.5 Bodies and Angles: *End Zone's* Dialogue of Rooms 83

2.6 'Adrift within this time and place' – Football and *Communitas* 93

CHAPTER 3 War, Capital, and the Narrowing of Experience in DeLillo's Short Fiction .. 102

3.1 'Sun-cut precision' – DeLillo's Greek period 103

3.2 Capital and War: DeLillo and the Compression of Space and Time 106

3.3 Time and Embodiment in 'The Ivory Acrobat' 113

3.4 Ontological Distancing and Nostalgia in 'Human Moments in World War III' . 125

CHAPTER 4 From the Island to the Desert: *The Names* and the Macro Chronotope 146

4.1 The 'Sleeper' in DeLillo's Canon: Critical Reception 150

4.2 'Forces which haunt the interior' – Isolation and Detachment on 'The Island' .. 155

4.3 'Byzantine blood and gold' – 'The Mountain' and the Return to History 167

4.3.1 The Formal Impact of the Chronotope 171

4.4 'The hawks turned in the empty sky' – 'The Desert' and Open Futurity 176

4.4.1 Owen Brademas and the Pull of the Desert 181

4.4.2 Hawa Mandir: Into the Desert's Heart 187

4.4.3 In the Heart of the Heart of the Chronotope 193

4.4.4 The Phenomenology of Glossolalia 196

4.4.5 Heidegger's Jug: Objects and the Role of Sacred Place 201

4.5 James Axton and the Chronotopic Journey 208

CHAPTER 5 The Black Hole of Abstraction: *Point Omega* 218

5.1 DeLillo, Space, and Time in the 21st Century 222

5.2 Quantum DeLillo 228

5.3 'Anonymity' and the Event Horizon 233

5.4 War, Abstraction, and the 'force of geologic time' in the Desert 238

5.5 The Timeless Universe and the Omega Point 245

5.6 ‘Sylphlike’ – Chronotopic Transgressions and Jessie’s Disappearance 248

5.7 Into the Void: The Singularity and the Horizon of Possibility 253

5.8 Lines of Flight 259

CHAPTER 6 Alienation, Immanence, and Transcendence in *Zero K* 267

6.1 ‘In the Time of Chelyabinsk’ and the Foreclosed Future 272

6.1.1 Chronotope of Crisis 275

6.1.2 Design and Resistance in the ‘shaved space’ of the Convergence 281

6.1.3 Silent Screens and the Spectacle of Crisis 290

6.2 ‘In the Time of Konstantinovka’ – Defining the Chronotope of the Everyday 295

6.3 A Chronotopic Interlude: Three Representational Hearts 301

6.3.1 Ben Ezra and the ‘spun-glass garden’ 301

6.3.2 Artis Martineau and the Existential Drift 308

6.3.3 New York City and the World Hum 311

6.4 The Politics of Silence and Sound in ‘Konstantinovka’ 314

6.5 Return to the Desert and a Clash of Chronotopes 322

CONCLUSIONS 335

DOCUMENTACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL 349

INTRODUCCIÓN 350

CONCLUSIONES 359

WORKS CITED 364

INTRODUCTION

As a glance at the bibliography section on the website of the Don DeLillo Society will confirm, criticism devoted to the Bronx-born author is at this point far-ranging in scope ("Literary"). This variety of critical approaches is undoubtedly due to the nature of DeLillo's fiction, as his corpus – which currently spans eighteen novels and over fifty years publishing fiction – is highly suggestive in a thematical sense. The titles of a selection of the single-author studies of his work are useful in demonstrating this range in thematic scope: *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (LeClair 1987), *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Osteen 2000), *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Cowart 2002), *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief* (Kavadlo 2004), *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (Boxall 2006), *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (Martucci 2007), *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo's Novels* (Laist 2010), and *The Language of Self: Strategies of Subjectivity in the Novels of Don DeLillo* (Pass 2014). From his engagement with systems theory and the transcendence of consumer culture to his exploration of issues of subjectivity through language, faith, existential dread, and technology, the attribution of such a range of thematic concerns is particularly noteworthy in that they all tend to hold up under scrutiny. Jesse Kavadlo's statement that "DeLillo has surpassed virtually all other living writers in his inventiveness, cultural acuity, vision, scope, and relevance" (3) is reinforced by this wide swath of criticism which is directed his way, which only expands when one takes into account the hundreds of journal articles dissecting his work. However, despite this considerable amount of critical attention, there is still truth to Randy Laist's argument that "even as he is one of our most admired writers, he is also arguably our least understood" (*Technology* 2).

If one were to simplify, the most clear schism in DeLillo scholarship is between those who read in his work an exaltation of the postmodern and those who see in it a defense of the Romantic subject, exemplified in the gap between one critic's description of the "instability his fiction portrays as the generalized context of the postmodern condition" (Carmichael 204) and another's identification of a "(conspicuously unpostmodern) metaphysical impulse that animates his work" (Maltby 260). As is usually the case, the prevalence of such apparently opposing arguments in fact testifies to the multi-faceted richness of DeLillo's fiction, which consistently explores both sides of this divide. DeLillo's *oeuvre* is one which walks a middle path in a number of senses, exploring questions of subjectivity in a way which echoes thinkers

from Heidegger to Derrida and Baudrillard, interrogating feelings of both alienation and of community, as well as wavering between the traditions of high modernism and postmodernism, between the sacred and the profane, and between immanence and transcendence. Following this line of thought, it is precisely this middle path which this dissertation seeks to elucidate, doing so, moreover, by way of an innovative approach to a neglected aspect of DeLillo's fiction.

Despite his thematic range, within both the relatively limited number of monographs on DeLillo and the more considerable number of journal articles and book chapters devoted to this great variety of critical issues which his fiction suggests, there is a noticeable gap in the scholarship when it comes to the way DeLillo's fiction explores issues through a particularly strong *spatiotemporal* representation. A central tenet to my analysis is that the full extent of DeLillo's representational achievement is yet to be appreciated given the author's sensitivity to – and expression through – the paired elements of space and time. In other words, I argue for the value of a formally distinct approach to DeLillo's work, demonstrating that he is an author whose fiction is consistently expressed in a way which fully embraces the representational power of space and time – of place – in a literary text. The analysis of DeLillo's work in this thesis is therefore born of a philosophical (primarily phenomenological) foregrounding of the role of place in human experience and subjectivity, which when translated to literature has been most accurately defined as a *chronotope*: the fusion of time and space into a representational whole in a text. Originally developed by Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin in the 1930s, the chronotope is a concept which has been used sporadically since its introduction to the English-speaking world in the 1980s. In the chronotope I identify a potent conceptual tool whose potential has rarely been appreciated to its fullest extent, especially in the analysis of contemporary literature. Moving beyond Bakhtin's own extended development of the concept, one of the principal objectives of this dissertation is to put into practice a chronotopic analysis which, crucially, is based in an understanding of the concept as *emerging from* the human experience of place. Place in this phenomenological sense has only been fully conceptualized in the last few decades, and thus the first essential task of this thesis is to argue for an updated understanding of the chronotope, one informed by recent philosophical and sociopolitical accounts of place.

This theoretical armature is developed in two parts in Chapter 1, which first goes into detail regarding the varying strands of thought which come together in foregrounding experience when it comes to perception of the world; this approach begins with our

embeddedness in space and time and, consequently, sees human ontology as a question of becoming or process rather than of static being. This then sets the stage for a contextualization in the second part of the chapter of Mikhail Bakhtin's original development of this concept through a rigorous updating of its theoretical foundation, arguing for the root of the chronotope's impact on the human imagination as lying in our embodied and embedded experience of the world. At the core of this project is an understanding that if human existence cannot be conceived of without the primary and conjoined elements of space and time, then neither can representation, including both narrative and memory itself. In this context, the more sensitive an author is to this fundamental aspect of experience, the more nuanced will be their representation thereof in their fiction; this is true in a double sense, as it applies to both the effect which fictional place (the chronotope) has on characters as well as the structural role the chronotope plays in a given text, which affects instead the external reader. What I argue in detail in this dissertation is that Don DeLillo is precisely such an author, and therefore the dearth of criticism which takes this into account constitutes an important gap to be filled.

Don DeLillo is in fact an ideal case study for this reconstituted chronotopic approach to fiction, signaled firstly by the fact that the author himself has repeatedly expressed a fascination with the concepts of space and time. Scattered attention has been paid to this interest on DeLillo's part, but there is a significant lack when it comes to his tendency to represent *through* these elements. Some critics have productively discussed his interest in and dialogue with different concepts of time, including Alberts (2016), Boxall (2012), Coale (2011), Dill (2017), Gourley (2013), Leps (2015), and Maslowski (2017). Focusing on different aspects of DeLillo's exploration of temporality, from quantum physics to the cinematic to geologic time, these scholars highlight for the most part the way DeLillo's characters undergo different subjective experiences of temporality. The core of my argument, however, is that this engagement with temporality must be viewed in fiction as inseparable from the spatial, and that moreover it is crucial to understand the way the fused elements of space and time become a representational force within these texts. Scholarly engagement with space is a similar story, with some excellent but isolated analyses of DeLillo's distinctive narrative spaces, including Barrett (1999), Harack (2013), Leps (2014), and Spencer (2006). Critics also tend to comment on DeLillo's repeated portrayal of "rooms and, particularly, men in small rooms intent on making sense of history and their place in it" (Liste Noya 240). Such mentions often focus on the association such men have with conspiracy and different sorts of plotting – one critic refers to the "many small rooms that breed trouble in DeLillo's fictional world" (Bieger 12). These

analyses tend to focus on character, exploring less the fact of room as chronotope and its wider implications, in that the result is effectively a two-way representational flow between character and room; this sense of room as chronotope I discuss with the example of DeLillo's *Great Jones Street* (1973) in the context of outlining my theoretical framework in Chapter 1.

Of those critics who do engage DeLillo's treatment of space or time, very few have approached them in a way approximating what I argue for as crucial in this thesis. Elise Martucci's monograph on the "environmental unconscious" in the work of DeLillo as well as her 2017 chapter on "Place as Active Receptacle" in DeLillo's short fiction together represent the most extended look at place in the author's work and lead to interesting insights, such as her argument that, in *Americana* (1971), protagonist David Bell finds that "the landscape disorients his grasp of time and place and, consequently, his sense of self" (*Environmental* 39). Martucci as the sole scholar to look specifically at place in an extended fashion in particular is surprising, given both the content of DeLillo's novels as well as such comments as his assertion in a 1982 interview that he is "too interested in what real places look like and what names they have" to write "fiction without a real sense of place" ("An Interview" 31). In terms of translating this sense of place into the workings of narrative itself, very few scholars have sought to engage with DeLillo's highly chronotopic representation that I argue for in this dissertation. Most prominent of these are Robert Kohn's mostly undeveloped use of the concept in his article on *Great Jones Street* (2005), Jacqueline Zubeck's introductory positing of a DeLillean delineation of a "twenty-first-century 'chronotope'" in her opening to the *Don DeLillo After the Millennium* collection (3), and Paul Smethurst's discussion of DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* (1976) and *The Names* (1982) in his broader outlining of *The Postmodern Chronotope* (2000). However, as I will explore further in the context of my theoretical discussion of the chronotope, Rachel Falconer's chronotopic reading of DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the only analysis which really looks at DeLillo's work in the way I do here, and it is limited to the context of a single article on the one novel. Overall then, going beyond the scattered focus on space, time, place and chronotope described here, in this thesis I conduct an extended analysis of the way different literary places function in the author's work, demonstrating that representation through the chronotope – be it on a micro or macro scale – is an essential aspect of DeLillo's fiction.

While this chronotopic approach to DeLillo's fiction would be illuminating in regards to every single one of these novels, with the aim of tracing a vein of continuity over the course of a long writing career this dissertation pays particular attention to those thematic issues

clustered around the recurrence of a particular type of fictional place: the desert. Spanning from his first novel *Americana* (1971) to the recent *Zero K* (2016), the desert reappears in various forms throughout DeLillo's writing, and a principal argument of this thesis is that it only tends to do so when certain thematic concerns are at stake. Counterposing the desert to the other spaces which emerge to create a chronotopic dialogue – often the famous small room – I argue for an evolving desert chronotope which DeLillo's characters tend to seek out for its (supposed) status as an ontological *tabula rasa*, which nevertheless only rarely works to their benefit. This desert focus in fact coincides closely with DeLillo's fiction composed in the first-person, as five of the seven novels written in the first person include deserts – the only two which do not are *Great Jones Street* (1973) and *White Noise* (1985). Moreover, despite their lack of desert landscapes, these latter two novels are not dissimilar in their exploration of the principal issues I identify as associated with the recurrence of this particular chronotope. At stake is DeLillo's continuous interest in probing potential responses to the different forces which press on the individual in a contemporary, globalized (especially American) context. In this dissertation I trace a parallel between this desert recurrence and DeLillo's evolving representation of characters struggling to develop an adequate ontological stance in the face of an increasing sense of alienation, which in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is often shown to emerge from the conflated forces of capital and war. Weaving my discussion of the novels through the chronotopes they employ, I establish the approach's indispensability when it comes to understanding the extent of DeLillo's engagement with the most pressing questions of the times; the chronotope allows a fresh understanding of the way DeLillo's characters (and thus his novels' readers) are enabled to seek strategies to deal with the range of issues associated with the contemporary moment, from a disorienting sense of time-space compression to an increasing sense of social alienation, from a narrowing down of the horizon of possibility to the varying impulses towards the transcendent and the immanent.

In terms of the primary texts chosen for close analysis, the selection ranges from DeLillo's second novel, *End Zone* (1972), through three texts of what I call DeLillo's Greek period in the early 1980s (*The Names,* "Human Moments in World War III" and "The Ivory Acrobat") to his late return to the desert with *Point Omega* (2010) and *Zero K* (2016). Beyond some briefer looks at novels relevant to the analysis such as *Underworld* (1997), *The Body Artist* (2000) and *Cosmopolis* (2003), the choice of thematic emphasis leaves out some of DeLillo's most acclaimed (and studied) novels, especially *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), and *Mao II* (1991). Not unlike his 1970s novels *Players* (1977) and *Running Dog* (1978), these

critic favorites are the novels which those seeking to validate the postmodernist thesis tend to gravitate towards, as they are, generally speaking, more concerned with the larger systems at play in society and the way a character is moved around by such systems. Their coincidence in third-person narration is thus unsurprising, as the authorial and readerly distance from the character which that type of narration entails is more suited to an exploration of these societal forces. While this does not mean these novels here mentioned are not ripe for chronotopic analysis, a focus on their use of fictional place would lead one more towards what Laura Barrett signals in her discussion of the "labrythine urban centers [and] vexing architecture" ("Here" 789) of *Mao II.* Generally speaking (and ignoring a good deal of nuance), while all his novels are sociopolitically engaged, these third-person texts are more concerned with the epistemological whereas the first-person texts – with their prevalence of deserts – signal a more fundamentally ontological concern, as characters find themselves in the barren landscape as part of their varying projects of seeking a reasonable method for navigating the chaotic flux of forces that is contemporary life.

In terms then of the dissertation's structure, after establishing the aforementioned theoretical framework of phenomenological place and chronotope in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 introduces DeLillo's career-long tendency to turn to the desert landscape in order to stage his characters' attempts to develop ontological stances adequate to the different species of crisis they face. Focusing on DeLillo's second novel *End Zone* (1972), this chapter explores the relationship the desert as a chronotope – or in the case of this novel, the desert's edge – holds with both the history of Western (Judeo-Christian) thought and the ascetic tendency, as well as the related sense of an open-ended temporality it offers to those who seek it out. While the novel is ostensibly about American football, the young characters who populate it wind up at its remote location in their varying attempts to come to terms with the sense of alienation and crisis provoked by the combination of a capitalist system – which was just transitioning to the flexible accumulation of the post-Fordist era – and the looming threat of global war. Paying attention to the interplay of the chronotopes of rooms and the wider desert edge they are embedded within, the chapter demonstrates the way such a focus unveils the differing sorts of responses the novel's characters pursue in their attempt to combat the increasing sense of social attenuation of the 1970s United States.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the 1980s and, taken together, comprise what I suggest should be understood as DeLillo's "Greek period," for which is outlined a traceable expansion of chronotopic sensitivity as a result of the author's actual experience of living abroad in Athens

for three years. Based in my argument for the literary chronotope's origins in the phenomenological account of place as foundational to human experience, both chapters highlight different aspects of this augmentation of sensitivity to place and the chronotopic. Chapter 3 is this dissertation's only departure from the overall focus on the desert chronotope, exploring two of DeLillo's critically-neglected short stories in order to elucidate the way the short form allows the author to work out the same problems he elsewhere takes to the desert sands. In both "Human Moments in World War III" (1983) and "The Ivory Acrobat" (1988), there is an intimate exploration of the individual attempting to come to terms with the conflated pressures of capital and war, whose combined effect leads to a sense of accelerated or compressed space-time. Where the 1983 story represents this through the abstracted, outside-in lens of two men floating in earth-orbit, the 1988 piece reverses it to the inside-out, presenting an account of crisis as navigated through embodiment.

Chapter 4 then examines in detail the primary example of the Greek period, *The Names* (1982), demonstrating through close attention to the text the cruciality of the chronotopic approach to this novel. While most criticism focuses on the novel's engagement with the role language plays in subjectivity, this chapter makes a comprehensive case for the equal importance of the chronotopic in *The Names*, which is highlighted by its own subheadings of "The Island," "The Mountain" and "The Desert." Arguing for a clear progression of chronotopic values from beginning to end, I explore the way this progression dictates the actions of the characters and the overall meaning to be taken from the novel. Specifically, an argument is outlined for a series of transitions: from "The Island's" (temporal) isolationist ontology to "The Mountain's" reincorporation of history to, finally, "The Desert's" ontological *tabula rasa*, which characters seek out in their varying personal quests of transformation. Significantly, the chapter details the way the chronotope in this novel operates in a macrostructural way, influencing the text within each section even if the action is not taking place in the actual location named (the island, etc.), an increased employment of the chronotopic which becomes the norm in DeLillo's career from this point onwards.

After briefly discussing the intervening years, Chapter 5 leaps forward to *Point Omega* (2010), the next novel after *The Names* to return to the desert in the same capacity. The discussion of this late, enigmatic novel reveals that DeLillo's interest in the fundamental questions of ontology, time and space continue unabated, here re-emerging in what I argue is a strikingly innovative way. In its attempt to represent the continuing trauma of the events which began with 9/11 – and which include the endless wars which arose in its wake – *Point*

Omega engages in a dialogue with theories of the universe, from the temporality of certain interpretations of quantum physics to the speculative cosmology of the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The novel demonstrates the continued and even increased danger inherent in the processes of abstraction, which previous chapters have connected to the pursuit of both capital and of war, and the combination of this problem with the trauma of the attacks is represented in the novel through what I argue is best understood as a representational black hole; DeLillo works the astrophysical concept of the singularity into the principal metaphorical and structural element of his novel, offering only vague lines of flight for its characters to escape its inexorable pull.

Even with his most recent novel *The Silence* (2020) in mind, Chapter 6 argues for *Zero K* (2016) as the pinnacle thus far in terms of DeLillo's chronotopic representation of the general line explored in this thesis. Similarly to *The Names*, the novel foregrounds the importance of the chronotope in its two section headings, "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" and "In the Time of Konstantinovka." Arguing for the opposition of a chronotope of existential crisis (on the species level) to one of the everyday (of immanence), the chapter explores the narrator Jeff Lockhart as a liminal figure who seeks a middle path, ontologically speaking, in a world of extreme responses. Leaving behind the enigmatic approach of *Point Omega*, in *Zero K* DeLillo returns explicitly to the sociopolitical context of alienation, countering the ironically named Convergence project – which while claiming to dissolve them together in fact reinforces a series of binaries – with a different sort of convergence: that which occurs on the threshold between mind and body, and between nature and culture.

In the conclusions, I highlight the progression charted throughout the thesis with reference to *The Silence* (2020), cementing at the same time the unique sort of vision which the chronotopic approach provides to a critically-established author such as DeLillo. Making reference to other possibilities both within DeLillo's body of work and beyond, I revisit the indispensability of the chronotope as a framework for approaching a literary text, laying the groundwork for future explorations beyond the work of DeLillo and his deserts.

CHAPTER 1 Towards a Revised Chronotope: Place, Space, and Time in Fiction

CHAPTER 1

Towards a Revised Chronotope: Place, Space, and Time in Fiction

Part 1: Philosophical Place and the Human Experience

Just as phenomenology, in its appeal to lived experience, would emerge as abstracted, partial, and disembodied without being situated in place, so the term "place" would be vague and cryptic without being thematized through phenomenology.

Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place*

Place serves as the condition *of all existing things. This means that, far from being merely locatory or situational, place belongs to the very concept of existence. To be is to be bounded by place.*

Edward Casey, *Getting Back*

1.1 Preamble: On Space vs. Place in Philosophical Thought

The task of this opening section is to provide an account of the development of thinking about the terms "space" and "place" in the Western tradition, and the reason for doing so is twofold: it is relevant to both the original conception of the chronotope, and will therefore inform my argument for a revised understanding of the concept, as well as more directly to the novels of an American writer such as DeLillo, whose interest in space and time forms a core component to his fictional exploration of contemporary subjectivities. The brief survey of spatial thinking which follows leads to an emphasis on recent accounts of "place" which are heavily based in phenomenological thought, and it is this way of understanding the integral

role of space and time – joined together as place – which is then brought to bear upon Bakhtin's concept of chronotope. In other words, in order to understand the representational importance of space and time in literature, it is first necessary to work our way towards a revised understanding of the role they play in actual human experience in the world, as I argue that it is out of this role that their representational power is born.

While ever a fundamental concern across human societies, conceptual understandings in the particular context of Western thought regarding the role of space, place and time in the human experience have gone through a rather significant upheaval and expansion in the previous century or so, with the last twenty-five years being particularly fruitful in this regard. There has in fact been a veritable explosion in space and place-based research, expanding the field in a great number of directions, including but not limited to the role of space/place in an individual's formation of the self, in social relations, in politics, regarding inequality in gender, class, and race, in memory, in art, and in urban theory. While the complexities and particulars of the varying arguments and pathways taken by such interdisciplinary efforts are already too numerous to approach as any sort of totality (and nor should they be), the essential point is that the breadth of such a summary listing speaks to the always already ubiquitous role of space, place and time in the human experience that is an integral aspect of the approach of this thesis.

In writing that the last century has seen an expansion in spatial thinking, there is of course no intention to bypass the foundational role that thinkers reaching back to Plato and Aristotle in Classical Greece and later passing through the likes of Descartes, Newton and Kant during the Enlightenment have had in shaping the Western spatial worldview in various directions, both theoretically and practically (in everyday experience). However, this last distinction between the practical and the theoretical is significant in that it represents the sort of dichotomy which has required special focus in order to achieve its dissolution in spatial thinking, since it is precisely such figures as Descartes, Newton and Kant whose spatial conceptions of the world have been advanced upon or even abandoned theoretically, but whose implications often persist in the practical spatial worldview of the general populace – as well as veiled within the exercise of critical theory and literary analysis. Specifically, part of the problem here is the continuation of the standard interpretation of Cartesian duality of mind and body,[1] as well as the (related) Enlightenment-era establishment of the twin pillars of Space and

[1] Though Gary Hatfield argues for a general misunderstanding of Descartes' thought in terms of the mind-body question, his discussion of the French thinker does make it clear that such (mis)interpretations have persisted into

Time, two conceptual giants whose existence lies in the realm of theoretical abstraction but whose nature is often mistakenly held to be actual to lived experience – an assumption which after careful inspection is decidedly not the case. Further, as with the creation of any dichotomy, the separation of Space and Time in such a way often sets the two at odds with one another, in an act which denies their essential inextricability in the human experience. While the act of abstraction may of course prove useful in the development of theory or the practice of analysis, in this case it seems to have gotten out of hand. As philosopher Edward Casey writes in his pivotal 1993 *Getting Back into Place*, the "*gigantomachia* between Time and Space - a contest of giants orchestrated by Newton and Leibniz, Descartes and Kant, Galileo and Gassendi - is a struggle that overlooks Place" (10). While the capitalization of the term "place" is appropriately abandoned by Casey subsequently, his text represents one of the key recent attempts to assert the importance of rethinking the deeply entrenched assumptions regarding our spatiotemporal experience as human beings.

In this vein, the eventual goal of this chapter and of central importance to the thesis in a more general sense is, in accordance with a number of recent thinkers such as Casey, to contribute to the reassertion of what English-speaking scholars term *place* as fundamental to the process of being and, more concretely, the implications this has for the study of literary fiction. Such a spatiotemporal fusion is a key factor in the break from these previous conceptions of space and time, especially that of Descartes, which in very general terms understood space as homogenous and calculable, and time as "spatialized," as Henri Bergson would put it, as similarly homogenized and understandable through linear progression.[2] This break from a centuries long habit of viewing space and time as fundamentally separate[3] towards their unity is in one way or another integral to the relatively recent focus of scholars working in a variety of disciplines, including such thinkers as Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, Edward Casey, Yi-Fu Tuan, David Harvey, Luce Irigaray, Jeff Malpas, Edward Soja, Tim Ingold,

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the present day of philosophy, and that Descartes did argue "clearly and distinctly to conceive mind and body as distinct beings to the conclusion that they really are separate substances" (Hatfield n.p.). For my purposes it is also significant that general lay discourse constantly reiterates the mind-body separation, both proving and contributing to its general persistence.

[2] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. Bergson writes, for example, "let us notice that when we speak of *time*, we generally think of a homogenous medium in which our states are ranged alongside one another as in space, so as to form a discrete multiplicity. Would not time, thus understood, be to the multiplicity of our psychic states what intensity is to certain of them, - a sign, a symbol, absolutely distinct from true duration?" (90).

[3] The shifts in thinking about space and time from the ancient Greeks to today is a complex and nuanced subject unnecessary to go into here. For a comprehensive account of this evolution see Casey's *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997).

Elizabeth Grosz, Dylan Trigg, Tim Cresswell, and Mikhail Bakhtin, just to name a few with particular relevance to this project. While there are variations and exceptions, as will be discussed at length, this complex relationship is most often referred to in the recent (English language) literature using the albeit already loaded term *place*. While in the end perhaps Alexandra Kogl's concise definition of "space + meaning = place" (15) will prove to suffice, it is nevertheless necessary to work towards operating understandings of these admittedly complicated notions of space and place before moving forward into any analysis (literary or otherwise) which proclaims spatial or spatiotemporal elements as the primary lens through which all else will be directed. The further aim is that in the course of doing so, the importance and unique potential of adopting this particular approach towards literature becomes clear as well.

Before entering the realm of space and time, however, it is perhaps useful to foreground the importance of even doing so in the first place in the context of a project which is ostensibly literary in nature. If place is held to be primary to all experience, as will be elaborated upon subsequently in detail, then that which logically follows is that its relevance to any aspect of the wide range of human affairs (be it sociopolitical, philosophical, psychological, ecological, aesthetic, etc.) is essentially ubiquitous, though it is important to stress that ubiquity in this sense by no means implies totality or a denial of multiplicity. The relatively recent acknowledgment of such a far-reaching impact has given rise to an interdisciplinary effort to reevaluate the role of space and place throughout the human sciences; questions of space and place emerge as most appropriately approached through a crossing of disciplinary boundaries (thus hopefully contributing to the latter's dissolution). As a result, the project of reexamining a half-century's worth of literary output of a well-studied author such as Don DeLillo through an explicitly spatiotemporal lens is conceived of in a similar vein to Philip Wegner's exploration of narrative utopias in his *Imaginary Communities*, which is intended as a "contribution to [this] emerging interdisciplinary formation centered on the problematics of 'space' or 'cultural geography,'" approached specifically through the analysis of fiction (11). Such contributions, both Wegner's and that of this dissertation, are therefore attempts to trace both spatiotemporal representations of issues relevant to the human-in-her-environment, be they sociopolitical, epistemological, ontological, ecological, etc., as well as authors' strategies for dealing with such a multitude of interrelated problems. This sort of approach takes on further critical value when it is able to examine a series of (artistic) responses to the contemporary condition over a certain period of time, especially given the particular

sociopolitical volatility of the world in the past hundred years or so. If our spatiotemporal experience of the world indeed underlies all experience, then such problems, strategies and eventual perspectival shifts will be traceable on the literary plane.

As both support for this approach and as a segue into the particulars of the discussion of space and place, it is useful to open with a statement offered by feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz:

> The history of scientific, mathematical, and philosophical conceptions of space and time have witnessed a number of major transformations, some of which have dramatically effected the ways in which our basic ontologies are conceived. The kinds of worlds we inhabit, and our understanding of our places in these worlds are to some extent an effect of the ways in which we understand space and time. (*Space, Time and Perversion* 97)

Grosz signals the important connection between conceptions of space and time and our ontological baselines, so to speak, which she is right to refer to in the plural. With the invocation of ontology, Grosz correctly signals the foundational importance that should be attributed to such matters before entering any other domain; Grosz, for example, arrives at this juncture in her thinking on feminism and issues of sexual difference, as does Luce Irigaray.[4] Though it will become clear in the subsequent process of developing these arguments, it is perhaps important to emphasize here early on the distinction between different types of ontology, for while its classical sense focuses on being as something *static*, other uses of the term refer rather to being-as-process, as *becoming*; such ontologies of process, an integral part of the idea of place I am working towards, are active in the work of otherwise varied thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Jacques Derrida, Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze and Elizabeth Grosz.[5] However, the sort of ontology of becoming relevant here is one informed by even more recent thinkers working directly with this "emerging disciplinary formation" Wegner signals. More precisely, the argument put forth here is in line with a series of thinkers of various disciplines who proclaim the unity of space (or place) and time in embodied, inter-subjective experience; I will work to show that across disciplines there is a strong vein of spatial thinking which can be seen to emphasize this complex unity, which prioritizes the lived over the abstract, the interconnected over the atomized.

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[4] I refer to Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1982), especially the chapter "Place: Interval".

[5] For more on ontologies of becoming see the collection edited by Elizabeth Grosz, *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures* (1999), as well as her book *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (2004).

Often in the beginning of such projects, which focus the gaze upon this or that element of the complex set of issues which fall under the spatial banner, critics will reference the so-called "spatial turn" of humanities.[6] What is obvious from the term itself is that such a general explosion in work emphasizing the importance of the spatial is that it is sometimes conceived as a reaction to a previous perception regarding the "dominating" position of time in the theoretical limelight. As a result, as some scholars have already pointed out, there is a tendency for such interdisciplinary efforts to overreach in the opposite direction, privileging space or place over time as if to make up for the centuries of slight that Space has received at the hands its fellow giant. Adam Barrows, in his recent *Time, Literature and Cartography After the Spatial Turn*, is one to observe that "the spatial turn has left time and temporality under-theorized and oversimplified" (28), citing as an example Edward Soja's contribution to the 2009 collection, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* In a similar vein, philosopher of place Jeff Malpas has recently commented that even in light of this "spatial turn," humanities researchers at times perpetuate a discourse of space which ignores all the important aspects of place (which is in fact inherently tied-up in time) – thus the urgency in reasserting the importance of the latter: "Modern scientific thinking tends to treat place as either a subjective construct or else as reducible to a mere location in space […]. Moreover, this scientific neglect of place remains true in spite of the tendency to talk of a spatial turn within the social sciences and humanities" (*Intelligence of Place* 2). This is all mentioned in order to emphasize that this study is envisioned as a reassertion of the importance of an inclusive understanding of space/place and time, of riding that middle line without falling prey to the analytical ease of elevating one over the over. Of course, the impetus behind steering such a middle course is a necessity given the actual role of space and time in the human experience that is defended in this study; the perception of this crucial role is indeed the source of the initial impulse to engage this subject matter in such an in-depth manner in the first place. It is thus that here I will labor to approach an updated understanding of space and time through place as the baseline for this project. This is doubly important in that this study is conceived in part with the objective of unifying a number of critical spatiotemporal thinkers into a productive assemblage, under the banner of chronotope, that when directed towards art such as literature is able to yield fresh insights into the complex nuances of the present moment.

[6] Cf. Barrows (2016) or Warf and Arias (2009).

Regarding terminology, the discussion of space, place, and time is perhaps increasingly complicated given this substantial increase in critical attention paid to it in the last three decades or so as alluded to by the "spatial turn." Fortunately, while there is of course a good deal of variation in defining the concepts, upon careful reading of much of the literature it becomes clear that throughout what are often presented as significantly different approaches one can trace a common thread whose nature lies in this nuanced intra-relationship of embodied human subjects with space and time, and the necessary turn away from abstract accounts of space as homogenous and static and time as either purely subjective or objective. One of the pitfalls in discussing such terms is that some writers use the terms "space" or "lived-space" where others would use "place," and vice versa, a fact which undoubtedly contributes to the complication of this interdisciplinary debate. Interestingly, though, it appears that this often likely attributable to a simple issue of translation between the French and English languages, as the influential scholars working in French (Lefebvre, Bachelard, Foucault, Irigaray, Derrida, Deleuze, de Certeau) discuss issues of what in English would be both space and place through the linguistically broader *espace*;[7] this is further complicated when English speaking scholars working in the wake of these French writers use the terms un-adapted – David Harvey seems to provide a clear example of this issue.[8] Regardless, the difficulty in pinning down the terms space and place actually increases as time goes on, in that every attempt to do so necessarily complicates the issue further as new modalities or definitions arise. This complication is however an inevitability in what essentially amounts to a multidirectional attempt to shift the spatiotemporal paradigm, and is moreover preferable to the previous tactic of simply assuming that the terms were self-defined, which only perpetuated certain modes of thought even while trying to engage them critically.

Writing in 1994, Doreen Massey points out this further difficulty, originally signaled by Lefebvre[9], writing that "Many authors rely heavily on the terms space/spatial, and each assumes that their meaning is clear and uncontested" (*Space, Place and Gender* 250). Further,

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[7] Jeff Malpas points this out in his introduction to *The Intelligence of Place* (2015), p. 3.

[8] Harvey's impressive body of work focusing on political issues of geography is heavily influenced by the likes of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau – indeed it was Harvey who introduced Lefebvre to the English speaking world. Cf. his discussion of de Certeau in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, pp. 261-262.

[9] Lefebvre, referring explicitly to French thinkers such as Blanchot, Bachelard and Foucault, writes: "We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth. Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly fundamental epistemological studies is not only the idea of 'man' but also that of space - the fact that 'space' is mentioned on every page notwithstanding" (*Production of Space* 3).

the disciplinary divide has increased the proliferation in definitions, since thinkers working in different fields have come to the topic from their respective angles. What is important here is that whether their proponents address it or not, these respective angles are based in underlying ontological assumptions regarding the (spatiotemporal) nature of being. The writings of key figures in the fields of cultural geography – or "critical spatial studies"[10] – such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey and Edward Soja demonstrate that they are all cognizant of this philosophical baseline; it is in the debt that all three of these thinkers have to Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) that the extent of that French metaphilosopher/sociologist's impact upon this expanding field begins to become clear. Though Lefebvre's life-long role in the development of such critical spatial studies is indeed foundational, philosophers both concurrent and subsequent to his career have attempted to go more explicitly beneath the surface, so to speak, in order to re-examine the nature of space and time as a ground for the possibility of embodied experience, or as Bakhtin would put it, as "forms of the most immediate reality" (*FTC* 85). If such explorations are understood to be actual to the human experience then it follows that other discussions can proceed always having these ontological baselines in mind.

1.2 Phenomenology and the Defining of Place

Simply put, the general trend in the shift in thought regarding space has been to turn away from static conceptions of both space and place, which saw space as an empty container or a neutral medium and place as a fixed point within that larger whole. In order to achieve this break away from the long-standing correlation of space and the void, or space as a container, recent thinkers, often though not always based in the phenomenological tradition, have focused upon reformulated ideas of *lived-space*, *place*, or *space-as-process* in order to attempt to redefine the spatial paradigm. There are of course a good number of studies which have engaged in detail the long history of these conceptions in Western thought, with space being the more concentrated upon of the two. In their introduction to the comprehensive collection *Thinking Space* (2000), for example, Nigel Thrift and Mike Crang summarize the recent shift in spatial thought, writing that the main focus of the "current writing on space, all of which in

[10] See Edward Soja's introduction to his chapter "Taking Place Personally" in *The Spatial Turn* collection, in which he tackles precisely this problem of defining what sort of term can define the focus of his career's research.

one sense or the other move away from the Kantian perspective on space—as an absolute category—[moves] towards *space as process* and *in process* (that is space and time combined in becoming)" (3). As will be seen, these sorts of descriptions of space as process hold similarities with such conceptions as *lived space* (Lefebvre, Soja) and *place* as a both a sociological and philosophical concept (Casey, Malpas, Massey), though there are important differences therein as well.

Perhaps the most important transformation in the approach to space and time towards the definition suggested above has occurred as a result of changing the locus of the gaze from predominantly the outside (the famous "view from nowhere"[11]) to a merged inside-outside, so to speak. That is, simply put, the important shift has been to reassert the primacy of implaced[12] experience when it comes to questions of time and space, without falling into the trap of valuing the purely subjective over a relational understanding between it and the objective. Here we can thus give a tentative, working definition of the terms space and place, but which will be understood to be non-fixed and under constant scrutiny in their subsequent exploration. Where "place" will be understood tentatively as *that which arises arising out of the complex intra-relationship of spatiotemporally oriented, embodied humans (including their memory and imagination) with elements both natural and social*, "space" generally refers to *a derivative of place through abstraction.* Thus, while place will be discussed in great depth subsequently, "space" is understood as the term generally used to discuss spatial abstractions which arise from the primacy of place, from the micro to the macro; one can speak of the "space of a house" to refer to its particular spatial qualities the same as one can refer to the space between the Earth and the Sun. However, though this sort of working definition situates place as a concept – in part a necessity given the well-entrenched notions of space passed down from thinkers of the Enlightenment – it does not imply the need to insist upon this one authoritative distinction between the terms space and place, though their historical difference is of course always of relevance and must therefore be kept in mind. Rather, the move is understood in part as a tactical one in the push to rethink these foundational notions of space and time through an emphasis on process or becoming; as such, the following section is designed to present this

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[11] See Thomas Nagel (1989).

[12] Borrowing from Casey (2009), this is a term I use at various points throughout the thesis, as it appears more clear than the options "in-place" or "placed," referring as it does to "experience through place." To clarify, Casey writes: "To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place - *to be implaced*, however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily" (13).

updated way of understanding the human spatiotemporal experience without falling into dogma regarding terminology; the use of the terms will continue to emerge in their presentation. As Jeff Malpas writes, although there is a strong temptation "to try to develop a notion of place that is clearly separated off from any concept of space […], this temptation is one that ought to be resisted" (*Place and Experience* 25).

Much of the thinking in a philosophical vein which has theorized place has been influenced by some combination of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's groundbreaking work in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), as well as the (later) writings of Martin Heidegger, especially essays such as "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951). While Heidegger's work in this regard has definite shortcomings in its fixedness on rootedness and authenticity, as well as in its sexual bias – both of which have been discussed at length[13] – certain elements in this thinking when taken as a starting point diverge fruitfully into current ways of understanding our relationship with place, and have indeed been of key importance for many of the contemporary thinkers dealt with in this chapter. In this 1951 essay, Heidegger writes that "Man's relation to locales, and through locales to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially" (359). He writes further that "Dwelling […] is *the basic character* of Being" (362, original emphasis). The important element in this is that he here signals the ontological priority of the human relationship to the places in which we "dwell," which in itself is a fundamental shift away from notions of space and time as transcendental concepts, for "dwelling" is a spatiotemporal activity of a subject's concrete now.[14] Where Heidegger's thought went astray, from a contemporary perspective, was (besides his significant and consistent lack of attention to the (sexed) human body in his consideration of Being) in the correlation he drew between dwelling and rootedness in a place, with the well-known example of his idealization of a typical peasant hut in the Black Forest of Germany. However, the original emphasis on dwelling is productive if one simply shifts the idea to one detached from the necessity for such

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[13] Cf. Ott (1993) or Harrington (2004) on the former, and Colebrook (1997) on the latter. Some of this criticism argues for this attention to authenticity and rootedness as correlative with Heidegger's somewhat ambiguous continued support for National Socialism. This is a debate I will not get into, mainly because it is precisely his emphasis on roots that the subsequent advancement upon of his thought turns *away* from in the updated understanding of place.

[14] For detailed investigations into the implications for place found in Heidegger's writings, see Elden (2001) and Malpas (2006; 2012), as well as the fruitful dialogue between them in *Philosophy & Geography* (Elden 2003; Malpas 2003)

rootedness;[15] it is crucial to understand the ability to "put down roots" as something that humans *may* do, but this as a consequence of a more fundamental aspect of being, not as something which is primary to being in and of itself.[16]

In this sense, it is Merleau-Ponty that provides another of the foundations for the current understanding of place in his phenomenological focus on the primacy of perception, specifically when it comes to the lived body's inherent spatial orientation. Diverging from the movement's founder Husserl, who maintained a categorical distinction between "the inner and the outer: the 'immanent' sphere of conscious experience and the 'transcendent' domain of external objects," as well as between "concrete and abstract entities" (Carman 205–6), Merleau-Ponty argues, put simply, that "we are always already this being who is both mind and body in a natural unity" (Bullington 28). In what amounts to a rather radical divergence from the dominant strand of philosophical thought reaching back to Newton and Descartes, Merleau-Ponty thus overrides the separation of cognition from the corporeal – which as Carman points out Husserl always maintained even in his own explorations of the lived body (205-7). In Merleau-Ponty's words:

> In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing-body. (*Phenomenology* 475)

Here it is also clear that it is not just the body that is the "essence of subjectivity," but the world as well; for Merleau-Ponty, the subject is inseparable from the body and the world (including, of course, other subjects therein). This now-classic break from Cartesian dualism accomplished most obviously by Merleau-Ponty is an essential step in reworking the understanding of the role of space/place in the possibility of human subjectivity. Of course, the spatial and the temporal come immediately into play as soon as the referred to body begins to exist in the

[15] A recent body of work has arisen giving a theoretical basis to this suggestion. Cf. Cresswell and Merriman, *Geographies of Mobilities* (2011) or Tim Ingold' chapter "Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge" in *Boundless Worlds* (2011).

[16] For detailed discussions of Heidegger's eventual shift from an emphasis on time early in his career to one on a veiled notion of place by the end of it, see Casey's chapter "Proceeding to Place by Indirection" in *The Fate of Place* (pp. 243-284) and Malpas's *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (2008). Casey also points out Heidegger's lack of attention to the body – see *Fate of Place* p. 242.

referred to world, which in all cases is from the very beginning; as soon as the subject is born and begins to interact with the world (or even before), the capacity for movement – a concept both inherently spatial and temporal – becomes relevant. Edward Casey, discussing Merleau-Ponty's statement that the "gearing of my body towards the world" is the "origin of space," (*Phenomenology* 297) clarifies the implications in a historical sense: "No longer is this origin sought in the world-building ambitions of a creator-god, much less in the pure mind of an austere transcendental subject. The origin is found straightforwardly in the body of the individual subject. Or, more exactly, it is found in the *movement* of that body" (*Fate of Place* 229).

This question of embodiment immediately provokes the feminist intervention that in such a philosophical attempt to ground being in a spatiotemporal experience, which is never divorced from the corporeal, there therefore still always enters the issues of gender. For example, in her *Architecture from the Outside* (2001), Elizabeth Grosz writes:

> A whole history of theorists of the body—from Spinoza through Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard, and others—have not acknowledged the sexual specificity of the body or the sexual specificity of knowledges, including their own, and have not recognized their own complicity in the consolidation of patriarchy, which is always at the same time a neutering and neutralization of the female sex. (40)

Though she is referring to theorists of the body, many of these names are the same whose theories extend into discussions of space, indeed a necessary correlation given their intertwined nature. Such a reminder as Grosz gives here therefore renders impossible the discussion of (for example) the novels of Don DeLillo and what the spaces therein have to say about a *universal* human experience, even one focused on the contemporary west or even the United States. Indeed, the introduction of bodily agency and freedom of movement into the equation immediately actualizes problems signaled by a range of feminist thinkers and cultural geographers regarding the necessary inclusion of not only gender but also sociopolitical categories such as class and race into such theories.[17] Doreen Massey's *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) is a good example of this, in which she critiques the (false) gender-neutral discussion of time-space compression in David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*

[17] While there are a great number of texts one could refer to on this, cf. Spain (1992), Irigaray (1993), Plumwood (2002) or Braidotti (2013).

(1989), and where she also draws attention to the question of socioeconomic status when it comes to the questions of mobility on which such theories are often founded:

> time-space compression needs differentiating socially. This is not just a moral or political point about inequality, although that would be sufficient reason to mention it; it is also a conceptual point [regarding] the power geometry of it all […]. For different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. (148-9)

Importantly, such critiques do not nor are they meant to claim that such an idea as time-space compression is incorrect at its base, but rather that they are often conceived of with some unacknowledged "universal condition" in mind that is generally not universal at all. Though the level to which thinkers such as Edward Casey and Jeff Malpas extend the implications of the concept of place is perhaps the closest one can get to defining a "universal" grounding for the possibility of experience, as will be explored presently, such considerations are therefore always taken into account in the conception of a project such as this, as well as constant awareness of the always singular and non-gender-neutral viewpoint from which emerges any fiction as well as any analysis such as the present work.

1.3 Drawing Contemporary Baselines: Casey and Malpas

The question of the capacity for embodied movement discussed via Merleau-Ponty above thus leads us towards contemporary understandings of place, a crucial point in that it is this more recent approach which I will argue is the unspoken foundation for the chronotope as a literary concept. This contemporary understanding of place has moved well beyond its most static definition as a specific geographical location within space, or even as a geographical location with particular human value attached to it (as explored in depth in Bachelard's classic 1958 work *The Poetics of Space*). The definition being worked towards is of place as an *event* comprised of the inextricable elements of space and time, which is precisely what the chronotope is within the realm of literature. Perhaps the most compelling arguments for an updated understanding of this human space-time experience (encompassed thus in the term *place*) begin with separate but highly correlative investigations by philosophers Edward Casey and Jeff Malpas. Of further interest is the way the two thinkers arrive at similar ontological conclusions through varying philosophical paths, since Casey's work is highly phenomenological in nature and demonstrates a deep engagement with continental philosophy,

whereas Malpas works from a more mixed approach of hermeneutics and phenomenology, engaging often with a variety of continental (mainly Heidegger), metaphysical (Strawson) and analytic philosophers (Donald Davidson). In what follows, the principal elements of their approaches to place will be presented as in dialogue with each other as well as with other interdisciplinary approaches, all in order to work towards a contemporary definition of place that will be essential in the subsequent discussion of literary places – of chronotopes – which are always complexly intertwined with both places of the real world and of representation (the imagination), and both of which spring from the nature of experience as place-bound in and of itself.

Though there had been prior texts exploring place from more sociologically and geographically-oriented perspectives – cf. Tuan (1977), Seamon and Mugerauer (1985) and Harvey (1989) – apart from the potential exception of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*,[18] Edward Casey's 1993 publication of *Getting Back into Place* (henceforth *GBP*) marked the first extended argument for focusing upon place as a significant philosophical concept which reunites time with a redefined space, specifically in the context of the embodied experience of the world. In reflecting upon this, Casey remarks that neither Bachelard nor Heidegger (to both of whom he owes a philosophical debt regarding his thinking on place) "adequately assessed the role of the human body in the experience of significant places" (*GBP* xv). In defining the goal of this first project, Casey writes:

> We need to get back into place so as to get out of (the binding and rebinding of) space and time. But this is not so simple a step as it may seem. Not even Bergson […] was sensitive to the special properties of place in contrast with space. Insensitive as well were other philosophers who should have known better, including even such otherwise resolute anti-Cartesians as Merleau-Ponty, James, Dewey, and Whitehead. Heidegger alone of postmodern thinkers has thematized place, albeit fragmentarily and inconsistently. (11)

Casey writes "not even Bergson" because it was Bergson who famously theorized the importance of the human time of duration – the heterogenous, non-linear time of the lived-human as outlined in *Time and Free Will* (1889). However, what Casey is pointing out is that this investigation into what may be called "lived time" on Bergson's part did not necessarily

[18] Besides the fact that he was writing in French, Lefebvre's influential work predates the philosophical use of the term "place" described in these pages. Regardless, although *The Production of Space* broaches issues of time and the body, his goal in that text is not to create a phenomenological or philosophical grounding for human experience, but rather to explore the next step and how this translates into complexities of social relations and power dynamics.

lead to an equal emphasis on space understood in the same manner, thus also continuing to emphasize the importance of time over space (evident especially in the reception of his work) rather than establish any sort of unity.

While his primary task is the reassertion of the importance of place, Casey nevertheless emphasizes the *equal* importance of place and time in the possibility of existence; there can be no vacuum, in that there can exist neither bodies nor events without a place-in-time for such. As he writes, "To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place - *to be implaced*, however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily" (13, original emphasis). In other words, "place serves as the *condition* of all existing things. This means that, far from being merely locatory or situational, place belongs to the very concept of existence. To be is to be bounded by place" (15, original emphasis). Such assertions have wide-reaching ontological implications, as they in effect represent a substantial paradigm shift in spatiotemporal perspective. Casey's "place" encompasses previous notions of space and time, taking their interrelation – or perhaps better intra-relation, as per Karen Barad[19] – as a natural given: "time and space, rather than existing before place and independently of each other, *both inhere in place to start with*" (288, original emphasis). Place is therefore that which, in regards to human experience, always encompasses space and time (though it is not reducible to their mere coexistence); in other words, space and time can be understood as abstractions which arise out of the act of cognitively extrapolating what is primary in implaced experience. Writing in 2007 in the different climate of this sense of place being more firmly established, Casey is even clearer on this fusion, writing that "place itself […] is indispensably spatio-temporal, ineluctably both at once" ("Boundary" 510).

As has been introduced above, experience is key to any formulation such as Casey's ground-up approach towards place. For example, Casey remarks that "Places, like bodies and

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[19] At the core of Karen Barad's fascinating and monumental project *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2006), which combines quantum theory of entanglement and philosophy, is an emphasis on "intra-action" over "interaction," as nothing exists independently in the first place: "To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future" (ix).

landscapes, are something we experience" (*GBP* 30). Following this, Casey continues on to assert that the primacy of place "is not metaphysical or even epistemological. It is phenomenological as well as ontological: places are primary in the order of description as in the order of being" (31). Significantly, as suggested earlier, if place is indeed understood as an ontological priority, then it follows that all other questions of the specificities of culture and society are informed by some prior ontological stance(s), explicit or not; it is for this very reason that these philosophical groundings for place are here examined before the more or less culturally-oriented writings on the subject by humanistic geographers. However, this is indeed a very nuanced issue, especially since maintaining artificial divides between fields traditionally held apart is by no means the aim of this project; as will be clear in the analysis of DeLillo's work throughout this thesis, the social element of the human and all its attendant complications is of course of primary significance as well, especially in the analysis of fiction.

On this question of the social, Casey in fact states explicitly that "there can be no unimplaced cultures […] they too are in place" (31). Further, place,

> already cultural as experienced, insinuates itself into a collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity. Place becomes social because it is already cultural. It is also, and for the same reason, historical […] We might even say that culture is the third dimension of places, affording them a deep historicity. (31-32)

Such a conceptualization, of culture as the "third dimension" of place, is productive in its identification of this extreme importance of social relations to being. While Casey quickly moves on from this suggestion in pursuit of the book's primary focus of reasserting place in the first place, so to speak, it does indeed open onto and validate the importance of an entire field of studies which focuses upon precisely this social element; a main goal of Henri Lefebvre's project in *The Production of Space*, for example, is precisely to reassert the necessary unity of the artificially separated types of space, including the social. It is, further, following Lefebvre that Edward Soja develops his "ontological trialectic of Spatiality-Historicality-Sociality" (*Thirdspace* 81), which at least on the surface aligns with Casey's suggestion. Moreover, the philosophical tendency to ascribe secondary importance to the social also speaks indirectly to the long development of a connection between asceticism and this sort of classically masculine thought from which originally stems the metaphysical "view from nowhere;" the idea of the ascetic is one which consists of denying the importance of both the social and the corporeal, and thus has correlations with a movement away from embodied being (as place-bound, including culture) to one of a "pure" being divorced from everything besides

the transcendent (God, Space and Time, etc.); this is a topic which will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter on DeLillo's *End Zone*, as that novel directly engages the traditional association of deserts and asceticism.

Though these questions of place, culture and history will be returned to at length, Casey's commentary therefore serves to underscore the way that place, conceived as such, underlies the human experience in a deeply significant way moving beyond the individual subject. This ability of place to provide the possibility for experience requires some further explication, especially since such ontological claims will extend by default into the complex realm whence spring works of the imagination, in this case literature. In light of the above discussion of Casey's principal arguments, Jeff Malpas's project which begins with *Place and Experience* (1999) demonstrates considerable parallels, though their conclusions are arrived at through differing methodologies. Both are at least partially informed by Heidegger, and in an exchange between the two Malpas points out a similarity in ontological conclusions reached specifically via the phenomenological method: "the sense of ontology that is relevant here [in *PE*] is undoubtedly one derived largely from Heidegger's phenomenological conception of the ontological project. For this reason too, I would say that both Casey's work and my own should indeed be viewed as phenomenological in orientation" ("Comparing" 233).

The crux of Malpas's argument is that place is that

> within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established – place is not founded on subjectivity, but is rather that on which subjectivity is founded. Thus one does not first have a subject that apprehends certain features of the world in terms of the idea of place; instead, *the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place*. The connection of subjectivity with place indicates […] the need to view subjectivity as tied to agency and embodied spatiality, and therefore as constituted in relation to a structure that extends beyond the subject to encompass a world of objects, events and persons. (*Place and Experience* 35, my emphasis)

This argument reflects Casey's claim that to exist at all is to be "implaced;" place as formulated here is a fundamental element of existence. Of course, the "place" that Malpas and Casey refer to is not that of its simplistic definition as a calculable location on a map, but rather the locus of a complex configuration of constantly altering elements grasped always through an embodied subject with capacity for movement; the philosophical support for these arguments regarding subjectivity, objectivity, agency and intersubjectivity are indeed what comprise the bulk of Malpas's full-length study.

While Malpas's emphasis here upon "structure" might be misleading in a perceived implication of fixity,[20] such structure should rather be understood as referring to the primacy of this always-temporary alignment of a variety of forces. For example, the first two occurrences of the word above could be productively replaced as such: "instead, the *possibility* of subjectivity is given in and through the *nature* of place," and the third occurrence regarding "the structure which extends beyond the subject" might be better phrased as informed by Alfred North Whitehead's term "prehensive unification," which implies the "bringing together of diverse processes (physical, biological, social, cultural)" (Harvey, *Justice* 263). The point is that this "structure" – or conglomeration of processes, physical bodies and events – is subject to constant change, as the varying elements comprising a place are ever-shifting according to their own varying and intertwined rhythms. Moreover, it is precisely the relationship with or experience of this conglomeration which is itself constitutive of being; as Malpas puts it:

> the claim is that we are the sort of thinking, remembering, experiencing creatures we are only in virtue of our active engagement in place; that the possibility of mental life is necessarily tied to such engagement, and so to the places in which we are so engaged; and that, when we come to give content to our concepts of ourselves and to the idea of our own self-identity, place and locality play a crucial role – our identities are, one can say, intricately and essentially place-bound. (*Place and Experience* 177)

In laying forth such arguments, what must be addressed at this point is the varying nature of places when it comes to talk of scale, as this is also relevant to the literary chronotope; upon considering one's formation of self in regards to place, as Malpas here suggests, obvious doubts may arise when it comes to this varying nature and size of places; how does a small room or house one considers their home-place relate to the enormous metropolis or rural countryside which that same (always embodied) person also calls home?

This problem leads Casey to return to *Getting Back into Place* in a second edition in 2009 and update the discussion with a talk of *region*, which he argues is a compilation of places grouped together for varying social or ecological reasons,[21] while Malpas talks alternatively via J.J. Gibson and Ulric Neisser of the "nesting" of places, in that one place can be nested within another – a room within a house within a city within a bioregion.[22] Rather than this

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[20] See the dialogue in the journal *Philosophy and Geography* (vol. 4 no. 2) between Casey and Malpas, in which they discuss this point, wherein Casey also takes issue with this suggestion of "structure" (231-238; 225–30).

[21] See pp. xxx – xxxv of the 2009 "Introduction" to *GBP*.

[22] See specifically Gibson's *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979) and Neisser's chapter in the collection *Autobiographical Memory* (1986).

being an issue, such nesting is for Malpas a testament to the complexity of place – and by extension self-identity – as it holds interesting correlations with the nesting of events in memory, and therefore with narrative. An important element here, as Gibson writes, is that the idea of nesting would seemingly imply a hierarchy, "except that this hierarchy is not categorical but full of transitions and overlaps" (quoted in *Place and Experience* 101); one might productively extend this discussion of "transitions and overlaps" in nesting through the notion of the rhizomatic, as per Deleuze and Guattari.[23] Further, regarding nesting, the idea also applies to memory and the mental process; as Malpas writes, "connections between attitudes, and between experiences and memories, are multiple, and so there is always more than one way to order those attitudes, experiences and memories – there is always more than one narrative within which they can be embedded" (*Place and Experience* 102).

Karen Barad, in her 2017 reading of the "temporal dis/junction" caused by the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings through the diffraction of time in quantum physics, suggests that the same "tracing of entanglements" mentioned earlier is the more compelling alternative to this problem of scalar distinction ("Troubling" 56, 63). As she rather poignantly puts it: "When the splitting of an atom, indeed, its tiny nucleus, destroys cities and remakes the geopolitical field on a global scale, how can anything like an ontological commitment to a line in the sand between 'micro' and 'macro' continue to hold sway on our political imaginaries?" (63). These considerations lead her to note that, as "entanglements call into question the geometrical notions of scale and proximity[,] topology, with its focus on issues of connectivity and boundary, becomes a more apt analytical tool" (63). Such suggestions are appropriate for this project, something further evidenced by Malpas's own later insistence on the practice of topology[24]. The lack of a hierarchy in the "nestings" mentioned by Gibson above indeed already represents at least a preliminary move away from the sort of geometrical attachment Barad here dismantles in favor of the more apt metaphor of entanglement. Such discussions begin to suggest the way in which both individuals and places (not to mention cultures) attain meaning (identity) through the non-arbitrary act of arranging the myriad *entangled* elements available into a cohesive narrative; the question of place-identity is thus so impossible to pin down because it depends on the always-differing narratives implicitly given to it by all the

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[23] Alexandra Kogl does precisely this in her chapter on "Rhizomes and the Politics of Fixity and Flow" in her 2008 study *Strange Places* (57-78).
[24] Cf. Malpas' chapter "Place and Hermeneutics: Towards a Topology of Understanding" in the *Inheriting Gadamer* collection (2016).

individuals (and their own entangled processes of self-in-world) who live in or even pass through that place; place understood as such points towards place as an *event*. As will also be seen in the discussion of the chronotope, this intrarelation between the non-hierarchically nested – or rather entangled – character of events, places, and memory in the process of creating a narrative of the self has considerable significance when it comes to literature, as Malpas signals by moving his discussion to Marcel Proust's famous exploration of these subjects in *Remembrance of Things Past* (1871-1922).

Before moving on, however, this last suggestion of place as an event is important to examine in more detail, as it has implications in the spatiotemporal study of fiction. The defining of place as constitutive of such an ever-shifting combination of elements, which are fluctuating further according to a great number of varying rhythms (natural, bodily, capitalistic, ritualistic, cosmological), has as its logical outcome this conception of place as an event. As Tim Cresswell writes in his 2004 *Place: A Short Introduction*:

> Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice. Place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence. (39)

Place, in other words, is in a constant state of *becoming*. Writing in 1994, Doreen Massey expresses a similar view, only using the term "moment" rather than "event":

> If one moves in from the satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one's head, then each "place" can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a meeting place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated *moments* in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (*Space, Place and Gender* 154-5, my emphasis).

While Massey perhaps confusingly refers to a "point of intersection," the emphasis on places as "articulated moments" implies that such points are only seen as such in the instant one's gaze is focused upon it, as a camera captures a moment in time; like the image of the picture, it by no means implies fixity. Indeed, several years later, Massey updates her terminology

explicitly to that of the event, writing of understanding places "not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events" (*For Space* 130). Massey's overall suggestion for this open, progressive sense of place is also useful in that it further clarifies what may be referred to as the complex unity of place, what Malpas implicitly means with the "structure" of place, or the way Harvey adapts Whitehead's "prehensive unification."

While in the pursuit of what Malpas and Casey are explicitly working towards in their philosophical project they are forced to leave largely undiscussed the "third dimension" of the social, this dimension is alternatively the explicit focus of a great number of thinkers, as Cresswell and Massey here represent. In this context, and in terms of this suggestion of place as event, a potential complication which arises from the sort of conception as articulated by these last two is related to the seeming *overly* fluctuating nature this attributes to the world commonly associated with the postmodern: life is pure flux, fragmentary, hyperreal, etc.[25] However, if one approaches the issue as does Henri Lefebvre in his posthumously published work *Rhythmanalysis* (1992), focusing the gaze explicitly on these varying rhythms mentioned above, the nuances of time as they are actually experienced (always in place, as place is always experienced in time) may in fact be approached. Indeed, this last project of Lefebvre's is a crucial addition to the overall consideration of space, place and time that has been worked towards in the preceding pages.

1.4 Towards Literature: Time and Memory in Implaced Experience

In *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre seems to find that key middle ground which lies between an entirely subjective experience of duration and the purely objective, abstract time of the linear clock, thus making it particularly relevant to the notion of place as outlined in the preceding pages. According to the book's English translator and Lefebvre scholar Stuart Elden, Lefebvre apparently first conceived his idea on rhythm in the 1920s, called then a "theory of moments," as a counter to the "dominant philosophy of Bergson" ("Rhythmanalysis" 4). Elden also signals Lefebvre's interest in Marcel Proust, who was instructive in his emphasis upon "loss and memory, recollection and repetition" (4); such elements contribute to Lefebvre's understanding of time, which even early on in its focus on the difference between the cyclical and the linear

[25] While there are many texts which pursue this line of thinking, two well-known examples would be Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) and Jameson's *Postmodernism* (1990).

therefore diverged from the traditional Marxist focus on the teleological progression of history. Rhythmanalysis as a method is based in principle on what is expressed in this difference between cyclical and linear time, though importantly it is not an idea divorced from the spatial. Indeed, as Elden writes, rhythmanalysis represents "a contribution to another of [Lefebvre's] lifelong projects, the attempt to get us both to think space and time *differently*, and to think them *together*" (3).

Lefebvre's thesis is that in the attempt to grasp the complex unity of the world, the only way to properly do so is through a shifting of the gaze to the varying temporal rhythms which comprise the event of place, as informed by Cresswell and Massey above. Lefebvre writes:

> Cyclical repetition and the linear repetitive separate out under analysis, but in reality interfere with one another constantly. The cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc. The linear would come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements, imposed structures. (*Rhythmanalysis* 18)

This sort of gaze therefore implies a dialectical approach to the world-in-becoming, which comprehends the different temporal (rhythmic) movements occurring wherever that gaze is focused. This is significant in the above-mentioned easing of the tension between an overly static place-world and one defined by postmodern flux, since any question of place (and one's experience therein) is always informed by these different and always varying rhythms. Concordantly, it is in part in this overall fluctuating shift in rhythms that one can hypothetically comprehend changes in place. Lefebvre's particular employment of the dialectical is useful here, although it is perhaps better articulated as "triadic analysis," designed to understand intra-actions between elements without falling into the trap of falsely elevating any of them to an *a priori* status; Lefebvre himself writes that this sort of analysis "links three terms that it leaves distinct, without fusing them into a synthesis" (22), thus distinguishing it from classical Hegelian/Marxist dialectics. Lefebvre and others have a particular fondness for the draw of the triad, as it opens onto possibilities other than either classic analysis (isolating elements of one object) or dual analysis (which draws conclusions through the setting up of binaries); in Lefebvre's case, at least, it is a gesture which therefore speaks to Barad's arguments in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* regarding entanglement, in that this triad points towards all the

possibilities which exist beyond the dual or the binary.[26] Further, such analytic lenses align with the sort of understanding of place which is discussed above as suggested by both philosophers and cultural geographers, and which is being driven towards in this leading up to the application of such ideas to the possible worlds of fictional literature.

Lefebvre's discussion of his rhythmanalysis project speaks to this literary application particularly in its focus on deriving meaning from the interrelationships between a variety of elements – in this case, between time, space, and energy. As he writes, "Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of (human) energy, there is rhythm" (25). Such a critical gaze therefore derives meaning from what Lefebvre would call alterations in rhythm, which he suggests through the contrast with eurythmia (when all is in harmony) and arrhythmia, with the cogent example that in our own bodies all is perceived as well until some rhythm (the functioning of an organ, for example) falls out of step: "when [rhythms] are discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state" (25); all this emerges, of course, in light of an intensely polyrhythmic world. The suggestion of pathology here is particularly relevant in the study of a body of literature whose impetus is often an attempt to explore (if not heal) any number of the various types of pathological states which may arise from a world commonly theorized with prefixes such as "hyper" or "super;"[27] Rowan Wilken, as an example, describes William Gibson's *oeuvre* as a "sustained and devastating series of literary pathology reports detailing the impact of technology on both urban and human form" (130). This sort of observation highlights that indeed the diagnosis of such pathologies – which are in a sense place-based, as Wilken's book explores[28] – is often what makes a certain form of fiction so compelling in its time; such significant considerations will thus be returned to repeatedly in the unfolding of my analysis of DeLillo's work.

It is of course the premise of an undertaking such as this dissertation that fiction holds the potential to both diagnose as well as potentially intervene in the myriad complications of existing today, especially in this period which is increasingly referred to self-reflexively as the

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[26] Lefebvre writes: "Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions. A dialectical relation (unity in opposition) thus acquires meaning and import, which is to say generality. One reaches, by this road as by others, the depths of the dialectic" (*Rhythmanalysis* 18)

[27] Cf. the writings of Paul Virilio (1995, 1997) or Marc Augé's argument for "supermodernity" (1995).

[28] This idea of place-based pathology has been developed with regards to the theatre stage as "geopathology" – see Chaudhuri (1997) for its theorization and Hernando-Real (2011) for an extended exercise in it.

Anthropocene and which is witnessing the rise of a critical apparatus which attempts to shift the gaze beyond an anthropocentric point of view.[29] It is for example a telling move that Malpas, whose investigation into place throughout the bulk of his study is rigorously methodological in terms of its philosophical orientation, turns to fiction to provide the final nail in the construction of his argument; as mentioned above, he looks for the most part to Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. This move suggests that, at a certain point in such research, it becomes obvious that approaching the way in which time and place are intricately tied-up in embodied experience is a considerable challenge to represent, so the turn to Proust in the difficult attempt to philosophically express this intimate relationship is thus a powerful testament to the potential for literature to explore such murky depths. Even further, in such a light, this reliance upon a text famously obsessed with *memory* and place becomes almost inevitable, since both human and place-identity are in fact deeply entangled with memory; memory is that crucial element which allows places to become entangled through time in meaning.

In his 2015 chapter "Place and Connection," Edward Relph discusses recent Nobel Prize winning research in neuroscience which affirms that it is precisely the loss of place-memory in Alzheimer's patients which causes them to lose their sense of self: "What neuroscientists call 'place cells' and 'grid cells' in the brain start to atrophy and sufferers cease to know where things are, where they are, how they got here and how they can get back to where they came from. They lose connection with the world" (177). In other words, as neuroscientist John Zeisel puts it, "Place is essential to memory; without a memory of place, people lose their sense of self" (quoted in Relph 177). Relph correctly identifies the importance of this research, which, beyond reinforcing the importance of place to self-identity through its negation in Alzheimer's patients, also emphasizes the non-fixity of such identities: "In short, the neural processes that connect us with places are comprehensive, flexible and adaptable" (178).[30] This scientifically supported flexibility and adaptability regarding these cells, which are specifically tied up in the process of implacement, are of considerable significance in undermining certain postmodern laments regarding the "placelessness" of contemporary

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[29] I refer here to the rise of such fields as object-oriented-ontology and a variety of New Materialisms; cf. Bennett (2010), Morton (2017) or Harman (2018).

[30] For more on the fascinating research into the way the brain has cells specifically tasked to different spatial tasks, see Moser and Moser, "Crystals of the Brain" (2011). For example, Moser and Moser identify, besides 'place' and 'grid' cells, 'head-direction cells' and 'border cells,' the latter which fire when the subject is "near the edge of the local environment" (69).

existence.[31] It is, of course, a telling sign that this term's originator was the same Edward Relph quoted above; even the most-cited thinker on placelessness has since revised his views on the topic.[32] Another implication of the study cited above is that, as has happened recently in other fields as well, (neuro)scientific research provides empirical backing for conclusions arrived at through wholly different paths; such correlations are steps in bridging the disciplinary divides that figures such as Elizabeth Grosz, Karen Barad and author Richard Powers lament,[33] and which seem to recently be under attack. A relevant example here is to turn to the work of Dylan Trigg, whose *The Memory of Place* (2012) is a rich phenomenological investigation into the same issues that Relph identifies above with respect to place and to memory, and therefore to time.

Trigg develops his argument that memory resides in places in the context of an emphasis upon the importance of the body as that which navigates between (and disrupts, in some traumatic instances) the divide between place as objective reality and place as subjective experience. Similarly, he argues for embodiment as also the fulcrum between the "dovetailing pair" of place and time:

> Indeed, it is only through materializing itself in place that the felt experience of time gains its powers. This experience has diverse manifestations, but the two most apparent factors are *movement* and *stasis*. Moving in place, be it from the car park to the elevator or from one planet to another, we experience time in and through place. The "in and through" motif here is essential. The movement of the body does not reconstitute itself with each new place to which it attends. Rather, moving through place means tracing an arc of time. For this reason, the felt temporal experience of a given day is inextricably bound with the movements of the body, such that the same day can diminish or expand in time according to the level of spatial activity. (*Memory* 7)

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[31] Fittingly, this is a theme often explored in literature through the trope of Alzheimer's disease. Beyond DeLillo's own *Falling Man* (2007), see also Kate Jennings (2003).
[32] For more insight into this evolution, contrast Relph's first book *Place and Placelessness* (1976) with his 2015 article "Place and Connection," in which he writes: "I do not doubt for a moment that […] displacement from these places because of urban renewal, war or environmental catastrophes is a profound psychological blow. Indeed there was a time when I wrote about the erosion of place by placeless forces of modernist uniformity and commercialism. But now I see little evidence of a widespread, amorphous process at work that has diminished placedness, rotted roots, and generally undermined society and geography" (182).
[33] Cf. Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside* (2001), pp. 28-29, or Richard Powers' discussion of interdisciplinarity in Burn (2008): "There truly are no independent disciplines that operate exclusive of any other—just people, acting out of very human hopes, fears, and desires. And fiction is uniquely privileged to place its camera at those imaginary boundaries between disciplines, to show the ways in which the turbulent currents generated by any mode of apprehending the world necessarily cascade into all other streams of thought" (171).

What is perhaps omitted here is the further potential for the "felt temporal experience of a given day" to alter with the rhythms of intensity of internal-time suggested in different ways by both Bergson and Lefebvre, which always add a further level of potential variation even within an otherwise parallel external spatial experience. Regardless, while Trigg's correct assessment as to the connection of place and time in embodied experience is not unprecedented (both Malpas and Casey argue similarly, among others), what this discussion leads to is significant. If the example of disturbances in familiar places (returning to a childhood home and seeing it destroyed or even completely altered by a different family's life therein, for example) make us aware of a "residual sediment" of place in our embodied self, as Trigg argues and as the research mentioned by Relph above suggests, then it follows that this "hints at another dimension of the body's relation to the environment: Place (and memory thereof) becomes profoundly constitutive of our sense of self" (11) – an argument which chimes with that of Malpas in particular. Following this, the fact of the embodied subject's constant movement through places, which "means tracing an arc of time" (7), therefore gives, as Trigg writes, the statement "we carry places with us" a "primordial significance greater than that indicated by habit alone. By carrying places with us, we open ourselves to a mode of embodiment that has less to do with habit and more to do with the *continuity of one's sense of self*" (11, my emphasis) Thus, Trigg reinforces a complex unity that this chapter has been working to demonstrate, in which self-identity depends on place (and vice versa, as seen earlier), memory likewise depends on place, while all (memory, place, and identity) depend on embodiment.

The result of all this is therefore of crucial significance when it comes the analysis of literature, as this dissertation demonstrates at length with regards to the work of Don DeLillo. Indeed, it is no surprise that Trigg at this point again mentions (along with Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*) Marcel Proust as one of the supreme examples of "this intimacy between embodiment and memory" (12). In works of fiction, this foundational intra-relationship (or structure, as Malpas would have it) of our existence regarding place and time (and the social) is therefore always implicated in the representation of meaning, with the necessary caveat that the extent to which an author or artist is sensitive to this underlying nature may vary. This is because while these elements – space and time – are technically separable in analysis, in reality all experience is comprised of some complex compilation thereof; it is indeed often in light of nuances in their relationship that these experiences take on particular meaning. It is for this reason that this project focuses on the particular sort of fictional places that authors like Don DeLillo return repeatedly to, namely expansive desert-like spaces and enclosed rooms, for it is

in the exploration of the relationship or dialogue between such literary places – such chronotopes – that significant thematic issues can be worked out. Indeed, it is the constantly-evolving elements of such a dialogue that Mikhail Bakhtin has in his sights in the formulation of the chronotope, as I will now discuss. Of course, the unique nature of the literary work as existing somewhere between the author, the reader, and its own permanence as a fixed object inevitably complicates the issue, but the point is that it is in the novel form's potential to explore within its pages any range of issues through its capacity to create and interweave fictional places and times that its particular – and potentially radical – power therefore lies. In order to proceed, it is thus essential to clearly delineate this unique potential represented by the creative production of (always intertwined) literary places and representations of time, especially given their inextricability from the subjectivities rendered artistically within a text.

Part 2: The Chronotope, or the Function of Literary Places in Fiction

For all the good work that has been done by an ever-growing number of intelligent critics, the chronotope remains a Gordian knot of ambiguities with no Alexander in sight.

Michael Holquist, "The Fugue of the Chronotope"

1.5 Bakhtin and the Origins of the Concept

The purpose of this section is to continue the preceding discussion of the implications of our inherent spatiotemporal orientation towards the world into a productive approach to literary analysis, concretely by providing a revised account of an idea originally proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin under the heading "chronotope." However, before attempting such a contemporary reconciliation it is necessary to elaborate on both the origins and the reception of Bakhtin's work in this regard, with the intention of dispelling any possible confusion which may arise from its different interpretations in order to then present my updated understanding of its origins and utility to literary analysis. This is necessary in part because Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, as with a great deal of his work, is one which has been applied rather widely since the translation and publication of his main texts into English in the early 1980s. While on the one hand some of the wide use it has been put to is a testament to its potential, on the other it is perhaps a detriment in that such adaptations which only apply the concept's basic definition as the "intertwining of time and space" can add to the confusion surrounding it. Further, such loose applications often demonstrate, for one, a failure to consider the influence of Bakhtin's sociopolitical context, therefore giving it a sort of universality that the very nature of the theory cautions against, as well as a related lack of attention to the rather significant differences between the concept as originally conceived in the 1930s and the concluding chapter amended on in 1973 near the end of Bakhtin's life. Further, Bakhtin's own theoretical shortcomings must be addressed, especially with relation to the body and the feminine, in order to emphasize just where a contemporary adaptation of the chronotopic gaze must diverge from its originator if it is to attain its full potential. With all this in mind, the goal of this section is to examine the chronotope in order to argue for its inherent complementarity with the place/time theorizations

of the first section, to reinforce this complementarity through concrete examples from DeLillo's own *oeuvre*, and to eventually establish the (updated) chronotope as part of a powerful critical apparatus for the study of literature, whose potency I will then demonstrate at length in the main bulk of the dissertation.

The first task therefore is to understand Bakhtin's original conception of the project, in terms of both the use to which he put it but also in the sociopolitical context of its formulation. Besides the implicit role it plays in his earlier *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), the idea is developed most clearly in the 1938 monograph "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics" (henceforth *FTC*), as well as in the essay "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism," the only remaining fragment of a longer text composed in roughly the same period.[34] It is in the *FTC* essay, published in English in 1981 in the collection *The Dialogic Imagination*, that the initial and clearest definitions are given in a brief two pages before he dives into a historical typology of the novel beginning two thousand years previous. Especially in light of that era's general continued adherence to the Cartesian or Newtonian notions of space and time discussed in the previous section (despite Bergson's attempts to the contrary), these initial pages begin to make it clear that the chronotope – "literally, 'time space'" in Greek (*FTC* 84) – is coined as a term at least partially separate from the then fresh "spacetime" of physics due to its particular relevance to (principally aesthetic) human perception.

At the start of the essay, the chronotope is defined by Bakhtin in its basic form as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). While his focus is explicitly on literature, with the signaling of an "intrinsic connectedness" of time and space there is then from the outset at least a surface parallel between this preliminary definition of the literary chronotope and the same interrelation of space and time in the human experience as outlined in the preceding section; a primary objective here is thus to critically examine the nature of this parallel, with the aim of defining and perhaps expanding its implications such that it becomes a critical apparatus all the more suited to the contemporary climate in terms of both fiction and criticism. As Bakhtin writes in 1938, "serious work on the study of space and time in art and literature has only just begun.

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[34] For more on the historical circumstances of this essay and on Bakhtin's life in general, see Michael Holquist's "Introduction" to Bakhtin's *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* (1986), pp. ix-xxiii.

Such work will in its further development eventually supplement, and perhaps substantially correct, the characteristics of novelistic chronotopes offered by us here" (85).

Continuing with the preliminary defining of the chronotope, Bakhtin clarifies the choice to adapt the term from physics to his purposes, writing that

> This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture. (84)

The "almost, but not entirely" parenthetical in fact contains a world of possibility within it, and while here at the outset of his essay Bakhtin limits his focus to the literary realm, his substantial 1973 additions to the essay do broach this subject further; this will be returned to at length. It is however striking that Don DeLillo's own career-long interest in the role of space and time in human experience which this thesis interrogates at length is capped (for now) by his return to Einstein's Theory of Relativity in his most recent novel *The Silence* (2020). While I will revisit this interesting (though not surprising) correlation in the dissertation's conclusion, what I wish to highlight from Bakhtin's passage above is the original objective of his study: the bulk of the analysis which follows these brief statements traces an arc through the history of Western literature, demonstrating that Bakhtin's primary preoccupation at this point is related to this "formally constitutive category of literature," specifically as it has shifted in the course of its development towards the novel as it stood in the first decades of the 20th century. The context of this initial emphasis, both upon a broadly sweeping historical gaze and on the chronotope as a formal category, has the potential to obscure the more nuanced applications to which it may be employed.

To be more specific, the bulk of Bakhtin's monograph is dedicated to the macrostructural chronotopes which he argues define a series of evolutionary stages of literature and the novel, surveying their broad characteristics without entering into excessive detail about any one text. A couple of these examples at the higher level of genre are helpful to shed a preliminary light on the function of the literary chronotope. Bakhtin distinguishes "three basic types of novels developed in ancient times," and their three corresponding ways for "artistically fixing time and space" (86): the adventure novel of ordeal, the adventure novel of everyday

life, and what he calls “ancient biography” (130). While not necessary to go into the details of the Russian thinker’s extended argument for these genre-defining chronotopes, to use one as an example, the first of these three is the plot of the ancient Greek romance. In this type of story, “The first meeting of hero and heroine and the sudden flareup of their passion for each other is the starting point for plot movement; the end point of plot movement is their successful union in marriage. All action in the novel unfolds between these two points” (89). Although the entire novel unfolds between these two points, however, in terms of effect upon the characters – and thus in terms of historical time – the in-between moments, what Bakhtin calls the “hiatus,” fail to have any effect: “the hiatus that appears between these two strictly adjacent biographical moments […] is not contained in the biographical time-sequence, it lies outside biographical time; it changes nothing in the life of the heroes, and introduces nothing into their life. It is, precisely, an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time” (89-90). This type of plot structure, which in fact survived in some form into the “Baroque novel” of the 17th and 18th centuries, is as Bakhtin points out what Voltaire ironizes in his *Candide*, in which the French writer mimics the structure of a series of events occurring between the moment of meeting of the two lovers and their eventual consummation of the union but with the addition of biographical time being active, with the result that the lovers are of old age by the time they finally come together (90-91).

Useful for our purposes here, what Bakhtin indicates about this particular sense of adventure time is that it needs a particular sort of representational space to work, in this case “an *abstract* expanse of space” (99). Where time is effectively absent, space takes its place – proximity and distance become the primary determinants of the course events take. In this sense, the space of such a story must be expansive, but the resulting “size and diversity [of space] is utterly abstract. For a shipwreck one must have a sea, but which particular sea (in the geographical and historical sense) makes no difference at all” (100). Also important is how Bakhtin demonstrates, moreover, that this particular arrangement of time and space – this chronotope – has a particular semiotic association as well, which all chronotopes do: “in this chronotope all initiative and power belong to chance” (100). The passivity of the characters and their ability to “endure” with “identity absolutely unchanged” is, according to Bakhtin, of great significance, as it demonstrates the “way the Greek romance reveals its strong ties with a *folklore that predates class distinctions*” (105, original emphasis). In a world in which “there is no potential for evolution, for growth, for change” (110), what is highlighted is this essential kernel of the folkloric human, of the importance given to being able to maintain a continuity

of self in the face of chance. In this sense then, what Bakhtin's analysis of this particular chronotope opens onto is a reading of the genre's relationship to its historical moment, and what the particular (chronotopic) forms its texts take reveals about the general concerns of the time.

A second useful example is Bakhtin's discussion of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, situated within the appearance "toward the end of the Middle Ages" of texts "structured as a 'vision'" (155). Mentioning also de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Bakhtin connects the three in their "acute feeling for the epoch's contradictions [and] a feeling for the end of an epoch" (156); thus, a particular chronotope points to a particular sociopolitical situation in the world of its creation. Bakhtin shows how Dante realizes a "stretching out of the world – a historical world, in essence – along a vertical axis" (157): "The temporal logic of this vertical world consists in the sheer simultaneity of all that occurs […]. Everything that on earth is divided by time, here, in this verticality, coalesces into eternity, into pure simultaneous coexistence" (157). In Bakhtin's chronotopic reading, Dante's deep understanding of "both progressive and reactionary forces of historical development" leads him to populate this vertical world with characters who "are profoundly historical," creating a dramatic situation: "the images and ideas that fill this vertical world are in their turn filled with a powerful desire to escape this world, to set out along the historically productive horizontal" (157). The "extraordinary tension" which results is thus the "result of a struggle between living historical time and the extratemporal other-worldly ideal," and the "artistic resolution" of this struggle is what "provides Dante's work with its extraordinary power to express its epoch, or more precisely, the boundary line *between* two epochs" (158). In this sense, this example of Dante is helpful in the way it reinforces the conception that chronotopic analysis is a method which unveils the structural elements of a text in a way crucial to understanding its broader relevance to its historical moment,[35] here highlighting the transition the medieval world of Europe was beginning to undergo in terms of cosmological perspective.

These two brief examples were selected to give a glimpse, for one, of how Bakhtin structured his discussion as a tracing of the historical progression towards the novel, which itself constitutes a genre at the broadest level. Moreover, this vision – which reads the

[35] Similarly to Bakhtin, Eric Auerbach's contemporaneous study *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* (1929) highlights this same aspect of the Italian poet, arguing for Dante as the first figure to separate the image of the human from the abstract, legendary type of moral figure to a living character bound to their historical moment.

chronotopes that artists turn to as integral to their attempts to represent the world of their day – is one of the arguments for the importance of a chronotopic approach to literature today, as it allows a perceptive eye to track representational shifts which might not otherwise be recognizable. As I will develop in my discussion of DeLillo, this is itself often due to the fact that the human perception of time and space can itself undergo change in shifting historical circumstances, and as one of the most fundamental aspects of human experience (as outlined in the previous section) tracing its movement as it emerges in art is therefore of considerable importance in any attempt to accurately identify broader shifts in the sociopolitical climate. Bakhtin's project was precisely this, although it is necessary to recognize the Russian's own particular situation, which is likely what caused him to forego a long discussion of the bigger genres of epic and drama for the lesser known works he discusses throughout the *FTC* essay.[36]

1.6 The Chronotope in its Sociopolitical and Dialogical Contexts

In considering the objective Bakhtin had behind his composition of this essay in the 1930s, it is important to highlight that there was a definite political context for this attempt to define the novel, both in this essay as well as in his *Rabelais and the World* (1984), which was composed in the same period. As Michael Holquist points out in his "Prologue" to the latter work, Bakhtin's goal to demonstrate "the peculiarity of the novel among other literary genres" had "a particular urgency in the 1930s because the novel had become the primary focus of the government's efforts to bring Soviet intellectual institutions into line," eventually leading to an insistence on "the stylistic unity of the Socialist Realist novel: one leader, one party, one aesthetic" (xvii). Similarly, in his 2007 monograph on the Russian thinker, Graham Pechey discusses at length Bakhtin's sociopolitical climate in regards to the composition of both *FTC* and "Discourse in the Novel" (1935), specifically with regards to both the Soviet regime of the period – with its rejection of modernism in the pursuit of socialist realism – as well as to a certain "hidden polemic": the chronotope essay is "a strategic move enabling Bakhtin to engage on common ground with the strongest body of Marxist writing on the novel then available: that

[36] Bakhtin's only discussion of these genres in the chronotope monograph is to indicate that, just as "the Greek saw a trace of mythological time" in every aspect of the natural world, so "Historical time was […] concreted and localized – in epic and tragedy it was tightly interwoven with mythological time" (104).

which bears the signature of Georg Lukács" (85)[37]. Given Lukács's popular emphasis of the time in *The Theory of the Novel* (1920) on the novelistic genre as seeking the totality of the epic form – as defined by "the dialectic between the urge for totality and man's alienated situation" in the post-Hellenic Western world (de Man 530) – Bakhtin's approach to this question of a historical poetics, which similarly to Lukács occupied a central position in his own thinking, must necessarily be read in light of the Hungarian thinker's writings on the novel. As is clear from a comparison of their respective approaches, where the early Lukács saw a "literary history composed [of] an ordered and univocal past whose meaning and value were fixed by the wider history that determined it" (Livingstone et al. 13), Bakhtin's overall method implied the opposite, focusing on a heterogeneity of voices and perspectives and the process of dialogic change which accompanies it. As Pechey signals, *FTC* counters Lukács's elevation of the epic, which to Bakhtin consists of an old and singular chronotope unreceptive to change, "by insisting that the novel is nothing if not always chronotopically *diverse*. To assimilate the novel to epic narration is to confine it within a single chronotope" (86). This context is relevant because it helps explain why Bakhtin devotes so much energy in the 1938 essay to the development of a long history of literature which elevates the influence of populism and which subverts the closed epic form along every step of the way.

Again, the focus discussed briefly above on the evolution of the novel from the premodern period through a study of chronotopes that Bakhtin provides is itself compelling, especially in the way it emphasizes the necessary relationship of a type of genre to its historical moment and the way tracing shifts in chronotopic emphasis therefore speaks to societal change more broadly construed. For example, Bakhtin also writes in the introductory pages to the essay that the novelistic chronotope defines both genres and the image of the human, which is "intrinsically chronotopic" (*FTC* 85). Further, historically speaking,

> These generic forms, at first productive, were then reinforced by tradition; in their subsequent development they continued stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations. This explains the simultaneous existence in literature of phenomena taken from widely separate periods of time, which greatly complicates the historico-literary process. (85)

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[37] See Pechey's chapter "Chronotopicity and Conceptuality" in its entirety for an in-depth discussion of this "hidden polemic" operating in Bakhtin's writing of the period regarding both Georg Lukács and Maxim Gorky, pp. 82-104.

This commentary is further useful here in that it refers indirectly to what is indeed a core element of Bakhtin's related theorizing on both discourse and the novel, which is the key role of *dialogue* (here between chronotopes of various time-periods) in the production of meaning. This is to be understood in the wider sense that dialogue obtains in Bakhtin's thought, which many scholars have elaborated upon at length (Michael Holquist refers to Bakhtin's general philosophy as "dialogism")[38]; it is indeed difficult to discuss any element of Bakhtin's thought in isolation, since it is all interrelated within the purview of his overall theoretical standpoint. It is therefore useful to examine briefly this sense of the dialogic, for it ties in directly to Bakhtin's insistence on language and being as *events*, which will have obvious correlations with the formulation of place-as-event discussed in the previous section.

Dialogue (linguistic, literary, artistic) in Bakhtin's writing is elevated almost to what Barad signals with her emphasis on entanglement, in that language is living, and complexly intertwined in a way which – as suggested by this "simultaneous existence in literature of phenomena taken from widely separate periods of time" (85) – defies linear time:

> Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse […] toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. ("Discourse" 292)

Further:

> Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages." (291)

In such a view there is, moreover, a constant tension between centripetal forces, which tend towards a unitary discourse of "one language of truth" – Bakhtin mentions "Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church" (271) – and centrifugal forces, which are those "uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification" (272). Ken Hirschkop argues that Bakhtin's elevation of populism in his development of the "dialogic" ignores larger structural "unevennesses," such as those represented by technologies

[38] The obvious text to see for this being Holquist's *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (1990).

and political realities, with relevant examples being the printing press and television as well as who controls these technologies (192). Hirschkop's intervention in pointing out Bakhtin's potential over-emphasis on the populist voice (associated with these centrifugal forces of "decentralization and disunification") is useful to keep in mind, as well as is his observation that though the novel incorporates a variety of social discourses it is still not a "dialogue" in that its author is fixing it in a certain way and has no direct interlocutor. However, such commentary in one sense misses the point that even though there are of course such one-sided discourses which are necessarily subject to the dynamics of power (a state-controlled television broadcast is a good example), an extrapolation from the argument inherent in Bakhtin's "Discourse" essay would be that even in the case of a person watching this one-sided state broadcast, her reception and subsequent utterances (presumably colored by said broadcast) are still part of her unique event of existence, and thus have dialogic force in continuing to shape discourse; responding to Hirschkop's critique then, an updated understanding of the dialogic would merely incorporate the differences in dynamics of power as well as the uneven spread of influence of utterances of different sources in its broader conception of dialogue. In fact, in terms of these centrifugal and centripetal forces, Bakhtin argues that the tension between them is particularly representable in the form of the novel; the main goal of the essay in which he writes this is of course to demonstrate that this particular characteristic of language reaches a new level with the advent of novelistic prose. Moreover, this discussion of language connects to *FTC's* discussion of generic forms in that Bakhtin also rightly emphasizes that literary chronotopes are equally subject to this broad sense of dialogue; this is a point important to this overall analysis and which I will therefore return to subsequently.

Firstly, though, it is important to stress that, at the broadest level, Bakhtin's philosophical stance is that human existence is best referred to, as he himself puts it, as "the ongoing event of Being" (*Toward a Philosophy* 2). Further, as Holquist points out in his 1990 monograph on Bakhtin, this ongoing event of being is always one defined by the relationship of self to other, an "event that is shared, […] always *co-being*" (*Dialogism* 24, my emphasis). Existence itself is thus dialogic:

> Existence is *sobytie sobytiya*, the event of co-being; it is a vast web of interconnections each and all of which are linked as participants in an event whose totality is so immense that no single one of us can ever know it. That event manifests itself in the form of a constant, ceaseless creation and exchange of meaning. (40)

Though Holquist perhaps identifies a "totality" where there can be none, and though he emphasizes that this sort of philosophical outlook, which holds for "a necessary multiplicity in human perception" (21), is an epistemological one resulting from Bakhtin's original interest in linguistics, its implications arguably extend further; this is a solid example of an epistemology associated with an ontological notion of process or becoming. This emphasis on ontologies of process or becoming is another which, as I will demonstrate over the course of the thesis, makes this approach particularly relevant to the work of Don DeLillo, as it is precisely questions of competing ontologies which the American writer often explores. Further, the "vast web of interconnections" comprising the event of being that Holquist refers to above is language very similar to that used by geographically-minded thinkers such as Doreen Massey or Edward Casey in their efforts to define place. Again, this correlation is natural in light of the emphasis that such ontologies put on the process of being as placed or implaced, a connection which I argue Bakhtin surely apprehended, as it explains his impulse to conceptualize the chronotope in the first place – he of course did not take the investigation so far specifically into the realm of what is now termed "place," writing as he was in the 1930s. However, even in this initial definition this important correlation presents itself:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (*FTC* 84)

To reiterate, I argue that a crucial missing link in the chronotope's theorization is in the extrapolation that Bakhtin himself does not make at this point, which is that this artistic fusion of indicators of space and time is a response to (implaced) experience itself; such aesthetic tactics can convey semiotic value unique to art *as a result of* their origin in the conception of place developed at length in the preceding section – place as providing the possibility for the showing-forth of the world. This is a key point, and is moreover where the "Concluding Remarks" that Bakhtin amended on to the *FTC* essay in 1973 come into play; these additional provide, for one, further examples of the chronotope behind the historical macro-structures mentioned earlier, as well as represent an updated conceptual standpoint on Bakhtin's part.

1.7 The 'Concluding Remarks' and Expanding Chronotopic Possibilities

Whereas the original essay stops after his discussion of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1534)*,* Bakhtin's addition thirty-five years later of the ten final pages of the *FTC* essay greatly expands the scope of the original concept of chronotope, and is probably that which prompts scholars such as Bart Kuenen to refer to its "the polysemic nature" ("Chronotopic Imagination" 35). For one, it indicates that the (chronotopic) gaze does not only have to be fixed upon the generic-level examples that Bakhtin defines at length in the original bulk of the essay, such as those different types of ancient "adventure novels" of the Greek period, Dante's vertical chronotope, and that of Rabelaisian folklore.[39] In this final section, Bakhtin shifts gears and discusses the possibility for "chronotopic values [of] different degree and scope" (243), thus presenting through the delineation of several "minor" chronotopes the important possibility for their existence on a variety of levels *within one text*. This discussion brings the concept closer to the contemporary moment, since the major genre-defining examples Bakhtin originally gives are, although historically important, not as generally relevant to today's literature given the relative ubiquity of the broader novelistic chronotope when it comes to prose fiction today. In contrast to these, Bakhtin presents a series of five more recent, minor chronotopes as examples, namely: that of the road, the Gothic castle, parlors and salons (meeting spaces), the provincial town, and the threshold (243-250). Rather than chronotopes operating at the level of genre, these are more particular spaces within a novel that serve a function within the text, and as will be discussed shortly can coincide in the same text with other such "minor" chronotopes, even existing on different levels with one nested within the other. The examples of the Gothic castle and parlors are useful in further highlighting the relationship of a chronotope to its historical moment.

The Gothic genre, for example, "is saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense of the word, that is, the time of the historical past," and its combination of feudal associations, "the traces of centuries and generations […] arranged in it in visible form," and its animating legends and traditions give "rise to the specific kind of narrative inherent in castles that is then worked out in Gothic novels" (245-6). Thus the typical Gothic narrative is expressed *through* labyrinthine spaces and corresponding temporal confusions in which the past and present are mixed, a narrative strategy which makes more

[39] See pp. 86-242 of *FTC* for the full discussion.

sense when considered in light of the genre's context as a response to the Enlightenment's paradigm-shifting explanations of the world's mysteries through rational thought. Thus, as Manuel Aguirre argues, in the emergence of the Gothic all the world's mystery gets condensed into this particular sort of nostalgic literary space; discussing Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, ostensibly the first Gothic novel, Aguirre writes that the castle of "Otranto is the final *terra incognita* left in a universe of rational order" (93).

Equally informative is the salon or parlor chronotope, which Bakhtin identifies as marking a turning point in Western society, and which he describes with reference to the work of Stendhal and Balzac. In these texts, he writes, such literary spaces achieve their

> full significance as the place[s] where the major spatial and temporal sequences of the novel intersect. From a narrative and compositional point of view, this is the place where encounters occur (no longer emphasizing their specifically random nature as did meetings 'on the road' or 'in an alien world'). In salons and parlors the webs of intrigue are spun, denouements occur and finally—this is where *dialogues* happen, something that acquires extraordinary importance in the novel, revealing the character, 'ideas' and 'passions' of the heroes. (246)

As Bakhtin points out, this new use of the salon space, which importantly in these novels therefore become intimately associated with the *possibility* for such dialogues, is specifically tied to the sociohistorical situation contemporary to the texts' production; in the "parlors and salons of the Restoration and July Monarchy" one finds "the barometer of political and business life," as it is where

> political, business, social, literary reputations are made and destroyed […]; here in their full array (that is, brought together in one place at one time) are all the gradations of the new social hierarchy; and here, finally, there unfold forms that are concrete and visible, the supreme power of life's new king – money. (247)

Thus the Gothic castle and the salon as literary chronotopes are only possible (only have such representational meaning) due to external sociohistorical circumstance; the Gothic genre emerges at the threshold of the final shift in socioeconomic order away from feudalism and all that entails, while the salons/parlors emerge as part of the birthing process of what Žižek refers to as today's "virtual Monster/Master (Capital)" (*Absolute* 40). As such, they are useful as further examples of the way shifts in the sociopolitical order of a society are registered within the domain of fictional representation.

Two of the other examples Bakhtin gives for these minor chronotopes provide an alternative to the more historically contingent examples of salons and Gothic castles, specifically into the way certain spaces remain more or less constant in terms of representational importance – though of course the meaning imbued into such chronotopes can and should be seen to have shifts in nuance over time as well. I refer specifically to the chronotopes of "the road" and "the threshold," which are worth briefly examining for two related reasons: for one, their importance across time speaks to my claim that the literary chronotope emerges from the actualities of implaced experience, seeing as they both originate in rather primordial types of spatiotemporal experience: secondly, when considered in this light, this prehistoric origin explains their continued relevance into novels of the present moment, including those of Don DeLillo. Indeed, as chronotopes (and even the imagination more generally[40]) are born out of the human experience of place, which though grounded in the biological fact of existence can always be socially influenced, such foundational chronotopes as *the road* (or the path, in earlier times) and *the threshold* are particularly useful in taking the pulse of a particular moment by examining how are they put to use by artists working in different periods.

Bakhtin discusses the chronotope of the threshold as one which is most often associated with moments of crisis or "breaks in a life," and which is always "metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly" (248). My argument is that this symbolic significance of the threshold is almost certainly related to the transitional nature of the physical threshold itself, referring as it does to the point of passage from one sort of place to another; one thinks of the shift in perception undergone in the transition from a field to a dense forest, from a mountainside to a cave, or from a street to an apartment. Significantly – especially regarding my general argument that literary places or chronotopes (and the reader's perception thereof) always emerge from implaced, embodied experience of the real world – this chronotope of the threshold is another item which recent scientific research appears to support. Studies in experimental psychology demonstrate that humans experience a "location-updating effect," or in other words a traceable shift in cognition (a short-term memory dump), when they pass through a physical threshold (an "event boundary") such as a doorway (Radvansky et al.

[40] While this is not an argument to be developed at length here, see also Keunen's book-length attempt to resituate the chronotope as a theory of the imagination: *Time and Imagination: Chronotopes in Western Narrative Culture* (2011)

1632); this is the source of the well-known sensation of entering a room only to forget what you planned on doing there. Thus, the *metaphorical* significance of the threshold is intimately tied to a *real* phenomenon of spatial cognition, as when we transition to a new space we really do leave something behind in preparation for the upcoming experience of this next space. As Bakhtin demonstrates through his discussion of Dostoevsky, such a transitional space is therefore a natural one through which an author may funnel the representation of important (transitional) moments in a character's life:

> In Dostoevsky, for example, the threshold and related chronotopes—those of the staircase, the front hall and corridor, as well as the chronotopes of the street and square that extend those spaces into the open air— are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man. In this chronotope, time is essentially instantaneous – it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time. (248)

To be sure, such a chronotope – whose temporal value is "as if it has no duration" – is more obvious when it appears in the midst of a novel dominated by the linearity of "biographical time" he refers to – this linearity was of course complicated greatly by modernist literature and all that has come in its wake. However, as the novel as a genre evolved towards its current multiplicitous form, the apparently primordial relevance of the threshold as a transitional space which the above research supports ensured its continued literary existence in a variety of forms, just adapted to whatever was required in the moment. For an example cogent to this thesis, Robert Kohn argues that DeLillo's third novel, *Great Jones Street* (1973), lives almost entirely within this threshold chronotope; his main argument is that there is "a temporal vagueness and a narrowing of space in *Great Jones Street* that ontologically connects to Bakhtin as well as to Buddhism" (207). While Kohn's analysis is overall more focused on this connection with Buddhism, the argument that DeLillo's third novel represents a significant extension of this threshold chronotope to include almost the entire novel does hold up under closer examination. As he points out, there are a large number of references to time, especially repeated mentions of "timelessness" and how "each day passed, detached from time" (DeLillo, *GJS* 54). However, although Kohn's combined argument that Bucky's retreat parallels that of Tibetan yogi Milarepa and that the novel reflects Bakhtin's philosophy of heteroglossia in language is valuable, there is more to be read into this extended exercise in the threshold chronotope. As a matter of fact, while DeLillo's first two novels – *Americana* (1971) and especially *End Zone* (1972) – will be discussed elsewhere, this threshold chronotope as embodied in the room which

Bucky Wunderlick retreats to in this early novel is a useful introduction to DeLillo's career-long development of the themes he wishes to address through the imbuing of particular places with semantic value – through the chronotope – and is thus useful to examine in some detail.

1.8 On the Threshold: DeLillo's *Great Jones Street*

The core structure of the novel is that the protagonist, Bucky, retreats from his life of rock star fame and the public spotlight to a single room apartment on New York's Great Jones Street, and he does so as part of his seeking a new form of being. What predicates Bucky's removal from the public eye is his suggestion that "it's possible the culture had reached its limit, a point of severe tension" (3), and thus his retreat is ostensibly in search of the way beyond this limit; as he says, "either I'd return with a new language for them to speak or they'd seek a divine silence attendant to my own" (5). Though the idea of the culture as having reached its "limit" is here transmitted linguistically ("a new language"), it is proven throughout the novel to refer to wider existential limits, in both an epistemological and an ontological sense, as suggested by the dichotomy between the options of a "new language" or "divine silence." This is a tension which comes to a head in the novel's closing, in which Bucky is administered a drug which relieves him of his language faculty, thus provoking a scene of transcendent realization within the profane everyday which DeLillo is so known for.[41] What Bucky represents in this sense is an individual trying to transcend the limitations of the American (male) subject in the early 1970s, trying to pass from one form of being to another. Read in this light, such a transitional passage as occurring in a threshold chronotope, which in this case is the one room apartment he retreats to, is no surprise. The threshold is indeed often used metaphorically to represent the limen, in the anthropological sense of the liminal state which occurs in the transition from one state of being and another.[42] Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz has discussed this liminal sort of space as well, as the "in-between," writing: "The space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural, and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the

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[41] See pages 244-249.

[42] I refer here to the work especially of Victor Turner, such as *The Ritual Process* (1989), which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter.

conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity" (*Architecture* 92). What I will briefly examine is the way DeLillo matches this emphasis on becoming and "openness to futurity" which Grosz here signals in a way which is uniquely available to the medium of fictional representation.

Here in *Great Jones Street*, the extended nature of this transitional stage – this liminal passage – is actually represented in great part *through* the space Bucky resides in, in that the room as a chronotope becomes inextricably intertwined with Bucky himself, or rather the space and the character mesh in such a way as to confound intentions of discovering which way the influence runs. This merging of character and threshold space is integral to the argument that the room's chronotopic value is as a type of threshold, thoroughly tied up with Bucky's own transitional project. This association of character to space moreover fulfills the double purpose of serving as an ideal introduction to DeLillo's strong sense of the representational importance of the spaces his characters inhabit, as his noted affinity for portraying "men in small rooms" is something which recurs throughout his career,[43] and which will be further placed in dialogue with his desert spaces throughout the course of this dissertation.

From the outset, *Great Jones Street* troubles the distinction between the character and the space:

> I went to the room in Great Jones Street, a small crooked room, cold as a penny, looking out on warehouses, trucks and rubble. There was snow on the window ledge. Some rags and an unloved ruffled shirt of mine had been stuffed into places where the window frame was warped and cold air entered. […] Later I shaved, cutting myself badly. It was strange watching the long fold of blood appear at my throat, collecting along the length of the gash, then starting to flow in an uneven pattern. Not a bad color. Room could do with a coat. (6)

Beyond the initial confounding of Bucky's body and the room by the use of his shirt to keep the place warm, the act of cutting himself shaving introduces blood into the equation, representative as it is of (human) life. The final sentence, "room could do with a coat," is then intentionally vague, potentially meaning the room could do with a coat of red paint, but also possibly meaning it could do with a coat of blood, or even with a coat for warmth, referring back to the cold mentioned a few sentences prior as if the room were human. This argument for the room as a transitional space is furthered into the neighborhood in which the apartment

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[43] In one interview, for example, DeLillo clarifies this tendency: "In my work a man alone in a room may simply be a way to present a highly concentrated sense of character, an individual, in his essential isolation" ("A Conversation" n.p.).

is itself located. As if in dialogue with the earlier mention of a culture "reach[ing] its limit," as well as the eschatological statement on Bucky's part that he "was interested in endings, in how to survive a dead idea" (5), the description of the decaying neighborhood around the apartment seem to describe a place reaching its own limit of deterioration. However, the narrator writes, "it wasn't a final squalor. Some streets in their decline possess a kind of redemptive tenor, the suggestion of new forms about to evolve, and Great Jones was one of these, hovering on the edge of self-revelation" (18-19). Thus the transitional space of the room is expanded to the entire neighborhood, suggestive as it is of "new forms about to evolve," which is precisely what both Bucky and the Happy Valley Farm Commune group of the novel are seeking in their different ways. Moreover, the combination of the above with Bucky's self-proclaimed interest "in endings" is reminiscent of Bakhtin's discussion of the "vision" works of the late Middle Ages such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*; Bucky and his room suggest being poised at the limit of a wider transition in terms of epoch. Further reflected in details which emphasize the liminal, such as Bucky's decision to move "the bed to the center of the room" because "Sleep seemed more possible [t]here" (38), this sense of change as referring to epochal change is reflected in a body of writing which pinpoints the period around the time of DeLillo's 1973 publication of this novel as one of societal (economic, political, cultural) transition in the United States.[44]

As Bucky is engaged in his mission of solitude, which is constantly interrupted by those from the outside – from the public sphere[45] – he is targeted by this urban group which ironically calls itself the Happy Valley Farm Commune, who perhaps in their very name demonstrate the limits of representation which language has seemingly come to in this novel as, despite their moniker, they live "on the Lower East Side" (17) of Manhattan. According to Opel, Bucky's romantic partner and the woman to whom the apartment actually belongs, the group is attracted to Bucky due to the fact that:

> They think you exemplify some old idea of men alone with the land. You stepped out of your legend to pursue personal freedom. There is no freedom, according to them, without privacy. […]. Revolutionary solitude. Turn inward one and all. Isolate yourself mentally, spiritually and physically, on and on, world without end. (59)

[44] I refer to work including that of David Harvey (1989) and Franco Berardi (2011); this is a topic I will not elaborate on for now because I will return to it in-depth in the context of Chapter 3.

[45] I owe the suggestion of the public versus private sphere in *GJS* to a talk delivered by Simon Pritchard at the "Inhabiting the Threshold" Conference in Madrid (2018).

The comparison of Bucky and his project of inward solitude, which is intimately tied to the space of the room and the experience of the time he has there, is here compared to "some old idea of men alone with the land," which suggests both the ascetic alone in the desert and the frontier of American nostalgia. The turning inward to a "world without end" is in fact reminiscent of the writings of Teresa of Ávila, which I connect in the following chapter on *End Zone* to the long line of ascetic thought born in the desert in the first centuries of the common era. In this sense, a parallel is drawn between Bucky's retreat to the room and that of the ascetic, although there is a crucial distinction to be made between the two. Whereas the ascetic has her sights set on a transition to the transcendence of a world beyond the tangible one, Bucky's is one which is more aimed at its opposite – the immanent.

As will be discussed at various points throughout the thesis, DeLillo often balances the drive towards the transcendent with that towards the immanent, for though lying on apparently opposing poles both arguably stem from the same initial impulse. An important part of this for DeLillo is often an emphasis on embodiment, as the embodied and embedded nature of human life is often what the ascetic must deny in the quest for transcendence. Bucky, despite his inward retreat, is (when alone) unable to deny the body nor the effects of space and time, only to pay attention to the fluctuations of these supposedly stable categories. In one example, the question of embodiment is expressed when a party occurs literally *around* Bucky in the apartment, as he stays sitting in the armchair for the entire duration – itself a scaled-down example of Bucky's retreat from society to the single room apartment: "A tall pale girl stood near my chair. Her red hair was in pigtails and she wore paint-streaked jeans and a T-shirt with a hole in the middle. I leaned over and touched her arm. Therefore I am" (76). Here the implication is a replacement of the English translation of Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am," substituting it with the implied "I touch, therefore I am." Another example from this party is more explicit in elevating the body to the place of the transcendent:

> I thought of all the inner organs in the room, considered apart from the people they belonged to. For that moment of thought we seemed a convocation of martyrs, visible behind our skin. The room was a cell in a mystical painting, full of divine kidneys, lungs aloft in smoke, entrails gleaming, bladders simmering in painless fire. This was a madman's truth, to paint us as sacs and flaming lariats, nearly godly in our light, perishable but never ending. I watched the pale girl touch her voluptuous navel. One by one, repacked in sallow cases, we all resumed our breathing. (79)

Similarly to this focus on the body, here presented in a way which conflates the grotesque and the sacred – "divine kidneys," "martyrs" with "gleaming entrails" – the sense of temporality also emphasizes immanence over transcendence. Bucky narrates that, when alone,

> I lived in the emergency of minutes, in phases of dim compliance with the mind's turning hand. The room had seasons and I responded to these; it was the only way to evade chaos. I knew the phases. I did not fear the crisis inherent in time because I borrowed order from it, shifting with the systematic light, sitting still in darkness. (54)

While the implications of the "crisis inherent in time" will be returned to in later chapters of this thesis, important here is that Bucky lives *within* time, just a different sense of it. Adapting to the room as if it is the natural world with its "seasons" and shifting light and darkness, this is a sense of time which is no longer bound to the order of a linear calendar, reduced to isolated "minutes" and the cyclical elements of day/night and seasons. Overall, when Bucky is alone in the room the semantic value of the space – of the chronotope – thus tends toward this sense of transition in the direction of immanence, of existing in a rhythm apart from the ordering rule of clocks and calendars, of what a character in 2010's *Point Omega* calls "the nausea of News and Traffic" (22). Importantly, though, this value the room as chronotope suggests is subject to change when Bucky is not alone therein, especially when he is with Opel, to whom the apartment actually belongs.

When with Opel, the sense of time in the room shifts: "I was never sure of time while she was there. […] There was a mind besides my own, closing over the room. All need for phases soon vanished, as did all hope of order" (*GJS* 54). What this comment signals is the first of a series of indicators that Bucky and Opel embody competing senses of time and place, which in fact translate to competing ontologies. While the term "competing" is not meant to imply that differing such stances are inherently in competition with each other, in the context of this novel that is what in fact takes place. As a relevant example, at another point Opel declares that "Places are always what you expect. […] I'm certain it wasn't like that in the past. But it sure is that way now" (86). This suggestion of stasis in terms of place she then carries as well to time:

> Timeless lands. Look at timeless lands. Why do I spend so much time in timeless lands? Because there's no time there, I guess. Because you stop evolving. Because the warm winds polish you like stone. Here where it's cold I develop and become angular and rapidly age. Great Jones, Bond Street, the Bowery. These places are deserts too, just as beautiful and scary as a matter of fact, except too cold for some people. (86-7)

Opel's suggestion that she "stops evolving" in places with "no time" transfers the sense of stasis to her own self, which she then reiterates: "people and places are a lot more static than they'd like to believe. Look at me. What have I become in the scheme of human evolution? Luggage" (87). Opel's self-declared ontology of stasis more generally parallels the belief in a static, never-changing celestial paradise, which is in turn contrastable with Bucky's emphasis on immanence, itself associated with an ontology of process or becoming. Crucially, this scene in which Opel declares explicitly this argument for stasis is in fact concluded with her sudden death: "The unwound clock was on its back in the bottom of the closet, helpless as an insect […] I watched snow come down now, confined in the precise light of streetlamps. […] When I turned from the window, Opel was dead" (87-88). The combination of Opel's final monologue and the "unwound clock" in the same paragraph as her sudden death reinforces this argument, which is in fact a chronotopic one – while the room was able to contain for a time both of these competing ontologies within it, Opel's emphasis on stasis is itself what leads to her cessation of existence; in the absence of change, DeLillo suggests, life ceases to exist.

What is therefore vital to highlight here is that the chronotope of the room in this novel is itself not one which is fixed, but rather which holds the possibility for *distinct* ontological stances to take hold within. Once Opel is written off, Bucky's transition is allowed to continue as he again occupies the room alone. The definition of this chronotope is therefore one of ontological openness, one which embodies the values of a liminal space in which time and space lose their concrete orientation and are open to other possibilities. In this sense the room in *Great Jones Street* is not unlike my overall argument in this thesis for what DeLillo develops with his different deserts, as they too are most often associated with a similar sense of ontological possibility. With this in mind, one might even argue for this 1973 novel as DeLillo's version of Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle*,[46] which as mentioned is a direct descendent of the earlier desert ascetics and which inverts the effect of the expansive landscape by bringing the outside in. This argument is upheld by *Great Jones Street's* final scene, which echoes similar scenes in later DeLillo novels, especially *The Names* and *Zero K*,[47] in which time itself seems to break down and a speech-incapacitated Bucky wanders a New York which seems to blend elements of the past and present.

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[46] This is more interesting in light of the fact that Teresa is explicitly mentioned in DeLillo's previous novel *End Zone*; I will discuss this more in-depth in Chapter 2.
[47] See Chapters 3 and 5 for my extended discussion of this same phenomenon in the 1982 and 2016 novels, respectively.

In the "city's older precincts," for example, Bucky observes "women pinned in little windows, forty years flowing through an isolated second, their true lives taking place in a European pastureland" (245). The girl Skippy walking with Bucky is described as "ageless, a wanderer of cities, one of those children found after every war," and he elsewhere wonders "how long I'd choose to dwell in these middle ages of plague and usury, living among traceless men and women […] speaking in languages older than the stones of cities buried in sand" (248). In a way reflecting the verticality of Dante's chronotope that Bakhtin indicates, in which all temporality is compressed into a vertical line, the lines above reflect a wider vision of the illusion of linear time, this time in the outside world rather than alone in the threshold chronotope of the room. The conclusion to be taken from the novel must therefore be chronotopic in origin, as in the last pages Bucky declares that he is beginning "to sink into history" (249), although even in his return he remains dedicated to the alternate sense of time he developed in the room: "When the season is right I'll return to whatever is out there" (250). Opel's emphasis on stasis and the unfortunate end it has for her is countered by Bucky's incorporation into an alternate sense of history, one which eschews the purely horizontal understanding of time and history; this shift in perspective – in ontological stance – on Bucky's part is represented to a great extent through chronotopic means. Overall, then, what is played out in *Great Jones Street* is an opposition of worldviews within the purview of a single, flexible chronotope, a useful example of the way chronotopes are precisely this, vehicles to represent worldviews, in the full, ontological sense of the word.

1.9 Clashing Worldviews and the Gates of the Chronotope

Beyond his examples of the minor chronotopes such as the Gothic castle, the threshold and the road, another key element of Bakhtin's later formulation of the chronotope as added in 1973's "Concluding Remarks" is the discussion of the way a single text often contains multiple chronotopes within its bounds, as well as the way in which these varying chronotopes may interact with each other. This is a possibility which is also of high importance for my project in this dissertation, as DeLillo's texts consistently portray relationships among differing chronotopes within one novel; this interaction is, I argue, often key to understanding the implications of his fiction. After his discussion of the main chronotopes mentioned above, Bakhtin writes that those are merely the major examples, "those that are most fundamental and

wide-ranging. But each such chronotope can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes; in fact, […] any motif may have a special chronotope of its own" (252). What I set out to do in this thesis is to explore the dialogue of certain chronotopes as they crop up repeatedly in DeLillo's *oeuvre*, often the desert and the interior space, such as Bucky Wunderlick's apartment described in the preceding section. This approach functions on a variety of levels, from a dialogue of chronotopes within a work to a dialogue of chronotopes among different works by the same author, as well as with other representations of said spaces in the broader cultural context. On this possibility, Bakhtin expands:

> Within the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work or author; it is common moreover for one of these chronotopes to envelope or dominate the others (such, primarily, are those we have analyzed in this essay). Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships. The relationships themselves that exist among chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships contained within chronotopes. The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word). But this dialogue cannot enter into the world represented in the work, nor into any of the chronotopes represented in it; it is outside the world represented, although not outside the work as a whole. It (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. And all these worlds are chronotopic as well. (252)

Embedded in this passage are a number of options, but which are all applicable at some point even within the limited field of the collected works of Don DeLillo, especially in the wake of his Greek period, which coincides with the augmented sensitivity to the chronotope I argue for in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 2 I argue for a fictional desert-edge setting in dialogue with the deserts of the Western ascetic tradition, a case of dialogic interaction on the broadest level. The more particular possibility for chronotopes to "envelop or dominate the others" within a text, for example, is one which is particularly relevant to the desert / room combination which recurs in these texts, as the room tends to be situated within the overpowering desert, and my discussion in Chapter 5 of *Point Omega* provides a perfect example of what happens when that is the case. Further, the possibility for chronotopes to be "interwoven with, replace or oppose one another" is also relevant, with two strong examples emerging in Chapter 4's analysis of *The Names* and Chapter 6's discussion of *Zero K*.

Outside the bounds of this dissertation, a pertinent demonstration of this phenomenon of chronotopes in opposition with each other is Rachel Falconer's excellent comparison of Milton's *Paradise Lost* with DeLillo's *Falling Man*, in which she similarly stresses that "what makes any literary chronotope dynamic is its conflict and interplay with alternative chronotopes and world-views" (112). Falconer's analysis of the two texts connects them in their composition in times of social crisis and the response embodied in their form. Specifically, she argues that both texts

> juxtapose the epic chronotope against the novelistic, or in Milton's case, the proto-novelistic. […] Both texts represent narrators and characters unmoored from time and space by a cataclysmic event. Adrift from their normal temporal address, they find no point of purchase from which to react to the disaster that has occurred. To regain a sense of agency, they need to combine the temporal perspective of the novel, in which the immediate future appears unscripted and open to intervention, with that of epic, in which their actions bear the full weight of historical meaning and consequence. (116)

Falconer's analysis thus works on the most macrostructural level possible within a single text – on the level of genre. Importantly, the way she does so is through careful attention to the markers of time and space, one of the better critical examples of how to effectively identify the chronotope:

> *Falling Man* begins at precisely this point where the balance between epic and novelistic chronotopes has capsized. The novel begins with the sentence, "It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night" [*Falling Man* 3]. This chronotopic shift from "street" to "world" signals a shift away from the novelistic to the epic, specifically the epic chronotope of the infernal afterlife. In this "time and space of falling ash", there is no forward trajectory, either spatially or temporally. The street has become a world in itself, and there seems to be no other reality beyond it. (118-119)

This argument for a sense of crisis as shutting down any "forward trajectory" in fact resonates more broadly with DeLillo's fiction, and while I do not discuss *Falling Man* in detail, by the end of Chapter 3 I will have demonstrated that DeLillo is in fact particularly adept at fictionally tackling precisely this problem. As will become clear over the course of this dissertation, Falconer's argument that a "vital function of the novelistic chronotope is to create a sense of open futurity, and along with this, to convey the up-closeness of experience, of time and space in their ordinary dailiness" (114) in fact signals a bright thread running through all the texts I analyze, as the "open futurity" she highlights is invariably juxtaposed to a narrowing down of what Franco Berardi calls "the horizon of possibility" (*Futurability* 28). This often translates

to the opposition signaled above with regards to *Great Jones Street*, as one between an ontology of (static) being and one of (open) becoming; *Falling Man* is another – albeit intensified – example of DeLillo seeking through fiction to come to terms with the various senses of crisis the individual in contemporary Western society has faced over the last half-century.

Near the end of his "Concluding Remarks" to the chronotope essay, Bakhtin touches on the more philosophical aspect of the chronotope, coming the closest to the phenomenological origin I argue should be understood as the origin of the chronotope's representational power. He writes:

> A literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope. Therefore the chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them. But *living* artistic perception (which also of course involves thought, but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation. It seizes on the chronotope in all its wholeness and fullness. Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope. Each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value. (243, original emphasis)

Importantly, where Bakhtin writes "in literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another" what is missing, from the phenomenological point of view, is in *life* itself. In other words, in light of the arguments of the recent philosophers of place such as Casey, Malpas or Trigg, Bakhtin's assertion that "living artistic perception" makes no division between time and space would be more accurate if the word "artistic" were removed. This simple change is demonstrative of the closeness the chronotope as a concept already bears to the phenomenological account of place, and thus my argument for the former's origin residing in the latter requires no great conceptual leap.

As a matter of fact, though the orientation of Bakhtin's overall corpus is ostensibly focused on literature, in general this work is not remote to the philosophical project broadly labeled as phenomenological. As Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan helpfully points out, "a philosophical theory of subjectivity can be distilled or extrapolated from his literary essays" (172). Erdinast-Vulcan's particular argument is that Bakhtin's "philosophizing through literature" is

> a response to a sense of disenchantment, shared by Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and other continental thinkers, with traditional philosophy. Literature, for Bakhtin, offers an opening into the workings of living, concrete human subjectivity—a Bergsonian conception of subjectivity—to which the abstractions of traditional philosophy cannot gain access. (172)

Similarly, in his insightful exploration of the correlations between Bakhtin, Bergson and Deleuze regarding time and the imagination, Bart Keunen reads this later emphasis on "living artistic perception" as demonstrating that "Bakhtin looks down somewhat on the teleological fixation of [a person], who, in his or her problem-solving behavior, cannot help but think 'abstractly,'" as opposed to those able to unite "the heterogeneity of [their] actions in a lived moment of time" ("Chronotopic" 47). In his analysis, which focuses more specifically on the temporal half of the chronotope, Keunen reaffirms a correlation noted by other scholars between Bakhtin's thought in this sense and Bergson's idea of duration or lived time.[48]

The chronotope is inextricably tied up in living human perception, and thus DeLillo's repeated emphasis on acts of abstraction as being opposed to the open sense of futurity mentioned above correspond to his increasing use of the chronotope to do so. Again, such acts of abstraction for the sake of analysis are of course useful at times in their application to specific problems, with this thesis being a case in point, but ignoring the fact that doing so *is* an act of abstraction leads to the sort of mistaken assumptions towards the world as characterized by such categories as Kant's transcendental, *a priori* versions of time and space. Moreover, prefiguring the criticism such thinkers as Casey and Massey later direct towards approaches to time and space as isolated entities, Bakhtin here rightly emphasizes that it is especially in the domain of literature that such markers should not be wholly abstracted from each other, since when they are combined as chronotope they become the very vehicle through which representation can hold meaning (can signify). The suggestion that "living artistic perception" can make "no such divisions and permits no such segmentation" is thus a denouncing of overly abstract literary analysis (as exemplified linguistically by Structuralism), in that such an act converts the "living" text into a dead thing, much as an attempt at understanding the complexities of someone's personality cannot be achieved through a post-mortem autopsy.

[48] Cf. Rudova (1996) and Erdinast-Vulcan (2010).

In the light of this rather phenomenological grounding, then, the chronotope becomes an essential element to understanding a (literary) text[49]:

> What is the significance of all these chronotopes? What is most obvious is their meaning for narrative. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative […]. It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events. (250)

According to Bakhtin, then, narrative itself is inherently chronotopic; the act of compiling a narrative from the myriad entangled elements available to (which have passed through) the author (in the broad sense) is accomplished through the chronotope. Or more poetically, as Bakhtin puts it, "every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished through the gates of the chronotope" (258). This last assertion bears closer examination, especially as that which leads up to it is of crucial significance.

At the very end of the essay, Bakhtin touches upon this "one more important problem, that of the boundaries of chronotopic analysis" (257). The discussion which follows is key in that it opens the question of chronotope into the wider realm of semantic meaning; "[s]cience, art, and literature also involve *semantic* elements that are not subject to temporal and spatial determinations" (257, original emphasis). Further:

> But meanings exist not only in abstract cognition, they exist in artistic thought as well. These artistic meanings are likewise not subject to temporal and spatial determinations. We somehow manage however to endow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence but also into a semantic sphere. This process of assigning meaning also involves some assigning of value. But questions concerning the form that existence assumes in this sphere, and the nature and form of the evaluations that give sense to existence, are purely philosophical (although not, of course, metaphysical) and we will not engage them here. For us the following is important: whatever these meanings turn out to be, in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the *form of a sign* that is audible and visible for us (a hieroglyph, a mathematical formula, a verbal or

[49] In later notes published as "The Problem of the Text," Bakhtin eventually greatly extends the notion of "text" – and thus by default all that applies here to literature– to its broadest possible definition: "The text is the unmediated reality (reality of thought and experience), the only one from which these disciplines and this thought can emerge. Where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either" (*Speech Genres* 103).

> linguistic expression, a sketch, etc.). Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope. (257-8, original emphasis)

It is important to parse this rather dense paragraph. For one, Bakhtin's reference to a "semantic sphere" of meaning which exists outside of place and time seems somehow contradictory to what follows. More specifically, the statement that "these artistic meanings are not subject to temporal and spatial determinations" apparently clashes with the following sentence, which claims that we manage "to endow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence but also into a semantic sphere." If we endow all phenomena with meaning, and meaning is defined by the incorporation of said phenomena into both the spatiotemporal sphere and the semantic sphere, then all meaning can only exist through this selfsame incorporation. Therefore, this "semantic sphere" which Bakhtin says exists outside spatiotemporal determinations is by definition actually inaccessible to any human subject in a pure, abstract state – such a pure state of course thus, for all intents and purposes, does not exist. As Bakhtin notes, this path leads directly to questions which are by nature "philosophical (although not, of course, metaphysical)." However, crucially, the final conclusion of the passage (and the essay as a whole) is to reassert the emphasis upon *experience*, which as he points out is always "social experience;" just as we endow all phenomena with meaning through our own relationship with the spatiotemporal and semantic spheres, so we are able to understand such meaning through our (implied) ability to share or communicate this with others through signs. Further, such transmission or creation of signs is always already tied to spatiotemporal determinations, and thus it is that "every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope."

This emphasis on experience as necessarily determined by time and space which Bakhtin comes to at the end of this 1973 addition has definite correlations with the emphasis those such as Casey and Malpas put on experience as embodied and embedded in place, and specifically on the necessity for taking this fusion as the necessary starting-point for all other lines of thought. It is true that one significant question to which Bakhtin did not turn in his investigations regarding the chronotope was the importance of embodiment in experience,[50] and thus the overall fundamental importance he gives to language in these writings must be

[50] While he does discuss the body a great deal in his discussion of Rabelais, this is not so much in the phenomenological sense but more in a metaphorical one as a response to Rabelais' deliberate emphasis on the carnal: see Chapters Five and Six of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 303-436.

tempered in face of this omission. However, this does not detract from the utility of the chronotope as a means of analysis. It is in fact at this point that it becomes clear just where Bakhtin's concept of the literary chronotope can take the current literary critic when considered in light of contemporary additions to the questions of place and time. This is particularly true when it comes to (embodied) human experience in all its forms, especially the sociopolitical, now that it is solidly established that there is a fundamental correlation with its conception and that of such varying philosophical standpoints as those of Casey and Malpas, but also Massey, Lefebvre, Grosz, Tuan, Trigg, Cresswell, Irigaray, and Ingold. That is, while the details in terms of what should be considered of primary importance are up for debate, the starting line for all is simply that the consideration of place (of space and time) in abstraction from lived human experience is a misleading gesture. Even if one does accept Bakhtin's suggestion of the existence of a conceptual semantic sphere floating somewhere in the ether between us all, every entry both into and out of said sphere would still be accomplished through these chronotopic gates, which in other words means through the necessarily implaced perspective of an always embodied and social human being.

In this vein it is also important to recognize the ramifications of the chronotope's conception as one which does not pay particular attention to the variations inherent in embodiment, and to update it accordingly. Firstly, the fact that chronotopes in fiction are typically navigated by human characters is another element which requires attention, as this embodied interaction with the space is often an integral part of the overall impact said chronotope has. This is readily apparent in DeLillo's own writing, as evidenced in the brief discussion of *Great Jones Street* above and which will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters; in both "The Ivory Acrobat" and *Zero K*, the protagonists' ability to physically navigate the different chronotopes of the texts is crucial to my reading. Secondly, as this always embodied and social human being is also therefore always a political entity, this necessarily brings into play those questions central to social theory, including particularly the concerns of feminism and its rethinking of subjectivity; as Elizabeth Grosz cogently signals,

> It is not enough to reformulate the body in non-dualist and non-essentialist terms. It must be reconceived in specifically *sexed* terms. Bodies are never simply *human* bodies or *social* bodies. The sex assigned to the body (and bodies are assigned a single sex, however inappropriate this may be) makes a great deal of difference to the kind of social subject, and indeed the mode of corporeality assigned to the subject. (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 84, original emphases)

In its incorporation of the living body as another fundamental element wherever possible, chronotopic analysis must therefore pay attention to these differences, as not doing so furthers the fallacy of a "universal" human. Chronotopes are born of the human experience of place, and while there are elementary elements shared by most (the sensory apparatus, the capacity to walk, etc.), as Grosz here indicates and others such as Doreen Massey elaborate on at length, this experience of place is an embodied one which is always tied to one's biopolitical position(s) in the world.

Conclusions

What follows from all this, therefore, is to consider that it is precisely such shifting relationships with the intertwined questions of embodiment, place, time, the social, and the (bio)political, that will necessarily be represented (chronotopically) in the creation of artistic works, especially in the realm of novelistic prose. Seen in this light, Bakhtin's initial impulse towards such a chronotopic focus in the study of literature becomes an open-ended suggestion which by definition must adapt with the times when it comes to our constantly evolving relationship with all these elements just mentioned; Bakhtin's elaborations on the different chronotopes he discusses in the essay are indeed a result of both his own (chronotopic) situation as well as the particular constellation of "texts" that had entered his own experience. The Russian thinker himself sensed this, and for this reason he reasserts in the 1973 "Concluding Remarks" something he suggested in its opening pages, namely that

> the study of temporal and spatial relationships in literary works has only recently begun, and it has been temporal relationships by and large that have been studied—and these in isolation from the spatial relationships indissolubly tied up with them. Whether the approach taken in this present work will prove fundamental and productive, only the further development of literary research can determine. (258)

As such, the chronotope opens onto a world of possibility. For example, through a focus on the particular composition of spatiotemporal and related semantic elements in a text, such productive and relevant spatiotemporal paradigms as time-space compression (Harvey, Massey, Virilio), sexual difference (Irigaray, Grosz) rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre), entanglement (Barad), and so on *ad infinitum* can productively enter into a greater interdisciplinary dialogue. In such terms, the chronotope becomes a lens which never shapes the object of study to its own form, but rather which attempts to approach an understanding of contemporary issues through a focus on those elements which are primary to the human experience, taking as the particular

impetus the unique possibility that literature has to mold, play with, and "fix" such elements in a particular constellation so as to express something new.

With this modernized grasp of the chronotope in hand it is now possible to turn to the texts of Don DeLillo. What is important to reiterate is that the chronotope, born as it is in the fundamentals of human experience, is ultimately a method of representing worldview, an ontological stance in the world. The representational power of place when brought to fiction is a crucial component in a writer's attempt to explore the myriad nuances and problems inherent in merely existing. When an author's vision encompasses a variety of *different* responses to the same world is when their fiction really shines through the chronotope, as the representation of clashing worldviews is the lifeblood of lasting fiction; this clash is portrayed fully only when it extends beyond the limited domain of the characters into the surrounding elements of space and time themselves, into the chronotope. This is an approach whose almost revolutionary potential in the realm of literary analysis has gone largely under the radar, as Bakhtin's sudden popularity in literary studies in previous decades was largely focused on isolated aspects of his work, such as the carnivalesque and readings of varying quality which employ his conception of the polyphonic novel. Quality studies which pay attention to the chronotopic as developed at length in this chapter are relatively few, where Falconer's earlier cited analysis of *Paradise Lost* and *Falling Man* remains a standout example.[51]

Bearing this in mind, the aim of this thesis is more than to survey those DeLillo novels which investigate certain themes through certain spaces, even though that would be a worthy task in and of itself given their relative lack of critical focus. One broader goal is therefore to unveil the multiple forms of dialogue identifiable in the fictional output of a single author, both within one text, between their own texts, and with the broader texts of their cultural context as well – a dialogue only comprehensible with attention to the form of their chronotopes. In other words, this project is thus also an attempt to demonstrate in a comprehensive form the relevancy of the chronotopic approach, to provide an extended, concrete example of its necessity in order to fully unveil the implications of fictional texts, even in an author as well-studied as the one I chose to concentrate on. As I will show, this necessity is in fact especially true in the case of

[51] While some chronotopic studies do not employ the concept to its fullest (Kohn 2005), (Lehman 1998), or go into its mechanics (Eckhard 2011), other quality examples include Burton (1996), Falconer (1998), Smethurst (2000), Granara (2005), and Gomel (2009).

authors such as DeLillo, in those who are deeply and consistently interested in the role of space and time in the attempt to navigate the chaos of contemporary life.

CHAPTER 2 The Desert, the Ascetic, and the Angel of History: *End Zone*

CHAPTER 2

The Desert, the Ascetic, and the Angel of History: *End Zone*

Time and memory: wind and space. The desert deconstructs and cleanses our categories of history and place and leads us physically to a space that is beyond the physical to the frustration of our quotidian earthly experience.

David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*

End Zone *wasn't about football. It's a fairly elusive novel. It seems to me to be about extreme places and extreme states of mind, more than anything else.*

Don DeLillo, "An Outsider"

This chapter explores the way that from the beginnings of his career DeLillo's representation has been highly chronotopic in nature, based even then in an intuition that sense of place is fundamental to subjectivity and thus to artistic representation. While the desert does appear in DeLillo's first novel, *Americana* (1971), it plays a significantly more minor role. Protagonist David Bell makes a cross-country journey in pursuit of his film project, whose final stage he describes as "the great seeking leap into the depths of America, wilderness dream of all poets and scoutmasters, westward to our manifest destiny, to sovereign red timber and painted sands, to the gold-transfigured hills" (*Americana* 341). The only interaction he has with the desert is near the end of the novel, when he stops for a night at a small community of young people who are attempting to live alongside some members of the Apache tribe. As will be seen with much of *End Zone*, these characters are on "the rim of the desert" (359) rather than within its bounds, and are there for a utopian project of escaping the "festival of death out there" and living in "the happiest place in the world" (355)– a place, moreover, which one character claims promotes "the single consciousness of the community. It's like everybody is you and you are everybody" (356). While their utopian dream is cast into doubt by elements

such as their belief in UFOs, Bell does play a game of catch baseball there with a boy which reconnects him with the joys of embodiment, narrating that he "could not recall feeling this good in many years" (359), an assertion which assumes importance in the context of a novel organized around a cross-country, "sacred journey" (124) in search of what remains of the "exploded dream" (129) of America. The ironic treatment of this utopian dream Bell finds at journey's end as played out on the desert sands is a foretaste of one of its attractions as a chronotope for characters in later novels, from *The Names* to *Underworld* to *Zero K*.

The utopian promise of the desert, however, is a result of its broader chronotopic value in DeLillo as an ontological *tabula rasa*, which can at times therefore attract those with an utopian impulse due to its lack of perceived historical entanglements. The characters in *End Zone* encounter a desert which reflects this more general chronotopic value but which does not necessarily make this veer towards the utopic. Regarding this chapter's structure, I open my analysis of *End Zone* through a close reading of its first pages, which introduce the alternate themes of asceticism and violence / war that are in this novel an important part of the characters' attraction to the desert (edge). I then develop this connection of themes to chronotope by drawing out the historical context of the desert imaginary in the Western tradition, which is tied up in a long history of monotheism and, more particularly, Christian asceticism. What close attention to the text of *End Zone* then reveals is that DeLillo here explores the potential the desert holds as a chronotope in which characters can challenge the dominant notions of time and history. The results are what might be termed projects of ontological renewal, where three young characters – narrator Gary Harkness, his roommate Anatole Bloomberg and teammate Taft Robinson – each seek to transform themselves in order to develop adequate responses to the wider sociopolitical circumstances of 1970s America, of which the looming threat of a nuclear winter is a constant. These personal projects are carried out for the most part in a very chronotopic manner, in which characters and rooms are woven together. Lastly, I explore one other important chronotope which appears in the novel as an alternative sort of response, one which, in opposition to the individual in a room, at least offers the potential for a sense of community: the football match in a blizzard.

The combination of desert as ontological *tabula rasa*, which characters seek in response to the pressures of late capitalism, war and alienation, as well as both the related ascetic project of enclosing oneself within a room within a desert and the sometime irruption of sacred moments of community into the profane everyday all together provide a relatively complete introduction to DeLillo's deserts and other chronotopes through which this thesis focuses its

analysis. *End Zone* is DeLillo's first novel after his debut *Americana,* and the difference in terms of place is rather striking; whereas David Bell wanders across the country, completing a sense of self through intimate contact with a broad range of its people and places, the story narrated by *End Zone's* Gary Harkness is DeLillo's first to focus in-depth on a particular place, on a particular chronotope. The fact that it is the remote location of the edge of a Texas desert rather than the New York City he was mostly familiar with at the time – and to which he does return in *Great Jones Street* (1973) – is a significant indicator as to the location's importance in and of itself. This importance is related to the sort of philosophical questions the writer works out in these texts which tend to deserts throughout his career and which this thesis explores, and it is therefore fitting that the analytical journey begins here.

2.1 A Thematic Overture

The first chapter of *End Zone* is only three pages in length, but in that short span manages to thematically set the scene for the rest of the novel, and is thus worth a detailed explication before engaging with asceticism and the text more broadly. The physical setting for the narrative is established as Logos College, a fictional university in West Texas, located in a place which the narrator Gary Harkness describes as "remote and unfed," a "summer tundra" (5). This of course actually refers to a desert, whose value as a chronotope is therefore colored by its shared sparseness in life and geographical features with the actual tundra. The remoteness and the "unfed" descriptor also tie this physical location to the thematic elements of asceticism and violence which these first three pages begin to unveil; already in the denial of the body which the fasting typical to the ascetic tradition entails there is implicit a sort of self-violence. Although the first sentences indicate that character Taft Robinson, "the first black student [at] Logos College" was by the end of the season "one of the best running backs in the history of the Southwest" (3), thematically and generically speaking the text deliberately both parodies and eschews the typical sports-novel narrative this opening would imply, steering instead towards these less generically-fixed waters of metaphysical pursuit. As Harkness narrates, there were rather

> other intonations to that year, for me at least, the phenomenon of anti-applause—words broken into brute sound, a consequent silence of metallic texture. And so Taft Robinson, rightly or wrongly, no more than haunts this book. I think it's fitting in a way. The mansion has long been haunted (double metaphor coming up) by the invisible man. (3)

In his article “Joyful Noise,” Roger Gilbert responds to this idea of “anti-applause,” writing that “the true antithesis of applause is of course silence,” and points out that Zen tradition emphasizes the nature of silence by referring to it as “the sound of one hand clapping” (17). His reading of the above quotation from *End Zone* is that “the chronic illness of our culture is epitomized by its propensity for various modes of ‘white noise,’ amplified silences that implicitly substitute themselves for the polychrome din of the human body and voice responding to what it sees” (Gilbert 17-18); in other words, the “amplified silences” of “white noise” are a negation of the embodied human. However, it seems that the anti-applause Harkness refers to has more to do with the Zen tradition Gilbert mentions than act as an indictment of the postmodern culture of the screen to which “white noise” here refers, as Zen holds many similarities with the sort of ascetic ideal which DeLillo explores variously both in this novel and in the following *Great Jones Street*.

In the passage cited above, Taft Robinson (and the urban New York from which he comes) explicitly “no more than haunts this book,” a line then followed by DeLillo’s metafictional signaling of the “double metaphor” of the “invisible man.” The primary allusion is quite clearly to Ralph Ellison’s 1952 novel of the same title, and thus race relations in the U.S. – and in extension the political in general – do form a thematic backdrop for the text; the second allusion arguably refers to God as the “invisible man.” The latter is suggested by the novel’s general emphasis on prayer and a host of overt references to the practices of early Christian monastics, which this chapter will explore in depth. The double metaphor of the “invisible man” therefore signals the dual concerns of the novel which could be termed the mystical and the secular, or the mythical and the historical. Further, this second allusion is further interesting for its immediate chronotopicity - the “mansion” which is haunted in this case suggests the American or Western subject, and thus the representational blurring of physical dwelling and subject which underscores both this novel and DeLillo’s career is already here hinted at from the outset.

In this thematic overture of the first three pages of the novel, then, the themes of violence and asceticism continue to emerge in several ways. Most obviously, joined in a single paragraph regarding the summer training the football team undertakes before classes begin there are intonations of both: “We did grass drills at a hundred and six in the sun. We attacked the blocking sleds and strutted through the intersecting ropes. […] There were any number of fistfights. There was one sprawling free-for-all, which the coaches allowed to continue for about five minutes […]. In the evenings we prayed” (4). This sort of textual juxtaposition of

violence and religion foregrounds their thematic contiguity which will play out in the course of the novel, and which other DeLillo critics have explored as well. Most notable of these is probably Mark Osteen, who sees the pairing as "DeLillo trac[ing] the source of our cultural fascination with nuclear apocalypse to the ascetic and religious desire for violent cleansing, for a purification through which we conquer the dread of death, paradoxically, by bringing it about" ("Against" 145). Osteen's argument regarding this push against the "dread of death" is sound, especially in his later signaling of the way "such asceticism is only a step away from fascism, from 'final solutions' that resolve problems through mass atrocity" (149). However, my exploration of the desert's role in the history of this "ascetic and religious desire" Osteen connects to "violent cleansing" suggests there is more to the issue; also at stake in characters' drives to asceticism and the desert are competing notions of time, the opposed ontologies of static being and dynamic becoming.

With respect to asceticism, a longer passage from this same page is useful for the way it paints the young members of the football team as mystics, almost as if on a spiritual retreat from the world:

> Football players are simple folk. Whatever complexities, whatever dark politics of the human mind, the heart—these are noted only within the chalked borders of the playing field. At times strange visions ripple across that turf; madness leaks out. But wherever else he goes, the football player travels the straightest of lines. His thoughts are wholesomely commonplace, his actions uncomplicated by history, enigma, holocaust or dream. (*End Zone* 3-4)

In this passage there is an ironic defining of the football player as pure, actions "uncomplicated" by such elements as "history, enigma, holocaust or dream." The choice of these four items is telling in that they refer to two competing conceptions of the world which play out in the novel, namely that of linear history/rationality ("the football player travels the straightest of lines") and the mythical/mystical ("visions ripple across the turf"). Gary Harkness and the other members of his team are thus ostensibly removed from such pressures inherent to life within a society, but what is perhaps most interesting to consider here is the significance of the football field as a smaller chronotope to itself. What is it about the space that allows for these players' complexities to only be noted within its "chalked borders," and what allows the visions and madness to manifest there? If these players are painted as disciples on the ascetic path, then the football field might represent the sort of geographical enclosure such men and women occupied, such as remote hermitages in the Middle Eastern desert. Or perhaps the football players, when beyond the bounds of their playing fields, are a stand-in for contemporary society

more broadly, whose ability to consume and consume without thought, avoiding existential "complexities" and "dark politics," is a necessity for the continuation of capital's accumulation. What is at least clear is that the players themselves are likened to such ascetics; the next paragraph reads: "We were a lean and dedicated squad run by a hungry coach and his seven oppressive assistants. Some of us were more simple than others; a few might be called outcasts or exiles; three or four, as on every football team, were crazy" (4). The inclusion of exiles, outcasts, and "crazy" individuals into the lineup under the auspices of a "hungry" coach – who is fittingly named "Creed" – is medieval in tone, and makes the team appear a scattering of hermits who have traveled to the desert to train in spiritual paring down at the feet of a renowned mystic. Bearing this in mind, the answer to the football field question might very well be that the delineated boundaries of the field are representative of society and its inherited cultural/moral norms in general. These outcast, exiled and crazy individuals in fact coincide with the historical phenomenon of outcast or "low status" members of society finding their privileged position as the carriers of faith, a point explored by both Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* (1988) and by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1989), which will be discussed in more detail at the close of the chapter.[1]

A final passage from this opening chapter again blends violence and asceticism, when Gary goes on to self-reflexively label himself as one of the "exiles," and wonders what he is doing there in the desert, being "made to obey the savage commands of unreasonable men. Being set apart from all styles of civilization as I had known or studied them. Being led in prayer every evening, with the rest of the squad, by our coach, warlock and avenging patriarch. Being made to lead a simple life" (5). Embedded within this phrasing of obeying the "savage" commands of "unreasonable" men there is a suggestion that it is submission to an authority which embodies a logic outside of "reason" that is inherently violent. Moreover, the passage also begins to define the overall chronotope of the novel's desert edge setting; it is "set apart from all styles of civilization," and thus in theory sets the stage for something new to emerge, in the ontological sense. Lastly, the coach, who leads the team in prayer, is defined using the dual loaded terms of "avenging patriarch" and "warlock." The OED indicates that the term "patriarch" is most often used in a religious context, referring to a high-ranking bishop within Catholicism specifically, or to "a man regarded as the founder or progenitor of a religious order,

[1] See Turner pp. 108-113 for this particular discussion.

institution, or tradition" more generally. The word certainly holds biblical connotations, and the "avenging" which precedes it therefore hearkens back (already gesturing to the pun in Gary Harkness' name) within the Judeo-Christian tradition, to a time before the message and practice of peace and love which is associated with the coming of Christ. Furthering this distancing from the Christian center is the second term, "warlock," which the OED defines as "one in league with the Devil and so possessing occult and evil powers; a sorcerer, wizard […] sometimes partly imagined as inhuman or demonic." The mystical persona of Coach Creed developed throughout the novel is therefore one which is ambiguous in nature, not firmly positioned within one tradition, nor even within the moral binary of good and evil. This ambiguity is important for understanding the trajectory of *End Zone*; indeed, the task at hand is to explore the way this trajectory is played out in a chronotopic sense, by the development of both characters and themes through the chronotopic play of the novel.

These motifs which DeLillo establishes in the first three pages are elaborated upon throughout the text. My intention in this chapter is to look closely at the way they are expressed chronotopically through the spaces that DeLillo includes in this novel – the desert and small rooms – in a way which will open up onto the rest of the thesis. In other words, I argue that the role the desert plays here in *End Zone* goes demonstrably beyond, as Osteen puts it, a "prefigur[ing of] the landscape after a nuclear holocaust" ("Against" 146) to suggest, for one, a long-standing connection with the historical development of Judeo-Christian, monotheistic thought itself.

2.2 Monotheism and the Desert

A distinction which probably needs to be made at this juncture is between the desert and the desert's edge. Broadly speaking, the vast majority of *End Zone* plays out on the desert's *edge*, whereas Gary only actually enters the desert proper a couple of brief times. Generally speaking, this place is highlighted for its remoteness, its lack of geographical features and life, and its silence. Reflecting on his "exile" there, Gary describes his meditation practice, in which there is ironically "nothing to meditate on," and then the place itself: "And then there was geography. We were in the middle of the middle of nowhere, that terrain so flat and bare, suggestive of the end of recorded time, a splendid sense of remoteness firing my soul" (29). The "flat and bare" geography in the "middle of the middle of nowhere," is reminiscent of the

William Gass short story “In the Heart of the Heart of the Country” (1958), which describes existence in the Midwest as “vacant and barren and loveless [….]—here in the heart of the country,” with “land [that] is flat” and the wind that can be “hot as a draft from hell” (180–81). DeLillo’s description, which implies a place far removed from society and all which that includes and is thus seemingly perfect for spiritual pursuit, suggests a similarity to Gass’ story of existentially empty Americans through the ironic “nothing to meditate on;” of course, like in the Gass story, the content of the novel itself is what proves the statement ironic. There are other implications to this description of the environment as well. As mentioned previously, Mark Osteen’s reading of *End Zone* emphasizes the relationship between the desert and nuclear destruction. Directly addressing the novel’s spaces, he writes:

> Deserts and motels: one prefigures the landscape after a nuclear holocaust, and the other reflects the terminal condition of the American ascetic spirit. Again and again DeLillo's ascetics end their tales in one or both of these terminal sites. The desert is harsh, unforgiving—and clean. As a character in DeLillo's novel *The Names* expresses it, “the desert is a solution. Simple, inevitable. It's like a mathematical solution applied to the affairs of the planet.” […]. A motel room is an indoor desert; it is another locus of terminality. For DeLillo deserts and motels are fictional end zones. (*American* 33-34)

While this reading is compelling, it is a central premise of this thesis that DeLillo’s deserts are more than merely “fictional end zones” – from *End Zone* to *The Names* to *Point Omega* and *Zero K*, the desert acts as an ontological blank slate upon which characters can attempt to remake themselves or their worlds. The location as “suggestive of the end of recorded time” (*End Zone* 29), a line which prompts Osteen’s reading, combined with Gary’s positive reaction to the remoteness in fact point together toward this other possibility, in which the desert allows for an escape from the confines of history, from the linearity earlier attributed to the football players when they are out and about in wider society. An escape of this sorts implies ontological renewal, a way of being freed from the limitations of the teleological interpretation of time and history. What is important here is that this chronotopic value of the desert is also present in the background throughout the novel, briefly here but also in later conversations between Gary and his roommate Anatole Bloomberg,[2] therefore undermining the desert as simply “terminal location” hypothesis.

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[2] Bloomberg and the conversations he has with Gary will be returned to in the upcoming discussion of rooms in this novel, as Bloomberg’s project is explicitly one of renewal: to remake himself and escape the “guilt” of being Jewish.

In Gary's description of the desert edge setting cited above, he further separates his experience in the remote location into exile and silence; exile, which he likes, makes him feel like he was "better for it, reduced in complexity, a warrior," whereas "the silence was difficult" (30). Gary reflects on this silence:

> It hung over the land and drifted across the long plains. It was out there with the soft black insects beyond the last line of buildings, beyond the prefabs and the Quonset hut and the ROTC barracks. Day after day my eyes scanned in all directions a stunned earth, unchangingly dull, a land silenced by its own beginnings in the roaring heat, born dead, flat stones burying the memory. I felt threatened by the silence. In my room at home, during my retreats from destructive episodes of one land or another, I had never even noticed the quiet. Perhaps silence is dispersed by familiar things; their antiquity is heard. (*End Zone* 30)

The "stunned earth," beginnings in "roaring heat," and most especially the "born dead" reference, with its connotations of the genetically destructive effect of fallout from nuclear radiation which can continue its devastation into future generations, all point towards this novel's desert as intimately tied up with the mass death of nuclear holocaust that Gary is so obsessed with in the novel. Thus the silence is itself associated with this potential for mass death, meaning it's also attached to the fact of human presence, or rather lack thereof. This speaks to the way that in his room in his childhood home he "never even noticed the silence," that it is perhaps "dispersed by familiar things; their antiquity is heard" (31); the presence of objects which have obtained significance through their association with (historical) humanity negates the sort of silence he finds out in the desert. This is a clearly anthropocentric stance with echoes of Heidegger in it, a topic which is treated in greater depth in Chapter 4's discussion of *The Names*.

In light of the passage cited above, then, the desert in *End Zone* and later novels such as *Underworld* is indeed defined in part by this relationship with the nuclear bomb and its Cold War context; not only does the desert environment itself suggest the absence of humanity, but the desert is the location in which the bomb's testing is carried out, both in the Southwest United States and in Russia's barren Kazakhstan region. However, while this direct link of the arid landscape to the nuclear bomb is one which has been treated in numerous ways by both theorists and artists,[3] the thread being traced in this thesis when it comes to DeLillo's deserts is one which goes beyond this correlation. Moving away from the landscape's relationship with

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[3] For theoretical responses cf. Beck (2001), (2009), and for artistic cf. Miller (1994) or Misrach (1987).

the looming threat of the bomb, I will explore instead the desert as defined in Western culture to a great extent by its role in the Abrahamic religions, especially when it comes to the origins of the asceticism which plays such a significant role in *End Zone.*

Other critical approaches to this novel have yet to broach the way the desert in a text such as *End Zone* is in often in dialogue with both the real and imagined deserts which have played a significant role in the development of Western society's general ideological trajectory. In my reading, it is no surprise that an American writer with a Catholic background[4] ends up returning again and again to the desert as a chronotope in which to work out certain types of problems. Though the novel is often ironic, with its repeated references to asceticism and prayer *End Zone* is certainly DeLillo's clearest engagement with that tradition (*Underworld* treats significantly with Catholicism as well, but in a different way[5]). Its desert edge setting also suggests a connection with Christianity's origins, an idea encapsulated in Paul Shepard's argument that "if ideas have habitats in which they originate and prosper, then the desert edge might be called the home of Western thought" (*Nature and Madness* 47). Shepard's writing on the role the desert environment played at this crucial period in history is in a sense a chronotopic reading in its own right, and is useful in order to contextualize DeLillo's desert in this novel. Shepard writes, for example, that "what the desert means is preceded by preconscious selection of what is seen and how it is seen," as its overwhelming sensory impact is "a massive shock to the human limbic system–the neural basis of emotional response–[and] which seems to demand some logic or interpretation" (48). In other words, the desert as a literary or artistic chronotope is always wrapped up in the actual experience of being in that place, and that experience is one which foregrounds ontological instability; Shepard's imaginative leap is to read the formation of monotheism – a religious worldview – as chronotopic itself, as significantly influenced by the real environment in which it was born.

A slight detour to explore this early desert is therefore instrumental in order to buttress my analysis of *End Zone's* exploration of the subject's relationship to time and history. Going beyond the obvious metaphorical importance of the desert as the site of forty years of wandering of those with Moses in *Exodus*, Paul Shepard speculates that the real-life Hebrews, who developed these myths, considered themselves "self-styled outcasts," but also that while

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[4] For in-depth discussions of the relationship of DeLillo's lapsed Catholicism to his writing, see Hungerford (2006; 2010) and McClure (1995)

[5] See Hungerford (2006)

"they adopted a nomadic style, the[y] were never true outsiders and contemptuous of the city in the manner of Arab nomads" (51). Shepard's narrative for the development of monotheism is therefore as follows:

> the ancestors of the Old Testament made virtue of their homelessness. They struck a gold vein of moral analysis by assimilating certain themes of transience from genuine nomads while rejecting their fatalism. In a Semitic storm god they found a traveling deity who was everyplace and therefore not bound by location. (51)

Of course, due to the paucity of documentation from this period in history such commentary will inevitably remain speculation. As George Steiner rather poetically reminds us:

> To speak of the 'invention' of monotheism is to use words in the most provisional way. The cast of intellect, the social forms, the linguistic conventions which accompanied the change [...] from polytheism to the Mosaic concept of one God, are beyond recall. We cannot feel our way into the minds and skins of the men and women who, evidently under constraint and amid frequent rebellion, passed into a new mapping of the world. The immensity of the event, its occurrence in real time, are certain, and reverberate still. But how the ancient concretions of worship, the ancient, natural reflexes of multitudinous animism were replaced, we have no way of knowing. The light curves towards us from across the remotest horizon. (Steiner 36-37)

However, the reason it's worth casting the gaze so far into the past is related to this sense that there is a certain meaning attached to the desert – a certain chronotopic value – which has both a long history in the west and which continues to impact its representation today.

What is therefore most useful of Shepard's discussion for our current purposes is what he suggests regarding the significance of the desert *as a place* for the originators of the Old Testament:

> Though important to the roots of Western spiritual life, the desert for the Hebrews was not valued as a place. It was a vacuum, idealized as a state of disengagement and alienation, a symbol of the condition of the human spirit. Its physiological potency for visionary ecstasy is evident in the lives of holy men, from the prebiblical patriarchs to Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and thousands of pilgrims, hermits, monks, and their followers. (58)

This is a significant claim when read in light of my discussion in the opening chapter of the way the value assigned to real places is intimately tied up with one's embodied experience there. Shepard's argument here seems to be that the people living on this desert edge managed to view the desert proper just beyond as a threatening, hostile place, maintaining their place-based identity elsewhere, be that the city or their desert's edge agrarian communities. This would nonetheless in some sense entail an effort of communally denying embodied experience

of place through ideology, resisting the tendency to create value and attachment to wherever it is that people live. While the relationship of these people to their environment is impossible to directly prove, what holds up under scrutiny is the way this claim reverberates into a cultural valuing of place (and environment) in general, a topic which has been taken up and argued by a range of recent scholars.

The relevant and rather well-known argument here is that by emphasizing the separation of the human from nature there opens up the possibility for oppression and exploitation. As Val Plumwood argues in the context of ecofeminism, "Western culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism[, which] explains many of the problematic features of the west's treatment of nature which underlie the environmental crisis, especially the Western construction of human identity as 'outside' nature" (2). As Plumwood's extended study demonstrates eloquently, this oppression is multi-faceted, though where others see its root in the "masculine presence [inherent] in the officially gender-neutral concept of reason," she argues that it is "the multiple, complex cultural identity of *the master* formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination, which is at issue" (5, my italics). This conception of the "master" of course has a deep connection with the similar relationship of the human to the monotheistic divine which has spread over much of the world during the last two millennia, but which crucially emerged in this particular place at this particular time. In this sense, and simplifying the issue greatly, if (the perception of) the desert played a role in the development of monotheistic thought, it has since played an indirect role in the systematic oppression of all the groups of people to which that applies. In this context, it becomes indeed an effective space through which authors such as DeLillo can stage representation of certain contemporary problems. As I will return to at length, just as this lack of attachment to the desert (edge) as a place is evidenced in the Judeo-Christian legacy, DeLillo's young characters in *End Zone* fail to meaningfully engage with the landscape around them; the emphasis is on the indistinct remoteness of the place, and the transformations which take place do so almost entirely in the characters' small rooms.

In terms of this distancing from the tangible experience of place, in their 2017 article on place attachment in the Bible, Counted and Watts signal that it is "widely recognized that attachment to a divine entity can function in a way that is analogous to a human person" (221). They further "suggest that proximity to God can also be achieved through proximity to *places* of religious significance" (221, my emphasis). If this is the case, then what follows is that the divine figure becomes a stand-in for what are fundamentally important human relationships,

those with other people *and* those with place. This then supports the argument that this particular religious worldview emphasizes the abstract, favoring a view of the desert as an idealized symbol rather than a real place imbued with embodied, communally (in the human and non-human sense) experienced meaning. This same reading is further traceable as informing the shift from the more place-based deities of polytheistic religions which once spanned the globe to the single, unknowable (and unlocatable) God of monotheism. Counted and Watts indicate that "the notion of place attachment in the Old Testament starts with the story of a man [Abraham] being called to leave his place of attachment for a new place of promise" (221); the founding myth of these traditions as found in this text is predicated upon deracination, upon an uprooting from one's sense of place. Given the inextricable function of a sense of place to a person's sense of self as discussed in the previous chapter, the profound impact this has had on the range of perspectives which can be generally grouped as influenced by the Abrahamic religions (which per estimates currently make up over 50% of the world's population)[6] is difficult to overestimate.

DeLillo's desert chronotope in *End Zone* is in fact the first of a series which I explore in this thesis to represent the way a general movement towards abstraction is intimately tied up in the constantly deepening experience of alienation in the contemporary world. While in subsequent chapters I emphasize different sources for this alienation – such as capitalism, technology and war – they are all in the tied up in each other, and as is well-documented Christianity (especially of the Protestant branch) is implicated in this.[7] What is interesting to develop further is the way the desert chronotope informs this historical process, as it is this relationship I argue DeLillo is in part engaging with in a novel like *End Zone.*

2.3 Religious intertexts: The Early Ascetics and the Desert

Rebecca Solnit is correct to point out that, in literary terms, except for the "occasional deserts of classical literature," before the late 19th century there was little to draw on except for "the deserts of the Bible, which were places of exile, punishment, and purification" ("Scapeland" 65). What is clear is that the use of the desert as a symbolically harsh, abstract

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[6] Johnson and Grim (2013)
[7] Cf. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (originally 1901), or more recently Kathi Week's *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (2011)

space in the formation of the Old Testament, as implied here by Solnit, was then advanced upon in early Christianity particularly through a seeking it out in the "purification" sense, as the location for the solitude of ascetic practice. Of high importance in this tradition is the figure of St. Anthony, both in his lifetime and especially thanks to his "biography" as written by Athanasius of Alexandria, not to mention his continued evocation in artistic forms into the present day.[8] Presenting Anthony as one of the earliest monks to go into the wilderness, this account of the "Life of Anthony" (*Vita S. Antoni*) – which appeared c. 360 CE during the lifetime of both St. Augustine and St. Jerome, important monastic figures in their own right – has had enormous influence in the varying traditions of Western monasticism and ascetism over the centuries. Anthony's story is one of a continuous battle with the devil, who time and again sends attacks of various sorts his way. While the battle is a spiritual one, what never seems to be discussed is the way Anthony seeks certain spaces to aid him in his fight.

First enclosing himself in some "tombs, which happened to be at a distance from the village" (Athanasius 581), after defeating various demons sent his way Anthony eventually ends up at an abandoned fort on a mountain in the desert, where "for nearly twenty years he continued training himself in solitude, never going forth, and but seldom seen by any" (585); both tombs and fort are enclosed spaces located at a distance from human civilization. The testing grounds of the desert space allows for Anthony to pursue in solitude the idea that "The kingdom of heaven is within" (588) through discipline and fasting, cornerstones of the ascetic ideal and important factors for Harkness and his teammates in DeLillo's *End Zone*. In a very early signaling of the desert's temporal value as a chronotope, Athanasius at one point explains that, in his practice, Anthony "gave no thought to the past, but day by day, as if he were at the beginning of his discipline, applied greater pains for advancement," and that he was "mindful of the words spoken by the prophet Elias, 'the Lord liveth before whose presence I stand to-day.' For he observed that in saying 'to-day' the prophet did not compute the time that had gone by" (579-580). This sense of time as devoid of the past and oriented towards an unearthly future, which though facilitated by a literal distancing from human societies is actively sought after in the pursuit of this specific religious worldview, rather paradoxically emphasizes the ephemerality of earthly existence through a focus on the everyday, on the present moment. As

[8] Evident in the series of paintings over centuries titled *The Temptation of St. Anthony* by artists such as Michaelangelo, Hieronymus Bosch, and Salvador Dalí, as well as in literature, most famously Flaubert's novel of the same title (1874).

will become clear, this sort of time value is alluded to at various points in *End Zone*, though in a way which will move away from the religious orientation aimed at a static eternity towards an emphasis on an open futurity, one which escapes the linearity of history understood as a teleological trajectory.

Although Solnit's signaling of the desert's significant absence in European literature for nearly two millennia is appropriate, my argument is that the influence of the desert as a concept (a chronotope) persisted in the European imagination, only mutated into other forms. In his 2004 study *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art and Culture,* David Jasper points out that in early monasticism, "which grew out of the Egyptian and Judean deserts […], the practice of *lectio divina* was the slow and meditative reading of the Bible in order imaginatively and actually to enter into its life and experience" (15); Jasper understands this as signifying that in this context "the reader lives within the text as desert itself" (15). In this reading, the materiality of the desert as a place is dampened enough to metaphorically merge as one with the narrative of the Bible, the result of which goes both ways; firstly, the desert space in this tradition is thus confirmed as *abstractly* sacred (for it is the text and not the place which is ultimately important), and, secondly, the text itself carries this desert association with it, even as it spreads into places where deserts do not even exist, such as northern Europe. Works such as Peter Anson's classic *The Call of the Desert* (1964) reveal the unbroken line of this tradition originating in the Egyptian and Judean deserts in the first few centuries of Christianity's existence, providing a detailed history of the varying orders of Christian monks who broadly speaking followed in their wake. What is important is that this tradition did indeed maintain significance into medieval Europe, though the desert as a wilderness was often simply recoded into other sorts of landscapes. As John Aberth explains:

> For monastic and religious communities, the forest wilderness had a special place as both the means of spiritual renewal by providing an isolated shelter from worldly distractions, and as a test of spiritual resolve by being the haunt of demons and other temptations. Such associations go back to biblical stories of the desert and the experiences of the early Christian desert fathers: Even though in topographical terms a forest could be considered the complete opposite of a desert, the two did share connotations of solitude, otherworldliness, and an uncivilized purity that were essential to the ascetic exercise. (128)

This rewriting of the forest landscape is not surprising given that the value of the desert which it follows was, though inspired by geography, abstract in the first place; isolation is the key factor. Aberth's use of the phrase "shelter from worldly distractions" is also indicative, in the

sense that there is a second important spatial element to these ascetic enterprises – the enclosed space, or the ascetic's cell. For while the tradition beginning with the "Desert fathers" such as Anthony always emphasizes the external desert environment, what is evident even in the earliest accounts is the equal (at least) importance of the enclosed space in such endeavors – as mentioned, Anthony first encloses himself in "tombs" a distance from the village and eventually retreats to his solitary desert mountain within an "old fort," not to mention the tradition of hermits famous for living simply in caves (which will make an appearance in DeLillo's *The Names*). The retreat to enclosed rooms is no surprise as, phenomenologically speaking, such protected spaces lacking in decoration allow the person therein freedom from sensory impressions from the outside, thus enabling an intense focus on one's own self (or on one's relationship to the divine, in the terms of these practitioners). The fact that the desert was sought for its further lack of geographical and organic features to stimulate the senses therefore goes hand in hand with the activities carried out on the inside. This correlation between enclosed spaces and the desert is in fact a subject of considerable consequence in the context of DeLillo; to start with *End Zone*, beyond its many thematic references to asceticism, there is a direct allusion to the tradition with the invocation of Teresa of Ávila when Gary Harkness enters Coach Creed's cell in the second half of the novel: "The room was small and barely furnished […] There were no windows. On the wall was a page torn from a book, a black-and-white plate of a girl praying in a medieval cell" (192). Creed later confirms that this is an image of Teresa, though his claim that Teresa was known for "eat[ing] food out of a human skull" is one which appears to be an invented and rather grotesque *memento mori* on DeLillo's part, its very falsity demonstrating Creed's confusion of motives in his sport-based ascetic pursuit.

Especially when combined with mentions of Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and Augustine's *City of God* found in his archives at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas[9], Teresa of Ávila's appearance in *End Zone* reveals that DeLillo is personally familiar with a variety of influential monastic/meditative texts of these earlier periods; together, Kempis's treatise (c. 1441) and Teresa's 1577 *El Castillo Interior* (*The Interior Castle*) were two of the most important works of their type for centuries of European readership during the Renaissance period. Relevant to our present discussion, what both of these texts emphasize is a withdrawal from the outside world into the interior, already evident in Athanasius's 4th

[9] Due to a COVID-19 related cancellation of a visit to the DeLillo Archives, I am indebted for now to Crystal Alberts for this information.

century assertion that "the kingdom of God is within you" (588). Kempis, for example, writes that "it is easier to hide at home than to be sufficiently watchful abroad. Therefore he who intends to attain the inward and spiritual must withdraw himself with Jesus from the crowd" (23). He stresses withdrawal from the concerns of society, but in more than just the sense of other *people*: "Keep yourself as a pilgrim and stranger on earth to whom the affairs of the world seem nothing. Keep the heart free and uplifted to God, for *here you have no abiding city*" (Kempis 31, my emphasis). In comments like this one can also see beyond the emphasis on ostracization from society to the continuation of the same disavowal of place attachment as found in the Old Testament discussed previously – you are a "stranger on this earth," and "here you have no abiding city." The negation of attachment to real place which originated in the desert religion therefore survives all the other historical shifts – both theological and geographical – which take place in the thousand years between Athanasius and Thomas à Kempis.

While in Kempis there is not much more mention of the spatial, Teresa of Ávila rather fascinatingly continues the collapsing of the desert space into the interior one by going on to expand this internal space from within. In other words, she inverts the inward-drawing motion of solitude, of interiority, to unfold a multi-dimensional castle to be explored within the "outer walls" of one's own skin; the "entry door" to which is of course "prayer and meditation" (*Interior Castle* 39). What this brief overview suggests is that the quality of the exterior desert as abstract space – as a space which allows the human to be removed from both time and from society in order to approximate the divine – is over the centuries assimilated into the concept of interiority within what probably amounts to the most meditatively, inwardly focused tradition to emerge in the West. The recent suggestion by Christia Mercer[10] that René Descartes' enormously influential *Meditations* (1641) was seriously indebted to Teresa of Ávila's *The Interior Castle* would even entail a continuity between such ascetic thought originating in the desert landscape and the development of Western philosophy since the Enlightenment. The exploration of this compelling correlation, however, will be limited in the present discussion to the different channels provided by DeLillo's *oeuvre.* Fortunately, as I hope to show, DeLillo himself appears to, consciously or not, explore this very connection.

[10] See Mercer's 2017 article "Descartes' debt to Teresa of Ávila, or why we should work on women in the history of philosophy."

2.4 Emergent Ontologies on the Desert's Edge

The digression from the text of *End Zone* in the preceding pages was accomplished in order to frame the argument that the desert edge setting of the novel's Logos College is only understandable in light of this historical context. The novel's setting and the events which occur there bespeak a chronotope whose function is related to this tradition of the desert above, namely as an abstract space associated with a disconnection from the linearity of time, and which is sought out by those looking for personal transformation; this is therefore a desert in dialogue with far more than the nuclear holocaust also associated with it. Regarding temporality, beyond the earlier cited reference to eschatology – the desert as "suggestive of the end of recorded time" (29) – in this second novel DeLillo begins to express a career-long interest in things "drifting" or to being "adrift."[11] In describing his trajectory of four universities which eventually lead him to Logos College, Harkness traces a spiritual sort of journey in which it seems the conditions in the places he goes do not match up with his existential needs. Describing, for example, his time at the second of these, Penn State, Gary narrates: "each day that autumn was exactly like the day before and the one to follow. I had not yet learned to appreciate the slowly gliding drift of identical things; chunks of time spun past me like meteorites in a universe predicated on repetition" (18). What this actually informs us is that the "slowly gliding drift" of repetitive things refers to a time-value which goes beyond the mere desert setting of the novel to include the 1970s United States as a whole. For instance, this comment is paired with a discussion of how, when he quits that team due to being unable to adjust his inner sense of time to the one expressed above, he tells his coach that "the endless repetition might be spiritually disastrous; we were becoming a nation devoted to human xerography" (19). One of the novel's more direct nods to the broader cultural context of an early 1970s, which had just shifted to an economic system of flexible accumulation, the comment echoes what is often read as the critique inherent in Andy Warhol's famous postmodern aesthetics of repetition.[12] Indeed, if Jennifer Dyer's reading of Warhol's work as "meaningful because it is revealing of the significance of the mundane, [...] iconologically treat[ing] the mundane as the divine" (35), something achieved moreover through the use of irony (35), then there is more to a surface correlation between the respective artists' projects;

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[11] I will return to DeLillo's use of "drift" in Chapters 2 and 3.

[12] See the chapter "Time-space compression and the postmodern condition" in David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (pp. 284-307) for a detailed discussion of this shift and its effect on artistic expression.

DeLillo's well-known focus on the "radiance in dailiness" is, however, well documented elsewhere[13]. The "human xerography" line in *End Zone* is undoubtedly concerned, like Andy Warhol, with alienation and the loss of individuality which commodity fetishism in late capitalist culture propagates, an issue which indirectly brings us back to the desert.

As Mark Fisher writes in *Capitalist Realism*, with the shift to flexible accumulation "there is no longer an identifiable external enemy" in class politics, and thus "post-Fordist workers are like the Old Testament Jews after they left the 'house of slavery': liberated from a bondage to which they have no wish to return but also abandoned, stranded in the desert, confused about the way forward" (39). Though metaphorical, Fisher's desert is useful here in its signaling of the same existential problem which sends DeLillo's characters in *End Zone* to the college campus on the desert's edge; it is in relation to that figurative desert of Mosaic wandering that is associated the creation of a completely new theology, that of monotheism. In other words, in both cases the desert is sought in conjunction with the urge for new methods of dealing with ontological crisis. In *End Zone,* as Osteen points out, even "the Bomb has been incorporated into the consumer mythology: it is the ultimate consumer item. We spend huge sums on nuclear weapons, not to use them, but merely to possess them as symbols of power and wealth" ("Against" 160). It is in this sense that, though never more explicit than brief mentions such as this "human xerography" quip, the metaphysical crisis inspired by the potential for mass death at the hands of super-powered weapons which drives these characters to the desert is, at its core, always a result of the relevant socioeconomic factors forming its backdrop. In other words, the sense of crisis created by the potential for nuclear destruction is only superficially separable from the more subtle crisis of alienation created by the augmentation of consumerism; this is a topic which I will return to in-depth in the following chapter's discussion of DeLillo's 1980s stories "Human Moments in World War III" and "The Ivory Acrobat."

Gary Harkness' progression through four different universities before finally settling at the remote desert's edge location of the novel in West Texas can therefore be read in terms of a seeking out of a place which matches the sense of time he feels: a chronotopic impulse if ever there was one. During his time at Logos he finally comes to actually enjoy this particular temporal sense:

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[13] See Zubeck (2007), Nel (2008) and Barrett (2018).

> We were doing simple calisthenics, row upon row of us, bending, breathing and stretching, instructing our collective soul in the disciplines necessary to make us one body, a thing of ninety legs […] the indifferent drift of time and all things filled me with affection for the universe. (54)

It is in this place that he can now shift to an appreciation of the "indifferent drift of time," for in the desert this sense of time detached from human affairs (and linearity) which he had felt was out-of-place elsewhere is now fitting, echoing through the empty landscape. It is in this sense that the desert of *End Zone* demonstrates its affinity with the desert as understood in the lineage which begins with the Old Testament and which runs through the medieval monastics discussed above.

What I wish to emphasize as crucial here is that what is therefore also broadly at stake are competing notions of time and of history. In referring to "history," the operating understanding is its teleological formation, as famously denounced by Walter Benjamin in his final work, "Theses on the Philosophy of History;" it is the historicist perspective that Benjamin identifies there which arguably continues to control the popular narrative in the second half of the 20th century that DeLillo's characters inhabit. Benjamin draws a connection between this historicist approach and "the old Protestant ethics of work […] resurrected among German workers in secularized form" (250), which is precisely the tradition in which Gary Harkness is brought up and is trying to break away from:

> My father had a territory and a company car […]. He had specific goals, both geographic and economic, each linked with the other, and perhaps because of this he hated waste of any kind, of shoe leather, talent, irretrievable time. […] It paid, in his view, to follow the simplest, most pioneer of rhythms—the eternal work cycle, the blood-hunt for bear and deer, the mellow rocking of chairs as screen doors swing open and bang shut in the gathering fragments of summer's sulky dusk. Beyond these honest latitudes lay nothing but chaos. (*End Zone* 17)

Gary's father represents the translation of this Protestant work ethic into the American ethos of Manifest Destiny, which is suggested here by the (spatiotemporal) references to having a "territory" and following the "most pioneer of rhythms." This is of course the same ethic behind the United States' conversion into the early leaders of the global shift to full-blown capitalism, and which drives the hyper-consumerist society that Harkness and the other characters of *End Zone* are driven to the desert's edge to try and escape from. Benjamin's critique of this historicist perspective (with its significant ties to the Protestant work ethic) further describes it as seeing history as a causal chain of events occurring in what is otherwise a "homogenous,

empty time." This is therefore a perspective which ultimately "culminates in universal history" (254) – in one controlling narrative. This is the history of "progress," (and thus intimately tied up in capital's self-propagation) and is opposed, for Benjamin, to a conception of time which he terms "Messianic," whose understanding involves "grasp[ing] the constellation which [the historian's] own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus [one] establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is "shot through with chips of Messianic time" (255).

In *Fire Alarm*, his close reading of Benjamin's final essay, Michael Löwy explains this distinction as that between "qualitative" and "quantitative" time:

> Qualitative time, studded […] with messianic splinters, stands radically opposed to the empty flow of the purely quantitative time of historicism and 'progressism.' We are, here, in the rupture between messianic redemption and the ideology of progress, at the heart of the constellation [which] draw[s] on the Jewish religious tradition to contest the model of thought that is common to Christian theodicy, the Enlightenment and the Hegelian philosophy of history. By abandoning the Western teleological model, we pass from a time of necessity to a time of possibilities, a random time, open at any moment to the unforeseeable irruption of the new. (102)

Even in the face of the persecution he was experiencing at the time of the "Theses" writing, Benjamin's overall standpoint remains fixated on the potential for a Messianic moment to be actually realized, for there to come a moment of universal salvation from class oppression; as Löwy explains:

> The "splinters (*Splitter*) of messianic time" are the moments of revolt, the brief instants that save a past moment, while effecting a fleeting interruption of historical continuity, a break in the heart of the present. As fragmentary, partial redemptions, they prefigure and herald the possibility of universal salvation. (101)

As Benjamin himself puts it, the future for the Jews did not turn "into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" ("Theses" 255). Though in a sense teleological (where the *telos* itself is radically different, of course), this sense of time can nonetheless be defined ontologically as one of *becoming*, as opposed to static *being*; as Elizabeth Grosz clarifies, "the future is that openness of becoming that enables divergence from what exists" (*Architecture* 142). An ontology of becoming emphasizes radical openness towards the future, the opposite of the teleological historicism which Benjamin critiques. In *End Zone,* characters seek out the desert edge of Logos College

for its relation to this other sense of time, its distance from the "eternal work cycle" (17) Gary's father values.

Interestingly, though in context and content otherwise very different, this conception of time as opening onto the possibility for a universal, totalizing salvation resonates with Teilhard de Chardin's notion of the "Omega Point" as outlined in *The Phenomenon of Man*; this is a connection worth noting for the reason that DeLillo's interest in metaphysical and spiritual writings of different traditions led him to, in his own words, "read Teilhard's de Chardin's book about the time [he] was getting out of college" ("A Conversation" n.p.); the fact that the controversial Jesuit's ideas had some sort of impact on him of course becomes obvious in their reemergence in DeLillo's 2010 novel *Point Omega*. While Teilhard's theological theory is overtly teleological, with the present and past all leading toward a final moment of unity[14] – a unity which merges the seeming opposites of the "Universal and Personal" (Teilhard de Chardin 260) – the very potential for such a totalizing event puts it into alignment with Benjamin's Messianic time. One might even argue that there are veiled hints to Teilhard de Chardin within *End Zone's* pages. For example, one of the coaches Gary plays under before making his way to the west Texas location of the novel tries to convince him not to quit the team by preaching a form of unity:

> Oneness was stressed—the oneness necessary for a winning team. It was a good concept, oneness, but I suggested that, to me at least, it could not be truly attractive unless it meant oneness with God or the universe or some equally redoubtable super-phenomenon. What he meant by oneness was in fact elevenness or twenty-twoness. (19)

Actual "oneness" is exactly what Teilhard's own "redoubtable super-phenomenon" as outlined in *The Phenomenon of Man* stresses, and this comment is another which reveals Gary Harkness's spiritual needs, so to speak, which eventually drive him out to Logos College.

Overall, what is important here is that in this context the suggested "end of recorded time" definition of the novel's desert edge setting in *End Zone* makes the chronotope one defined by the potential for, in Löwy's terms, the "irruption of the new," which involves a break with the linear continuity of history's causal (and oppressive) train of events. In this light,

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[14] Though see Mei (2008), whose reading of *The Phenomenon of Man* (which he does alongside Heidegger) would find similarities to Benjamin's Messianic time; on Teilhard: "the culmination of the cosmos in Omega Point has a reciprocal effect whose exigency is to reinterpret the past. Historical understanding is anything but a retrospective gaze looking at a static past; rather, it is a retrieval of it in order to better understand the future, the utmost possibility of being. In other words, the call of the future actualizes the past" (Mei 77).

the way that the world of the text seems to be constantly pushed at from without by traditions and perspectives from the past makes more sense – the return of the past is a potential inherent in its very chronotope. This potential return is indicated by a sometime temporal or even ontological indistinctness within the text, a phenomenon which is repeated in 1982's *The Names* and which I will discuss in Chapter 4. At one point during the football match between Logos and Centrex which makes up the heart of the novel, for example, Gary's teammate Onan Moley complains of the opponent he is matched against, calling him "one mean person, place or thing" (122). Another character, Gary's teacher Alan Zapalac, says at another point during a lecture that "there's some kind of mythical and/or historic circle-thing being completed here" (157). While such examples are encased in the heavy sense of irony the novel employs throughout, what follows from this potential opened up by this desert (edge) chronotope and its "end of recorded time" nature is thus an openness to new, emergent forms of being; this is inherent in both Benjamin's open sense of time and Teilhard de Chardin's assertion that the reaching of the Omega Point will involve a collective arrival at "its point of convergence – at the 'end of the world'" (272).

2.5 Bodies and Angles: *End Zone's* Dialogue of Rooms

This capacity therefore intrinsic to the desert chronotope for emergent forms of being makes it an ideal staging ground for individual characters to seek out in order to enact personal transformation. As the novel goes on, it is eventually revealed that three primary characters – Gary Harkness, his roommate Anatole Bloomberg, and star running back Taft Robinson – are all at the remote campus more for existential reasons than for the football which is their ostensible purpose there. This seeking of personal transcendence is a highly individual pursuit represented in great part through the interactions with and within the enclosed spaces of these characters' rooms, beginning a trend which is famously traceable throughout DeLillo's career. As DeLillo himself says in an early (1982) interview with Thomas LeClair in response to a question regarding "abstract spatial analysis of characters or situations in [his] fiction":

> It's a way to take psychology out of a character's mind and into the room he occupies. I try to examine psychological states by looking at people in rooms, objects in rooms. It's a way of saying we can know something important about a character by the way he sees himself in relation to objects. People in rooms have always seemed important to me. I don't know why or

> ask myself why, but sometimes I feel I'm painting a character in a room and the most important thing I can do is set him up in relation to objects, shadows, angles. ("An Interview" 30)

This comment, especially the taking of "psychology out of a character's mind and into the room he occupies," speaks directly to the function of the literary chronotope in general, and specifically to the chronotopic use towards which DeLillo's rooms trend throughout his fiction. Speaking more specifically on the types of characters drawn to forms of self-discipline, which in this novel includes Taft and Harkness but which also refers to characters like *Running Dog's* Glen Selvy and *Ratner's Star's* Endor, DeLillo affirms in the same interview that

> I think they see freedom and possibility as being too remote from what they perceive existence to mean. They feel instinctively there's a certain struggle, a solitude they have to confront. The landscape is silent, whether it's a desert, a small room, a hole in the ground. The voice you have to answer is your own voice. (24)

The remoteness of freedom and possibility and its result in a "solitude they have to confront" points towards the sociopolitical backdrop of an attenuated American culture operating under its late capitalist system; nothing is divorced of this climate from which it emerges. However, one argument which will emerge at length is that even in the course of DeLillo's own career this sociopolitical climate changes to such an extent that it is traceable through the sort of in-depth study I am conducting of this particular author's characters when they are brought to this particular sort of chronotope. Beyond the general critical consensus that the existential paring down these young characters enact through self-discipline and their treatment of their rooms as ascetic-type cells is a response to the pressures of life under the threat of nuclear annihilation, what I wish to here explore as important is the way the interactions of these characters in and with their rooms represent several *distinct* ways of dealing with crisis – a crisis which, moreover, is as outlined above also tied up in a constricting sense of linear temporality/history.

Resonating with both my previous discussion of temporality and with DeLillo's comment from the LeClair interview cited above regarding his vision of a character portrayed "in relation to objects, shadows, angles" (30), one of Gary Harkness' first conversations with his roommate Anatole Bloomberg is about the meaning of history. Gary's argument is that history is "the placement of bodies":

> this placing of bodies may seem inconsequential. But I believed it mattered terribly where we were situated and which way we were facing. Words move the body into position. In time the position itself dictates events […] What men say is relevant only to the point at which language moves masses of people or a few momentous objects into significant juxtaposition. After that

> it becomes almost mathematical. […] Whatever importance this evening might have is based on placements, relative positions, things like that. A million pilgrims face Mecca. Think of the power behind that fact. All turning now. And bending. And praying. History is the angle at which realities meet. (*End Zone* 43-44)

This obsession with positioning on Gary's part is reflected throughout the novel, usually through his descriptions of the various objects in rooms and the angles of the bodies of the people occupying them. While the reference to crowds and Mecca will be returned to at length, what this removal of all but the physical geometry of human relations from history perhaps represents is a defense mechanism in the face of history's atrocity record, denying the ethical element in all such mass events which are generally discussed in the context of "history." While not reducible to just this, in one sense at least this perspective is like the historicist view which Benjamin critiques in "Theses," which reduces history to a chronology of events devoid of subjective nuance. Peter Boxall also points out the similarity this mathematical precision has with the late works of Samuel Beckett, writing that as "in Beckett's Rotunda texts, the intense focus on the mathematical, architectural construction of the built space [in *End Zone*] coexists with an equally sharp focus on the disposal of the human figure within it" (*Possibility* 42). The suggested relationship to these Beckett texts, which "consist, in their entirety, of the exact mapping of these white spaces, and the white bodies that they contain, as they tremble on the brink of Deleuzian imperceptibility in the white void" (41), aligns this sort of response with the late modernist aesthetics of estrangement which DeLillo, significantly, personally disavows in the context of a question regarding his own feelings on the idea of place:

> place has […] important meanings. So much modern fiction is located precisely nowhere. This is Beckett and Kafka insinuating themselves onto the page. Their work is so woven into the material of modern life that it's not surprising so many writers choose to live there, or choose to have their characters live there. Fiction without a sense of real place is automatically a fiction of estrangement, and of course this is the point. As theory it has its attractions, but I can't write that way myself. I'm too interested in what real places look like and what names they have. ("An Interview" 31).

Beyond DeLillo's 1982 negation of fiction located "precisely nowhere" setting him apart from the postmodern sensibility often attributed to him at the time, this comment supports the argument that DeLillo and his spaces represent an important transition from late modernist Beckettian reduction, which resists the pull towards the verbosity of the opposite as in what are

often lumped together as the encyclopedic novels of the postmodern period.[15] The chronotopic dialogue as enacted through Gary Harkness in this novel demonstrates rather perfectly this balance; for one, as Boxall points out quite well, Taft Robinson's room – which represents a denial or at least an estrangement of the self – holds many similarities to these late Beckettian spaces:

> The empty grey compartment in which Taft sits silently meditating is cast as a late Beckettian space. […] When Harkness visits Taft in his balanced, measured room, he finds beauty and historical significance in the bare angles that the room creates, in the pure relation between its various planes and the objects and bodies it contains" (*Possibility* 41)

Opposed to this is Anatole Bloomberg, who represents the contrary pull towards a verbosity associated with an exaggerated individualism. Gary Harkness vacillates between these two, attracted to both sorts of response to contemporary crisis, and in the end will enact a negation in the face of this paradox of contradictory and unsatisfying responses.

Anatole Bloomberg

Returning to the early contrast of views on history between Harkness and Bloomberg, in response to Gary's talk on the importance of bodies and their angles and placements, Bloomberg alternatively proclaims that "History is guilt" (*End Zone* 43). Bloomberg is Jewish, and his explicit purpose at Logos college is to "unjew" himself, related to his desire to escape an "enormous nagging historical guilt" he identifies as a resulting from the fact of "being innocent victims" (45). This "unjewing" is to be accomplished by, as he describes:

> go[ing] to a place where there aren't any Jews. After that you revise your way of speaking. You take out the urbanisms. The question marks. All that folk wisdom. The melodies in your speech. The inverted sentences. You use a completely different set of words and phrases. Then you transform your mind into a ruthless instrument. You teach yourself to reject certain categories of thought. (44)

This personal project of transformation is here described linguistically and philosophically, in a way which echoes the ascetic project entailed in Coach Creed's program of disciplined exercise and prayer, especially with the transformation of the "mind into a ruthless instrument"

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[15] In this category fall Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), Gaddis' *The Recognitions* (1955) and *J R* (1975), and later David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996). DeLillo himself does enter this category with *Underworld* (1997), which when paired with the minimalistic *The Body Artist* (2000) which immediately followed quite succinctly demonstrates his status as riding that middle line between the shifting categories of "late modernist" and "postmodern."

which "reject[s] certain categories of thought." This more cognitive solution is paired with a physiological one, as in the same conversation Bloomberg asserts he is "trying to lose weight" at Coach Creed's orders (44); he begins on the same ascetic path with which the desert has been synonymous for two millennia.

In the same conversation, when Gary asks him what it's "like being three hundred pounds," Bloomberg responds that it is "like being an overwritten paragraph" (46). Throughout the novel, it is significant that Bloomberg is almost entirely absent from the action taking place outside the room he and Gary share – he is only mentioned briefly two times in regards to a football match. This is in contrast to other characters, who are described in the context of other activities, from dining to games around campus to visiting each other's dorms. Harkness even comments at one point on Bloomberg's "white neck," making him "the lone unsuntanned member of the squad" (41), as if he somehow actually spends all his time in the room despite the impossibility of this due to his role as a left tackle on the school's football team. In this sense the room for Bloomberg is like a cocoon, within which he is able to pursue the course of his desired evolution; Bloomberg's personal project of transformation evolves over the course of the novel, eventually ending in a reversal which puts it in opposition to that of Taft and his bare room of angles and silences, as well as to the fasting later associated with Gary.

Tellingly, while Bloomberg is at first trying to lose weight, he eventually gives up on the diet:

> As I lost weight, as I continued to struggle against food and its temptations, I began to lose the idea of myself. I was losing the idea of my body, who it belonged to, what exactly it was, where all the different parts of it were located, what it looked like from different angles and during the various times of the day and evening. I was losing the most important part of my being. (73)

In this speech he claims that if he continued he would be reduced to just his "Jewishness," the "subsoil, as it were, of [his] being. Alternatively, he decides to go the opposite direction, declaring:

> I am working myself up to a point where I can exist beyond guilt, beyond blood, beyond the ridiculous past. Thank goodness for America. In this country there's a chance to accomplish such a thing. I want to look straight ahead. I want to see things clearly. I'd like to become single-minded and straightforward in the most literal sense of those words. History is no more accurate than prophecy. I reject the wrathful God of the Hebrews. I reject the Christian God of love and money, although I don't reject love itself or money itself. I reject heritage, background, tradition and birthright. These things merely slow the progress of the human race. They result in war and insanity. (74)

In this light, the transformation Bloomberg seeks is one in which the importance of the role of the body in the concept of the self is (over)emphasized, an approach which contradicts the negation of the body which the transcendental project (embodied by Taft Robinson and Coach Creed) of the ascetic tradition values. Further, this embracing of the importance of the body on Bloomberg's part (which like its opposite is explored in an at least partially ironic way) is then associated with his rejection of history, of "heritage, background, tradition and birthright." This in some ways captures the classical American ethos of cultural renewal, or rather of the perception of the U.S. as a place which represents a blank-slate for cultural subjectivities; DeLillo playfully translates this American ethos of endless possibility into the physical realm by attaching it to Bloomberg's body. As Gary narrates:

> Bloomberg weighed three hundred pounds. […] It was an affirmation of humanity's reckless potential […]. It seemed a worthwhile goal for prospective saints and flagellants. The new asceticism. […] I cherished his size, the formlessness of it, the sheer vulgar pleasure, his sense of being overwritten prose. Somehow it was the opposite of death. (47)

The dual expansion of the physical form and its linguistic association is here directly correlated with the problem of death around which the novel revolves, correlated rather as its supposed negation. This is also generally a philosophy associated with Bloomberg's above assertion that "history is no more accurate than prophecy," a rejection therefore of both the past and the messianic future that "prophecy" refers to in this context. This temporal view, arguably unhealthy in the extremity of its nature, is therefore related to the logical conclusion that the more Bloomberg wants to escape from the confines of tradition and his cultural past, the more he should consume and expand his body; just as the ascetic denial of the body is a gesture towards the present's ephemerality, over-consumption is here an over-exaggeration of its singular importance. This is exactly what he ends up doing, leading up to a scene near the end of the novel in which he emerges, in a narrative sense, from the room to which he is largely confined in the novel's narration.

Declaring to Gary that he's "up to three-o-six" (meaning 306 lbs.), in language which hints at personal transformation Bloomberg then asserts that the "new mind expands with the old body. I feel more alert every day. I feel revitalized" (208). This statement is then followed by a long monologue in which Bloomberg first assumes the character of an "anguished physicist" – who has invented a "supermegaroach aerosol bomb which can kill anything that moves on the whole earth in a fraction of a microsecond" (208) – and then rather wildly touches

upon a great number of the themes present in the novel and which are the subject of our present discussion:

> I am interested in the violent man and the ascetic. I am on the verge of concluding that an individual's capacity for violence is closely linked with his ascetic tendencies. We are about to discover that austerity is our true mode. […] In our silence and terror we may steer our technology toward the metaphysical, toward the creation of some unimaginable weapon able to pierce spiritual barriers, to maim or kill whatever dark presence envelops the world. You will say this seems an unlikely matter to engage the talents of superrational man. But it is precisely this kind of man who has been confronting the unreal, the paradoxical, the ironic, the satanic. After all, the ultimate genius of modern weapons, from the purely theoretical standpoint, is that they destroy the unborn much more effectively than they destroy the living. (209-210)

Though irony continues to reign in his apparently crazed speech, Bloomberg's project of self-expansion through a denial of the past is in some senses like making an abstraction of the self – just as the Kantian conception of Space was an (unacknowledged) abstraction derived from the reality of place, the hyper-individualism of Bloomberg's evolution points towards the creation of an abstraction of the self divorced from cultural and historical context, which might be defined as this "superrational man" – a being of pure cognition and logic. This superrational figure represents one aspect of U.S. and Western culture in the time contemporary to the novel's composition, in that here we have a figure who exposes what Peter Boxall calls the "fundamental, tautological sameness" of the spiritual and the rational in this context. In other words, rationality's inherent polemic with the mystical – the "unreal, the paradoxical, the ironic, the satanic" – is here brought to its limit by Bloomberg's taking the reality of the nuclear bomb and its ability to "destroy the unborn" even further to a weapon which can somehow target the spiritual dimension; this speaks further to Boxall's argument that "salvation and damnation, God and the bomb, are inextricably fused in th[is] novel," in the sense that "the end of history as a final redemptive union with an all knowing God, and the end of history as total nuclear annihilation, [eventually] reveal themselves to be the same" (*Possibility* 45-46). Of course, what this also does is unveil through hyperbole and irony the inadequacy of such a response, even though Harkness himself is unable to respond with any seriousness to Bloomberg's speech in spite of the fact that is likely the most direct addressing of the novel's overarching motifs to be found in the novel; Harkness and the others present are reduced to laughter, "not knowing exactly why. Maybe we thought Bloomberg was crazy. Or maybe we laughed because it was the only reaction we could trust, the only one that could keep us at a

safe distance" (*End Zone* 210). What Harkness himself does not realize is that Bloomberg's identification of the correlation between violence and the ascetic tendency is an uncomfortable one, as it resonates with his own trajectory in the novel.

Taft Robinson and Gary Harkness

Bloomberg's personal brand of self-transformation, carried out in the particular location of his room within this desert edge setting, is therefore one type of response possible in the face of the crises inherent in existing as part of a late capitalist culture with the overhanging threat of nuclear annihilation which defined the Cold War period. Taft Robinson represents another direction available for such individual transformation, this time in the ascetic vein which has a long tradition in the desert and which Bloomberg here identifies as intimately tied to one's "capacity for violence." Whereas Bloomberg's process is represented throughout the novel, Taft's is only revealed at the very end, when Gary Harkness finally visits him in the former's own room. Robinson's personal philosophy holds more similarities with the views that Gary expresses to Bloomberg at the beginning of the novel, particularly with regards to Gary's previously-cited argument that "What men say is relevant only to the point at which language moves masses of people or a few momentous objects into significant juxtaposition. After that it becomes almost mathematical. […] A million pilgrims face Mecca. Think of the power behind that fact" (43-44). Whereas Gary has at this point at the end of the novel finally succumbed to the pressures of structural order (he has accepted a position as team captain, effectively ending his outsider status), Taft confirms that he is quitting football to instead focus on "instructing [him]self in certain disciplines," on "small things," on "sit[ting] still" (227-8). Rather than Gary's description of "living an inner life right up against the external or tangible life" that he relates to playing football, Taft claims he alternatively wants to take "the whole big outside and drag […] it in behind me" (228). In this sense, Taft's response to Cold War reality (like Gary, he too is obsessed with reading about atrocities) is directly in line with the ascetic tradition discussed in the previous section; specifically, his expansion of his inner space to include all else is reminiscent of Teresa of Ávila's personal project in *The Interior Castle*.

Taft's response is also, similarly to the early ascetics, to live a life removed from social and political reality, making it in a contemporary context an escape; as Joseph Dewey argues, Taft restructures "his dorm room into an exercise in hermetically sealed control akin to the very game field he is forsaking. The world at large is dismissed to irrelevancy" (59). Importantly

for the context of our chronotopic discussion, Taft does indeed “structure” his room, and it is the logic behind his doing so which aligns him with Gary’s interest in bodies and the angles at which realities meet. For example, Taft first tells Gary that although quitting he will stay at the school, since he’s “got the room fixed up just the way [he] want[s] it” (*End Zone* 233), a first hint that the room itself has become intimately intertwined with Robinson’s own sense of self. This correlation is strengthened shortly after: “It’s a well-proportioned room. It has just the right number of objects. Everything is exactly where it should be. It took me a long time to get it this way” (233). Taft’s personal transformation is therefore in opposition to Bloomberg’s; whereas Bloomberg’s is about expansion, Taft’s is about rigid control, narrowing down his reality to this managed space, to the gap between his room’s two clocks: “Between them, a balance is arrived at, a notion of how much space has to be reconstructed. Space meaning difference between disagreeing hands” (233). Space and time are here conflated, and their relevant value is reduced to almost zero.

The overall picture, then, is that Taft has come to the desert edge environment, sold on it by Creed’s talk of “self-denial, on being alone, on geography” (232), in order to pursue a path particularly well-served by the removed-from-time nature of the chronotope. However, as Joseph Dewey points out, his ascetic retreat from the world is immature at best: “in such sudden retreat, with its feel of ascetic spirituality, Robinson has embraced most superficially the vertical vision (he has ‘read up’ on Islam and eagerly awaits kneeling toward Mecca, relishing the show, unaware of its implications)” (59). Though attracted throughout the novel to this type of response Taft represents, Gary is unable to take that step which Taft does (quitting football and all its associations), therefore ending the narrative shortly thereafter in an extreme and somewhat ambiguous way.

The end of the novel, which occurs immediately following this conversation Harkness has with Taft, involves the former’s decision to stop eating and drinking water for many days: as he narrates, the result is that “High fevers burned a thin straight channel through my brain. In the end they had to carry me to the infirmary and feed me through plastic tubes” (236). This ending is read differently by various critics. Mark Osteen argues that “the meaning of his fast remains ambiguous. […] It is not certain whether Gary's final fast demonstrates his intention to follow Creed's advice, or whether it represents a repudiation of his unity with the team, and hence a rejection of his responsibilities as captain and therefore of Creed's asceticism” (“Against” 158). While it is somewhat ambiguous, it seems more that it is in fact both of these, an escape from the impossible position of having to decide between two inadequate responses

to such crisis. Joseph Dewey reacts rather strongly to Gary's fast, calling it a "private apocalypse" of "chilling immaturity and divaesque melodrama," and argues that the fast is a "clumsy response to the premise of vulnerability," resolving "the anxiety over nuclear apocalypse by impudently pretending to claim authority over his own death" (59). Dewey's argument overall is that Harkness is adolescent in his inability to embrace the sublime (including of course death). While Dewey's argument is well-founded, there is again another element at play which he does not appear to consider, namely that even the ability to face the sublime (and thus death) is a much more complicated task when one must do so as an *individual* (as opposed to as a community). While this inability for the individual to face the sublime of death in a mature way is something which will return in great force even into DeLillo's most recent novel *Zero K* – published forty-four years later than *End Zone* – it is also true that part of the incapacity to face the sublime here in Harkness' case and elsewhere in DeLillo's *oeuvre* is related to the very sense of cultural attenuation which instructs members of society that death and the sublime are parts of life which must be faced on own's own.

As suggested at the opening of the chapter, while in general terms DeLillo is predominantly concerned with representing the individual's attempt to formulate a response to such problems, the alternative found in the ossified communal element of contemporary life is one which does surface repeatedly throughout his career as well. In terms of *End Zone,* in several of the previously cited lines from Harkness and Robinson there are already several mentions of Mecca and the power inherent in the sheer number of human bodies which either make pilgrimages there or simply turn to face it multiple times in a day. This fascination with the power of crowds in general and with Mecca in particular is one which will recur repeatedly in DeLillo's career, and is a subject not unfamiliar to critics of his work. Indeed there is a significant amount to be said about the counterbalance which the crowd represents in terms of its opposition to the individual in the enclosed space within DeLillo's fiction; the crowd might even be read as a spatialization of the communal impulse. While this is a topic I will discuss at greater length in the context of Owen Brademas in *The Names*, there is an important manifestation of this communal element in *End Zone*. Although the dichotomy of the desert and the room I have developed at length define the majority of the novel, the third chronotopic element of the football match (and the possibility for *communitas* it inheres) provides a useful contrast with which to conclude the discussion of this novel.

2.6 ‘Adrift within this time and place’ – Football and *Communitas*

While it is not one of the deserts or enclosed spaces this thesis primarily focuses on, the minor chronotope of the football match is useful to inspect carefully for the broader conversation it begins with other such moments of potential *communitas* which occur in DeLillo’s career. Moreover, given the dialogic nature of chronotopes in a text outlined in the opening chapter, it is vital to read the varying occurrences of this other chronotopic logic of the football match as somehow responding to the same broader issues (capital, war, alienation) I have identified with regards to *End Zone’s* desert edge and enclosed room chronotopes. The two instances of this football match chronotope I discuss in what follows in fact differ in form between themselves in their shared gesturing towards what might be defined as a communal impulse. This communal impulse, which for DeLillo is often related to temporary manifestations of transcendence or rapture, provides a useful foil for the more individualized pursuits which lead these early characters to the ascetic stage of the desert or the small room.

The novel’s structure is in fact organized around Part One’s leading up to the important match Logos has with their rival Centrex College, the match itself as described in the shorter Part Two, and then the aftermath of their loss in Part Three. The long, jargon-heavy description of the Centrex match of Part Two is almost entirely devoid of descriptions of the spectators or their perspective, the lone exception being a two-page long parenthetical in which the narrator breaks the fourth wall and addresses the reader (as “the spectator”). These two pages in parenthesis make direct reference to the novel’s thematic undergirding, such as the correlation between war and football: “The exemplary spectator is the person who understands that sport is a benign illusion, the illusion that order is possible. It’s a form of society [….] without harm to the unborn […]. Here is not just order but civilization” (107-108). In this metafictional interruption the narrator makes it quite clear that football and sport in general indeed function as a placebo which allows society to continue to function in the face of the broader instability which the rest of the novel explores. Sport as providing “the benign illusion that order is possible” makes football in this novel not unlike the role of religion hinted at in various ways throughout the novel, serving as a temporary relief from the instability of contemporary life. Like a sermon or a mass, the football match alleviates the fear created by the future’s indeterminacy, although its dispelling of uncertainty through the illusion that everything is under control in the present moment is temporally distinct from the Judeo-Christian emphasis on afterlife.

Interestingly, the only other long, parenthetical aside of the novel also speaks to this same issue, albeit in a more indirect manner. Discussing Taft Robinson and an imagined scene in which he exhibits his outstanding speed in a football run, the narrator writes:

> It was not just the run that had brought them to their feet; it was the idea of the run, the history of it. Taft's speed had a life and history of its own, independent of him. To wonder at this past. To understand the speed, that it was something unknown to them, never to be known. Hipwidth. Leglength. Tendon and tibia. Hyperextensibility. But more too: wizardry drawn from wells in black buckets. Much to consider that could not be measured in simple centimeters. Strange that this demon speed could be distilled from the doldrums of old lands. But at least they had seen it now. The hawks in their lonesome sky. It had been a sight to ease the greed of all sporting souls. Maybe they had loved him in those few raw seconds. Truly loved him in the dark art of his speed. That was the far reach of the moment, their difficult love for magic. (186)

Without addressing more directly the history of racism involved in the topic, DeLillo here presents the fact of human speed as holding the element of magic in it, as that thing which brings people into a timeless zone of "dark buckets taken from wells," which sounds medieval, and the "doldrums of ancient lands," a faintly colonial sounding, veiled reference to non or pre-Western societies. What this passage as a whole suggests is that the spectating of a sports event like this opens up the *potential* for another sense of time, and therefore relatedly for another sort of ontology. Even though the previous assertion and the general course of the novel suggest that this potential is in the end a "benign illusion," the football stadium thus nevertheless acts as a space which allows for the past – and here the past can and perhaps should be understood as referring to a different social order – to intrude upon the present. The apparent random insertion of the sentence in this passage which reads "The hawks in their lonesome sky" is in fact informed by an almost identical sentence which reappears ten years later in *The Names*, and which similarly emerges in the context of temporal suspension or non-linearity.[16] Hawks turning in an empty sky is an image with no ground, and the non-linear flight with no background of the hawks therefore refers indirectly to the sense of time "adrift" that is mentioned multiple times in this novel.

In its suggestion of the orderly control of the present moment, as well as in light of the description of the spectators' response to Taft's speed, the football field becomes a space which points towards the possibility for the "irruption of the new" that Löwy signals is inherent in

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[16] I refer to page 287 of *The Names*: "The word for yesterday was the same as the word for tomorrow. The hawks turned in the empty sky." I will return to the recurrence of this image in its context in Chapter 4.

Benjamin's conception of Messianic time. The fact that this might in the end be an "illusion" does not stop people from seeking it out, again and again. With all this in mind, the idea of abandonment to a spectator sport might be conceived of as responding to a yearning in the face of the loss of certain societal patterns. I refer particularly to the necessity for occasional structural reversals in the function of societies, as well as for sacred places; these are concepts which emerge in the context of anthropological research such as that of Victor Turner and his work on liminal rites of passage, as well as in writings on the historical importance of sacred place by such scholars as L. Michael Harrington.

In Turner's discussion of liminality in his 1969 *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, what becomes clear is that there is a cross-cultural pattern which suggests a common need for a social balance between structure and what Turner terms *communitas*: "The distinction between structure and communitas is not simply the familiar one between 'secular' and 'sacred,' or that, for example, between politics and religion. [This is] a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society" (96-97). This is contextualized as part of a dialectic process: "for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness" (97). The suggestion I'd like to explore here is that a gradual move away from ritualized transitions and structural reversals of society – which survived for centuries in Europe in both religious rites as well as the carnival tradition – is an important problem for DeLillo, as it contributes to the sense of alienation inherent to the geographical, technological, and sociopolitical reality of contemporary Western life under late capitalism. Recurring manifestations of the sacred in the profane throughout DeLillo's career are related to this diminishment of especially "officially" recognized moments, in which individual members of society undergo liminal transitions or even experience the sense of communitas which anthropologists like Turner cite as necessary parts of healthy social existence. Such moments are still experienced spontaneously, which is what DeLillo often reflects, but a general societal recognition of their importance is often largely missing.

According to Turner, the primary function of these moments, these "liminal phenomena," is that

> they offer [a blend] of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented, in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social

structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. (96)

The idea that spectators of a sports match are able to experience a flattening out of social hierarchies and a "moment in and out of time" is returned to in DeLillo's prologue to *Underworld*, which depicts the 1951 championship baseball game between the Dodgers and the Giants from multiple points of view. DeLillo narrates at one point that the player Ralph Branca "is twenty five but makes you think he exemplifies ancient toil" (*Underworld* 38), and at another point describes the sound of the crowd: "Now the rhythmic applause starts, tentative at first, then spreading densely through the stands. This is how the crowd enters the game. The repeated three-beat has the force of some abject faith, a desperate kind of will toward magic and accident" (36). The "will toward magic and accident" and the "in and out of time" (Turner 96) description of Branca is also resonant with the above description from *End Zone* of spectators in awe at the speed of Taft Robinson's run, in which the present is mixed with elements of the medieval and "ancient" past. Though *End Zone's* narrator metafictionally points out that the spectator is merely succumbing to "the illusion that order is possible" (*End Zone* 107), it is of course important that the context of this comment and of the novel's composition in general is a society far removed from the much smaller/non-Western ones that Turner was studying in the context of his research. Turner himself does address this distinction, and importantly for the context of this chapter relates his discussion of traits associated with liminality to contemporary religious traditions.

Turner first provides a long list of binaries – in which the first term corresponds to the liminal and the second to "the status system" (hierarchical system) – which include such relevant dichotomies as transition and state, communitas and structure, anonymity and systems of nomenclature, sacredness and secularity. He then continues on to write:

> The reader will have noticed immediately that many of these properties constitute what we think of as characteristics of the religious life in the Christian tradition. Undoubtedly, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews would number many of them among their religious characteristics, too. What appears to have happened is that with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities "betwixt and between" defined states of culture and society has become itself an institutionalized state. But traces of the passage quality of the religious life remain in such formulations as: "The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head." Transition has here become a permanent

> condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world religions. (*Ritual* 107)

Rather than a society with a structure periodically interrupted by moments of liminality and communitas, what Turner signals here in relation to contemporary culture is crucial: an institutionalization of both structure (in secular society) and the liminal (in monastic/mendicant traditions). In other words, the institutionalization of liminal traits into the ascetic tradition Turner points to is "balanced" by its opposite in the form of a secular culture stripped of such traits; one could even argue that this very imbalance is one underlying source for the difficulty Western secular individuals often have in dealing with the prospect of death and the sublime, a problem DeLillo famously explores in *White Noise*.[17] In this light, DeLillo's interest in such traditions – Joseph Dewey calls DeLillo "manifestly versed in visionary literature, both Eastern and Western" (54) – and his return to the desert of the early ascetics is a move which demonstrates an instinctual perception of the structural imbalance Turner suggests impairs the healthy functioning of contemporary societies. In the context of *End Zone*, despite the self-aware commentary that the type of *communitas* experienced as the spectator of a football match is somehow illusory, there is another pivotal moment in the novel which offers a different perspective, in which the players engage in a spectator-less football match in the middle of a snowstorm.

This match, which starts as five on a side in the parade grounds in the freshly falling snow, grows in size as Gary Harkness and some of this teammates play on for several hours. Gary describes the way that, as time passes, rules are made to make the game simpler and simpler, such as the outlawing of gloves, the outlawing of putting hands in armpits for warmth, and eventually even the forbidding of making plays in a huddle in the usual way; instead, "each play […] would be announced aloud by the team with the ball. There would be no surprise at all" (189). While at first some people stop to watch, eventually the snow picks up and Gary writes that it became "impossible to see beyond the limits of the parade grounds. […] We were part of the weather, right inside it, isolated from objects on the land, from land, from perspective itself. There were no spectators now; we were totally alone" (189). This leads to a feeling which echoes previous references to time's suspension: "We were adrift within this time and place and what I experienced then, speaking just for myself, was some variety of environmental bliss" (189). Whereas earlier references to "drifting in time" are made to emphasize a sense of

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[17] Cf. Laura Barrett (2001).

disconnection from the linear history of progress, here it is significant that Gary feels "adrift *within* this time and place" (my emphasis); the act of playing the football match in the snow provides an opportunity for Harkness and his teammates to experience this sense of "environmental bliss," which together with the emphasis on simplicity and anonymity suggest a communitas experience of homogeneity with both each other and with the snowed-in desert environment in which they live.

Gary and his teammates reduce their actions in the end to almost nothing but bodily confirmations of each other's existence, barely playing football more than to crash against each other again and again. One argument which emerges here is that perhaps the sacredness sought in this novel – which is otherwise deeply concerned with aborted attempts to find the sacred – is only present here, in this brief moment near the end. The reduction of the players to anonymous bodies without a hierarchy is at its most basic an expression of this sense of communitas that Turner describes with relation to liminal passages. As a matter of fact, the liminal experience this snowbound football match suggests is interrupted by Gary's being summoned to Coach Creed's ascetic cell, which leads directly to the important personal transition which occurs for him; he at this point shifts from an existential floater to incorporation within the hierarchical order, as Creed at this point makes him a team-captain. The conclusion we are left with is that while the organized clash of the spectated football match is one attempt to fulfill the need for *communitas* – perhaps even standing in a as a (pseudo) sacred place for the spectator (of which Mecca is one of the most outstanding examples)[18] – the experience of *communitas* so desperately sought after by adolescent members of society such as Gary Harkness might be found in unexpected places. With its emphasis on embodiment and its temporary interruption of structure, it probably stands as the most prominent example of a positive response to the dread of mass annihilation to be found in the novel, even though Gary himself is not explicitly aware of it.

Conclusions

The preceding pages have argued at length that the desert edge location and its chronotopic value as a literary place in *End Zone* go well beyond their description as a terminal

[18] See L. Michael Harrington's *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (2004) for relevant discussion of sacred places, especially with regards to Heidegger and the potential for their transmigration into objects in the wake of the desacralization of places themselves; this is a topic I return to in Chapter 4 as well.

location. There is in fact an intimate tie to the ancient deserts which played a role in the formation of monotheism at its outset, and thus in the most general sense this both real and fictional desert of the biblical past forms a broad backdrop for the entire Western cultural complex to follow in its wake. It is in this context that, for DeLillo, the desert here becomes a chronotope which (evoking Benjamin and Teilhard de Chardin) allows for the potential irruption of the past into the present, or rather time to lose its rigid sense of linearity that is posited in more teleological veins of thought. Though sharing in one sense an emphasis on the present moment, this also moves DeLillo's desert beyond the ascetic's faith in a static eternity towards and ontology of becoming. It is this sense of time which thus further establishes the desert as the site for potential personal transformation in the face of late capitalist, Cold War existential anxiety, where the seeking of an adequate ontological stance in response is aided by this removal from the deadlock of linear time. For Anatole Bloomberg, this time-value facilitates his task of separating himself from the burden of historical association, where for Taft Robinson it allows the attempted negation of a political and social self, which is necessarily embedded in a particular historical moment; I have tried to show how these personal attempts at transformation are enacted chronotopically through their relationships with the spaces they inhabit.

Regarding the narrator Gary Harkness and his own quest, whose trajectory Dewey identifies as one of DeLillo's few coming-of-age plots,[19] what the ending of the novel and Gary's hospitalization highlight most of all is the difficulty of developing an ontological stance capable of assimilating the contradictions and anxieties of contemporary life, of escaping the entanglements of history to embrace an open futurity. While Harkness does find the correct place to match the sense of indifferent drift of time which he senses as pervading the wider context of 1970s American culture, he is unable to fully commit to any of the particular responses he both pursues and interacts with there (whether this inability is Harkness' own or simply a wider limitation of the circumstances is inconsequential). Where Bloomberg's personal consumption and expansion extends the self to such an extent as to obliterate any connection with both the past and the future, Taft Robinson's method of dragging the outside in behind him and narrowing the self (correlated chronotopically with the space of his tightly controlled dorm-room) to a still point approaching zero/silence likewise represents a negation

[19] Along with *Ratner's Star* (1976): see Dewey's chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, pp. 53-64.

of human society. It is in contrast to these individual responses between which Gary vacillates that the potential communal aspect of the football match is also contextualized. The football match in the snow presents a moment of spontaneous *communitas*[20], a brief overturning of the tendency Turner identifies for the institutionalization of both the structural and the liminal into separated domains. Harkness' final act, however, reinforces the sense that his wish to find a middle path between the different sorts of extreme responses (including his own obsession with war games and jargon) leads him to an existential impasse. This attempt to navigate a middle path between the various pressures and extremes they tend to create is a motif which will recur again and again throughout DeLillo's career. Moreover, while the next chapter will explore two examples which treat a similar theme through two different chronotopes, it is most often in texts which feature deserts that this tendency is the most noticeable; my discussion of *Zero K* in Chapter 5 will conclude the progression evident through DeLillo's *oeuvre* in this sense.

DeLillo's development of a dialogue between the various places which the novel converts to chronotopes with their own unique values should be seen as an introduction to a tendency which only strengthens as his career advances. Even in this early text his use of the characters' rooms to represent their ontological projects demonstrates a keen understanding of both the important role which the experience of place plays in a subject's development, as well as the way this can played with and expanded upon through its translation to the literary chronotope. His further enactment of a dialogue between chronotopes of different "levels," where the rooms of the novel are embedded within the chronotope of the desert edge where the college campus is located, only reinforces this argument. With this early chronotopic awareness established, it is moreover important to emphasize the way that paying close attention to this vital aspect of his artistic representation results in significant conclusions about his fiction which are not evident otherwise. An understanding of the desert's sense of time divorced from the linearity of history – and its relationship both to projects of ontological renewal as well as to a long history of asceticism – is one which is crucial to a reading of the texts which I analyze in the subsequent chapters. How does DeLillo continue to explore possible responses for the contemporary subject to the shifting tides of technology, capital, war and social alienation,

[20] Interestingly, DeLillo mentions in a 1993 interview that the entire scene of the football match in the snow was itself written in a state of pure, authorial flow, in contrast to his normal pace and habit of constant revision: "In *End Zone* a number of characters play a game of touch football in a snowstorm. There's nothing rapturous or magical about the writing. The writing is simple. But I wrote the passage, maybe five or six pages, in a state of pure momentum, without the slightest pause or deliberation" ("The Art of Fiction" 90-91).

which only seem to increase as time goes on? In the next chapter I deviate slightly from the desert focus, reading two of DeLillo's oft-ignored short stories from the 1980s for their condensed treatment of the same problems Gary Harkness is dealing with a decade previous.

CHAPTER 3 War, Capital, and the Narrowing of Experience in DeLillo’s Short Fiction

CHAPTER 3
War, Capital, and the Narrowing of Experience in DeLillo's Short Fiction

There can be no liberation from the body, or from space, or the real. They all have a nasty habit of recurring with great insistence, however much we try to fantasize their disappearance.

Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture*

Hamm*: And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?*
Clov*: What in God's name could there be on the horizon?*

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*

3.1 'Sun-cut precision' – DeLillo's Greek period

As the analysis of the previous chapter should have begun to make clear, Don DeLillo's fiction is one which demonstrates an awareness of the importance of the embodied experience of place even from the beginnings of his long career.[1] The way that early characters like Gary Harkness, Taft Robinson, and *Great Jones Street's* Bucky Wunderlick work out their existential issues through the spaces they inhabit is a clear demonstration of this early chronotopic sensitivity on DeLillo's part; this sort of commentary also points towards the argument that an artist who (intuitively or explicitly) perceives the importance of place is driven towards (or at least enabled to put into practice) a literary expression which prioritizes representation *through* the means of literary places – through the chronotope. In this vein,

[1] A slightly altered variation of this chapter's arguments regarding the short story "The Ivory Acrobat" were previously published in the journal *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* – see Westmoreland (2020).

although the early novels – from *Americana* (1971) to *Running Dog* (1978)[2] – already demonstrate a highly spatial artistic expression, in this chapter I will develop the argument that beginning in the 1980s DeLillo's fiction demonstrates a further augmented sense of place-awareness. Further, I argue that this increased sensitivity to place is related to his real life displacement to Greece for three years, and thus for an understanding of the three texts analyzed in this and the following chapter as belonging together under the umbrella of what I call his Greek period. The three texts in question are *The Names* (1982), "Human Moments in World War III" (1983), and "The Ivory Acrobat" (1988), which I treat slightly out of chronological order by leaving the analysis of *The Names* for the following chapter.

Place in this context again refers to the sense developed in the opening chapter, which emphasizes the inherently embodied and place-bound ground for subjectivity which phenomenology in particular emphasizes. As will become clear, especially relevant here is the important argument Dylan Trigg makes that by the act of "carrying places with us [in memory], we open ourselves to a mode of embodiment that has less to do with habit and more to do with the continuity of one's sense of self." (11). All three of the texts that emerged from what I call DeLillo's Greek period are connected by a fictional exploration of what Trigg here signals, a questioning of what it means to *be* (a self) through a highly place-based representation; the characters in all three of these texts are forced to confront their (often unstable) implaced ideas of their selves. As will be explored in this chapter, this confrontation is in some senses always connected to the inherent instability caused by the seemingly simple fact of geographical displacement. However, whereas 1982's *The Names'* obvious interest in language is well explored by literary critics,[3] this other evolution in DeLillo's fiction – which I hold should be of equal interest to that of his language exploration – is until now decidedly lacking in discussion.

As hinted in the lines above, then, I argue that there is a noticeable shift which occurs in DeLillo's writing which coincides with his own real-life, personal displacement: in the period between 1979 and 1982 DeLillo spent around three years living in Athens, Greece, both working on *The Names* as well as travelling in the general region of the Middle East.[4] When it

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[2] Further analysis in this vein could focus on the spaces of apartments and motels in *Players* (1977), as well as the desert borderlands where *Running Dog's* (1978) protagonist Glen Selvy meets his violent end – at a place where everything "was in the distance," where "Distance was the salient fact" (*Running Dog* 190).

[3] See the following chapter for an in-depth discussion of this.

[4] Cf. the Harris interview (p. 18) or the 1987 Rothstein interview (p. 23), both found in the 2005 DePietro collection, *Conversations with Don DeLillo*.

comes to the embodied experience of place of the living artist and that experience's inextricably intertwined relationship with the chronotopic expression of said artist's work, as Bakhtin signals in his essay on the chronotope,[5] there is here an important and unavoidable correlation to be fleshed out between DeLillo's writing and his life. Broadly speaking, the argument is that the experience of living and traveling in such places were highly formative in the context of DeLillo's immediate and subsequent fictional expression, especially when it comes to place, and thus in his chronotopic representation. This is a correlation helpfully signaled by DeLillo himself in several interviews of the period, in which he discusses both the impact of Greece as a place on his writing as well as on his desire at the time to slow down and be more precise in his composition – up until that point he had published on average a novel once every two years. In one 1988 interview, for example, DeLillo says:

> In *The Names*, I spent a lot of time searching for the kind of sun-cut precision I found in the Greek light and in the Greek landscape. I wanted a prose which would have the clarity and the accuracy which the natural environment at its best in that part of the world seems to inspire in our own senses. I mean, there were periods in Greece when I tasted and saw and heard with much more sharpness and clarity than I'd ever done before or since. ("An Outsider" 68)

While the first part of what DeLillo here indicates is most explicitly referring to the *style* of his writing, the second part, in which he indicates he "tasted and saw and heard" with extreme "sharpness and clarity," points towards the significant impact that the experience was having on the author himself as an individual. The sudden exposure to radically other ways of perceiving the world is readable within the pages of his fiction which emerged in the immediate wake of the experience.

Whereas the most obvious form which DeLillo's early chronotopic expression takes is related to the individual enclosed in a small room – in *End Zone* tied in part to the desert's role in the ascetic tradition as well as, like *Great Jones Street,* to a merging of the room's representational value with the character(s) therein – what emerges in *The Names* and these two short stories of the period is an expansion of the role of place in subject formation, expressed thus through the chronotope. Although the ascetic drive and the related spiritual

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[5] Bakhtin: "However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them" (*FTC* 254).

impulse never disappear throughout DeLillo's career, there is at this point an increased attention paid to the philosophical (ontological) ramifications of our existence in and through places, an increase which is readable in the chronotopic expression of the texts themselves. In this sense, the short stories "Human Moments in World War III" and "The Ivory Acrobat" are natural companions to the 1982 novel, for though 1985's *White Noise* was published between the two stories examined in this chapter, the setting of Athens for 1988's "The Ivory Acrobat" brings its concerns quite clearly back into the fold of the Greek period. As a matter of fact, though it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in-depth, even in *White Noise* there is an argument to be made that the sense of placelessness[6] it explores is in fact a demonstration of an *increased* sense of place-awareness on the author's part; the fact of its composition upon DeLillo's return from his time abroad indicates an amplified awareness of the disorienting and empty-of-meaning spaces of 1980s hyper-capitalist U.S., which I argue likely *results from* an augmented sense of the importance of meaningful places picked up during his time living in Greece and travelling generally in the region, which would have contrasted sharply with his return to the U.S. Focusing first on these two short stories, I will explore in depth how this translates to his fictional representation, particularly when it comes to his decision to employ the short form in order to represent the individual struggling to create an adequate response to the sense of crisis which stems from the pressures of both late stage capitalism and the threat/reality of war.

3.2 Capital and War: DeLillo and the Compression of Space and Time

For such a careful and well-studied author, criticism devoted to Don DeLillo's shorter works of fiction is notably sparse. Though this is perhaps excusable in light of the incredibly rich and thematically multi-faceted nature of his corpus, it does seem a mistake to consider these stories somehow less significant or less meticulously wrought. While a scattering of analysis has been directed towards the early stories,[7] DeLillo's 2011 publication of the collection *The Angel Esmeralda* should be a clear sign that he considers these later pieces especially, which range from 1979 to 2011, as able to stand tall alongside his more celebrated

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[6] Mark Osteen calls the supermarket of *White Noise*, along with malls and motels, one of DeLillo's "postmodern temples" (*American* 166).
[7] See discussions in Engles (1999) and, most notably, Mark Osteen's *American Magic and Dread* (2000).

novels. Only very recently has serious critical attention been directed toward this collection, most notably a couple of articles on "Baader-Meinhof"[8] as well as Elise Martucci's recent chapter surveying the collection's engagement with a sense of place, this latter being the only one to attempt a comprehensive analysis.[9] Henry Veggian, discussing the lack of critical engagement regarding the short fiction, suggests that it perhaps poses "particular challenges to readers of his novels," in that "the novels are systems that disrupt other systems," whereas his "short stories are instead objects of art that move in another direction, away from systemic modes of narrative organization, taking the reliquary form of myth" (115-6); this potentially off-putting difference in essential form might explain some of the lack of attention. However, this distinction may also present new possibilities to his readers, as the altered modes of narrative form are precisely what allow DeLillo to convey a different sort of message therein; the important point is to not consider the conclusions of one or the other as more significant.

One of the reasons it is useful to continue the discussion left off with *End Zone* by focusing first on these two shorter texts is in a thematic continuity related to the overhanging threat of war. Though it was not the focus of my previous chapter on his second novel, what I will argue that both these stories speak to is a certain spatiotemporal problem which DeLillo already sensed in *End Zone*, namely the experience of a sense of compression of time and space in the face of both a globalizing, capitalist world and, more particularly, a world at war. Though the novel takes place on the desert's edge, as I discussed at length, there is in fact a moment in which Harkness detours slightly into its interior, just after engaging in a long discussion on the catastrophic potential of modern weapons with the Major Staley in the non-place of his motel room. The desert represented in this scene is one of pure silence, where Harkness is "the only moving thing," and where "the sound of [his] feet was the only sound, [his] body all their was of moving parts" (*End Zone* 84). Even "the plants did not move in the wind" (84), an image which will return forty-four years later in *Zero K*. This desert (as opposed to the desert's edge the novel primarily presents) is significant thus in that it becomes like an abstract, ontological field on which the human character encounters the negativity inherent in the destructive capability of the mass weapons Gary was conversing about just before this scene. Indeed, on the next page he stumbles across an enigmatic, "low mound" of "excrement, […] simple shit"

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[8] See articles by Kauffmann (2008) and Daanoune (2017).

[9] See Martucci's chapter "Place as Active Receptacle in *The Angel Esmeralda*" in the 2017 collection of essays, *Don DeLillo after the Millennium.*

(85), whose nature as "nullity in the very word" sends him into a existential spin which ends with his fleeing from "this whisper of inexistence" (85). This association of the desert with the nullification of the human is one which does evolve along the course of DeLillo's career; at this point the looming threat of mass destruction is the primary thematic driver in regards to this particular chronotope. I mention all this to support the decision to here make a detour from the focus on texts featuring deserts precisely because these two short stories approach this same thematic issue – of what this looming threat does to people living beneath its shadow, especially regarding the subjective experience of time and space (place) – through varying chronotopes.

In *End Zone* such an effect is mentioned briefly, just after Gary flees from this scene of nullification above:

> I looked down at the road as I walked. […] I thought of men embedded in the ground, all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth. […] Perhaps there is no silence. Or maybe it's just that time is too compact to allow for silence to be felt. But in some form of void, freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself. […] To begin to reword the overflowing world. To subtract and disjoin. To re-recite the alphabet. To make elemental things. To call something by its name and need no other sound. (*End Zone* 86)

This passage is doubly useful. The problem identified as a passing reflection that perhaps "time is too compact to allow for silence to be felt" – the individual's experiential result at the hands of external pressures – becomes a core concern in these texts a decade later. Whereas this concern is essentially ontological in nature – what does it mean to be, to exist, in this context? – the passage's references to "reword[ing] the overflowing world" and "re-recit[ing] the alphabet" also signal DeLillo's other well-known concern with language, and the way language is similarly fundamental to questions of being and knowing. While the separation is in some senses artificial, this focus on language is contrasted with the focus on becoming through place which I am exploring in this thesis, in the sense that it potentially represents two opposing philosophical approaches to the question of the human – whereas Ludwig Wittgenstein's (who receives an explicit reference in *End Zone*[10]) general approach that philosophy is really the study of language inarguably resonates with DeLillo's thinking, what my project as a whole strives to reveal is a career-long alternative current which explores such philosophical questions through a non-linguistic, embodied experience through place. While in the end the

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[10] "Poster of Wittgenstein, I thought. Maybe that's what he'd had up there, or almost had. Dollar ninetyeight poster of the philosopher surrounded by Vienna Circle" (*End Zone* 228)

two concerns will always come together – both are essential to all forms of being human – DeLillo's exploration of the (often universalized American, male) subject through language has, again, already been demonstrated by critics in multiple ways.[11] Here, however, the focus is on embodied experience through place, and it is for this reason that these two short stories are so useful, as they concisely explore through a highly chronotopic representation the experiential problem of compressed space and time. The stories are treated out of chronological order for the simple reason that the later "The Ivory Acrobat's" thematic drive is, similarly to *End Zone*, more explicitly limited to the threat of war, while the earlier "Human Moments in World War III" does the important job of linking this existential threat of war with the more subtle threat of the Western capitalist ethos of consumption. Along the way I moreover hope to show that the short form of fiction is, for DeLillo, one which stylistically allows for a different way of thinking about a given topic; whereas the novel form is necessarily concerned with larger systems[12] and with plot, the short form (which DeLillo tends towards in his late novels) is notable for a different sense of temporality, which DeLillo is drawn to in his more philosophically-oriented fiction. In this sense there is a correlation with his texts which tend towards deserts, especially in the vein I explore in this thesis, and the oft-ignored stories are therefore valuable to examine more in-depth for what they add to the discussion.

In terms of the overhanging threat of war and the different sense of temporality alluded to above, of central importance to the analysis which follows regarding these two short stories is both a familiarity with as well as an understanding of the similarity between the two concepts of "time-space compression" and "accelerated time." Writing in 1989, David Harvey introduced time-space compression in *The Condition of Postmodernity* as a term to refer to what might now be a recognizably ubiquitous effect regarding our spatiotemporal experience of the world in light of the ongoing development of capital and technology:

> I mean to signal by that term processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves. I use the word 'compression' because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us […]. As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and

[11] While I will return to this subject in the following chapter, see David Cowart's *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (2002) for the most comprehensive example of this focus in DeLillo scholarship.
[12] This is especially true with DeLillo: see LeClair's *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (1987)

> ecological interdependencies […] and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds. (240)

Ignoring the variety of critical responses both possible and already existent regarding the nuances of Harvey's overall analysis,[13] in this text the British geographer argues convincingly for a noticeable, society-wide shift in terms of both representation and actual experience of time and space in moments of economic crisis; Harvey highlights in particular the moments of 1848 in Europe, those leading up to the first World War, and around the time the global economy shifted to a system of flexible accumulation in 1973.[14] Further, a glance at critical thought subsequent to 1989, both with regards to literature and in the social sciences, suggests that Harvey's argument in the general sense was highly perceptive, although other theorists tend to focus more on speed and the more obvious correlation it holds with time. A prominent example of this latter emphasis is the writing of Paul Virilio, who similarly (albeit less systematically) discusses the problem of "accelerated time" in a number of his texts, most especially in *The Art of the Motor* (1995) and *Open Sky* (1997). Virilio's focus is mostly on the effects technology (and the increase in speed it enables) has in relation to our understanding or experience of space and time; he even claims the need to introduce light (as in the speed of light) as a third sign in addition to the classic space/time duo (*Open Sky* 15). Virilio's descriptions of the "paradoxes of acceleration" in *Open Sky* include recognizable problems of the postmodern age; for example, he describes the way "the current revolution in (interactive) transmission is in turn provoking a commutation in the urban environment whereby the image prevails over the thing it is an image of" (19-20). Such correlations – between this notion of an altered experience of time (and space) and the commonly theorized postmodern problem of simulacra – begin to suggest the way this space/time issue is intimately tied up with contemporary questions of representation as well as of subjectivities. What is important to emphasize is that close scrutiny of both of these ideas – that of time-space compression and that of accelerated time, associated respectively with Harvey and Virilio – supports the claim that they indeed represent varying approaches to the same phenomenon, which is namely a fundamental shift in the way members of contemporary Western societies experience the spatiotemporal world in light of changes in technology and all that which follows in their wake.

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[13] See Doreen Massey's chapter "Flexible Sexism" in *Space, Place and Gender* (pp. 212–48) for an important feminist critique of Harvey's text.

[14] See chapters 15-17 in Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989)

This assertion is particularly interesting when considered through the sort of phenomenologically-oriented gaze explored in my opening chapter, which takes embodied, implaced experience as the starting point for all such sociopolitical and indeed ontological considerations; in this critical context, such a shift in the way we experience the spatiotemporal world takes on a foundational nature and is therefore of fundamental importance.

In terms of Don DeLillo's engagement with the Western experience of time-space compression or of accelerating time, it is not a fresh revelation in terms of literary criticism. However, with a few notable exceptions, the primary focus of such discussions is on its most obvious manifestation as found in the much later *Cosmopolis,*[15] published in 2003. Nicole Merola, for example, argues that "throughout *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo exposes the extent to which the compression of time and space and materiality constitutes contemporary technoclass experience," as well as specifying that the novel represents a critique on DeLillo's part: "the predominant suture of technospace with attenuated socioecological relations marks the tone of the novel as critical of the particular compressions that make possible and emerge from the digitization of contemporary life" (831). Merola's emphasis on the novel's critique is correct in not attributing to it any attempt at resolution of such compression-related problems; one would be hard pressed to identify in the pages of *Cosmopolis* anything beyond an extended and precise *diagnosis* of this contemporary condition. One notable exception to the *Cosmopolis* emphasis in the discussion of DeLillo's engagement with this spatiotemporal phenomenon is Peter Boxall, who briefly but convincingly identifies parallels with Virilio's concept of accelerated time in both his 2006 full length study *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction,* and in his 2012 article "Late: Fictional Time in the Twenty-First Century," referring in the former to *White Noise* and *The Names* and in the latter mostly to DeLillo's post-9/11 fiction.[16] Also significantly, with regards to Virilio's accelerated time, several DeLillo scholars[17] have identified through research in the DeLillo archives in the Harry Ransom Center of Austin, Texas that in preparation for writing *Cosmopolis* DeLillo was reading the French thinker's *Open Sky* (1997), a text which, as mentioned previously, deals explicitly with this theme, so

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[15] For more on time-space compression/acceleration in *Cosmopolis*, see articles by Chandler (2009), Merola (2012), and Varsava (2005).
[16] See Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (p. 114) and "Late: Fictional Time in the Twenty-First Century" (p. 690).
[17] I refer to articles by Nicole Merola and Crystal Alberts (2016), as well as a book-length study by James Gourley (2013).

even if it were not symbolically evident in that novel the association is in a certain sense confirmed.[18] However, while all of these discussions of DeLillo's engagement with this changing sense of time and space are helpfully informed by the confirmation that DeLillo was reading Virilio leading up to *Cosmopolis*, the following analysis of both "The Ivory Acrobat" and "Human Moments in World War III" does more than provide yet another argument which situates DeLillo as a thinker with his finger famously on the pulse of the times. In fact, as these short stories actually appeared in *Granta* prior to Harvey's publishing of *The Condition of Postmodernity* in 1989, I suggest they offer a contemporaneous artistic response to the theoretical identification of the phenomenon.

"The Ivory Acrobat" (1988) is a compact example of the way that DeLillo continues to mold the spaces in his fiction to the shape of the particular problems his characters encounter, or rather the way the existence of his characters bleeds its way into their surrounding spaces. Further, paired with "Human Moments in World War III," it is particularly useful when it comes to my focus on DeLillo's chronotopic representation, in that the particular problems which are explored in these texts – the angst resulting from the looming threat of global war and destruction, for example – are necessarily temporal in nature as well. Not unlike other texts of the period such as *Libra* or *Mao II* – the latter which Laura Barrett argues "presents a world in which the negotiation of unfamiliar territory - labyrinthine urban centers, vexing architecture, ambiguous images, and technological communication - compromises notions of subjectivity" (789) – "The Ivory Acrobat" thus chronotopically engages a particular problem generally associated with the postmodern era: the difficulty of the individual attempting to stay afloat and maintain a sense of identity in a world bowing under the pressures of what is described by Virilio as "accelerating" time. However, whereas DeLillo's longer fiction which treats this increasingly pertinent theme focuses more on the often debilitating ramifications of spatiotemporal compression – one thinks again of Eric Packer's fate in *Cosmopolis,* for instance – I argue that this particular shorter piece, perhaps due to the unique possibilities of the short form, in the end actually suggests the possibility of encountering a method of escape from the crushing pressures of contemporary space-time. As will be explored through an analysis of the main character's spatial interactions, the answer in this text lies in a narrowing

[18] Gourley writes that, in *Cosmopolis,* "clarified is DeLillo's conceptualization of time, which in this novel (derived from my research in the *DeLillo Archives* at the University of Texas at Austin) moves beyond [George] Steiner's analysis of time to the work of Paul Virilio" (6).

down of one's spatial subject-identification – of one's "place" in the world – from the abstraction of the room one inhabits to the subject's body itself, a movement which is explored in this story through the titular ivory figurine of the female acrobat. As will be seen, this is an artistic response on DeLillo's part which varies rather significantly from the rest of his fiction of the period – the narrowing in to a focus on the subject through the body (as opposed to the isolated subject in a room) is one which does not reappear so explicitly until 2000's *The Body Artist*, which is generally considered the beginning of DeLillo's "late" period[19]. In this sense, the Greek period, with its heightened sensitivity to place and chronotope, demonstrates its affinity with the type of thinking DeLillo returns to in in his late style.

3.3 Time and Embodiment in 'The Ivory Acrobat'

Kyle, the protagonist of the story, is an American who lives in Athens, Greece and teaches English at a children's school. The story opens in the aftermath of an earthquake, and it is this seismic event and its persistent aftershocks which provide the narrative drive. The obvious (and quite literal) effect of the earthquake is to shake the foundations, a geologically extreme event which undermines the natural stability typically associated with the earth. The tremors have a direct effect upon the wellbeing of the city's inhabitants, whose trust in the physical surroundings of their interior spaces is undermined. It is Kyle, however, who is the most disturbed of all by the quakes; they eventually force her into a state of perpetual instability due to the constant expectation of another aftershock. The uncertain ground Kyle is placed on due to the threat of more aftershocks is a key element in the story – it is emphasized at a variety of points throughout. At one point the narrator describes, for example, the way the "tremors entered her bloodstream. She listened and waited. She couldn't sleep at night and caught odd moments in daytime, dozing in an unused room at the school. She dreaded going home" ("Ivory" 60). The tremors "entering her bloodstream" serves as a segue into the way in which they are somehow undermining her very sense of self, deconstructing her subjectivity; the entry into her bloodstream suggests an infiltration of being. Throughout the story she is constantly pausing to listen, never able to relax even (or especially) in her own home, and this state of suspension eventually comes to dominate her life; her "dread of going home" (60) thus begins

[19] For extended discussion of DeLillo's late style see Peter Boxall's "Late: Fictional Time in the Twenty-First Century."

to reinforce the suggested link between her subjectivity and the spatial correlation of home to self. This particular relationship – between room and subject– should of course be quite familiar by this point.

It is, however, important to further solidify this symbolic relationship between room and self within this particular narrative in order to understand the consequences of the sudden hostility of this intimate space of the home in "The Ivory Acrobat." The correlation begins to emerge as soon as the reader is taken into Kyle's room, which is recently destabilized by the effects of the initial earthquake; when she first goes back to her apartment to finally get some sleep after hours of aimless wandering, she is unable to do so in her bed. Rather:

> she placed herself on the sofa between a sheet and blanket, her head resting on an airline pillow. She closed her eyes and folded up, elbows at her midsection, hands pressed together between her knees. She tried to will herself to sleep but realized she was listening intently, listening to the room. (57)

The passage presents a series of in-between or transitional elements, which together form a physically liminal placement that demonstrates that she no longer feels bound to the room, her home; she positions herself in the fetal position (reminiscent of the first transition: birth), is placed squarely in the middle of the room, and is even supported by an airline pillow, another reference to the liminal through the phenomenon of modern air travel.[20] Further, rather than falling asleep – which would signify being at ease with one's place (both in this room and in this world) – she can only listen intently. Overall, such a description firmly establishes a compromised sense of belonging, of place, on Kyle's part; her place-bound sense of self is attacked even in its safest location, the space of her own living quarters. This sense of unease in her home is further developed in the subsequent pages, and then something she says to her colleague Edmund reinforces this correlation between her existence in the apartment and her subjectivity: "There's only one subject. That's the trouble. I used to have a personality. What am I now?" (62). The crisis of identity signaled by the lament for her loss of personality goes hand in hand with the way the continued seismic tremors destabilize her existence in her apartment; the tremors steadily overtake Kyle, causing a simultaneous feeling of dislocation from both the room and from her corresponding self. By the end of the story this disassociation becomes even more obvious: during another aftershock she pushes "her hands against the door

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[20] See the following chapter's discussion of *The Names* for a more in-depth exploration of the role of air travel in DeLillo's fiction.

frame, searching for a calmness in herself. She could almost see a picture of her mind, a vague gray oval, floating over the room" (68). Here, in a paradigmatically liminal placement, she stands in the threshold, and in a moment of almost metafictional revelation is herself able to glimpse the nature of her crisis; the problem suggested is a disassociation of mind and body, an unhealthy Cartesian split which coincides with a wedge driven between character and now-hostile room. While the implications for one's sense of place and identity in terms of this mind-body split are of central importance for the piece, this liminal placement – halfway between the inside and the outside – is useful to unravel in more detail.

This liminal element is worth examining because, although it is eventually made explicit, from the first page of "The Ivory Acrobat" a primary consequence of the earthquakes is precisely this disruption of the classical boundaries between inside and outside:

> When it was over she stood in the crowded street and listened to the dense murmur of all those people speaking […]. She heard the same phrases repeated and stood with her arms crossed on her chest, watching a woman carry a chair to a suitable spot. (55).

Besides the fact that DeLillo opens with a character having just been expelled from the safety of her home, the "woman carrying the chair to a suitable spot" represents the transgression of personal space from the inside to the outside. The inclusion of Kyle's "hearing the same phrases repeated" is also indicative of an associated narrowing down of self through limiting repetition, an assertion based in DeLillo's well-documented correlation of language-use and identity-formation.[21] It is then two pages later that the newfound importance of the dichotomy for Kyle is made explicit: "She didn't want to be alone in her perception that something had basically changed. The world was narrowed down to inside and outside" (57).

This narrowing down to inside and outside has a parallel in Paul Virilio's elaboration of the causes and consequences of accelerated time. In both *The Art of the Motor* (1995) and *Open Sky* (1997), Virilio repeatedly emphasizes a point resonant with Kyle's preoccupation with the disruption of the inside/outside dichotomy. For example, in discussing the role of technology in creating a sense of accelerated time, he writes in the former that whereas before "being present meant being [physically] close," today's technology allows proximity to be redefined through virtual rather than physical presence. Virilio sees in this "the unheard-of possibility [of] a sudden splitting of the subject's personality. This will not leave the 'body

[21] Cf. Boxall's discussion of *End Zone* and Wittgenstein in his 2006 monograph (pp. 42-44) or, more generally, Cowart's *The Physics of Language* (2002) and Pass's *The Language of Self: Strategies of Subjectivity in the Novels of Don DeLillo* (2014).

image' – the individual's self-perception – intact for long" (*Art* 106). Such a splitting of personality is of course destabilizing, and can thus also be understood as an undermining of subjectivity in general. Laura Barrett describes DeLillo's preoccupation with just such a problem in her discussion of the more or less contemporaneous novel *Mao II* (1991), writing that the urban spaces of that novel represent "an erasure of the boundaries - between inside and outside, reality and representation, time and space," which erasure engenders "a loss of subjectivity" ("Here" 790). Besides confirming DeLillo's perception of the same phenomenon observed by Virilio (among others), these similarities also inform Kyle's problem with an undermined sense of subjectivity and later adaptation involving the Minoan figurine, which I will broach shortly.

What Virilio writes just after the above, however, suggests a potential result of dismantling the inside/outside dichotomy: "sooner or later, [the] classic distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' will go out the window with it. The hypercenter of the *real time* [of] one's own body […] will then prevail over the center of the *real space* of one's own world" (*Art* 106-7, emphasis in original). While this assertion may be problematic in its dichotomous separation of time and space in one's experience of the world (rather than emphasizing merely a shift in the relation between time and space in the unitary experience of human perception), Virilio's relation of the suggestion that the "real time of one's own body" will come to take precedence over the "real space of the world" to a question of accelerating time does resonate with the contents of this DeLillo piece. To be more specific, near the end of the story the source of the problem in DeLillo's fictional world reveals its parallel with these concerns of Virilio: Kyle "listened to the voices fall around her. She wanted to hear someone say this very thing, that the cruelty existed in time, that they were all unprotected in the drive of time" ("Ivory" 68). And again, one page later: "The pitiless thing was time, threat of advancing time" (69). While there is obviously a distinction between "accelerating" and DeLillo's choice of the words "advancing" or "driving" with regards to time, I argue that the sense which they impart is decidedly similar; one reason for which accelerating time is so disconcerting is that one feels suddenly powerless to cope with its increasing speed – its sense of uncontrollable advance is overwhelming. While one could argue that this sense of "threat," to use DeLillo's term, is possible even in times before the onset of these effects of techno/economically induced compression or acceleration, it is precisely time's increased sense of speed – ever more disconnected from the slower rhythms of nature – that makes the threat existentially palpable. These two isolated statements are thus crucial in an understanding of this short piece; the same

issue of accelerating, "advancing" time that Virilio, Doreen Massey, and David Harvey write about in their varying ways is also a core concern underlying DeLillo's narrative.

The picture therefore being painted is that the earthquakes which so destabilize Kyle's world are representative of a problem larger than their more straightforward seismic disruptions; they represent precisely this threat of advancing time. As suggested, the pressure of accelerating (or compressing) time in the postmodern era of this story's composition is arguably a driving force behind a great number of DeLillo narratives. Of course, the sense of this pressure is driven by the combination of complex forces, whose varying elements are indeed the focus of longer works,[22] but there is one element which is directly referred to within "The Ivory Acrobat:" the nuclear bomb, the threat of which is a subject broached in the previous chapter and which many have addressed in regards to DeLillo's preoccupation with the topic in the period leading up to and including *Underworld* (1999). There are a couple of times that the bomb makes its presence felt in this story. The first is with a veiled reference to the Doomsday Clock: "She sat on the sofa […]. It was two minutes before midnight. She paused, looking off toward the middle distance. Then she heard it coming, an earth roar, a power moving on the air. […] The moment burst around her" (67). The "two minutes before midnight," suggesting proximity to the classical "midnight" of global nuclear holocaust monitored since 1947 by *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, establishes a solid tether from the story to the implicit potential for a global catastrophe. The connection is furthered by the way the syntax of the earthquake's description could easily be substituted for a narrative describing a bomb being dropped, with the "power moving on the air" and the moment "bursting" around her. Moreover, in an even more overt instance, Kyle crouches "in the open doorway like an atomic child" (60) during an aftershock, a line which rather speaks for itself. Though less explicit than in *End Zone,* these two references are thus enough to confirm the presence of the atomic bomb in the background of the story, persistent as it was in its role as a driving force behind the sense of accelerating time in the late Cold War era of its composition.

Beyond the "atomic child" reference, it is worth returning to Kyle's placement in the doorway in the previously cited passage and elsewhere in the story as further employments of the liminal, since they are repeated examples of the presence of thresholds in a story in which one also finds such lines such as Kyle "lived inside a pause" (60). This emphasis on the liminal

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[22] I refer to the Virilio and Harvey texts cited in this chapter, as well as Massey's essay "A Global Sense of Place" (1991), published in her collection *Space, Place and Gender* (1994).

space of the threshold and the related notion of temporal suspension evokes Virilio's description of the way that acceleration affects duration, eventually reaching a point in which the present extends into both the past and the future, creating an "extended now":

> If the classic interval is giving way to the interface, politics in turn is shifting within exclusively *present time*. The question is then no longer one of the global versus the local, or of the transnational versus the national. It is [now] a question of the sudden temporal switch in which not only inside and outside disappear, the expanse of the political territory, but also the before and after of its duration, of its history; all that remains is a real instant over which, in the end, no one has any control. (*Open Sky* 18)

Though this is perhaps an example of Virilio's periodic tendency to hyperbole, the concept of an "extended now" is a theme which DeLillo will develop heavily in *Cosmopolis* and which is clearly a part of his thinking in his later career in general. This is unsurprising in the combined fact that he is a sensitive writer and that many have identified the period near 1973 (when DeLillo was just getting started) and the move to flexible accumulation as a crisis point which further increased the sense of pressure on the individual in the context of Western society.[23] This significant presence of threshold spaces and temporal pauses in the piece is also helpfully enlightened by Bakhtin's description of the threshold chronotope discussed earlier in relation to *Great Jones Street*; again, Bakhtin writes that "in this [threshold] chronotope, time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time" (*FTC* 248). The use of the doorway and the sense of living in a pause thus make sense when this "extended now" caused by the pressures of accelerating time is taken into account; existence (the chronotope of this story) becomes contained within this expanded liminal, in-between space, as if the whole story sees Kyle crouching in the metaphorical doorway, waiting for the onslaught to finish so she can emerge somehow renewed. What Bakhtin refers to as biographical time is of course referring to time *within* narrative, but the refraction of our real-world sense of time (and space) into literature (and vice versa) is a fundamental assumption in an array of approaches to literature, including Bakhtin's own[24]; indeed, this refraction of the (real-world) sense of accelerating time, the "threat of advancing time," into the fictional world DeLillo creates in this short piece touches on a core argument of this dissertation. The question that remains is when the interior space – an individual's

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[23] Cf. Harvey (1989) or Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (2009).

[24] See Bakhtin pp. 253-254 on this.

subjectivity – is suddenly hostile, when "all the danger [is] inside" ("Ivory" 60) and the character is forced into a liminal zone between inside and outside, what methods remain for survival?

The titular figurine is first introduced more than halfway through the story, given to Kyle by her friend Edmund to replace her figurine of Hermes that had broken in the first earthquake. The gift

> was a reproduction of an ivory figurine from Crete, a bull leaper, female, her body deftly extended with tapered feet nearing the topmost point of a somersaulting curve. Edmund explained that the young woman was in the act of vaulting over the horns of a charging bull. This was a familiar scene in Minoan art. (65).

The overt inspiration on her friend Edmund's part is clear; he gives the female figure to his friend who he'd once seen as figuratively "lithe" (63), but who he now sees struggling to get along. However, Kyle forgets about the figure until the end of the story, as she was still undergoing the unsettling process of her sense of self breaking down. Significantly, this latter process is one which DeLillo channels through the prose style itself, where the final last page and a half leading up to the scene in which she reencounters the figurine are constructed of fragmentary paragraphs of one or two sentences. This technique effectively transmits Kyle's narrowed-down state, with the following lines selected to give an idea of the effect:

> She took the stairs up and down. […]
>
> The pitiless thing was time, threat of advancing time.
>
> She was deprived of presumptions, persuasions, complications, lies, every braided arrangement that made it possible to live. […]
>
> She paused, alone, to listen. […]
>
> She was deprived of the city itself. We could be anywhere, any lost corner of Ohio. […]
>
> And everything in the world is either inside or outside. (69-71)

Kyle's world is indeed narrowed down to inside or outside, but her problem is that her current place is neither; metaphorically, she is stuck in the middle, still crouching on the threshold like an atomic child. While the described deprivation of "presumptions, persuasions," and so on demonstrates the effect this narrowing down is having on her subjectivity, the deprivation "of the city itself" suggests that identity is tied inextricably to a sense of place, and her current lack of bearings – "we could be anywhere" – furthers this argument. If Kyle's experience in this story is then extrapolated to the debate over the concepts of space and especially place which lie at the heart of the interdisciplinary spatial endeavor as outlined in the first chapter, the result is an interesting engagement on DeLillo's part, related to my argument for DeLillo's shift in

thought in the early 1980s and a corresponding Greek period of representation. While the text clearly speaks to the sense of spatiotemporal compression that David Harvey develops in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, regarding the related question of the significance of *place* in contemporary life DeLillo here steers away from the sort of Marxist-geographer approach Harvey defends, which tends to see space and place primarily as social constructs.[25]

Like later DeLillo texts such as *The Body Artist* or *Falling Man*, "The Ivory Acrobat" instead moves towards a more phenomenological definition of the (always embodied) experience of place – it leads more in the direction of an understanding of place as, in the words of Tim Cresswell, "something much deeper than a social construct[,] something irreducible and essential to being human" (*Place* 30). Approaching more directly Kyle's problem of subjectivity at hand, then, is Jeff Malpas' argument in *Place and Experience* that place is "that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established – place is not founded *on* subjectivity, but is rather that *on which* subjectivity is founded. […] the structure of subjectivity is given in and through the structure of place" (35). Kyle's sense of place is quite obviously being undermined by the recurring earthquakes which make her home a hostile space, and thus the parallel disintegration of her subjectivity acts as support for the above theoretical assertion on the literary plane. Moreover, besides the previously mentioned overhanging threat of nuclear apocalypse and the complications of the postmodern era in general, there is the added factor that Kyle, as an American living in Greece, is a transplanted figure; she is a person living somewhere radically different from her "home" sense of place.

In such a light, the nature of the threat she faces would seem to suggest a postmodern conceptualization of place first developed by humanistic geographer Edward Relph, who a decade before the publication of this DeLillo story was elaborating on the (negative) effects of a newfound sense of "placelessness" caused by homogenization and the mobility of a globalizing capitalist world – by the very same pressures which cause the sense of time-space compression.[26] If it is the case that subjectivity is structured through place and not vice versa, as discussed at length in the opening chapter and as summarized by Malpas above, then the problems inherent in human existence related to this compromising of place are self-evident. What I would like to suggest here is that this DeLillo text, in a move which both refutes

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[25] Cf. Harvey's *Justice Nature and Geography of Difference* (1996): "Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct" (293).

[26] See Relph, Edward. *Place and Placelessness* (1976). See also Augé (1995) for a furthering of this concept into that of the "non-place."

"placelessness" and which rather varies from the readings of his novel-length fiction of the period dealing with this particular theme, offers a conclusion which suggests a positive adaptation based in a redefinition of place as something centered first and foremost in the body; place is re-defined rather than proclaimed deconstructed or absent. Such an observation is of great interest in that it represents an early exploration of strategies which DeLillo will return to in a post-millennial context. Katrina Harack, for example, develops her argument for DeLillo's response to 9/11 in 2007's *Falling Man* through a contrast with 1985's famously postmodern *White Noise*, the latter which, rather than offering solutions, merely "diagnoses the dangers of forgetfulness, placelessness, and non-consideration of the other in America" (305). In contrast, Harack writes that *Falling Man*

> repudiates postmodern concepts of urban space and time, as well as the disembodied subject. DeLillo makes it clear that after 9/11, popular, theoretical views of postmodernism have been shattered, to be replaced by actual bodies, physical ruins, and the altered space not only of New York but of the U.S. (306-7)

The result in terms of "The Ivory Acrobat" is a 1988 short text sandwiched between such novels as *White Noise, Libra,* and *Mao II*, which all in their own way *diagnose* the postmodern conditions of, as Barrett writes regarding *Mao II*, "permanent dislocation" ("Here" 791) and "compromise[d] notions of subjectivity" (789). It seems, in other words, that in his novel-length fiction before 2007's *Falling Man,* DeLillo focuses primarily on exploring the ramifications of such postmodern disruption of subjectivity, while only in that post-9/11 novel does he actively counter "any sense of celebration regarding the postmodern subject […], instead invoking an embodied ethics that examines the individual's relationship to place, to the body, and to others" (Harack 304-5); all this of course emerges specifically in response to the cultural trauma of the attack on the World Trade Center. In such a light, "The Ivory Acrobat" represents an interesting hiccup in the timeline, as Kyle's eventual response to the trauma of the (metaphorically loaded) earthquakes is reminiscent of the tactics Harack describes in relation to the much later *Falling Man.*

The key here in the narrative is the figurine, which Kyle finds again in a drawer at the very end of the story, at the point when the text tellingly fleshes out again into normal-length paragraphs following the fragmentary section cited previously. Upon locating it, she first observes that the "body was alone in space, with no supports, no fixed position, and seemed best suited to the palm of the hand" ("Ivory" 71). The parallel to be drawn is a spatial one; just like the figurine, Kyle too is now a figure with "no fixed position," "alone in space" due to the

earthquakes undermining the seeming stability of her self-in-room. As mentioned, her friend Edmund gave it to her due to a perceived parallel on his part: "Edmund had said the figure was like her. She studied it, trying to extract the sparest recognition" (71); ironically, she doesn't see the connection. The passage continues:

> She turned the object in her hand. All the facile parallels fell away. Lithe, young, buoyant, modern; rumbling bulls and quaking earth. There was nothing that might connect her to the mind inside the work, an ivory carver, 1600 BC, moved by forces remote from her. She remembered the old earthen Hermes, flower-crowned, looking out at her from a knowable past, some shared theater of being. The Minoans were outside all this. Narrow-waisted, graceful, other-minded - lost across vales of language and magic, across dream cosmologies. This was the piece's little mystery. It was a thing in opposition, defining what she was not, marking the limits of the self. She closed her fist around it firmly and thought she could feel it beat against her skin with a soft and periodic pulse, an earthliness. (72)

The realization on Kyle's part described here has to do with the otherness of the figurine that she notices, that nothing "might connect her to the mind inside the work," which was "moved by forces remote from her." This is in contrast with her previous figurine of the Hermes that the acrobat replaced, whose "knowable past" connected her to it through a "shared theater of being." This brings the subject back to time, to the historical drive of a Western civilization whose origins are typically held to be in the era of Classical Greece from whence came the broken Hermes statue. If Kyle and the Hermes share a "theater of being," which the Minoan culture is outside of, the question is then what does this "theater of being" (and the Minoans' corresponding "other-mindedness") represent? Elise Martucci argues that the story's conclusion celebrates "a separation from any particular place and therefore a freedom from self-awareness" ("Place" 91); however, this argument seems incomplete. The most suggestive answer is related to perception, to a way of perceiving the world based in two millennia of the development of Western thought. If this is the case, then the suggestion that the unknowable Minoans are located "across *dream cosmologies*" (emphasis mine) is key, in that "cosmology" is defined, beyond its general association with "the nature of the universe," more precisely as a way of understanding "the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe" ("cosmology"). The figurine offers Kyle a way out; its location "across dream cosmologies" therefore suggests other ways of understanding space and time, a whole *other* perspective, which is a theme that DeLillo will return to at length in later works such as *Point Omega*. Indeed, the way she feels the figure "beat[ing] against her skin with a soft and periodic pulse,

an earthliness" evokes a profound connection with the earth, on an ecological or even geological level, as if she could feel the heartbeat of the planet itself. Further, the fact that the figurine "defines what she was not, marking the limits of the self" therefore reveals the delimiting of her subjectivity as constructed within this context of Western perception and its dominating notions of space, time, and especially the subject, which in this case is still often based in a simplistic and unhealthy Cartesian mind-body split.

In this light, the significance of the concluding lines of the story is unveiled: "Her self-awareness ended where the acrobat began. Once she realized this, she put the object in her pocket and took it everywhere" ("Ivory" 72). The piece ends both on a note of motion and with a merging of sorts, which I argue together represent a strategy for dealing with the pressures of "advancing time" that the earthquakes have represented throughout. Concretely, this merging has three layers of meaning: she escapes from the tyranny of accelerating (Western) time by merging her consciousness with an "other" way of perceiving the world (as represented by the Minoans and their "dream cosmologies"), the spatial representational affiliation is switched from self-and-room to self-and-figurine (a body "alone in space"), and, related to the previous, she merges her *consciousness* (as the typical Cartesian-influenced perception considers the mind the higher seat of the self) with a *body*, therefore suturing the mind-body split. In other words, the "solution" is an alliance with the ivory figurine and all it represents – in literary terms the figurine replaces the room as representational support for the existence of the character Kyle, while in broader terms the merging represents an acceptance of other ways of understanding time, and an acceptance of the body-in-motion as a fundamental element in human subjectivity.

This reading of the spatiotemporal implications of this DeLillo short story with its threshold-like chronotope and the related conclusion of a "solution" of sorts through the merging of character and figurine, mind and body, is significant in that it marks a different sort of approach to the problem of spatiotemporal compression than DeLillo normally tended towards in his fiction of the period. Whereas *End Zone* ends with the protagonist reaching an impasse and denying the body through starvation, "The Ivory Acrobat" suggests that DeLillo's work in the short form holds the potential to approach thematic issues in a different way than the longer fiction, thus resulting in an earlier treatment of themes which will only emerge much later in the form of a novel. Rather than repeating the trope that the short stories preclude the novels, however, the suggestion I would like to make is that the form's potential is something which DeLillo later gravitates towards in *all* his fiction, with texts such as *The Body Artist*

(2000), *Point Omega* (2010), *Zero K* (2016) and *The Silence* (2020) coming to mind in a post-millennium context. Although *Zero K* is technically a longer novel, the narrator's episodes of dream-like wandering and the formal use of accentuated paragraph breaks throughout the novel are more evocative of the austere style of DeLillo's short fiction than the typical novel-form of the first decades of his career. Further, in "The Ivory Acrobat," Kyle's ultimate alignment with the Minoan figure and its inherent disassociation from the drive of historical time correlates with the mythic sense of time in which short fiction lives, as Henry Veggian helpfully points out when discussing these two forms of DeLillo's fiction; Veggian comments that minimizing the value of the short fiction to mere previews of the longer work risks

> fusing the short fiction into biographies of the novels in question. It is a sequence that erases precisely that which makes the stories unique: their mythic sense of time beyond time, what Truslller calls the "suspended" temporality of short fiction and what Boxall describes as the "unmeasured time" that would seem to carry over from the stories to DeLillo's more recent short novels. (125)

With this in mind, an interesting avenue of research opens up, in that while DeLillo was at work on the longer novels he is most known for (from *White Noise* to *Underworld*), he was at the same time driven to the short form in order to explore certain themes which would only emerge fully much later. The suggestion in this is therefore that rather than reading the short pieces as embryonic precursors to later novels, DeLillo's later tendency toward such a style should be the impetus to revisit them in-depth as important in their own right in order to fully appreciate the dense treatment they give to specific thematic issues. This is particularly vital since, as the case of "The Ivory Acrobat" demonstrates, the different style inherent to the form and sense of time of the short story – also a chronotope in and of itself[27] – allows for different conclusions than in novels; indeed, this potential seems to call to DeLillo both stylistically and formally in his later fiction. The implication of this analysis is therefore to take a closer look at the relationship between DeLillo's style in his shorter and longer fiction, especially with an eye towards the potential the former has to engage with thematic drivers in a way significantly different than the typical form of the novel. To put this suggestion into action I will now turn to the other short piece meriting special attention in this context, "Human Moments in World War III."

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[27] See Falconer (1998).

3.4 Ontological Distancing and Nostalgia in 'Human Moments in World War III'

Originally published in *Granta* in 1983, "Human Moments in World War III" presents a world set approximately twenty years into the future in the first weeks of a third World War (which in light of its 1983 publication would put it somewhere in the early 2000s). Despite this world-at-war context, the entirety of the action takes place in the small confines of a U.S. military spacecraft orbiting the earth. The two men occupying the craft are in charge of a futuristic, light-based weapon, which in the early 1980s would surely remind any science fiction fan of a more humble version of the Death Star's superlaser from the original *Star Wars* films. Overall, what I wish to argue is that this text explores in a very concise way what it means to wage war, and that the way the theme is represented is achieved through a close attention to the implaced (embodied in space and time) aspect of human existence. Whereas *End Zone* explores the obsession with the incomprehensibility of nuclear holocaust, with "Human Moments in World War III" DeLillo moves on to frame his thinking about the contemporary subject coping with (among other things) the fact of global war into the imagined context of the "banning of nuclear weapons" established in the fictional world of this story; this is a ban which, as the narrator quite ironically quips, "makes the world safe for war" ("Human" 26). In this sense it represents a step to the side, figuratively speaking, in order to approach the human capacity to engage in war from a more philosophical perspective, implicitly linking the capacity for abstract thought with the capacity to dehumanize and kill.

While the story includes some characteristic (for DeLillo) references to the importance language has to construct (and thus undermine) realities, as a fitting precursor to my questioning of *The Names'* predominant representation through language as generally asserted by literary critics, I here take the approach that such references to the importance of discourse serve more to reinforce thematic points made primarily through an embodied, embedded representation rather than vice versa. In this context, these linguistic elements in this story that I refer to serve best to introduce the issues at hand; namely, there are several cases of ironic reversals of language: "As mission specialist I'm content to be in charge. (The word *specialist,* in the standard usage of Colorado Command, refers here to someone who does not specialize.)" (25). This sort of reversal points quite openly to the sort of logical manipulations necessary in order to engage in the forms of large-scale and distanced warfare the story presents. Another prime example is when the narrator talks about the process for activating their laser-weapon, which entails both crew members acting in unison in order to put the system into "open-

minded" mode (36) before it can be fired. This particular irony well encapsulates the thrust of the story, which is aimed at exploring the idea that war – as well as its ideological counterpart, consumer capitalism – in fact promotes or even requires the opposite of such an "open-minded" mode.

With regards to the narrative framing, the text's opening paragraph is useful for its setting of the thematic stage in a succinct way:

> A note about Vollmer. He no longer describes the earth as a library globe or a map that has come alive, as a cosmic eye staring into deep space. This last was his most ambitious fling at imagery. *The war has changed the way he sees the earth.* The earth is land and water, the dwelling place of mortal men, in elevated dictionary terms. He doesn't see it anymore (storm-spiraled, sea-bright, breathing heat and haze and color) as an occasion for picturesque language, for easeful play or speculation. (25, my emphasis)

As is here made quite clear, the context of the story is established as having to do most clearly with matters of perception, especially regarding the human relationship with the earth (in which is included poetic, Homeric representations thereof – "storm-spiraled, sea-bright"), and how this relationship shifts in the face of war. In terms of this exploration of the human relationship with place, the setting of the story in earth's orbit is a literary maneuver which creates a purposeful distancing, a removal from the intimate engagement through place that life normally entails. This is a symbolic removal which in some ways parallels the effect of DeLillo's deserts, in which characters driven to that environment are confronted with the enormity of such vast themes as "the whisper of inexistence" (85) Gary Harkness encounters in *End Zone* (85), and which will come back in different form in the much later *Point Omega*, as I discuss in Chapter 5. However, this initial similarity does not indicate equivalency; as I will demonstrate in what follows, the space orbit of the two characters in "Human Moments" is overall of a somewhat different origin than the drive which sends his characters into the desert. Instead, I argue that the literal distancing enacted here allows the story's thematic content to match its mythic short form, using the sense of distance to simultaneously treat several thematic issues which are related through a uniting sense of *abstraction*. That being said, and similarly to my approach to "The Ivory Acrobat," while the specific desert / room dichotomy this thesis generally focuses on is absent in this short text, the story's relevance to the project at hand remains quite strong due to what it presents in terms of my objective of tracing DeLillo's evolving portrayal of the shifting human relationship with place in a contemporary, Western context.

With this in mind, the core of my argument with regards to this story is therefore that the displacement of the characters from the earth gives them a "privileged vista" ("Human" 25), whose perspective DeLillo uses in order to explore the ramifications of abstraction (of distancing), in a place-based and thus existential sense. Further, as indicated in the story's opening paragraph cited above, this distancing is bound to the realities of human conflict, encapsulated neatly in the phrase "the war has changed the way [Vollmer] sees the earth" (25). In what follows I will discuss the way that this story functions to expose the dangers of such an affective or even ontological distancing, which beyond the waging of war is also implicated in the ethos of consumerism. Further, I show how DeLillo utilizes the phenomenon of nostalgia to representationally unite this sense of disassociation with the contexts of war and the late stage capitalist system from which it emerges.

In simple terms, the content of the text is, again, a description of these two American soldiers three weeks into a war in the near future, assumed to be the "World War III" of the piece's title. The unnamed narrator's voice is that of the more experienced of the two military men – its his "third orbital mission" (25) – while the other character is a younger soldier named Vollmer on his first. While the story takes place during this apparently global war, there is no description of any sort of warfare-in-action; it consists, rather, of a combination of philosophical meditations – on the part of both the narrator and Vollmer – as well as descriptions of their everyday life floating together through space, including references to various "human moments," as well as to the unexpected reception of lost audio signals picked up from errant satellites. These human moments and audio "noise" they pick up on are united by a common sense of nostalgia, which itself functions at the level of both place-attachment and as a commentary on a particular temporal effect of post-Fordist capitalism.

My argument for this story is centered in the fact of its chronotope, which as one of earth orbit inherently suggests a radical difference in nature to any Earth-bound one. As will be examined closely, as the story goes on there are continuing references to an unmoored sense of time which matches the more obvious spatial distancing (from the *ur*-place of Earth) which orbit implies, again suggesting an affinity between this chronotope and that of DeLillo's deserts. That being said, this is a story set in outer space by an author who is otherwise defined by a commitment to a representational style which pays attention to the particular places through which the stories emerge; again, this story was published shortly after *The Names* and DeLillo's time in Greece, which spurred his self-proclaimed increase in attention to the detail of place. Further, in the context of this speculative story, there is a certain implicit contrast to

writers generally categorized under the umbrella of science fiction, who tend to take such a distancing from Earth as their representational starting point for expansion *beyond*. In contrast to such fictions, the perspective of this story still has its gaze focused quite fixedly on Earth; rather than a turning away from this world in order to imagine eutopian or dystopian futures, as does much science fiction,[28] "Human Moments" never lets the planet from its sight – the characters' gazes and descriptions of their experience throughout the story are overwhelmingly directed inwards at the planet. As such, the distancing enacted by the placing of the characters in Earth's orbit – "at two hundred and twenty kilometers" (25) above sea level – serves most clearly to provide a different sort of perspective on the planet and all its relevant sociopolitical baggage. This orbital perspective is one defined by abstraction, akin to that which is required in order to engage in certain forms of metaphysical thought which have tended to dominate Western thinking, and which I will show is related to the capacity to engage in war as well.

The connection of orbit and abstraction to the metaphysical is one suggested rather candidly by the narrator himself in the story's first pages:

> I try not to think big thoughts or submit to rambling abstractions. But the urge sometime comes over me. Earth orbit puts men into philosophical temper. How can we help it? We see the planet complete, we have a privileged vista. In our attempts to be equal to the experience, we tend to meditate importantly on subjects like the human condition. It makes a man feel *universal,* floating over the continents, seeing the rim of the world, a line as clear as a compass arc, knowing it is just a turning of the bend to Atlantic twilight, to sediment plumes and kelp beds, an island chain glowing in the dusky sea. (26, original emphasis)

In some senses then, with such lines as "Earth orbit puts men into philosophical temper" and references to "privileged vistas," "the human condition," and feeling "universal," the story's thematic framing is one which almost seems, at least from our current standpoint two decades into the 21st century, a wry pointing towards the language typical to Western, masculine philosophical discourse which attempts to make universalizing claims. In this sense, the story reflects Tim Engles' recent discussion, in a slightly different context, of DeLillo's presentation of an "ironically individualizing white masculinity" (147), especially his argument that "DeLillo has repeatedly exposed the late-twentieth-century American hyper-individualism most fully embodied by middle-class white men as a pathological sham" (148). The irony

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[28] While there is slight debate regarding generic boundaries, this definition is informed by Darko Suvin's defining of the eutopian and dystopian genres as falling within the broader embrace of science fiction; see Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) and the essays collected in *Defined by a Hollow* (2010).

inherent in this story and its "philosophical temper" provided by earth-orbit speak to the same issue of problematic identity-formation and the relation Engles also develops with regards to (white male) nostalgia, though in this case the question is brought to a more abstract level than the personalized representations it obtains through the protagonists of such novels as *White Noise* and *Underworld*, which latter is the focus of Engles' chapter. Generally speaking, this universalizing, "philosophical temper" therefore constitutes one of the important aspects of the text's framing, specifically in its pairing with both a newly transitioned (late) capitalist society as well as with the context of war as established in the passage cited earlier. Also evident in this passage, however, is an augmented sense of place-awareness; beneath the irony, there is an expression of genuine helplessness in the face of the narrator's physical situation – how could he *not* engage in such abstract thought, removed as he is from the solidity of any real (earthbound) place? What DeLillo here establishes is a parallel between the geophysical situation of these characters in orbit, the sociopolitical circumstance of wartime, and the figurative situation of metaphysical contemplation, which of course similarly attempts to "meditate importantly on subjects like the human condition" ("Human" 26). In what follows I will elucidate the ways all these elements are productively brought together in the span of the story's nineteen pages.

Setting the scene, the previously mentioned opening pages of the story inform the reader that this is the narrator's "third orbital mission" while it is "Vollmer's first" (25), which difference creates a significant gap in certain aspects of their respective worldviews. In terms of their immediate physical situation, the narrator describes the way they are generally comfortable in the efficient carrying out of their tasks: "We are not cramped here. […]. Food is fair to good. There are books, videocassettes, news and music. We do the manual checklists, the oral checklists, the simulated firings with no sign of boredom or carelessness. If anything, we are getting better at our tasks all the time." However, he importantly continues, "The only danger is conversation" (29). Similarly to the case of "The Ivory Acrobat," in this short text DeLillo provides an explicit reference to a "danger" relevant to its fictional world. Whereas in the later story it is the interiority of the subject which is imperiled in the face of an explicitly accelerating time, in "Human Moments" the danger is here shown to be somehow embedded in the idea of discourse. My argument is that this danger in communication also refers to the inherent intersubjectivity which conversation implies; when silently carrying out their routine tasks and living in their comfortable, homely environment (full of "books, videocassettes, news and music"), it is easy to imagine they are in any other normal work or home-place back on

earth. However, when conversation enters the picture they are soon unable to avoid the geopolitical truth of their extreme displacement, and the serious and difficult separation (both socially and in terms of place) which that entails. At least in the beginning, then, even though the narrator actively attempts to not "think big thoughts" (26) on his own, Vollmer ends up bringing up such topics when they engage in conversation. Thus the narrator describes a strategy aimed at minimizing the danger inherent in a conversational tendency towards such "big" subjects when in orbit: "I try to keep our conversations on an everyday plane. I try to make it a point to talk about small things, routine things […] I want to build a structure of the commonplace" (29). This strategy is undermined by Vollmer, who in contrast wishes to discuss "enormous subjects," such as "war and the weapons of war," and "global strategies, global aggressions" (29). This interest on Vollmer's part is perhaps due to his recent arrival to orbit, as over the course of the short text there is a noticeable shift with regards to his attitude towards the planet as a whole; this progression will be returned to at length.

It is important, however, to here dwell for a moment on the technique the narrator employs in order to fend off the encroachment of such "enormous subjects" – and the related affective detachment which they imply – which is to concentrate on the titular concept of "human moments." The term is introduced in an early discussion of Vollmer's character:

> He is twenty-three years old, a boy with a longish head and close-cropped hair. He talks about northern Minnesota as he removes the objects in his personal-preference kit, placing them on an adjacent Velcro surface for tender inspection. I have a 1901 silver dollar in my personal-preference kit. Little else of note. Vollmer has graduation pictures, bottle caps, small stones from his backyard. I don't know whether he chose these items himself or whether they were pressed on him by parents who feared that his life in space would be lacking in human moments. (26-27)

In the syntax of the narrator's commentary itself there is a connection between the objects in Vollmer's "personal-preference kit" and the place he comes from, since he is "talking about northern Minnesota *as* he removes the objects" for "tender inspection" (my emphasis). Further, while the narrator's anachronistic "1901 silver dollar" as his only personal item suggests he is already rather disassociated from his origins (and is perhaps an early sign of a nostalgic attachment to the past), Vollmer's items demonstrate an affective attachment to a place of origin as expressed through objects. Especially of note are the "small stones from his backyard," which as pieces of the earth itself serve to solidify the argument that place attachment in the broad sense is of particular importance to this short story. Related to this is a

comment Vollmer makes shortly thereafter, in which he claims that "I still get depressed on Sundays" (27). Though the narrator suggests that there are no Sundays in space, Vollmer elaborates, saying that "No, but they have them there and I still feel them. I always know when it's Sunday" (27). The narrator himself later points out the contradiction, commenting that "Vollmer's remark about Sundays in Minnesota struck me as interesting. He still feels, or claims he feels, or thinks he feels, that inherently earthbound rhythm" (28), regardless of the fact that in orbit there is no longer a standard sense of day and night – that they are in a fundamentally *other* chronotope.

Thus in the early pages of the story the character Vollmer – on the occasion of his first mission into orbit – still demonstrates an affective attachment to Earth, both in the general terms of society's temporal norms (Sundays) and in the particular terms of his homeplace in northern Minnesota. However, this is an attachment which undergoes a change in the face of the war, as the opening passage cited above makes clear: "The war has changed the way he sees the earth" (25). Three weeks into the war, he therefore begins to demonstrate a different sort of perspective. For one, he begins to "suggest that people are disappointed in the war. The war is dragging into its third week. There is a sense in which it is worn out, played out" (29). This comment hints at the theme which is explored more in-depth by "The Ivory Acrobat:" namely, the accelerating effect that violent conflict (or the threat thereof) has on the human experience of time of which, again, the most relevant theorists are probably Paul Virilio and David Harvey. What emerges from both their writings as well as from my previous in-depth discussion of the 1988 short story is that the advance of capital and technology go hand in hand with the advance in military potential and the threat it represents. However, in contrast to *End Zone* and "The Ivory Acrobat," in this text DeLillo goes as far as to create a fictional world explicitly in the *midst* of a war, and therefore the sort of engagement with the topic changes in form; this also in part informs my decision to discuss the texts in this chapter in a non-chronological manner. Accordingly, then, what I will explore now is the way this short text by DeLillo duly combines these spatiotemporal ramifications of war on the one hand and late stage capitalism on the other, eventually arriving at their conflation through the uniting concept of nostalgia.

The correlation between nostalgia and war in this case is not one which is necessary to draw out through subtle analysis – the unnamed narrator makes the connection directly:

> It is not too early in the war to discern nostalgic references to earlier wars. All wars refer back. Ships, planes, entire operations are named after ancient battles, simpler weapons, what we

> perceive as conflicts of nobler intent. This recon-interceptor is called *Tomahawk II.* When I sit at the firing panel I look at a photograph of Vollmer's granddad when he was a young man in sagging khakis and a shallow helmet, standing in a bare field, a rifle strapped to his shoulder. This is a human moment, and it reminds me that war, among other things, is a form of longing. (30)

DeLillo's discussion here of the self-referential nature of war is enlightened by something else which Vollmer says on the same page: "Vollmer says that people have always enjoyed and nourished themselves on war, as a heightening, a periodic intensity" (30). If war is approached in this way, as a periodic event of heightened intensity – of crisis – then the logical result is a corresponding sense of an extreme narrowing down of experience, of which the perception of time and space (place) are of course of primary importance. Thus one result of war is a heightening of the experience of compression which, as has been discussed at length previously in this chapter, is already an important element of contemporary Western experience in the years following the economic shift to flexible accumulation in the early 1970s.

In times of war, specifically, existence is narrowed down to a world of greatly reduced possibility, to the point that times of peace (either past or projected into the future) become remote, or even removed from the realm of possibility completely – of a different ontological order.[29] This already suggests a similarity with the mechanics of nostalgia, since, as Edward Casey points out, the past world longed for in the context of nostalgia is similarly "a past of another type, another ontic order, from that of the recollected past - even if it is often cued in by remembrances of things past" ("Nostalgia" 366). As Barkawi and Brighton argue in the opening of their discussion of the ontology of war, "while destructive, war is a generative force like no other" (126), and this in the social sense: war "marks the disruption of this wider [societal] order and the people and other entities which populate it, the unmaking and remaking of certainties, of meaning, of – potentially – the very coordinates of social and political life" (136). This definition highlights the social and ontological instability inherent in the experience of war, and I argue that it is therefore in this context that DeLillo's narrator's comment that "all wars refer back" ("Human" 30) takes on meaning; it is as if when immersed in the reality of war a society is ontologically at a remove from its own (peacetime) self, such that the only relevant past reality (in the ontological sense) one has access to during times of war is the

[29] I owe much of the following discussion on the ontology of war to the threads tied together in the discussion in Astrid Nordin and Dan Oberg's 2015 article "Targeting the Ontology of War: From Clausewitz to Baudrillard."

recollection of *other times of war*. A time of war thus also represents a temporal deferral of the present;[30] further, as illustrated in the passage cited from Barkawi and Brighton, war always holds inherent in its violence the potential for something new to irrupt, therefore in a way also aligning (in a twisted sense) with Walter Benjamin's concept of Messianic time discussed in the previous chapter. What this correlation generally suggests is that – as DeLillo perceptively points towards in the above-cited passage from "Human Moments" – war does in fact maintain a fundamental relationship with the experience of nostalgia. While I will return to the mechanics of nostalgia and its relation to war, it is useful at this juncture to first examine nostalgia and its emergence in this story as similarly tied-up in the experience of twentieth-century capitalism.

Although the "selective noise" of old broadcasts the characters begin to hear midway through the story will be the main focal point for the presentation of capitalist nostalgia in this text, there is first a useful passage which helps to set the context. The narrator briefly describes a rendezvous which his and Vollmer's ship has with another orbital crew: "We dock with the command station, take on food, exchange cassettes. The war is going well, they tell us, although it isn't likely they know much more than we do. Then we separate" (30). In the wake of this encounter, the narrator describes the sense of well-being this sort of contact brings:

> The maneuver is flawless and I am feeling happy and satisfied, having resumed human contact with the nearest form of the outside world, having traded quips and manly insults, traded voices, traded news and rumors […]. We stow our supplies of broccoli and apple cider and fruit cocktail and butterscotch pudding. I feel a homey emotion, putting away the colorfully packaged goods, a sensation of prosperous well-being, the consumer's solid comfort. (30-31)

While the first of these sentences describes the pleasure of human contact, the others directly reference the "homey emotion" of consumption (the "consumer's solid comfort"), the recognizable result of the successful dissemination of the capitalist ethos into every reach of society through decades of marketing campaigns, media, and so forth; this is a long story told well elsewhere.[31] In truth, what this here represents (in a way which in this case does align with

[30] Here also there is much to be said about the contemporary arguments by the likes of Nordin and Oberg (2015) that the understanding of war needs to shift in a post 9/11 context to encompass the current, deferred state of *permanent war* – in this context, the temporal deferral inherent in wartime as ubiquitous in the contemporary moment supports arguments which highlight the current cultural exhaustion as reflected through the absence of any conception of the future, especially a positive one; see Berardi (2011) and Fisher (2014).

[31] While innumerable examples would suffice, cf. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), Marcuse (1964), Debord (1967; 1988), Lefebvre (2014).

the conclusions of most science fiction) is that the leviathan known as "capitalism" has itself escaped the bonds of its conception on Earth, or that the human escape from its terrestrial origins by no means implies an escape from the systems established therein. The fact that the narrator feels "happy and satisfied" after the combination of a very brief and shallow human contact as well as enjoying the "comfort" of restocking his "colorfully packaged goods" concisely allegorizes 1980s consumer America, in which the sense of "prosperous well-being" found in consumption is similarly prioritized over types of human relations more intimate than the superficial sort of connection described in the passage. This short description of the characters' exchange with the command station establishes the thematic context for what follows; these characters, both military men and armchair philosophers, are deeply embedded in the consumer culture from which they emerge. In other words, the "remove" of being in orbit does not entail a removal in terms of ideology; this is an aspect to this orbital chronotope which is similar to that of the DeLillo's deserts, as I will discuss in the context of both *Point Omega* and *Zero K*. This context of capital chasing the human beyond the earth's bounds is useful to keep in mind in light of what happens when the characters start picking up what appear to be radio signals from deep space.

At first the unnamed narrator hears what sounds like a voice, which, in another case of discursive manipulation, his central command back in Colorado denies, informing him that "It is not a voice as such, Tomahawk. It is selective noise. We have some real firm telemetry on that" (32). However, what they call "selective noise" are in fact most definitely voices, first described as such: it was "a voice that carried with it a strange and unspecifiable poignancy. I seemed somehow to recognize it. I don't mean I knew who was speaking. It was the tone I recognized, the touching quality of some half-remembered and tender event, even through the static, the sonic mist" (32). Vollmer hears it soon after as well, importantly mentioning "how intensely affecting these voices were, even when the signals were at their weakest. One thing he did know: it wasn't selective noise. A quality of purest, sweetest sadness issued from remote space" (33). These initial descriptions, of the "touching quality" and the "half-remembered, tender event," and of the "sweetest sadness issu[ing] from deep space," are achieved with language which evokes the particular poignancy of nostalgia. These terms resonate with Edward Casey's discussion of nostalgia and its "highly ambiguous nature," especially his description of its "characteristically bittersweet quality, its proclivity for combining regret with longing, a vivid sense of missing with an equally vivid sense of what is missed" ("Nostalgia" 361); the "sweetest sadness" of DeLillo's text correlates with this "bittersweet quality" Casey

signals. The ambiguity Casey mentions here also alludes to the fact that nostalgia is a phenomenon more complex than it might first seem.

In terms of nostalgia's origins, as Dylan Trigg reminds us in his book on *The Aesthetics of Decay*,

> the term 'nostalgia' originally implied a solely physical condition, defined in terms of spatial geometry. Deriving from the Greek *nostos*, "to return home," and *algos*, "pain," the word was coined by a seventeenth century Swiss medical student, Johannes Hofer. In his dissertation referring to Swiss mercenaries relocated from their homes, Hofer described nostalgia as homesickness to the point of pathology. (53)

As Trigg and other scholars who study nostalgia in a contemporary context chart,[32] the term's usage has evolved with the shifting tides of thought since the 1600s, but its core concern with a feeling of pain in the absence of something remembered – usually associated with a particular place – has stayed consistent. There is of course also an important temporal element, and Trigg's discussion of nostalgia in particular criticizes the type of fixity on its spatial aspect which he identifies in, for instance, Heidegger's writings on the topic, pointing out that well before the 20th century "Kant had already established the temporal dimension of nostalgia as central" (54). Thus, Trigg elaborates, bypassing Heidegger and returning to Kant's conception, the

> dynamic of past and present gradually becoming disunited is central to nostalgia, since the attraction of nostalgia structurally depends on an image of the past that is fixed in the present. The desire to return to a place is caused by the desire to return to the same place that we remember. For that continuity to unfold, time and place need to converge. (56)

Of course, the particular pain inherent to nostalgia is the impossibility of ever returning in time to the point of remembrance, since even the return in the present to the physical place of a memory will fail to satisfy that particular longing, seeing as this convergence of time and place that Trigg refers to can never actually occur. Edward Casey makes a similar point in the context of a discussion in which he also defines the function of nostalgia in temporal terms – and in which he additionally emphasizes that what one longs for in the past is in fact a *world* (in the phenomenological sense of *lebenswelt*), which he calls the "world-under-nostalgement" ("Nostalgia" 365) – namely, that this longed-for world is not one which ever actually existed as such. As he puts it in temporal terms, what makes re-entry into that world "impossible is not

[32] See also the full-length texts by Svetlana Boym (2001) and Helmut Illbruck (2012) for the most in-depth studies of the relevance of nostalgia to the contemporary moment.

only the fact that the world-under-nostalgement is past (elapsed, over and done with) but past in the radical sense of being something that *was never strictly present*" (365, original emphasis). In this sense, as I mentioned above, this "world-under-nostalgement [...] has a past of another type, another ontic order, from that of the recollected past" (366). This understanding of nostalgia takes on relevance when it becomes clear that the "selective noise" the characters in DeLillo's story are hearing are actually relics of the 20th century's broadcasting past.

Despite their command center's attempt to get them to dismiss the incoming audio, the two characters in "Human Moments" are entranced by what they hear, realizing that they are somehow "picking up signals from radio programs of forty, fifty, sixty years ago" (33). This becomes clear through the details of the transmissions: "we've been able to recognize theme music, an announcer's introduction, wisecracks and bursts of applause, commercials for products whose long-lost brand names evoke the golden antiquity of great cities buried in sand and river silt" (33). Here in one sentence DeLillo conflates references to consumer products with the language of a place-based nostalgia for a "lost" past; the fact that this is achieved specifically through old radio programs (an antiquated, "lost" media form itself in the television era) and that it is the "long-lost *brand names*" which "evoke the golden antiquity of great cities buried in sand and river silt" all point towards a specifically 20th century, capitalist sort of nostalgia. As Edward Casey writes, nostalgia is a phenomenon oriented towards a lost *world* (365), which is precisely what the image of "great cities buried in sand" evokes. The origin of this particular lost world and the nostalgia it inspires in the characters in the auditory relics of a mid-20th century American, consumerist culture provides yet another example of DeLillo's intuitive attunement to the pulse of his times. As discussed previously, the 1970s and the shift to flexible accumulation is the oft-cited moment for a fundamental turning point in Western capitalist societies, but what has not yet been explicitly discussed is the relationship this shift has to the ideological weight given to cultural conceptions of both the past and the future; both Harvey and Virilio discuss the problem in spatiotemporal terms, but with particular focus on the resulting increase in attention to the *now*. It is therefore useful at this point to turn to those more recent theorists who in retrospect identify a shift, starting in this period, with regards to the idea of "the future," as it is precisely the sort of perception which this story speaks to.

Probably the best example of this is Franco Berardi, whose 2011 book *After the Future* deals explicitly with the idea of a positive "mythology of the future" (17), with the specific premise that the "rise of the myth of the future is rooted in modern capitalism, in the experience of expansion of the economy and knowledge" (18). He adds to this that "the idea that the future

will be better than the present is not a natural idea, but the imaginary effect of the peculiarity of the bourgeois production model" (18). Berardi's argument is that this historically contingent idea that the future will be better than the present – which is tied up with a constant sense of utopia operating in the background – played a defining role in Western cultural production up until a certain, identifiable point. Starting the discussion with the (proto-fascist) Italian Futurists at the beginning of the century, his argument is generally as follows:

> The idea of the future is central in the ideology and energy of the twentieth century, and in many ways it is mixed with the idea of *utopia*. Notwithstanding the horrors of the century, the utopian imagination never stopped giving new breath to the hope of a progressive future, until the high point of '68, when the *modern promise* was supposedly on the brink of fulfilment. In the last three decades of the century, the *utopian imagination* was slowly overturned, and has been replaced by the *dystopian imagination*. For many reasons, the year 1977 can be seen as a turning point: this was the year when the punk movement exploded, whose cry – 'No Future' – was a self-fulfilling prophecy that slowly enveloped the world. (17, original emphasis)

The different elements signaled in this passage are evident both in the development of American culture from the 1980s onwards (with the emergence of cyberpunk, as marked most notably by Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* and 1984's *Neuromancer* by William Gibson) as well as in the cultural analyses of the period by the late Mark Fisher, which are collected in his writings on his twist of the term "hauntology" in his appropriately titled 2014 book, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Indeed, in this book Fisher emphasizes Berardi's accuracy in his description of the "*slow* cancellation of the future" (6, my emphasis), as this was a process which occurred over a span of decades rather than suddenly at any one moment. However, Berardi's specific targeting of 1977 for a breaking point with regards to the utopia/dystopia question inherent in the bourgeoisie idea of the future, as well as the coincidence with the genre-shift visible in works like *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*, matches with the contents of DeLillo's nearest brush with the wide genre of science fiction encapsulated by this 1983 short story; the story sits on a threshold when it comes to this utopia/dystopia mentality towards the future. As Berardi elsewhere signals, "In the 1980s, cyberpunk writers described the future as a never-ending dystopia. The prophet was once again cursed, as in ancient times" (*After* 51). DeLillo is with this story thus artistically expressing what later analyses by Berardi and Fisher make clear, which is that in this period there began a heightened narrowing down of the horizon of possibility, something opposed to

the emergence of the "cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization," which reached "a peak in the years after the Second World War" (18).

While the answer as to why exactly this happens is hard to pinpoint, Fisher posits an economy-based answer:

> Why did the arrival of neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism lead to a culture of retrospection and pastiche? Perhaps we can venture a couple of provisional conjectures here. The first concerns consumption. Could it be that neoliberal capitalism's destruction of solidarity and security brought about a compensatory hungering for the well-established and the familiar? (*Ghosts* 14)

This suggestion, that the alienation inherent in the progressive advance of capital (a theme which DeLillo continues to deal with in both explicit and implicit ways through 2020's *The Silence*) provokes a hunger for the familiar, certainly chimes with the description in this short story cited earlier describing the narrator's feeling of "homey comfort" when putting away his "colorfully packaged goods" ("Human" 31). However, the later description of DeLillo's characters' relationship to the old broadcasts casts more light on the topic:

> We listen to the old radio shows. Light flares and spreads across the blue-banded edge, sunrise, sunset, the urban grids in shadow. A man and a woman trade well-timed remarks, light, pointed, bantering. There is a sweetness in the tenor voice of the young man singing, a simple vigor that time and distance and random noise have enveloped in eloquence and yearning. Every sound, every lilt of strings has this veneer of age. Vollmer says he remembers these programs, although of course he has never heard them before. What odd happenstance, what flourish or grace of the laws of physics enables us to pick up these signals? Traveled voices, chambered and dense. At times they have the detached and surreal quality of aural hallucination, voices in attic rooms. (38-39)

Beyond the increase in attention to the poignant details of these transmissions, there is the seemingly innocuous line that "Vollmer says he remembers these programs, although of course he has never heard them before." The obvious suggestion here is one of time becoming unstuck, of a break in its linearity. This comment also comes in the wake of the narrator's telling how at this stage "Vollmer talks about childhood. In orbit he has begun to think about his early years for the first time. He is surprised at the power of these memories. As he speaks he keeps his head turned to the window. Minnesota is a human moment" (38). The relationship of orbit to the immersion in early memories, never before considered by Vollmer, is in a way related to the claimed remembrance of these old radio programs, which were broadcast well before he was born. This returns the discussion to the story's chronotope, as this thematic context of late stage capitalism/wartime is inextricably tied up in the meaning of this particular fictional earth

orbit, and what I'd here like to argue is therefore that this spatial fact of orbit is symbolically associated with the socio/psychological effects of consumer capitalism.

Embedded in his own discussion of nostalgia, Dylan Trigg discusses the nature of "capitalist space," pointing out that one

> aspect [of] capitalist space derives from its universality. A space that is impermanent is able to avoid being situated in place. The delimiting borders of the place-world, which would literally bind capitalist space to a specific value, are delivered under the capitalist logic. A placeless space becomes atemporal, and so universal, by excluding alterity. With that excess in universality, the remnants of place, which by their nature are temporally particular, are discarded. Capitalist space is temporally clean. The lack of alterity entails an absence of history. (*Aesthetics* 125)

DeLillo's representation in this story is precisely an exploration of this sense of universality Trigg signals, or in other words is an analogous spatial and temporal exploration of this phenomenon in which "capitalist space is temporally clean" and its "lack of alterity entails an absence of history." The way Vollmer suddenly claims to remember these old advertisements and radio programs while in orbit is significant, in that orbit is a place beyond the entirety of the "place-world," making it the "space that is impermanent" which Trigg relates to "capitalist space;" this is thus a fictional, spatiotemporal indicator of the same argument Trigg here makes in a philosophical context. While this in and of itself does not claim (nor need) to explain the origins of the problem as Fisher and Berardi attempt in a critical vein, in the very same paragraph in which Vollmer claims to remember these old programs DeLillo signals a crucial correlation: that between capitalism as an economic system and the act of war.

Following the description of these old radio broadcasts cited above, in which Vollmer claims to remember the programs, the narrator thus continues:

> the sound effects are full of urgency and verve. Cars turn dangerous corners, crisp gunfire fills the night. It was, it is, wartime. Wartime for Duz and Grape-Nuts Flakes. Comedians make fun of the way the enemy talks. We hear hysterical mock German, moonshine Japanese. The cities are in light, the listening millions, fed, met comfortably in drowsy rooms, at war, as the night comes softly down. Vollmer says he recalls specific moments, the comic inflections, the announcer's fat-man laughter. He recalls individual voices rising from the laughter of the studio audience, the cackle of a St. Louis businessman, the brassy wail of a high-shouldered blonde just arrived in California, where women wear their hair this year in aromatic bales. (38-39)

The sentence "It was, it is, wartime" is crucial here, in that in neatly encapsulates my argument regarding the temporal deferral of war, which was discussed previously in relation to the

narrator's comment that "All wars refer back" (30); "It was, it is, wartime" syntactically enacts the bridging of two periods of time remote from each other by juxtaposing the past and the present into the same sentence, effectively achieving the same cutting out of all that lies between as war does with respect to time. The further juxtaposition apparent in two of the following sentences – "We hear hysterical mock German, moonshine Japanese. The cities are in light, the listening millions, fed, met comfortably in drowsy rooms, at war, as the night comes softly down" – continues to syntactically enact this effect DeLillo explores in this story. While the first sentence clearly refers to the World War II-era radio programs coming in, the second purposely confounds a sense of time, as it ambiguously describes the coming of night for the "listening millions" of the cities in what is probably the near-future present tense of the story's setting, but which could just as easily be referring to the 1940s. Moreover, the simple sentence "Wartime for Duz and Grape-Nut Flakes" serves to make concrete the correlation between the "solid comforts" of capitalism (31) and war; there is thus a double conflation at work in this passage, and in the story in general – that between different times of war on the one hand, and that between the signs of capital and the reality of wartime on the other. The result of this double conflation is neatly captured in the way Vollmer, soon after the above descriptions in which time appears to slip its moorings, is described as "drift[ing] across the wardroom upside down, eating an almond crunch" (39). This embodied shift to the upside-down (typical consumer product in hand) is accompanied by a description of the way "He sometimes floats free of his hammock, sleeping in a fetal crouch, bumping into walls, adhering to a corner of the ceiling grid" (39). The fetal crouch is reminiscent of the scene in "The Ivory Acrobat" discussed previously, in which Kyle is driven into a liminal, disembodied state by the threat of "advancing" time represented by the earthquakes, and thus Vollmer's embodied drifting becomes clearly associated with his claims to remember the radio programs; approaching the text's ending, space and time in this story – its chronotope – become demonstrably untethered, reflecting the non-fixity of a spatiotemporal void. Such a void is in the end signaling an existential problem, and this is of course related to one of the main issues DeLillo is most concerned with over the course of his career. The existential ramifications of war and late stage capitalism, duly conflated, are here demonstrated with parable-esque clarity to be directly correlated with the experience of extreme spatiotemporal displacement.

In this light, then, DeLillo again shows himself to be on the cutting edge of cultural criticism. While, as mentioned in the preceding section, it is only confirmed that DeLillo read Paul Virilio in the much later context of his research for *Cosmopolis*, the fictional explorations

of this short story echo Virilio's notable discussion of the same. Berardi points out that Virilio was likely the first theorist to develop this line of thinking in detail, in his case through an emphasis on an increase in the sense of speed as interlaced with the growth of capital and technology:

> Paul Virilio has shown the connection between war and speed: in the modern forms of domination, the imposition of war onto the whole of social life is an implicit one precisely because economic competitiveness is war, and war and the economy share the common denominator of speed. (*After* 36)[33]

This sort of discussion of speed, of acceleration, again suggests the increase in an experience of compression, which is in turn related to my discussion above of the spatiotemporal unmooring the character Vollmer begins to experience in the third week of the titular World War III. In terms then of the story's chronotope of earth orbit, the correlation which suggests itself is located between this unmooring and the extreme sense of compression the text explores in the face of the dual presence of war and late stage capitalism. In other words, this fictional earth-orbit explores both the results of abstraction, which both war and capitalism require, as well as the related sense of compression of spatiotemporal experience which is their by-product. Abstraction and spatiotemporal compression are further related in the sense that abstraction also implies an inability to grasp history, the temporal element of this spatiotemporal void which orbit here represents. A hyper-focus on the now, which Virilio discusses in various contexts,[34] thus results in a limiting of temporal horizons, both past and future. In this context the arguments of Berardi and Fisher as to the death of the idea of the future at this historical moment are correlate.

Crucially then, this general argument is translated into the fictional context of DeLillo's story, readily apparent in such comments as the following: "A note about the universe. Vollmer is on the verge of deciding that our planet is alone in harboring intelligent life. We are an accident and we happened only once. […] He feels this way because of the war" ("Human" 41-42). This comment, which demonstrates an end to what one might call a cosmic optimism, is thus existential in nature once again, here presented in its widest possible sense – on a literally universal scale. The narrator continues:

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[33] For Virilio's own discussion of this, see *Speed and Politics* (1977) or the later *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy* (2006).

[34] Cf. *Open Sky* (1997)

> The war, he says, will bring about an end to the idea that the universe swarms, as they say, with life. Other astronauts have looked past the star points and imagined infinite possibility, grape-clustered worlds teeming with higher forms. But this was before the war. Our view is changing even now, his and mine, he says, as we drift across the firmament. (42)

Again in the syntax the arguments are reinforced, as their changing worldview is directly related to their state of "drift," which echoes Vollmer's drifting, fetally positioned body floating around in his sleep. The narrowing down effect which war has here is, in the context of the preceding discussion, thus ineluctably tied up in the recent shift to flexible accumulation which makes up the story's backdrop. Almost as a side note, a related item which suffers collateral damage in the course of this story is poetic expression itself; the imagined "grape-clustered worlds" cited above, which are now out of the question, are Homeric in presentation (as in: the wine-dark sea). This moreover echoes the story's first paragraph, in which its described how Vollmer no longer sees the earth "(storm-spiraled, sea-bright […]) as an occasion for picturesque language" (25). The suggestion is therefore that the narrowing down of the horizon of possibility (the hyper-focus on the now) caused by war and capital is further reflected in language – the adequate register for such times is one of practicality, in which all poetic expression is superfluous.[35]

Similarly to many other DeLillo texts, alongside the fact that it contains elements of irony, the overall impact of the story is one of poignantly expressed critique. "Human Moments in World War III's" ending is indeed a culmination of all the preceding analysis regarding the disorienting effects of war and capital, for although on the surface appearing comedically light, the story is in fact a rather bleak indictment of the common outcome of existing in such a hyper-capitalist society in perpetual war. The last two paragraphs are worth quoting almost in full, as it is in the effect of their juxtaposition that meaning is transmitted. Leading up to these final lines, the narrator first tells how "Vollmer has entered a strange phase. He spends all his time at the window now, looking down at the earth. He says little or nothing" ("Human" 43). He then breaks into a long authorial description which breaks the previous tone of narration, as he here claims access to Vollmer's thoughts where in the rest of the story all such descriptions are through reported speech:

> The view is endlessly fulfilling. It is like the answer to a lifetime of questions and vague cravings. It satisfies every childlike curiosity, every muted desire, whatever there is in him of

[35] For more on the role of language in the structures of capital, see Marazzi (2008).

> the scientist, the poet, the primitive seer, the watcher of fire and shooting stars, whatever obsessions eat at the night side of his mind, whatever sweet and dreamy yearning he has ever felt for nameless places faraway, whatever earth sense he possesses, the neural pulse of some wilder awareness, a sympathy for beasts, whatever belief in an immanent vital force, the Lord of Creation, whatever secret harboring of the idea of human oneness, whatever wishfulness and simplehearted hope, […] whatever remnants of his boyish longing to fly, his dreams of strange spaces and eerie heights, his fantasies of happy death, whatever indolent and sybaritic leanings—lotus-eater, smoker of grasses and herbs, blue-eyed gazer into space—all these are satisfied, all collected and massed in that living body, the sight he sees from the window.
>
> "It is just so interesting," he says at last. "The colors and all."
>
> The colors and all. (43-44)

In this paragraph, the narrator waxes poetic, touching in a virtuoso passage (which is in fact one long sentence) on a significantly broad series of thematic concerns, well encapsulated in the view's description as "endlessly fulfilling" and "answer to a lifetime of questions and vague cravings." The following progression of topics touches on poetry, mysticism, place-awareness, spiritual energies, God, and beyond (with "human oneness" again hinting at Teilhard de Chardin), and thus refers in one fell swoop to all those "big" topics which are (based for one on the serious and poetic tone of their expression) presented as actually worth considering, but which are precisely the sorts of topics which are nullified by the compressed reality of the war/late stage capitalism combination the story and its orbital chronotope represents. This explains Vollmer's final reaction, which is to contradict the narrator's waxing poetic regarding his thought-process as he stares at the earth with the declaration that what is "so interesting" about it is nothing more than "The colors and all." While the effect is slightly comedic, what both the comment as well as the story's ending, with its repetition of the final phrase, imparts is the unfortunate suggestion that such narrowing down has existential ramifications as well. Thus Vollmer's curiosity and critical faculties, hinted at by the long paragraph preceding the comment, are also narrowed down in a fashion not dissimilar to the narrowing down and eventual nullification of his optimism regarding the potential for life to exist elsewhere in the universe. This narrowing down in the end points towards a nullification of life itself, in as many sense of the word as one can formulate it.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shifted the general focus of the thesis from DeLillo's novels with significant deserts to these two short stories of what I call his Greek period for several reasons. For one, the thematic density and altered sense of temporality of the short form mean that the author is able to explore themes of interest in different ways than in a novel, focusing less on systems and the broader context of plot and more on characters' individual battles of the self. Another reason for this alternate focus has been to flesh out my argument for what I consider to be a significant shift in DeLillo's representational style, an increase in place-awareness and therefore in chronotopic representation which coincided with his years living abroad in Athens. Taken together, what both "The Ivory Acrobat" and "Human Moments in World War III" explore are responses to the same looming, impending sense of doom which sends *End Zone's* characters to their rooms in the desert edge campus of Logos College. However, whereas the 1972 novel is overwhelmingly concerned with the specific sort of crisis brought on by the danger of nuclear annihilation inherent in the Cold War, in DeLillo's Greek period the sense of crisis he responds to is expanded to include the broader context of the alienated subject in a globalizing capitalist context. "Human Moments" develops a chronotope of earth orbit to represent the crisis which occurred when the idea of the future, which Berardi shows was a bourgeois concept tied up with utopia, transformed to a point where its very potentiality was negated in the cultural imaginary. This crisis, which elsewhere emerges as the dystopian or cyberpunk, DeLillo represents through a chronotope of orbit which subverts the expected focus on the exterior; what seems like it might be a first-contact-with-aliens story suddenly and ironically turns inwards, exploring instead the characters' nostalgic relationship with the past. The chronotope is therefore in a sense like the desert in terms of its temporality, for it is a literary space which allows for the possibility of other temporalities than the linear mode of progress associated with bourgeois capitalism. However, in "Human Moments" the unnamed narrator's "privileged vista" (25) is in the end unable to show him a glimpse of the future, only providing a window which shows a narrow image of the present as colored by a nostalgic past. Moreover, DeLillo's story emphasizes the way this narrowing of vision exposes the underlying congruence of the ethos of post-Fordist capitalism and the capacity to wage war, joined as they are in the unifying act of abstraction. All this is portrayed chronotopically through earth orbit, which when seen as representing the most extreme sort of deracination physically possible reads as a parable for the effects of both consumer capitalism and perpetual war which it accurately conflates.

"The Ivory Acrobat" takes the sense of crisis present in "Human Moments" and widens it into a chronotope in and of itself, channeled through the destabilizing event of a natural earthquake. Opposing the distanced view of the earlier story's protagonist, "The Ivory Acrobat" prefigures *The Body Artist* in its exploration of an embodied response to this sense of crisis, though in the end it finds a line of flight which "Human Moments" does not. Whereas the unnamed narrator and Vollmer are locked into their inward-looking viewpoint, only seeing past wars and past products and thus remaining earthbound even as they orbit, Kyle reaches *beyond* the first reflection of Western society (Classical Greece). Her association with the Minoan figurine allows her to discover a sense of alterity beyond Western culture, which is significantly expressed through a return to the body. What the stories together suggest is that in DeLillo's Greek period he is grappling with the sense of foreclosure ushered in by neoliberal globalization, a phenomenon whose shape was beginning to become clear by the 1980s. In both stories, DeLillo works around the death of the bourgeois concept of a future of progress by paradoxically looking to the past; while in "Human Moments" the past too proves to be a mirror to the present, in "The Ivory Acrobat" a sense of elsewhere, of renewing otherness, is found in the "lithe," mysterious figurine.

As my discussion of *The Names* in the following chapter will make clear, this emphasis on the distant past is indeed a running theme in DeLillo's Greek period. What the analysis of these two short stories does is to foreground the heightened sense of place and the chronotopic which DeLillo develops in this period and carries into the rest of his career. Further, they serve to more clearly delineate the deep and multi-faceted sense of crisis which DeLillo is tackles in his fiction, as well as the way he does so through an increasingly chronotopic representation. The subject's response to this variety of forces which press in on the individual – often experienced through an altered sense of time/space – is the uniting concern of this period and beyond.

CHAPTER 4 From the Island to the Desert: *The Names* and the Macro Chronotope

CHAPTER 4

From the Island to the Desert: *The Names* and the Macro Chronotope

The Names *marks the beginning of a new dedication. I needed the invigoration of unfamiliar languages and new landscapes, and I worked to find a clarity of prose that might serve as an equivalent to the clear light of those Aegean islands.*

Don DeLillo, "The Art of Fiction"

I find it revealing the way that we talk about the desert as empty, or barren, just because it's not a particular type of ecosystem. It's often even personified in a very active, malicious way, like it's vicious or brutal. But really it's just indifferent. And that's scarier than anything.

Claire Vaye Watkins

In the previous chapter, I have examined the two short stories from what I term DeLillo's Greek period in order to argue for a heightened chronotopic representation which is related to an increasing awareness of the crucial role of place in human experience. This sensitivity is expressed in both "The Ivory Acrobat" and "Human Moments in World War III" through the lived experience of time-space compression that according to David Harvey intensified by the late 1970s and 1980s. In this case, the short story form therefore allowed DeLillo to explore in detail a particular problem inherent to that historical moment, even though it is a topic he eventually returns to at length with *Cosmopolis*. With DeLillo's increased sense of place-awareness and resulting enhanced chronotopic representation firmly established through my discussion of the short stories of his Greek period, I now turn to the longest and the chronologically first of the three texts born of his time abroad – *The Names* (1982).

What I attempt in the following pages is to make a clear case that this novel passes through three consecutive chronotopes, and that understanding the distinctions between them

and how they relate to each other – a tension to which the characters themselves unknowingly respond – is key to understanding all of this novel's implications. In this vein I argue that *The Names* – as the principal text of DeLillo's Greek period – represents a milestone in terms of the author's chronotopic expression, which as I argued at the opening of the previous chapter appears to have been provoked by his extended personal experience in these places outside of North America. DeLillo's already penetrating gaze into the complexities and contradictions of contemporary American life is given a whole new range of material to try and represent, and *The Names* for this reason marks an important fulcrum in his literary career. DeLillo's representation is at this point infused with the rich variety of people and places – probably best phrased as people *in* places – he encounters while in Greece and the Middle East, and the unavoidable amplification in perspective this entails is played out in the pages of this novel.

In the context of her discussion of *The Names'* geopolitical intertexts, Anne Longmuir points out that "the [hostage] crisis provided [DeLillo] with a platform to explore a tension that dominates his novels, the tension between the traditional American conception of subjectivity as autonomous and independent on the one hand and as patterned and determined by some larger, preexisting system on the other" (Longmuir 109). It is my argument that DeLillo's exploration of this tension Longmuir correctly identifies in his project as a whole is impossible to grasp fully in *The Names* unless one pays attention its chronotopes. Of primary interest here is the way that the text's plot develops through three figures which chart the same course signaled in the novel's subheadings – Owen Brademas, James Axton, and the language cult for which the novel is named. These three are linked in this search for the balance between the autonomous subject and the systems which are created in the attempt to make order from chaos.

While the previous discussions of *End Zone* and the short stories have introduced DeLillo's chronotopic representation, this approach is particularly cogent for this novel because of the form which DeLillo himself gives it; the novel is broken into three main sections and a short coda, all bearing geographic titles: The Island, The Mountain, The Desert, and The Prairie. While DeLillo has always had a tendency to structure his novels in ways which reflect the thematic contents therein – often invoking the form of a loop – as hinted at in these section headings, *The Names* is one of the novels in which the role chronotopes play within should be most obvious from the outset, something which will arguably not recur in such a fashion until 2016's *Zero K*. *The Names* is therefore an ideal example of the relevance of Rachel Falconer's call to attend specifically to the relationship *among* chronotopes:

> I wish to argue that we should pay closer attention to the heterochrony, or interplay of different chronotopes, in individual texts and their genres. As Bakhtin's own essay demonstrates, what makes any literary chronotope dynamic is its conflict and interplay with alternative chronotopes and world-views. […] This clash of spatiotemporal configurations within a text, or family of texts, provides the ground for the dialogic inter-illumination of opposing world-views. (112)

While Falconer's essay dexterously explores the clash of epic and novelistic chronotopes in DeLillo's later *Falling Man*, *The Names* too presents a series of chronotopes whose differing values correspond to a changing narrative logic, as well as which influence the characters existing within them. Encompassed within this progression is a shift which is probably best described as perspectival, presenting as Falconer signals a "dialogic inter-illumination of opposing world-views." In this chapter I focus on this dialogic interaction, particularly what the three main chronotopes corresponding to the section titles represent (Island, Mountain, Desert) as well as both how they are active on a macrostructural level in the novel and how this translates to the characters themselves.

In terms of the chapter's structure, after first establishing the general critical tendencies towards this novel and where I depart from them, I first show how the island chronotope is one which encapsulates a sense of time removed from history, representing a willed separation or isolation from historical and thus ethical involvement in the world (all related to American exceptionalism). This temporal value translates semantically to a sense of abstraction, associated with logic and reason divorced from embodied, implaced experience – a stance which, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is intimately linked to the interrelated pursuits of capital and warfare. This overarching narrative logic in turn directly impacts the characters themselves, who as fictional subjects are inevitably caught up in these unseen chronotopic forces which they are immersed in. I then argue that this narrative logic shifts with the transition to the novel's second section, "The Mountain," whose chronotope permits an opening up of temporality to situate the human once again into the flow of history, in which the present moment is ethically bound up in the shifting tides of power of the past; this chronotope thus suggests an ontological turn towards process and becoming. The final chronotope, corresponding to "The Desert" section, then explores how the desert is once again sought by DeLillo's characters as a space which provides the possibility for ontological actualization – it is perceived as a representational ground on which radical transformation become possible. Thus the cult, Owen Brademas and James Axton all experience their respective metamorphoses, something made possible by the desert's tendency to disrupt the linear flow

of time and allow new constellations to form. The resulting emphasis when the text is viewed in this manner is best described as existential, in which Heidegger's late writings on "dwelling" come into contact with a return to both Turner's communitas as well as to the concept of sacred place and its lack in contemporary, secular societies. Ultimately, I argue, the novel's engagement with its geopolitical intertexts is undergirded by the search for an (American, or at least Western) ontological stance adequate to the myriad ethical complications which comprise late 20th century life, emphasizing the role of language in fostering human community (rather than just language itself).

4.1 The 'Sleeper' in DeLillo's Canon: Critical Reception

Generally speaking, considering its thematic range and quality, *The Names* is a DeLillo novel which has received a relative dearth of critical attention; this is especially true when compared to the novels which follow it in the 1980s and 90s, including critic favorites such as *White Noise*, *Libra* and *Underworld*. I agree, however, with Anne Longmuir's 2005 assessment that "[d]espite this comparative neglect, we should recognize *The Names* as the 'sleeper' in DeLillo's canon" (105). As such analyses as Longmuir's attest – and as I hope to reinforce in the following pages – the novel is in fact much richer than it is given credit for, in terms of style, thematic breadth and philosophical nuance. Beyond this overall lack of attention, moreover, with only a few notable exceptions the orientation of the analysis which the novel has received is rather unidirectional, as the majority of those who pay it critical attention do so with a primary focus on its readily apparent engagement with issues of language and subjectivity.

More specifically, critics starting in the 1980s have explored the way the novel resonates with the poststructuralist thinking on language and meaning which was still being developed at the time: Paula Bryant writes in 1987 that the novel's "characters discuss language and its failure to order for them situations that seem increasingly disordered," and that although they try to use language to "pull their experience neatly together, […] words no longer contain meaning, and no one speaker can contain all language" (17). Mark Osteen and Peter Boxall both make similar arguments in their respective DeLillo monographs regarding the function of novel's language-cult, which murders societal outcasts when there is a correspondence of initials between person and place. Osteen argues that "by conflating character and object in

their initialed victims, they aim to eliminate the deferral of meaning inherent in signification and destroy referentiality itself, which involves that unbridgeable gap between signifier and signified" (*American* 130). Not dissimilarly, Boxall writes that the "meaning of the cult cannot be approached directly, or spoken in words, because it works at the very point at which language meets with the world, at the blank, empty, in-between space in which language and the world are knotted together" (*Possibility* 100). This argument for a "gap" or "in-between space" of meaning points, for one, towards the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, as both Bruce Gatenby and David Cowart have signaled: "[DeLillo] is in close agreement with Derrida in his belief that it is language itself that orders reality by creating systems of safety that paradoxically seek to conceal the fact that reality (world) has no real connection with the symbols (word) that represent it" (Gatenby 348); "Like Derrida, DeLillo seems to construe as transcendental and even spiritually enabling the idea of presence that cannot be represented directly" (Cowart, *Physics* 165).

The rich variety of analysis of this novel in this "linguistic" vein is understandable as a result of both the dominant critical trends of the time as well as of the substance of the text itself – there is indeed a fascinating meditation on language and subjectivity at work within the novel. However, my aim here is not to reengage this discussion of the function of language in *The Names*, but rather to show that there are parallel developments in DeLillo's thought and writing with regards to an embodied existence through place, and the embeddedness within the larger context of culture which this implies. In this matter I am therefore in agreement with certain critics who find in the novel more than a philosophical contemplation of language, among them, again, Anne Longmuir: "*The Names* has frequently suffered from underreading; critics have rendered the novel a metaphysical meditation on language, ignoring the political ramifications and historical circumstances of the text" (105). To this I would add a reiteration of my argument – crucial to my project – that critics have also ignored the underlying philosophical approach to implaced existence at work in the novel, as well as the way this emerges through chronotopic representation.

Interestingly (in terms of what followed), the first scholar to publish a full-length study on DeLillo, Tom LeClair, approached *The Names* in a more rounded way than the concentrated focus on language which became the critical tendency soon thereafter. LeClair's relevant chapter in 1987's *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* emphasized several points which have been either glossed over by critics or taken up again only recently. Most relevant to my general argument in this dissertation is the attention he pays to the role of space and

setting in the novel. While LeClair does affirm the novel's obvious interest in language as summarized above – writing that "In *The Names* a wide world both demands and resists linguistic mapping; the limitations of language have their causes and effects in that world, not just in the literary text" (178) – he does so in a way which stresses the inextricability of language and (fictional) world. I argue that in this text, this sort of experiential focus is also translatable to place (as in a phenomenological approach to place versus an abstract account of space and time), and LeClair at least gestures in this direction as well:

> The themes gathering [here] can be introduced in one question with several meanings: How do humans cover space? That is, how do we transport ourselves across spaces? How do we build our artifacts in space? And how do we communicate on and through spaces? The answers are necessarily inconsistent – an individual's motives maybe be influenced by the spaces he occupies, or the space he occupies may be a product of other motives – and difficult to illustrate in fiction, where space is frequently origin or target, backdrop or filler. (180)

In this commentary there is, first and foremost, a recognition of the importance of space in this novel, more so than in any of DeLillo's novels up to that point. In this signaling of its increased importance I am in general agreement, with the caveat that LeClair's analysis of the text itself does not pursue this spatial emphasis very far. The commentary above in fact identifies the most pressing spatial question in the novel as regarding how humans *cover* space, demonstrating an understanding of space more in line with its abstract conception – as extension, as *surface*, whose inadequacy was outlined in my opening chapter. This explains LeClair's following commentary, which sees space in fiction as "frequently origin or target, backdrop or filler." While this is not to say that some writers are indeed less attuned to the chronotopic, as this comment would indicate, it does further the surface-level definition of space which its preceding lines suggest, and it is therefore no surprise that LeClair's otherwise excellent analysis does not actually broach the potential for chronotopic representation in fictional texts which DeLillo's novel exemplifies so well. In other words, rather than to ask "how do humans cover space?" I would argue that more relevant question to ask (regarding this novel, but also DeLillo's work in general) is: *how do humans exist through place*? (and, of course, how is this translated into representation through fiction?). It goes along with my general thesis that reframing the question in this way in turn casts a different light upon the spaces one finds in this novel, illuminating their role as much more than "backdrop" or "filler."

None of this is to say that LeClair was not on the right track; as a matter of fact, it was probably his personal familiarity with DeLillo which led him to an insight which corresponds

with my argument as to the impact living abroad in Greece had on DeLillo's writing: "Residing and traveling abroad renewed [DeLillo's] passion for life outside the text; it also gave him a center of experience around which old and newer concerns could cohere and find vital expression" (176). LeClair adds that

> DeLillo's crossing of hemispheres reengaged him with the concrete textures of landscape and the symbolic spaces that marked the cross-country travel of *Americana*. The Middle East during the Islamic Revolution of 1979-80 furnished a setting in which he could reconsider the subjects of religion and state power, which he had treated obliquely in *End Zone* and *Great Jones Street* (176).

This emphasis on the effect actual displacement had on DeLillo, including the landscapes and the geopolitical context of his time abroad, is concordant with my own argument for a Greek period in his writing.

LeClair's mention of the "Middle East during the Islamic Revolution of 1979-80" as the historical context for *The Names* also signals the above-mentioned glossing-over by critics in favor of the discussion of language, for after LeClair this geopolitical context was generally ignored for nearly two decades of criticism. More recently, however, scholars including Anne Longmuir and Heather Houser have returned to the novel with a critical gaze directed at the geopolitical, leading to alternative interpretations which coincide more with what I wish to develop in the present discussion. Longmuir, for example, suggests that the commonly asked (abstract) question regarding this novel – "Can language refer outside itself?" – should rather be asked more concretely, "within a very specific location and period" (106). Her corresponding argument is that "*The Names*' most important intertext is historical: its references to the Iranian revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis" (106). Houser focuses more directly on risk and the political effects of mobility via Ulrich Beck, arguing "that the novel theorizes the late twentieth century as marked (even marred) by an increase in travel that simultaneously generates forms of knowledge essential for risk assessment and distances one from forms of experience necessary for ethical responsibility," thus developing "how DeLillo's text characterizes mobility as a form of tourism that produces detached observation and a problematic diffusion of responsibility" (126). Houser's reading of the novel changes the focus from a question of the decentering of the subject through language's failure to adequately represent reality to a more broadly existential one in the face of shifting geopolitical tides; she writes, for example, that in "*The Names,* global finance, international travel, and new communications media all help create a vast landscape that slips one's cognitive grasp" (133).

This is a shift which resonates with my own reading, in the sense that she also points towards existence as wrapped up in *place* – as evidenced here in the referencing of a "vast landscape" which the characters are unable to grasp, as well as elsewhere in her discussion of place attachment in the text.

The articles by Houser and Longmuir together represent recent, exemplary cases of an overdue reappraisal of this novel, both of which counterpose the abstracting discussions of language (signifier and signified, etc.) to readings which situate the characters and events of the novel concretely in their socio- and geopolitical context.[1] While this has definitely been a critical necessity in the wake of the overwhelmingly linguistic focus described above, in a sense my reading of the novel occupies a middle ground being the two. I distill from the novel's overlooked, highly chronotopic representation a developing perspective (on DeLillo's part) which leads eventually to the role of place for the human subject – in both a general philosophical sense and a more concrete political sense. Thus, where Longmuir's sees *The Names* as comprising "DeLillo's use of a more 'realistic' fiction to question epistemology, language and geopolitics" (105), I would add that in the novel one may find a questioning of associated ontologies as well. In this sense, therefore, what David Cowart writes regarding DeLillo and linguistic theory – that "DeLillo often arrives independently at philosophical insights paralleling those of linguistic and literary theory" (*Physics* 172) – should be equally applied to DeLillo and philosophical approaches to the subject, especially in the phenomenological vein and its branch of place studies. Further, it is at least partially as a result of this de-emphasis on the significance given to language in terms of subjectivity (or perhaps better an elevation of the significance of place to a similar level) that I come to different conclusions regarding more specific elements within the text, including the significance of character Owen Brademas' desert trajectory and the location of Axton's final "epiphany."

A lack of careful attention to this chronotopic interplay can lead to critical oversights of important elements in the text; what is true within the chronotope of "The Island" might no longer apply in the same way in "The Mountain" or "The Desert," for example. While Elise Martucci's analysis of *The Names* in her 2007 book on *The Environmental Unconscious of Don DeLillo* is insightful and indeed is that which comes closest to my own in its attention to place,

[1] This is by no means to simplify all the existing analyses of *The Names* such that they fall under one of these two categories, but merely to describe a general trend.

it too at times overlooks these important chronotopic distinctions. For example, her argument as to the novel's geographic sectioning is that:

> The geographic title of each of the novel's sections - each a bordered off section of land - signifies a character's desire for separation from the culture of the country in which the formation exists. In the novel, islands, mountains, deserts, and prairies are all remote desolate locations where the characters believe they can retreat from society. Each of them, however, overlooks the fact that nature and culture are not two separate spheres. (70)

While these places are indeed "remote desolate locations," the idea that they are limited to places "where the characters believe they can retreat from society" is limiting in that there is interwoven in the movements of these characters a complex desire for integration rather than merely escape. The "retreat from society" element is most clear in the novel's first chronotope of "The Island," but as I work to show the following two chronotopes complicate that endeavor. Thus, while Martucci's analysis does lead her to the conclusion that Axton is eventually brought to abandon his detachment and understand his implication within the world, what I hope to show is both the way this path is facilitated by these shifting chronotopes as well as expose some of the novel's previously untapped philosophical implications along the way.

4.2 'Forces which haunt the interior' – Isolation and Detachment on 'The Island'

The novel opens with the narrator James Axton's description of his reluctance to visit the Acropolis in Athens, despite the fact that he has been living in the city for a year.[2] Axton is an American working as a risk analyst, and the narrative whenever it takes place in Athens generally revolves around his social interactions with a group of American expatriates who do business throughout the Middle East. The novel is framed by the ruins of the Acropolis, since Axton's inability to visit here at the outset is countered by his concluding experience there at the novel's end. Here at the beginning his view of the Acropolis is as an "exalted thing," a "somber rock" which he contrasts to the "modern city, imperfect, blaring" (*Names* 3) below, which he says he prefers. As will become clear by the end of the chapter, this perspective he has regarding the Acropolis is related to both the island chronotope and who he is as a person throughout this first section; the distinct perspective he demonstrates at the end neatly

[2] The reader knows from several references that the novel is supposedly composed by Axton himself in the years following the events which take place therein.

encapsulates many of the issues the text explores. At this point, however, the Acropolis is left untouched by Axton, and very quickly the narrative's setting switches to the island for which this first section is named.

Kouros, the Greek island where Axton's estranged wife and son are living, is an invention on DeLillo's part, described as "an obscure island in the Cycladic group" (7). The earliest suggestion as to the island's role in the text is in this name itself, as it is explicitly attached to the *kouroi* statures of the Archaic period of Greece:

> the name of the island derived from a colossal statue found toppled near an ancient gravesite about a hundred years ago. It was a traditional *kouros*, a sturdy young man with braided hair who stood with his arms close to his nude body, his left foot forward, an archaic smile on his face. Seventh century B.C. (36-7)

Tom LeClair argues that the significance of the island's name is related to the particular state of the (American) characters who populate the novel: it is "suggestive because James Axton and many of the other characters, both on Kouros and in Athens, are suspended youths trying to occupy a safe island space" (*In the Loop* 181). All the characters LeClair refers to are in fact Americans living abroad in varying capacities, and the sorts of examples he uses to follow up on this argument clearly suggest the relationship of this "safe island space" mentality to the context of American exceptionalism and related neocolonialism, although he does not make this link so explicitly himself. LeClair rightly connects the thirty-eight year old Axton's desire to "think of himself as twenty-two" (181) to his proclaimed status as a "perennial tourist" (*Names* 43), thus forecasting the extended argument Heather Houser makes in her 2010 article: "the novel theorizes the late twentieth century as marked […] by an increase in travel that simultaneously generates forms of knowledge essential for risk assessment and distances one from forms of experience necessary for ethical responsibility" (126). The association of travel and mobility to a decrease in ethical responsibility is particularly relevant in the context of the sort of American businessmen and military operatives among whom the narrator moves in the novel, as both Axton and others repeatedly affirm sentiments which demonstrate this mentality: "To be a tourist is to escape accountability. Errors and failings don't cling to you the way they do back home. You're able to drift across continents and languages, suspending the operation of sound thought" (*Names* 43). In this context, the island of Kouros as representing what LeClair calls a "safe island space" for "suspended youths" is an insightful claim, as one of the principal characteristics of youth is in fact an elision of responsibility; again, this is an argument Houser takes up in much more detail than LeClair does.

However, of more interest to the present analysis is this appearance in the same sentence of the joint terms “drift” and “suspend,” the first which I discussed regarding both *End Zone* and “Human Moments in World War III.” That is, evidenced in this passage above – “you’re able to drift across continents and languages” – as well as drawn out in Houser’s article are references to a sense of place detachment. Houser’s argument in fact partially centers on this issue: “DeLillo’s text argues that detachment from place—expressed as being a ‘tourist’—results in detachment from ethical responsibility” (138). Whereas the terms “drift” and “detachment” are more spatial in their metaphor, “suspension” is more clearly temporal, and thus Houser’s identification of detachment as a central issue to the text is accurate; the question of *place* is again what is at stake here.

While the term “drift” and the actual geographical reality of an island as an isolated landform both signal spatial detachment, the related temporal metaphor is, as indicated above, “suspension,” a term which one could otherwise define as a decoupling from the flow of linear time. Beyond this single passage of *The Names* discussed thus far, there are further references within the text which reinforce the chronotopic value already suggested here – of “drift” and “suspension,” of isolation, of a space and time detached from the rest of world. One subtle example is in the description of the way James’ son Tap is paralyzed by fear when he is one day surrounded by bees: “He stood with his knees slightly flexed, one foot forward, head down, his hands at belt level, held slightly out from his body. Arrested motion” (120). Tap’s fear-driven paralysis and his posture during the resulting “arrested motion” reflect the position of the *kouroi* statues for which the island is named, hinting moreover at the sense of (existential) paralysis and resulting desire to arrest the motion of time (of history) involved in retreating to such a “safe island space” in the face of the increasing chaos of what is alternately described as postmodern or late modern, Western existence. Another example, which speaks more directly to the temporal value of the island space, is in an early scene in which James and Tap go to visit the archaeological dig where Kathryn, Tap’s mother and James’ estranged wife, works (the dig being the reason all three are on the island to begin with). The passage opens with a description of breakfast in the village, which includes the observation that “A white ship crossed in the distance” (20). After arriving at the “dazed landscape” (21) of the dig later in the morning – whose status as a declining operation causes James to comment that nothing “could seem more lost or forgotten” than the dig’s abandoned tools, indeed that “what they were leaving behind seemed older [than] what they’d found” – the description of the visit ends with the lines “The same white ship came into view” (22). While the repetition of the event of the

white ship's passing suggests a temporal looping, opposed as it is to linear flow, the description of the declining dig as already seeming "more *lost* or *forgotten*" (my emphasis) than the ancient, Minoan city they are excavating suggests that it is in the nature of the place itself to remove whatever falls within from the flow of history, distancing it further from the contemporary real than the ruins of a five-thousand year old civilization.

Another telling passage occurs when James attempts to think his way into why Kathryn is so motivated in these belated beginnings to her new career in archaeology. He writes:

> She senses the completeness of the trench. It is her size, it fits. She rarely looks over the rim. The trench is enough. A five-foot block of time abstracted from the system. Sequence, order, information. […] In its limits the trench enables her to see what's really there. […] The trench is her medium by now. It is more than the island as the island is more than the world. (133)

Though Axton follows this up with the admission that he "couldn't see what the work signified or represented for her" (133), the description he gives in fact makes the trench a miniaturized version of the island chronotope I am here fleshing out, where the isolated space coincides with a removal from history. This is further interesting in the way time and space are joined in the trench's description as a "five-foot block of time abstracted from the system," as the two are here fused in a way similar to Bakhtin's description of the chronotope itself. Though it does not play an extended role in the text, the trench in this context is presented as a smaller chronotope nested within that of the island, and indeed in the last sentence of this quotation above the narrator inverts this sense of nesting, where the trench is "more than the island as the island is more than the world." This inversion represents an experiential perspective, emphasizing the near before the distant, similar in other words to the difference between a phenomenological approach to world (which starts with the subject's experience) and the sort of Cartesian dualism which sees it from the abstracted perspective of the interaction of objects; this contrast is one which, as I have tried to make clear in the preceding chapters, represents a consistent theme operating in the background for DeLillo.

Though Axton is here unable to understand Kathryn's motivation for seeking out such a place – elsewhere he does realize the personal project of transformation involved, writing "each blazing day she grew into something slightly newer" (93) – this is likely because it differs from his own reason for wanting to occupy the island chronotope and all it represents. While Axton's association with the island as chronotope is partially related to the joint LeClair / Houser argument mentioned previously, in which James is a "suspended youth" occupying the "safe island space" of detachment from ethical responsibility, what is being revealed here is

that this detachment is clearly represented in a chronotopic manner in a way which allows both a contrast with other characters (the cult and Owen Brademas, especially) as well as to open onto the possibility of a shift when the text moves to the subsequent sections and chronotopes.

A final indicative example of the chronotope's value occurs when Axton, sitting outside at Kathryn's rented island home one evening talking with her and her dig leader Owen Brademas, is thrown inwards into memory. This first happens when he projects forwards in time, presumably to later that night: "I looked ahead to the walls of my hotel room. Standing by the bed in my pajamas" (81). The choice of "ahead" over the more common "forwards" is interesting in and of itself, as it serves to create a spatial/temporal ambiguity. The reader then finds out that the "name of the hotel was Kouros, like the village, the island, the ship that provided passage to and from the island. Singly knit. The journey that shares the edges of destinations" (81). The repetition of the name and the description of all as "singly knit" reinforces the self-contained nature of the island chronotope – the sense of (spatiotemporal) isolation evident in all the preceding examples – even doing so at the end with a spatial metaphor. The "journey that shares the edges of destinations" implies that one is never really going anywhere new, or even (following the island metaphor) traveling in a circle around the same central place, not unlike Bakhtin's description of the ancient chronotope of adventure time I mentioned in the opening chapter. The act of "looking ahead" to this hotel room then sends James back into the past in memory, as he connects the projected action of standing by a bed in his pajamas to previous such moments when he still lived with Kathryn in Canada:

> Standing by the bed in my pajamas. Kathryn reading. How many nights [we] shared this moment, not knowing it was matter to share. […] Here I am again, standing by the bed in my pajamas, acting out a memory. It was a memory that didn't exist independently. I recalled the moment only when I was repeating it. (82)

Thus the act of looking ahead in time to a certain event sends James into a memory of similar past moments which all seemed to pile onto one another, repeating in a way which points always inwards, again invoking a loop, much like the white ship or the repetition of the island's name cited just above. James continues on in this vein:

> The moment referred back to itself at the same time as it pointed forward. *Here I am*. A curious reminder that I was going to die. It was the only time in my marriage that I felt old, a specimen of oldness, a landmark, standing in those slightly oversized pajamas, a little ridiculous, reliving the same moment of the night before, Kathryn reading in bed, a dram of Greek brandy on the

> bedside table, another reference forward. I will die alone. Old, geologically. The lower relief of landforms. Olduvai. (82, original emphasis)

The first line, that "the moment referred back to itself at the same time as it pointed forward" is the text's most explicit example of this self-referring, looped sense of time (and its associated sense of isolation, of being set apart) I argue applies to "The Island" section as a whole. Olduvai is the place in Tanzania where remains dating back to *Homo habilis* from 2 million years ago have revealed much about human evolution. What I interpret from the fragmentary assertions that he "will die alone. Old, geologically. The lower relief of landforms. Olduvai" is not therefore that this temporal apartness results in some sort of transcendence of time, but rather that what is signaled is *isolation* taken to such an extreme that Axton's attachment to humanity is here imaginatively dissolved; he associates himself with the geologically old landforms he mentions. This is categorically distinct from referencing the past in a way which fosters a sense of connection by bridging the hominoid gap, so to speak, different than Kyle's finding of a sense of alterity through the Minoan figurine in "The Ivory Acrobat." In other words, rather than establish connection with these human predecessors, the opposite occurs – his solitude is exaggerated such that it becomes more than human.

What the sum of the preceding examples does is to establish the island as a fictional setting which contains its own particular fusion of time and space – which comprises a particular chronotope. While proving this is perhaps interesting in and of itself, where it becomes more broadly relevant is when we see how the chronotope is related with the rest of the text, including the events which occur therein. This is especially the case regarding the novel's central figure of the cult, as well as both the general cultural and political context, including, significantly, subjective responses to such contexts. The geopolitical discussions of this novel by both Longmuir and Houser indicate the way in which this novel explores a transition in light of the fresh conflicts resulting from the escalation of the United States' neocolonialism in an increasingly globalized world (specifically in the Middle East), as well as DeLillo's capacity as an author to both see and represent this juxtaposition of political realities and the epistemological complications which emerge. The island chronotope as developed in the preceding pages is undoubtedly linked to this overall discussion; in this context, I argue that the chronotopic value of isolation it develops is related to a Western, particularly American, sense of exceptionalism. The cultural attitude of moral superiority and the resulting sense of exemption from the (legal, geopolitical) standards of the rest of the world is translated into spatiotemporal terms, where what occurs within the island chronotope is self-contained,

not answerable to anything other than itself. This is echoed in the final lines of the "The Island" section of the novel, which read: "In the painted evening they walk past the windmill. He points out to sea, about a hundred yards, to the place where dolphins breached, a week ago, in a softfall of violet light. It is one of those imprinted moments, part of him now, *contained in island time*" (134, my emphasis).

This exemption and sense of self-containment also carries over into the actions of the characters themselves, most especially James Axton and his group of friends (presented as American businessmen and their wives, almost exclusively) in Athens. Thus what LeClair defines as a "safe island space" for "suspended youths" is given a political context; remaining in the exceptional zone of youth for these people involved in international finance is, as Houser points out quite well, a complete evasion of ethical responsibility. The island, then, emblematizes a mentality which is necessary in order to pursue the sort of financial transactions these people engage in. Anne Longmuir's development of the Iranian hostage crisis as *The Names*' historical intertext includes the important argument that "the hostage crisis was one of a series of events, including the Vietnam War, which forced the United States to recognize that its values were not universal" (116); I would argue that the island chronotope represents the effects of a *denial* of that recognition. By developing his text with the aid of the structuring agent of the chronotope, DeLillo is therefore able to explore the ramifications of such an exceptional attitude.

The most tangible way that the island chronotope described thus far determines the text is through its impact on the characters the reader first meet there; James Axton and the dig leader Owen Brademas together represent two generations of Americans grappling in their own way with the contradictions of their country's exceptionalism and the larger reality they are exposed to outside the United States. Anne Longmuir's argument as to the Iranian hostage crisis as the novel's main intertext emphasizes that it is more than a matter of displacement for these characters – the background of the novel is one of geopolitical and therefore representational crisis, of a kind with the crisis in subjectivity and representation discussed in the preceding chapters with regards to *End Zone*, "Human Moments in World War III" and "The Ivory Acrobat." My reading of *The Names* is of course framed by these, especially the discussion of the two other texts of DeLillo's Greek period; the same omnipresent threats of war and capital are also evident in this novel. War and capital are in fact repeatedly intermingled in this novel as well, similarly to their conflation in "Human Moments." This is first expressed with regards to language: "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 blooding of the gray-suited, the pale, the corporate man. It's all the same game, these cross-argots suggest" (47). At another point James makes a related comment to Kathryn, proclaiming that "We do the wrong kind of killing in America. It's a form of consumerism. It's the logical extension of consumer fantasy. People shooting from overpasses, barricaded houses. Pure image. […] No connection to the earth." (115). Beyond the direct conflation of "killing" and "consumerism," the final, semi-ironic "no connection to the earth" line attests the importance of place detachment that both Heather Houser and Elise Martucci have signaled with regards to this text. A final example takes the irony even further when James' banker friend David Keller says unironically that he is training for a "Night drop into Iran. The bank's determined to be the first ones back in. I'll be leading a small elite group. Credit officers with blackened faces" (131). Such a clear, almost absurd example serves to hammer home the point that this conflation of war and capital is a significant background context for the novel, and that DeLillo's previous explorations of such threats as the nuclear bomb and the associated sense of compressed time/space are now merely contextualized by the geopolitical reality of American (and Western, generally) involvement (financially, politically, militarily) in the Middle East.[3]

Moreover, this brief contextualization of the intersecting crises DeLillo treats in this novel serves to bridge the gap, to promote a dialogue between his earliest texts such as *End Zone* and his later, post-9/11 fiction. Thus an argument which Rachel Falconer makes in the course of her analysis of 2007's *Falling Man* resonates with this novel from a quarter of a century earlier: "the texts which intelligently and persuasively think through the conflict between […] opposing chronotopic perspectives are more significant than ever in our crisis-ridden times." ("Heterochronic" 114). Falconer is referring to the clash between novelistic (open-ended) and epic (closed-off) worldviews in the wake of an event like September 11th, and though the competing perspectives here in *The Names* are not exactly the same there is nonetheless a clear correlation. The island chronotope and all the events which occur within its bounds – both on the island itself as well as regarding the financial activities and related conversations James and his friends pursue in Athens and the Middle Eastern region – reflect

[3] See James Axton's discussion of the Middle East with Kathryn on page 114, for example: "All the banking and technology and oil money create an uneasy flow through the region, a complex set of dependencies and fears. Everyone is there, of course. Not just Americans. They're all there."

the particular worldview associated with the chronotope as developed above, a closed-off approach to the world in its own way. What this approach accomplishes with this novel in particular is to draw out more concrete distinctions from the novel's conclusion in the fold of the desert chronotope.

As indicated in the opening discussion of this chapter, the cult and its *modus operandi* – murdering people with blunt objects when they find an alphabetical correspondence between the initials of a person and those of the place where they happen to be – is consistently interpreted in light of poststructuralist theories of language. Given the context – alphabetic murders, fascination with speaking multiple languages – this is, again, a coherent way of approaching the issue. However, already evident in the elaboration of the island chronotope as embodying a self-referring sense of time, looped back in upon itself in a way which is constantly pushing towards removing all within its bounds from the grasp of history, is a deeper connection with the cult's project. In Owen's first meeting with the cult, for example, he describes to them his recent obsession with epigraphy, with visiting archeological sites to study inscriptions of ancient writing in stone and clay. Noticing their excitement in telling them of "Ras Shamrah in Syria," he realizes "in the end they were interested in the alphabet […]. Not Ras Shamrah. Not history, gods, tumbled walls, the scale poles and pumps of the excavators. The alphabet itself. They were interested in letters, written symbols, fixed in sequence" (*Names* 30). Explicitly not interested in history, the alphabetical obsession importantly features a rejection of gods and ruins as well as of contemporary technology, all which represent different ways of ordering the chaos of life, different "larger, preexisting systems" as Longmuir puts it (109). Owen, James, and the reader all learn soon after that this interest in letters in sequence translates directly into their *modus operandi*, in that they commit the radical act of ending another's life when the proper sequence is lined up. While interpretations of the cult's method vary, the general critical consensus is that they are attempting to impose order on a world in which they perceive chaos, creating a new system for understanding life through death, decided by the arbitrary, linguistic coincidence of person and place.[4] With this general argument I do not disagree, but wish rather to highlight the cult's trajectory and own transformation when the novel's distinctive chronotopes are taken into consideration.

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[4] Cf. Bryant (1987), Osteen (2000), or Boxall (2006).

While Owen's transition is somewhat more complicated, I argue that the cult's representational power is greatest while on the island of Kouros, and that it gradually diminishes as the narrative progresses towards the Thar desert between India and Pakistan, where it will eventually cease to exist. Likewise, James Axton's course is correspondingly chartable in a reverse sense; while at first fully immersed in all that the island chronotope represents, his journey is a progression in the opposite direction, as he paradoxically gravitates away from the pull of what the cult signifies even as he himself feels more drawn to them. This assertion that the island is the cult's place of power, so to speak, is one again supported by attention to the detail of place description in the novel. When it is discovered that there has been a murder on this tiny, sparsely populated island, the narrator describes how it occurred in a small village called Mikro Kamini at the island's center. The village and the landscape around it, including Gothic sounding "pillars and castellated rock forms" (72), are depicted in great detail, and because I believe this place and the textual association it has with the cult and their gruesome murder in some ways make it central to what the island represents as a chronotope, I quote at length:

> The landscape begins to acquire a formal power at Mikro Kamini. There's suggestion of willful distance from the sea, willful isolation, and the fields and groves abruptly end nearby. Here the island becomes the bare Cycladic rock seen from the decks of passing ships, a place of worked-out quarries, goat-bells, insane winds. The villages nestled on the coast seem not so much a refuge for seagoing men nor a series of maze structures contrived to discourage entrance by force […]; from here they are detailed reliefs or cameos, wishing not to attract the attention of whatever forces haunt the interior. The streets that bend back on themselves or disappear, the miniature churches and narrow lanes, these seem a form of self-effacement, a way of saying there is nothing here worth bothering about. They are a huddling, a gathering together against the stark landforms and volcanic rock. Superstition, vendetta, incest. The things that visit the spirit in the solitary hills. Bestiality and murder. (72)

Beyond the intriguing correlation between the landscape acquiring a "formal power" and the very definition of the literary chronotope, this long description is significant for a number of reasons. In a strictly geographic sense, this inland village is closer to the island's physical center than anywhere else described in the section, and this literal centrality thus already hints at the place as a metaphorical center or core for the chronotope; if this is the case, then this passage indeed takes on considerable importance. It is in fact not unusual for chronotopes to have such a core or heart, places where the particular representational value associated with said

chronotope is at its strongest,[5] and various factors in the description signal that this might be the case here as well. For example, the "willful isolation" of the village is a turn of phrase which could comfortably be used to describe the cultural attitude associated with American exceptionalism. Further, there is the combination of a "willful distance from the sea" with the "abrupt" end of all agriculture just outside the village bounds due to the landscape shift to "bare Cycladic rock" and "insane winds," all together which imply a harshness, a general distancing from that which gives life. This is a distance relatable in turn to the figurative distancing which results from the different sorts of isolation discussed regarding this period: cultural isolation due to exceptionalism, as well as the feeling of subjective isolation which results from the combination of said exceptionalism and a society under the influence of the Cold War, changing technological landscapes, and the "period of rapid change, flux, and uncertainty" which resulted from the breakup of the economic configuration David Harvey calls "Fordist-Keynesian" in 1973 (*Condition* 124)[6]. In this context, the distancing apparent in this village's description echoes the affective detachment from place already signaled as important in this novel, as both are related to a separation from concrete, implaced forms of life and the sense of ethical responsibility that comes with it.

The dark results of the place's association with such detachment are found in the description itself, including the sense of "forces which haunt the interior," "streets that bend back on themselves or disappear [as] a form of self-effacement," and especially the final list: "Superstition, vendetta, incest. […] Bestiality and murder." The streets that bend back on themselves or disappear seem a microcosmic, spatial mirroring of the island chronotope's looped sense of time, but carried to a twisted extreme, hinting at the more sinister results described thereafter. These final five terms – superstition, vendetta, incest, bestiality and murder – are all in their way human attitudes or acts which similarly reflect a turning inwards, or perhaps better a turning *away from* the wider world of healthy society. In this sense the village, and by extension the cult (for it is only in association with the murder they commit

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[5] Beyond its discussion here related to *The Names,* I will elaborate this argument for chronotopic cores, specific sites where the value of a chronotope is at its strongest, in more detail in Chapter 6's discussion of *Zero K* and the two opposing chronotopes of that novel.

[6] "I broadly accept the view that the long postwar boom, from 1945 to 1973, was built upon a certain set of labour control practices, technological mixes, consumption habits, and configurations of political—economic power, and that this configuration can reasonably be called Fordist—Keynesian. The break up of this system since 1973 has inaugurated a period of rapid change, flux, and uncertainty" (Harvey *Condition* 124).

there that this village even enters the narrative), demonstrates the darker ramifications of the wider turning inwards or turning away from world that the island chronotope represents. This association with the cult is in fact crucial, in that the cult is thus intimately associated with all else with which the island chronotope is affiliated. This includes James Axton's role as a risk analyst, those of his friends as investment bankers and so forth, as well as the more general sense of isolation and cultural exceptionalism which both permits and is reinforced by such roles. In this climate of detachment from ethical involvement in the world, the cult's project takes on power; their method of selection for their murders is one of pure logic, "abstracted from the system" like Kathryn's trench, totally devoid of anything human.

Both Owen Brademas and James Axton are attracted to the cult, whose power in this section derives from its affiliation with the island chronotope as well as its status as a response to the increasing sense of disorder and attenuation in contemporary life. Owen Brademas' interest in the cult is stronger, related as it is to his already existent pursuit of epigraphy. However, Owen's interest in the cult is largely due to the reverberations of a powerful event during his childhood which has left him psychologically scarred; early on, James describes Owen in the following way: "His pain was radiant, almost otherworldly. He seemed to be in touch with grief, as if it were a layer of being he'd learned how to tap. He expressed things out of it and through it. […] I never doubted the unsparing nature of whatever it was that haunted his life" (19). The pain James notes in Owen is indeed connected to this as yet unrelated event which "haunts his life." The memory, much like the "forces which haunt the interior" of the island, is one in which Owen was unable to speak in tongues during a gathering at the Pentecostal church his family attended; I will return to discuss this event in detail further on, as it plays a significant role in the final desert section. What is important at this point is that it is the absence created in Owen by this childhood failure that drives him in a search which parallels in a certain sense the project of the cult, interested as they both are in alphabets and the power of the detached signifier, leading him to follow them to both the eponymous mountain region of the Peloponnese in the second section, as well as deep into the desert in the third.

The narrative is of course experienced almost entirely though the eyes of Axton, who follows, at first unknowingly, in Owen's footsteps in his own increasing interest in the cult. His interest is similarly connected to the hope that this violent method somehow contains an adequate response to the world as he experiences it. Axton, however, is of a younger generation than Owen, and his initial reason for proximity to the island chronotope and the cult found

there is connected to his new profession as a risk analyst, and the world of finance and exploitation he is more generally involved in through his circle of friends in Athens. The fact that James' job (and the general life he is immersed in) necessarily involves a detachment from place and the ethical responsibility which Houser demonstrates that comes with – he writes near the beginning that "there was nothing to come back to if I failed, no place in particular I belonged" (49) – is what creates the pull that he feels towards the cult's apparent method for ordering the chaos. However, whereas the cult will finally dissolve into nothing by the novel's end, James' development is in the opposite direction, leading him towards the beginnings of a sense of involvement in the world. This is a shift which first takes shape in the novel's second section and chronotope, "The Mountain."

4.3 'Byzantine blood and gold' – 'The Mountain' and the Return to History

Importantly, much of the extant criticism of *The Names* is arguably performed in a way which interprets the entire novel as if it exists solely within "The Island" chronotope as outlined at length above, focusing on detachment from place, the failure of language, and what might be called an American historical narcissism, all of which are bound up in the figure of the cult. As an example of the former issue, that of place, critics tend to focus on the types of statements which emerge when Axton meets his filmmaker friend Frank Volterra, the third (American male) figure of the novel attracted to the cult, while in Amman, Jordan. After Volterra describes in rather explicit terms his inability to develop affective attachments to places – saying he doesn't understand "the idea of losing yourself in a place," that he "can't see it as an aspect of [him]self or vice versa" (143) – Axton describes his travels for his job as such: "I was a traveler only in the sense that I covered distances. I traveled between places, never in them" (143). The syntactic choice of "cover distance" in this context reflects the sort of (literally) superficial understanding of space described earlier with regards to Tom LeClair's discussion of the novel, and the disavowal of actual engagement with particular places demonstrated here would therefore seem to support all the arguments which highlight Axton as a prime example of the deracinated American subject and associated exceptional status. However, as LeClair himself hints at though without following up much on the implications,[7] the fact that in this second

[7] LeClair writes: "Although Axton says he travels 'between places, never in them', he does travel by boat in 'The Island,' by car in 'The Mountain,' and finally on foot in 'The Desert.' These progressively more concrete methods

section Axton indeed begins to travel *in* places rather than merely between them, quite contrary to his own statement to Volterra as cited above, serves as the first evidence that there is in fact some sort of transition involved here.

The shift to a new chronotope in "The Mountain" is one which, similarly to "The Island," is best understood by a dual attention to the description of place as well as to the events which occur in the narrative. While the concurrence of Kathryn's dig and the cult's presence on the island of Kouros potentially troubles the argument that the cult is the figure central to these progressive chronotopes, both "The Mountain" and the subsequent "The Desert" set that doubt to rest; both are named for particular places that James and/or Owen travel to directly in their pursuit of the cult. Specifically, Axton travels twice to the Mani, the mountainous middle peninsula of the Peloponnesus region of southern Greece, inspired by his intuiting through their conversation that Owen had himself sought the cult out there after their island murder. So although much of the action of this second section occurs in Athens, similarly to in "The Island" the defining passages for the relationship between the titular mountains and the section's chronotopic value occur during Axton's trips to the region, the first of which he takes with his son Tap. Prominent among these descriptions is one which Axton provides while narrating this first trip:

> The mountains here contained a sense of time, geologic time. Rounded, colorless, unwooded. They lay in embryo, a process unfolding, or a shriveled dying perhaps. They had the look of naked events. But what else? It took me awhile to understand in what precise way these pale masses, southwest of Argos, seemed so strange and irreducible, in what way they worked a mental labor in me, forcing me to shift my eyes time and again, keep to the wheel, look to the road. They were mountains as semantic rudiments, barest definitions of themselves. (180)

First and foremost, there is here an explicit reference to a concrete sense of time associated with this particular landscape, seemingly making the job of chronotopic analysis quite straightforward. This "geologic" sense of time is of course fundamental, although its interpretation is perhaps not as unambiguous as it may seem. That is, while the passage might remind the reader of the reference to the archaeological site at Olduvai in the passage referenced from "The Island" section – in which Axton asserts he will die alone, "geologically" old (82) – here the implication is distinct. Whereas the earlier passage, in line with the

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necessitate sacrifice of speed for some intimacy with a place's sights and sounds, its religion and politics" (*In the Loop* 183).

isolationist nature of its chronotope, indicates an inwardness or a solitude so extreme that his connection with humanity (and thus history) is imaginatively dissolved, here (human) time is exploded outwards into the geologic scale, an expansion which necessarily includes perceiving the human in its entire history (including even a view which incorporates what we've learned from a place like Olduvai) as a drop in the temporal ocean when it comes to the history of the planet. Further, and also crucially, the landscape here suggests a "process unfolding," be it one of becoming through beginnings ("in embryo") or of "shriveled dying." Moreover, the association with "naked events" further emphasizes the different sense of *possibility* inherent in such terms, as the unique event is the integral unit in the unfolding of history. In sum, the idea of *process* is crucial, as this is categorically distinct from the static result of the island's inwardness.

There is thus already in this passage a move away from the self-isolating temporal value of the island, in which time is suspended and where events recur and are removed from the broader flow of history and world, presenting instead a sense of time which begins to reincorporate the human into the larger context of the world. The mountains' association with geologic time serves to broaden the framework for a figure like James Axton, imposing (the beginnings of) a removal from the island chronotope's egotistical inward spiral in order to allow for this opening outwards of perspective. The mountains as "semantic rudiments" further suggest this potential for becoming, pointing in the opposite direction of the insular island towards *other* (epistemological, ontological) possibilities, the phrase implying as it does the beginnings of meaning itself. When translated to a subjective, geopolitically-aware worldview, this broader understanding of time – which forces one to contextualize the human as a mere blip in the earth's timeline – therefore pushes by necessity against the exceptionalist attitude Axton embodies in the first part of the novel.

It is worth digressing for a moment to point out that this employment of geologic time in fiction appears to forecast a trend which will emerge in the wake of the post-millennial discussion of the Anthropocene as a potential geological era. In her 2015 article "What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene? American Fiction in Geological Time," Kate Marshall includes DeLillo's 2010 *Point Omega* in a discussion of novels which self-reflexively engage desert landscapes in particular in order to represent the epochal-scale temporal shift in perspective

which theorists such as Dipesh Chakrabarty have introduced to the humanities with the term Anthropocene.[8] Marshall writes that

> Contemporary US fiction seems quite clearly to be responding to the pressures of the larger anthropocenic imagination by staging its own temporality within increasing time scales and geologies. A growing body of literary fiction published in this decade understands itself within epochal, geologic time and includes that form of time within its larger formal operations" (523–24).

Seeing as Marshall discusses a number of novels of which 2010's *Point Omega* is the earliest, *The Names* could very well represent another case in which DeLillo is a writer who fictionally explores contemporary issues prior to their theorization in a more academic setting. However, I here prefigure the discussion of DeLillo's later novel *Point Omega* in my following chapter due to the alternative emphasis I wish to place on this sort of formal maneuver's relationship in *The Names* to the states of process and becoming mentioned above. Whereas Marshall's argument as to texts like *Point Omega* stresses that the "linkage of [species] death to the accumulation of human matter on the planet's surface remains a kind of insistence on species agency that, when rendered within the narrative project, has the capacity to become a rampant if frustrated desire for ubiquitous consciousness" (529), in *The Names* the formal enactment of geologic time in this section serves a more humble purpose. Again, in this earlier text it functions to reconnect the character James Axton – and by extension the reader who identifies in any way with his position as an American (or neocolonialist, etc.) – with the broader context of history. There *is* an obvious step in the direction of such Anthropocene fiction that Marshall identifies, which I would indeed argue is indeed another example of DeLillo's prescience, but the main effect is nonetheless this more simple one; the context is still predominantly human.[9] For Axton, it involves the beginnings of a process of incorporation into the larger fields of history and an opening onto the possibility of acknowledging culturally-other worldviews.

This historical incorporation is introduced several lines after the initial descriptions of the landscape discussed in detail above. Following the mention of the mountains as a "process unfolding" and containing this sense of "geologic time" (*Names* 180), Axton continues:

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[8] See Chakrabarty (2009). For example, Chakrabarty explores the way "The geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history" (212), and the way that "species history and the history of capital" (220) are to be considered together under the umbrella of the historical concept of the Anthropocene.

[9] Marshall's argument includes discussion of *Point Omega's* Richard Elster's commentary as reflecting contemporary nonhuman theory (528); again, refer to the following chapter for more in-depth discussion of this topic.

> We let the features gather, the low skies and mists, the hilltops edged with miles of old walls, fallen battlements, that particular brooding woe of the Peloponnese. It hovers almost everywhere, war memory, a heaviness and death. Frankish castles, Turkish fortresses, ruined medieval towns, the gateways and vaulted cisterns, the massive limestone walls, the shaft graves, the empty churches with their faded All-Creator floating in the dome, the curved Lord, the non-Euclidean, and the votive lamps below, the walnut throne, the icons in the side galleries, Byzantine blood and gold. (181)

Here it becomes clear that this mountain region has another aspect to it than the more abstract correlation with "naked events;" human history, most especially as organized around war, religion and death, is also intimately associated with this place. The passage asyndetically enumerates an inventory of shifting allegiances and cultures inscribed onto the very landscape, emphasizing through saturation the entanglement of the place with human history. Further, a line like the last one – "Byzantine blood and gold" – creates a link between the contemporary conflation of capital and war evident in this novel with the cultures of the past, reinforcing the sense of historical continuity lacking in the chronotope of "The Island." The mountain chronotope thus emerges as one which, taking its impetus from the Mani of southern Greece, expands the field of time outwards to the geologic in order to escape the confines of the inward looking island. Again, reminiscent of Benjamin's concept of Messianic time, the result is an emphasis on *process*, which in terms of the human translates into a view of history which is unable to deny the entangled nature of the present and the past.

4.3.1 The Formal Impact of the Chronotope

Importantly, although these passages from Axton's trip to the Mani do not occur until one-third of the way into "The Mountain," the chronotopic value indicated is operational throughout the section. This is noticeably evident even from the outset: the transition of chronotopes is recognizable within the section's first pages, which consist of a rapid-fire description of Axton's travels to and around the Middle East, eventually leading him to Amman and then to Jerusalem. Of particular note is the way the section is opened with a description of the experience of traveling by air; there are such asides about the experience of air travel at the outset of all three of the primary sections, and thus the distinctions between them are useful in their microcosmic indication as to this broader representational shift I argue for. At the opening of "The Island," for instance, Axton's reflection on air travel reinforces the irresponsibility and detachment already discussed, and even includes a relationship to time:

> I flew a lot, of course. We all did. We were a subculture, business people in transit, growing old in planes and airports. We were versed in percentages, safety records, in the humor of flaming death. […] This is time totally lost to us. We don't remember it. We take no sense impressions with us, no voices, none of the windy blast of aircraft on the tarmac, or the white noise of flight, or the hours waiting. Nothing sticks to us but smoke in our hair and clothes. It is dead time. It never happened until it happens again. Then it never happened. (6-7)

The unfortunate ability of the "business people in transit" to see "the humor of flaming death," an allusion to one of the violent ways people die in the region and in which they refuse ethical implication, is paired with the description of travel as "lost" time. Not only do they not remember it, nothing "sticking" (an apt word, as Sara Ahmed has demonstrated at length[10]) to them, but time is actually "dead," to such an extent that the event is denied ontological status: "it never happened until it happens again. Then it never happened." This denial of the event in regards to air travel is an epitomization of the island chronotope's detached value, reflecting both its sense of time as well as the individual adaptations to it which Axton and his business friends represent.

The description of air travel in the opening two pages of "The Mountain," on the other hand, stands in contrast to this. Although in the face of two upsetting or serious events – Axton sees a man out his window mysteriously "walk into [the] nothing" of the desert as well as sits "across the aisle from a dead man on a Yemen Airways flight" (138) – he reacts in both cases by sitting rigid in his seat "look[ing] straight ahead" (137, 138), thus continuing to avoid involvement, there is nonetheless a clear difference overall. That is, rather than letting nothing "stick," in this second section Axton becomes deeply involved in the intimate details of what is around him: "I found myself studying doors, shutters, mosque lamps, carpets[,] women's hands covered in small red marks, designs of some kind;" "windows were false, shadows crossed the wall in dappled patterns, […] prayer niches were aligned with Mecca" (138). Further, he writes that "so much that happened seemed to happen simultaneously" (138), a declaration which stands in stark opposition to the negation of events which "never happened" in the description of air travel in "The Island." Such attention to detail and the affirmation of the event indicate the beginnings of a shifting perspective for James Axton, paralleling the shift outlined above in terms of the mountainous landscape of the Mani and its association with the

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[10] See Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in which she uses the term "sticky" to discuss the "effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs." Thus, "stickiness depends on histories of contact" (90), which history is precisely what the characters in *The Names* do their utmost to avoid.

fluctuating tides of history. Moreover, in a way which will be furthered in the final section of "The Desert," the description of the detached form of air travel is juxtaposed with increasing intimacy with real places.

For instance, upon meeting his old friend Frank Volterra in Amman, where Volterra discusses his own obsession with finding other units of the language cult in the Wadi Rum desert, the two decide to visit Jerusalem to follow a lead for a guide who supposedly has more information about the mysterious group. Their trajectory eventually takes them to the "old city" (142) to meet a man named Vosdanik, a loquacious guide who "sp[eaks] seven languages" and tells Axton and Volterra "his life story as a matter of course" (148), giving them a whirlwind of confused information on the cultural and sociopolitical chaos of the region. Axton's presence in Jerusalem and experience in a smoky tavern with this "guide as storyteller" (149) figure represent a significant demonstration of this newfound immersion in the broader world referred to above. Of all the places in the world one could choose as a center point, Jerusalem perhaps presents the best case; the city is considered sacred to the three Abrahamic religions which now span the world, and thus bridges a cultural gap between "west" and "east." The city and its complex history, both past and present, make it a true center of otherness, and Axton's journey there is thus symbolic of the initiation of a process of opening up to such alterity. Further, it prefigures the significance of sacred place (or lack thereof) to the novel, which I will discuss at length in the context of "The Desert."

Axton and Volterra meet Vosdanik to get more information about the cult, and he tells them a convoluted story which they will later have trouble remembering in full – the man speaks "a thousand words to every one of [theirs]" (150). Of interest is the way he recounts how when he first heard of the cult he had thought it was ancient rather than modern, as the region "was a land of cults and sects and desert monks and stylites" (149). He then digresses at length:

> Wherever you will find empty land, there are men who try to get closer to God. They will be poor, they will take little food, they will go away from women. They will be Christian monks, they will be Sufis who dress with wool shirts, who repeat the holy words from the Koran, who dance and spin. Visions are real. God is involved with living men. […] Always some men go away. (149)

This commentary is reminiscent of the role of the desert as outlined in Chapter 2 with regards to *End Zone*, where the "empty land" of the desert provides the ground for the ascetic type of spiritual pursuit, for "get[ting] closer to God." There is thus a tenuous link established between

the project of this language cult and these old ascetics, and in a sense the eventual trajectory that will take Owen to the middle of a desert to find them is similarly informed by that relationship as well; the difference, however, between this desert and that of *End Zone* will also become clear in due course. Upon taking their leave of Vosdanik and in the wake of the rush of information they receive from him, which includes details of two more cult murders, the two Americans are presumably overcome by the intensity of the event: Volterra is unable to stop laughing and Axton goes "into an alley to vomit" (153). This emotional, bodily reaction to the event amplifies the sense that Axton here passes over a mountain, metaphorically speaking, into a commitment in terms of his interest in the cult as well as his move away from the island mentality and its ethical detachment – before this meeting with Volterra he proclaims his interest in the cult is merely passing. As a matter of fact, in a way which supports this reading Axton himself realizes something of the sort at a later point, reflecting on "the night [he]'d vomited [in] Jerusalem, an episode [he] now saw as a clear separation, a space between two ways of existing" (211).

The interest in the cult thus coincides with the increased involvement in the world which I suggest above begins at this stage, a logical correlation in that the cult at this point appears to be something which could provide an answer to the world's incomprehensibility. Beyond the trip to Jerusalem and the subsequent journey to the Mani described previously, within this "Mountain" section Axton also concentrates on learning Greek, an act which belies his earlier claims negating a sense of belonging in any particular place (49). Axton additionally meets with an Athens local named Andreas Eliades, who engages him in an evening of geopolitical conversation. Although during this conversation he continues to cling to a naivety about the role of the United States in the region, unable to see the truth in Eliades' claim that "Americans choose strategy over principle every time and yet keep believing in their own innocence" (236), by the end of "The Mountain" Axton shows somewhat more awareness. When his friend Ann Maitland calls him to warn of Andreas' potentially undue interest in Axton's job as a risk analyst (she and the Greek are having an affair), he defends the other man by acknowledging that "[Andreas] has deep feelings and deep suspicions and he should have them, why shouldn't he, when you consider events, when you consider history" (243). Seeing as this occurs just before the end of this second section, there is thus a slight change noticeable in James even within the section; at no previous point in the narrative does he demonstrate a point of view which takes history into account in such a direct way.

A final example of this shift in James Axton is relevant in that it also brings the focus back to the cult. He travels to Rhodes with two friends, and there presents from his future position as the writer of this novel the geopolitical context contemporary to the narrative's action:

> This was the period after the President ordered a freeze of Iranian assets held in U.S. banks. Desert One was still to come, the commando raid that ended two hundred and fifty miles from Tehran. It was the winter Rowser learned that the Shi'ite underground movement, Dawa, was stockpiling weapons in the Gulf. It was the winter before the car bombings in Nablus and Ramallah, before the military took power in Turkey, tanks in the streets, soldiers painting over wall slogans. (233)

Interestingly, the long, historically accurate passage from which the above is excerpted is followed by a single-line paragraph: "All around us the human noise, the heat of a running crowd" (233). Beyond the resonance the image will have with a scene which actually gives it flesh in the much later *Zero K*, the sentence suggests a correlation between "human noise" and an active involvement in the world. This provokes a contrast with what an isolated member of the cult tells Axton and Volterra during the former's second trip to the Peloponnesus: "This is the strength of the Mani. It does not suggest things to us. No gods, no history. The rest of the Peloponnese is full of associations. The Deep Mani, no. Only what is here. The rocks, the towers. A dead silence. A place where it is possible for men to stop making history. We are inventing a way out" (209). This (once) cult member named Andahl (Axton suspects he agrees to talk because he has been estranged from the group, though it is left unclear) associates the silence of the landscape with the cult's now explicit desire to "stop making history," to invent "a way out." There is therefore an opposition set up between the "human noise" associated with geopolitical reality (and thus history) and the "dead silence" Andahl attributes to the Mani and its associated desire to escape history. In a chronotopic sense, this verbalized desire to negate history distinctly clashes with the value of "The Mountain's" chronotope as described in the preceding pages, in fact holding much more similarity with that associated with "The Island" chronotope of the novel's first section. This chronotopic dislocation is in fact evidence for the diminishment of the cult's influence that I alluded to earlier; what Andahl says here substantiates the assertion that the cult's symbolic power is at its greatest in "The Island." What the cult searches for in their secretive way is foiled by the semantic and temporal value of the mountain chronotope; in fact, the cult never commits a murder there and the members are moreover dispersed from the remote Mani village they had chosen due to its "being developed,"

as somebody wants to "open the area to tourists" (201). The rather improbable development for tourism in the area denotes a subtle intervention in the cult's goal of ontological liberation from history – tourism represents, for better or worse, another instance of the reassertion of contemporary geopolitical realities.

The result of this conversation with Andahl, especially when it comes to his attribution of the landscape as allowing a stoppage of history, is therefore that the cult is trying to force the issue when it comes to their ontological goal. At one point during this episode Volterra also remarks to Axton that the cult members are "secular monks," and that they "want to vault into eternity" (203). This attempted escape from mortality again forecasts *Zero K*, and like that later novel DeLillo takes the enactment of such an attempt to the sands of a remote desert in order to play it out. What has thus been set up so far by attention to *The Names'* chronotopes in the first two sections is a contrast between varying approaches to the world which coalesce around the difference between detachment and involvement, between temporal stasis and historical becoming. The eponymous desert of the third section thus emerges as the ground on which all the characters seeking answers in this novel will play out their conclusions. As a member of the cult will later tell Owen Brademas, "the desert is a solution" (294). While their eventual (re)solution is probably not what the cult hopes for, the desert of *The Names* is in fact the first instance in which DeLillo explores its depths in full. Whereas Gary Harkness of *End Zone* was drawn to the desert but was unable to do much more than make brief forays into its interior, in *The Names* DeLillo fleshes the chronotope out in detail for the first time.

4.4 'The hawks turned in the empty sky' – 'The Desert' and Open Futurity

To preface the final chronotopic shift which takes place in "The Desert," it is conducive to begin with the novel's third and final description of air travel; again, the novel contains such descriptions at the outset of all three of its primary sections, and thus they provide nicely encapsulated examples of their respective chronotopic values. Whereas the analogous description in "The Island" reinforced the sense of "dead time" (7) of that chronotope and the corresponding affirmation that ethically "nothing sticks" (7), in the opening lines of "The Mountain" I argued for evidence of an increased engagement with the world on Axton's part which corresponds with the chronotope's reincorporation of historical time. The opening lines of "The Desert," in turn, read as such: "In this vast space, which seems like nothing so much

as a container for emptiness, we sit with our documents always ready, wondering if someone will appear and demand to know who we are, someone in authority, and to be unprepared is to risk serious things" (253). Although this is a description of an airport, the consequence of opening a section titled "The Desert" with the line "In this vast space…" is to effectively conflate the titular barren landscape with the airport space actually being described. The resulting suggestion is that the desert too might be read as a "container for emptiness," where an extension of the metaphor would refer to the unknown "someone in authority" who might "demand to know who we are" in a more metaphysical sense. The nature of this space, Axton continues, "impel[s] us towards a sense of inwardness, a sense of smallness, a self-exposure we are never prepared for" (253). The airport here embodies the quality of the desert which compelled both the "Desert Fathers" of early Christianity as well as the young characters of *End Zone* to seek it out – the empty space promotes this inwardness that is also an integral part of the ascetic pursuit. However, the sense of "self-exposure" Axton refers to is unsettling because neither Axton nor his business friends have any desire for this ascetic path – they are in fact trying as hard as they can to ignore such effects. Thus whereas the novel's first description of air travel emphasizes metaphysical absence and the second overwhelming simultaneity, in this third depiction Axton now perceives the situation with a clearer view, admitting to the powerful effect the experience of exposure in the "vast space" has on the individual.

It is with this more coherent perspective that Axton reflects further:

> Air travel reminds us who we are. It's the means by which we recognize ourselves as modern. The process removes us from the world and sets us apart from each other. We wander in the ambient noise, checking one more time for the flight coupon, the boarding pass, the visa. The process convinces us that at any moment we may have to submit to the force that is implied in all this, the unknown authority behind it, behind the categories, the languages we don't understand. This vast terminal has been erected to examine souls. (254).

The reminder that the "modern" person recognizes herself through this process of "remov[ing] us from the world and set[ting] us apart from each other" echoes the sense of attenuation caused by the same phenomena discussed with regards to time-space compression and accelerated time in the preceding chapters. In the airport's absence of normal societal structure, of immersion in "the thick crowded paint of things" (254), there comes a sudden awareness of the "unknown authority behind […] the categories, the languages we don't understand," repeating the

sentiment from the section's first paragraph cited above. It is precisely this trepidation in the face of the unknown which Axton refers to when he soon after writes:

> All of this we choose to forget. We devise a counter-system of elaborate forgetfulness. We agree on this together. And out in the street we see how easy it is, once we're immersed in the thick crowded paint of things, the bright clothes and massed brown faces. But the experience is no less deep because we've agreed to forget it. (254)

This passage is key to any discussion of the role of air travel in this novel, which many critics have engaged with in one way or another. The assertion that Axton and his colleagues "choose to forget" all this, indeed "devise a counter-system of elaborate forgetfulness," is a response to the unwanted truths which the "vast space" of the airport terminal reveals regarding "who we are."

As part of her overall argument as to the evasion of ethical responsibility in this novel, Heather Houser yokes together this "counter-system of elaborate forgetfulness" described here in "The Desert" with the "amnesia" (Houser 135) of the passage from "The Island" in which Axton refers to travel as "dead time" (*Names* 7). However, according to my chronotope-driven reading such a conflation is unwarranted, and to further overlook the crucial final sentence of the passage is to extract a completely different meaning. This final assertion, "But the experience is no less deep because we've agreed to forget it," speaks to the different levels of understanding and therefore analysis which are here at play. To clarify, the first is epistemological: by devising this "system of forgetfulness" the characters are able to avoid the knowledge of their ethical implication in the world, which Houser is correct to unveil and critique. However, there is also an important ontological aspect at play, signaled by the first part of the sentence: even though they choose to forget, the experience is still "deep." If they have agreed to forget, at what "deep" level is this experience having an effect on these characters? The answer is on the level of being, the ontological level, and it is indeed here in "The Desert" where the ontological takes center stage; this difference in focus which the "vast space" of the airport terminal here prefigures is one which until now has not been satisfactorily addressed in DeLillo scholarship.

While, unlike its predecessors, there is no overt reference to a temporal value in this third example of air travel in *The Names*, one might extract from the phrase "at any moment we may have to submit to the force that is implied in all this, the unknown authority behind it" (254) a particular sense of time – of abeyance, a sense of waiting in which something is constantly on the verge of happening. This speaks, for one, to the concept of the liminal, though

in the concrete sense of its role in the process of *transition*, of becoming. That is, one might understand the combined impression of the descriptions of air travel in this novel as Peter Boxall does: “between the opposing time and weight of continental landmasses, the airport and the aeroplane occupy a kind of no-place and non-time” (*Possibility* 98). This approach poses the airport as a spatiotemporal absence, a hollow center which emphasizes the figurative “vacuum produced by flight” (98) as an in-between space. However, this interpretation again is based in what I would argue is the sense of “dead time” of the island chronotope, and Boxall indeed cites that same earlier passage in his own discussion (98). What the sense of abeyance hinted at in the line indicated above suggests more, however, is a perception of time I discussed with regards to *End Zone*; it is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s “Messianic time,” which is opposed to the “homogenous, empty time” (*Illuminations* 255) of the “Western teleological model” (Löwy 102) and in which *becoming* is emphasized over static *being*. In this context, the “dead” or empty in-between time of air travel as it is portrayed in the novel’s beginning is substituted here in “The Desert” for one which redefines the in-betweenness as merely the liminal stage in a process of (ontological) transition or becoming. This sense of becoming, of actualization of the self, is one which pulls both the cult and Owen Brademas, and eventually Axton in his wake, into the Indian desert.

Similarly to the preceding sections, the narrative in “The Desert” takes place in a variety of locations. The flight to which the above airport descriptions corresponds takes Axton to Mumbai, where he meets Anand Dass, another character who had worked at the dig on Kouros and who informs him that Owen Brademas is now located in Lahore, Pakistan. The narrative then returns to Athens for a short time before Axton travels to Lahore at the behest of his boss Rowser, who tries to warn him that it would be a good time to quit his position, as Rowser himself is doing. This is due to the fact that the “Northeast Group” for whom they work has been outed as having connections with the CIA, but Axton is unaware of this connection even at this late point and does not find out until some time later, as his boss does not tell him directly in this Lahore meeting. While in the city Axton also takes advantage of the opportunity to visit Owen where he is sheltered in a small flat in the old city, and it is there that Owen tells him the long story of his journey to find the cult in the middle of the Thar desert. I contend in the subsequent pages that this desert narrative of Owen’s, in chronotopic and thematic terms, comprises the central core of this third section. After leaving Owen at the conclusion of his tale, Axton then returns to Athens for the final pages of the novel’s narrative – there is a short

fourth section titled “The Prairie,” but this consists of his son Tap’s fictional recounting of Owen’s childhood story of failed glossolalia and thus falls out of the narrative timeline.

While the events of this section take place in the variety of settings just described, as in the preceding two sections the value of the desert chronotope is most clear when the action is located within the bounds of the actual geographical region in question. However, as suggested by the opening conflation of the title “The Desert” with the “vast space” of the airport, this third major chronotope of the novel is the one which bleeds most heavily into the narrative contained within its frame. In other words, even before James Axton finds Owen in his one-room shelter, the potency of this desert chronotope has a noticeable effect on the text, in a formal sense. The correlation I signaled above between the desert chronotope and the Benjaminian conception of time which is opposed to a sort of empty linearity of teleological progression is here rendered as a weakening of the glue which holds narrative together, and the text thus begins to fragment more in this section.

Three brief examples from before Axton meets Brademas in Lahore will suffice before turning to the desert narrative itself, where the majority of the semantic and formal proofs for this argument lie. For one, there are several instances in which the narrative jumps without warning or syntactic indication from the present tense of the narration to the past tense of a memory in a way unseen in the previous two sections of the novel. One is a memory of Kathryn “com[ing] at [him] with a potato peeler” (256) which pops up between narrative of Mumbai and Athens, while the second is the sudden insertion of a page worth of text which takes the narrative from Athens to another memory of his life with Kathryn in Canada: “The figure appeared in a blizzard, moving toward the house from the other side of the park, a skier […] the only clear shape in that dead-even light, a world without shadow” (266). Although this memory is inserted between his narrative of Athens and his arrival in Lahore to meet Rowser, there is again no formal indication that this is a memory; all three elements are told in the novel’s standard of the past tense. This is a sign that within “The Desert” as a formal whole, temporal linearity no longer has such a firm grip, that its influence is being weakened. Further, the two examples suggest that such temporal slips have something to do with memory. A different sort of example occurs a few pages later as Axton moves through the city of Lahore with his boss, Rowser:

> We were stopped by traffic on the road around the old city. A man came through the fortified gate and stood at the car window looking in at us, a man with a bamboo stick, wearing a rag

> wrapped around his head, a military jacket with copper medals, a dozen bead necklaces, a filthy white robe, oversized army boots without laces, beads around his ankles and wrists. […]
> "I think I'm in New York," Rowser said. (270)

Rather than a breakdown of temporal linearity, there is here a suggestion of spatial confusion, in which a scene in Pakistan is confounded with New York City. While Rowser's comment also speaks to the shrinking of distances and homogenization of place inherent in the process of globalization of which the two men are a part, given the nature of the chronotope as a whole the affirmative nature of the comment ("I think I'm in" rather than "This seems like") also subtly suggests that the scene is another formal representation of the loosening of the hold of the laws of space and time within this section.

4.4.1 Owen Brademas and the Pull of the Desert

As will be seen presently, such spatiotemporal ambiguity aligns with what the desert represents as a chronotope. The story which Owen Brademas recounts to James while they sit in Owen's small room in Lahore's old city sits, both thematically and chronotopically speaking, at the core of this novel. The events of his story, which culminate near a small town called Hawa Mandir in the Thar desert of western India, comprise the conclusion of the vectors represented by both the cult and the archaeologist Owen, as well as constitute a crucial moment for Axton; as discussed previously, the novel's narrator is himself caught up in the trajectory of the cult and its twisted pursuit of meaning. There are in fact hints of some sort of tether between the narrator and the older archaeologist, channeled through their mutual interest in the cult. For example, during a break in his narration of his tale of entering the desert, Owen at one point remarks to James: "What do you see when you look at me? […] You see yourself in twenty years time. A damn sobering sight. It's true, isn't it? Our likeness is a kind of leap, a condition you can't help but foresee" (293). While Axton himself remains unsure even at the later time of his ostensible writing of the novel – "Was this true, was he right?" (295) – this connection is correlated by the fact that during this section Owen's desert narrative merges with Axton's, in the literal sense, as when he finds Owen in his room the older man's perspective takes over the novel's narrative voice for the duration of his story.

To find Owen in the first place Axton uses directions given to him by Anand Dass, and the description of his journey to the place Owen resides in the old city, a section of Lahore devoid in many places of cars and vehicles, is like a microcosmic rendition of Owen's later

telling of his journey into the desert. It is representative, for example, that the directions Axton receives to find Owen defy the use of a map: "If I wanted to find him, I would have to look for a house with a closed wooden balcony roughly halfway between the Lohari Gate and the Kashmiri Gate in the old city" (273). Further, he "wander[s] for half an hour" in "those lost streets" (274) before two children finally lead him to Owen. Where this suggests a spatial indefinability or unmappability, Axton's description then demonstrates its temporal counterpart:

> Once inside I began to receive impressions, which is not the same as seeing things. I realized I was walking too fast, the pace of the traffic-filled streets I'd just left behind. [...] I received impressions of rawness and crowding, people in narrow spaces[.] Donkeys carrying bricks, children squatting over open sewers. I glanced at my directions, made an uncertain turn. Copper and brassware. A cobbler working in the shadows. This was the lineal function of old cities, to maintain an unchanged form, let time hang with the leather goods and skeins of wool. Hand-skilled labor, rank smells and disease, the four-hundred-year-old faces. There were horses, sheep, donkeys, cows and oxen. (273-4)

The old city, where the "air was centuries old," is presented as a place in which the line between the past and the present is blurred. Further, the receiving of "impressions" as opposed to "seeing things" is another way of highlighting the ambiguity of the space, which combines for the reader with the rest of the elements in the passage which conflate the present with the past: the various types of livestock, "copper and brassware[,] a cobbler working in the shadows[,] hand-skilled labor, rank smells and disease." The scene is indeed one which could describe a "four-hundred-year-old" setting, or one even older. Crucially, this historical ambiguity is of a different nature than the incorporation of history represented in the chronotope of "The Mountain;" similarly to the formal devices just described, here there is the sense that the character experiences a moment in which time's linearity is weakened. The effect therefore moves from the incorporation of the past of the preceding chronotope to one of the desert's spatiotemporal ambiguity, in which the terms "present" and "past" begin to lose their meaning.

When Axton finds Owen in his room there is another such moment:

> He was reading when I entered and looked up to regard me in a speculative manner, trying to balance my physical make-up, my shape, proportions, form, with some memory he carried of a name and a life. A moment in which I seemed to hang between two points in time, a moment of silent urging. (274-5)

This moment hanging "between two points in time" is again reminiscent of the sense of waiting discussed with regards to "The Desert's" opening description of the airport. The pause is aptly described as one of "silent urging" because it inheres uncertainty, out of which something new must accordingly emerge; what is at stake here in Owen's attempt to find the "memory he carried of a name and a life" is, for Axton, a fundamentally ontological issue. Moreover, on the very next page the reader discovers that the reverse is also true – this is a similar such moment for Owen. After telling Axton "I knew you'd come," Owen then says: "But when you stood in the door I didn't recognize you at all. I was surprised, James. I wondered who you were. You looked familiar—but in the damnedest way. I didn't understand. I thought something was *happening*. Am I dying, I wondered. Is this who they send?" (275, original emphasis). The suggestion here is in fact double – Owen sees in James a potential angel of death, the harbinger of the end of his existence, which will take on context presently in light of the archaeologist's experience in the desert. Further, and in line with the argument for Axton's chronotopically-traceable progression developed thus far, the inability to recognize Axton also reflects back on the narrator himself, subtly suggesting that it is he who has undergone (or is undergoing) a transformation which causes his unrecognizability.

Once Axton has settled in, Owen begins to tell the story of his travels through India and how he arrived at this one-room house where he has been found. At this point the narrator's voice switches to a third-person recounting of Owen's story, occasionally interrupted by brief exchanges in the room in Lahore. The tale is one in which the archaeologist slowly draws nearer to the desert, first seeking out old monuments and stone writings, especially "an enormous Sanskrit poem" (278) carved into stone at a place called Rajsamand. Owen's recounting presents an overwhelming amount of sights and experiences, full of colors, people, religions, sights, and languages. Regarding the latter, at one point the narrator writes: he "was able to ask for food and lodging in Hindi when necessary, and to read a bit and ask directions. The word for yesterday was the same as the word for tomorrow" (279). While this observation appears at this point merely a linguistic oddity which strikes Owen, the clear temporal value it encapsulates is an important addition to the elements described thus far which comprise the desert chronotope; this is especially true because the phrase will reappear further along in the story once Owen enters the desert. While the presence of the cult in the desert is the obvious draw which eventually brings him there (even though Owen himself is reluctant to admit it), the attraction of the desert for Owen is in fact twofold. As he recounts his story to Axton, it becomes clear that tangled up in Owen's pursuit of the cult for its potential provision of some

sort of answer is an alternative approach to the chaos of modern life. This alternative is one centered around the idea of masses of people gathering, especially for religious purposes, and thus stands opposed in a way to the inward-spiraling logic of the cult and their terminal seeking of the desert's solitude. The two opposing motivations, however, will eventually come together when the idea of sacred place and the desire for moments of communitas are brought to bear on the discussion.

Alongside Owen's novel-length attraction to the cult, there is also a repeated fascination with crowds, specifically of the sort associated with religious ritual. At an early point in the text, Owen proclaims that "Masses of people scare me. Religion. People driven by the same powerful emotion. All that reverence, awe and dread. I'm a boy from the prairie" (24). His opposition of mass religious events to his personal identification with "the prairie" of his childhood is interesting, in that he elsewhere describes the prairie as such: "All that space. I think we plowed and swung the pick and the brush scythe to keep from being engulfed by space. It was like living in the sky" (77). In terms of the discussion of place generally at stake in this dissertation, "living in the sky" immediately brings to mind a disconnection with the earth (with place), itself a theme in the novel as discussed with regards to Axton, and thus Owen emerges as a figure similarly associated with this problem. The references to "all that space" and the "living in the sky" impart a sense of abstraction, which correlates with Owen's interest in epigraphy in the novel; Matthew Morris in fact rightly connects this interest with the workings of the cult: Owen "drift[s], by way of overly formal thought, into complicity with the names cult" (120). Further, Owen's linking in the passage above of his fear of "masses of people" and "people driven by the same powerful emotion" to his identity as "a boy from the prairie" (24) gives the sense that these origins are to be associated with the opposite, which one might call a secular solitude, and in this sense Owen becomes a potential avatar for the general plight of an increasingly secular United States consumer culture slow to fill in the gaps left by the abandonment of the sacred.

Even as Owen is on the verge of his final encounter with the cult, he is haunted by the idea of such mass events. During an eclipse, an important moment for the dominant Hindu faith of much of India, he reflects:

> In his fear of things that took place on such a rampant scale, was there an element of desperate envy? Was it enviable? Did they possess a grace, a beauty, as his friend Kathryn believed? Was it a grace to be there, to lose oneself in the mortal crowd, surrendering, giving oneself over to

> mass awe, to disappearance in others? He crossed his arms to clutch himself against the chill. In three days he would walk into the desert. (285)

The composition of the paragraph here contains a suggestion that the idea of "mass awe" and "disappearance in others" is what makes him first "clutch himself against the chill" (rather than the moon's blocking of the sun) and then, even more significantly, to "walk into the desert" three days later. There is therefore a discernable connection established between Owen's pursuit of the cult into the heart of the desert chronotope and his lifelong fear of losing himself in such mass awe. As a matter of fact, even at a more advanced stage of his narrative in which he has already found the cult and they are on the verge of their final murder, Axton and Owen interrupt his story to discuss the meaning of the desert. At this point, Owen goes into more detail than before about what it would mean to participate in such a religious event, aligning it at the same time with the desert landscape:

> To penetrate the desert truly. To learn the geography and language, wear the *aba* and *keffiyeh*, go brown in the desert sun. To infiltrate Mecca. Imagine it, to enter the city with one and a half million pilgrims, cross the border within the border, make the *hadj*. What enormous fears would a man like me have to overcome, what lifelong inclinations toward solitude, toward the sanctity of a personal space in which to live and be. But think of it[,] over a million of us. To make the seven circuits of the Ka'bah. […] There are other times when great masses gather during the *hadj*, on the plain of Arafat and for three days at Mina, but it's the circuit of the Ka'bah that has haunted me ever since I first learned of it. (296)

Owen's choice of words reveals several things. For one, the dual reference to "geography and language" befits my goal in this chapter to elevate the import of geographical elements in this text alongside those language issues which are so often focused on by its critics. Secondly, Owen clearly views the desert as associated with religious ritual, here referring to Islam's important pilgrimage to Mecca, and places himself as an outsider to such, understood through his use of the verbs "penetrate" and "infiltrate" with regards to the desert and Mecca, respectively. A bit further on in the monologue Owen continues by saying that "to be carried along" by "the crowd itself" is "what draws him to such things. Surrender. To burn away one's self in the sandstone hills" (296). What is interesting in such affirmations are the continuity they hold with the opposing role of the desert as a locus for the individual sort of surrender, for the ascetic pursuits of solitary seekers of oneness with God, as discussed at length in Chapter 2. Owen understands that for him to join the masses in the celebration of such an event would involve overcoming "enormous fears" based on "lifelong inclinations toward solitude," even

though his own language shortly after draws the parallel – to "surrender" and "burn away one's self in the sandstone hills" could just as easily be referring to the ascetic pursuit of the Desert Fathers. What this implies is that the desert as an environment (as a chronotope) is a grounds on which it is possible to experience the sort of radical transformation which results from such surrender, whether it be to the mass pull of the crowd or to the solitary burning away of the self. This is something which was already evident in *End Zone* as well – that novel also contains direct reference to the Meccan temple and its ancient black stone.

As opposed to ascetic hopeful Gary Harkness, Taft Robinson's final lines in the 1972 novel suggest this other path Owen is so afraid of: "It's getting to be time to turn toward Mecca. The black stone of Abraham sits in that shrine in old Mecca, the name of which I'll have to look up again because I keep forgetting it" (*End Zone* 236). Going back to the longer passage cited above, one might almost say that Owen's declaration that "the circuit of the Ka'bah that has haunted me ever since I first learned of it" applies to DeLillo as well, given its recurrence in various forms over the years.[11] This is also interesting because it is a repetition of the combination discussed regarding *End Zone*, where the individual drive towards solitude and asceticism which sends characters towards the desert is (briefly) contrasted with an opposing gesture towards potential experiences of what Victor Turner discusses as "communitas." Whereas in *End Zone* the moment of playing football in the snow does actually occur for a time, a subtle but potent counterweight to the overwhelming logic of structure imposed by the conflation of games of war and football which dominates the novel, in *The Names* Owen is fascinated by the prospect of such liminal moments in a crowd but is himself unable to ever actually take part.

Also significantly, even at this late point in the novel the narrator James Axton is unable to comprehend the potential of such moments: when Owen asks him "do you see what draws me to the running [of the *hadj*]?", James responds that "To honor God, yes, I would run." However, when Owen declares that "There is no God," Axton is adamant that he cannot then partake since "there's no point," causing Owen to "withdr[a]w into silence" (*Names* 296-7). Though he has made progress, as demonstrated through close attention to the chronotopically signaled shifts of the novel thus far, Axton at this point is still incapable of breaking completely free of the trappings associated with American individualism; this is, however, something

[11] DeLillo's 2005 play *Love-Lies-Bleeding* features a room carved into rock and painted completely black, for another example.

which I argue will change by the end of the novel. Further, although Owen is enthralled and "haunted" by the idea, his failure to ever partake in such an event suggests that the older man is a figure which stands in for the ever-increasing sense of isolation which defines the modern world. While this isolation is here given a particularly American flavor, the fact that he is from the prairie, a place like "living in the sky," strongly suggests a symbolic relationship to the general sense of social attenuation and individual alienation which results from the various processes of abstraction which define the shifts in material and social production occurring at the time of the novel's composition. It is in the context of this sort of argument that it becomes clear that *The Names* is neither a single-minded treatment of concrete geopolitical situations and identities nor an exclusively metaphysical meditation on language and being, but rather a complex text which deftly weaves it all together to explore the broader epistemological and ontological ramifications of a life fully engaged in the contemporary geo/sociopolitical moment.

4.4.2 Hawa Mandir: Into the Desert's Heart

I turn now to the core of both Owen's narrative as well as of this final major chronotope of the desert, which begins just after the above scene in which he clutches himself against the cold during an eclipse. The place to which he travels is described as the "the sand hills of th[e] desolate western reach of the Thar, the Great Indian Desert, not far from the Pakistan border" (286). Owen's recounting of his journey to eventually find the cult near a lost village called Hawa Mandir gives more concrete expression to all the chronotopic value for the desert described in the preceding pages. He travels slowly, passing "two villages in four days on foot and in buses," eventually meeting a wandering figure (who calls himself a "guide") who comes "hobbling toward him out of the hills [leading] a goat on a rope" (286). The man in a way appears an avatar for the desert chronotope itself, beginning his conversation from "the other side of the road and in what appeared to be the middle of a sentence, as though continuing a conversation the two men had started some years earlier" (286). When Owen tries to ask him directions and what he can possibly show him as a guide in this desolate region, the man just "look[s] at him. The word for yesterday was the same as the word for tomorrow. The hawks turned in the empty sky" (287). Here the earlier linguistic oddity Owen remarks upon about the Hindi language returns in a way which reinforces its relevance to the chronotopic context. The time value, which troubles the typical linearity of time's arrow, is paired with the image of

"hawks turn[ing] in the empty sky;" this is an image which appeared ten years earlier in *End Zone*. As I discussed in that chapter, the image of hawks flying in a non-linear fashion with no visual ground there relates to a sense of time adrift, appearing in that earlier novel in the similar context of a passage which troubled the distinction between past and present. Here such a temporal indistinctness becomes increasingly evident as Owen's continues his narration – the old guide in their first conversation on this same page tells Owen about "the nomadic tribes in the area, about snake charmers and wandering minstrels" (286), images which at least to a Western reader might recall the premodern past. This suggestion is repeated in the man's monologue, apparently about "his early days as an acrobat and juggler, wandering between the fortress cities" of the region, which again in sum suggest another era.

After the guide's departure, Owen awakens the following morning to a number of scenes which reinforce this breaking down of time's linearity hinted at by the encounter with the man, and on that same day he will find the village of Hawa Mandir, which based on the form of the narrative comprises the heart of this chronotope. Owen is "barely awake" when "a small caravan of brass-studded iron carts approached, bullock-drawn, heading the same way he was. Blacksmiths and their families, the women wearing bright veils and silver trinkets" (288); the description is one which could have been taken straight out of the Middle Ages. This caravan takes him to his destination of Hawa Mandir, which Owen had learned was the place to search for the cult from a member back in Greece. The village is described as such:

> It was a fifteenth-century town slowly being assimilated by the desert, so much the color of the desert that Owen did not see it until they were nearly at the gates. It was being received and combined, sinking into the land, crumbling, worn away in stages. Even the dogs that sulked along the outskirts were yellowish brown and passive and barely visible. He walked through the streets and alleys. The houses were sandstone, with carved facades and flat roofs, auspicious signs on many walls. […] In minutes Owen had made his way to the edge of town. Sand began to blow. (288)

Here the temporal ambiguity is taken to another level, evident even in the place's direct description as "fifteenth-century;" moreover, combined with its slow assimilation by and disappearance into the desert, the idea is given that the place is being absorbed into the chronotope itself, that this place is one in which the particular logic of this chronotope is strongest. The last line, in which "sand began to blow," builds on this sense; the blowing sand here stands out as an element which highlights a chronotopic transition. This is a fictional technique which deserves more exploration in general, but which is noticeable both within the

oeuvre of DeLillo as well as elsewhere; often some weather-based event (a sandstorm, heavy wind, a downpour) will signal a fundamental shift in the narrative logic, a shift once again best defined with reference to the chronotopic. A similar example occurs in DeLillo's *Zero K* with a sandstorm, and in both cases the blowing sand signals a significant transition within the text.[12] This is an argument which is strengthened by a later description from the scene:

> Sand was blowing across the tawny ruins. A rough path led through gorse and thorn to the cluster of small buildings. Sandstone hills rose in regulated layers in the distance. He passed a woman and child with a gaunt cow. The child followed close to the animal, gathering dung as it fell to the ground, folding it, patting it briskly. The woman screamed something at her, lashing the air with a stick. This sound carried briefly on wind. History. The man who stands outside it. (288)

The "cluster of small buildings" Owen is heading towards are "earthen bins […], sand-colored, conical, one or two with thatched roofs," used to store food and grain on the "immediate edge of a village" (288); it is there he will find the cult waiting, and thus the increasingly heavy sandstorm indicates the narrative's transition into this central event around which the novel in a way revolves.

While the ruins and the passage through "gorse and thorns" to finally reach the cluster reinforce the signaling of transition I here argue for, the last line of the passage above is at first sight difficult to parse. The paired sentences "History. The man who stands outside it" seem to refer more to the chronotopic value of the novel's first section "The Island" than they do that of "The Desert" as developed thus far. However, it is precisely this ambiguity which is what makes the desert such an interesting and crucial chronotope for a number of DeLillo's texts – the potential the desert holds for escaping the "threat of advancing time," as DeLillo puts it in "The Ivory Acrobat" (69), is precisely what makes it attractive for the metaphysical goals of people or groups such as this novel's eponymous cult, who earlier claim that they want to "stop making history" and "are inventing a way out" of it (*Names* 209). In artistic representation, in other words, the desert's temporal indeterminateness translates into a ground of ontological ambiguity, on which significant projects of transformation (seemingly) become possible. Thus the image of the "man who stands outside" of history makes the most sense when attached to

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[12] See Chapter 5 for my discussion of this scene in *Zero K*. For an excellent example of this technique external to DeLillo, see J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (pp. 82–99), in which Coetzee uses heavy rain to signal a chronotopic transition as Mrs. Curren journeys from the city into the heart of the South Africa's allegorically charged shanty towns beyond the reaches of "civilization."

the figure who appears in the paragraph immediately following: "[Owen] could barely see by the time he approached the bins. The sand stung his face and he walked with his arm crooked in front of him, opening his eyes only long enough to glimpse the way. Something startled him, a man standing at the head of the path, dark-skinned, his hair ringleted and wild, his face uncovered despite the blowing sand" (289). It is here that Owen has finally located the cult, and thus the more coherent argument is that the "man who stands outside history" refers to this man Owen finds, who represents the group; the fact that the man's name – "Avtar" – is strikingly similar to "avatar" only furthers this impression.

This avatar character, whose name "Avtar Singh" Owen is sure is a pseudonym, is a slippery figure who "look[s] different every time Owen [sees] him," fluctuating between "an ascetic, streetcorner preacher, a subway bedlamite" (290). All these terms refer to various types of marginal or liminal figures, thus suggesting that the cult occupies within the world of this text the structurally undermining sort of role such figures often play. In Victor Turner's discussion of liminal elements of societies – such as the "court jester," the "holy beggar," or the traditional Western genre's "homeless and mysterious 'stranger' without wealth or name who restores ethical and legal equilibrium," to name a few – he makes it clear that these outsider figures "play major roles in myths and popular tales as representatives or expressions of universal human values" (*Ritual* 110). He adds that all these "marginal" figures nevertheless represent "what Henri Bergson would have called 'open' as against 'closed morality,' the latter being essentially the normative system of bounded, structured […] groups" (110). What Singh and the cult for which he stands in thus suggest is that they too are to be included in this list of figures which undermine the system. However, in truth it is as if they represent an *inversion* of this typical liminal figure; rather than marginal figures who undermine the "normative system," they *impose* a (randomly chosen) structure in order to counteract the disorder and chaos – the lack of system – so often attributed to the postmodern world. This explains Singh's monologue, in which he claims that "the world has become self-referring," thus excluding human subjects who have typically taken refuge therein since the world has now "made a self of its own" (*Names* 297).

The "self-referring world" quip is of course highly conspicuous to literary critics, and many have thus discussed its connection to the postmodern; Thomas Carmichael, for instance, writes that the cult's "murders are a systematic mockery of the decentered and disseminated world of indifference in which the cult members live and which they associate with contemporary experience" (213). While their status as a "mockery" does not necessarily seem

so obvious, it is clear that what attracts the novel's three American men (Owen, James Axton, and Frank Volterra) to the cult is this very same aspect, their suggested ability to impose order in a supposedly "decentered" world. Moreover, Turner's conclusion to the above-cited observations is that it is these "marginal" figures come to symbolize what he terms "communitas" in *The Ritual Process* (111). This is important since, as discussed previously, Owen Brademas is a man who is deeply drawn to the religious rites which are themselves enactments of Turner's communitas; he is "haunted" by both the idea of the Ka'bah in Mecca as well as the memory of his childhood with which he comes face to face with while here with the cult in their desert position. Given this suggested connection between the cult and the marginal figures Turner discusses, it thus makes even more sense that Owen is so drawn to the cult, "as an object to a neutron star" (*Names* 286).

Once Owen makes contact with the cult, he settles in to one of these "thatched silos" (290) they have occupied at the edge of the village and stays with them for an unclear number of days, talking with Singh and Emmerich, the latter a member who he had met on Kouros, until they eventually are given the chance to enact their system and murder an innocent victim. The man who they will kill is the same old guide with the goat who Owen had met a few days earlier, whose name of Hamir Mazmudar matches up with the initials of the village Hawa Mandir. In the days leading up to that fatal moment, however, Owen has a number of revealing conversations with the two men. Emmerich, for example, tells him a long story of the etymology of words for "book," prompting Owen to ask the question "Is this history?", to which Emmerich's response is that "This is not history. This is precisely the opposite of history. An alphabet of utter stillness. We track static letters when we read. This is a logical paradox" (291-2). The etymological story's status as "the opposite of history" parallels the cult's desire to stand outside history, to escape from it. The conclusion is that the cult is unable to handle the "logical paradox" of both writing and of the world in general, an inability which is again evident in their later reasoning with Owen as to how it is logical to kill the old man (whose memory is apparently impaired); when Owen protests that he is "not so sick," that he "walks for days on end," Singh and Emmerich proclaim that "Once your memory goes, you're an empty body," and thus "There's no point anymore, is there?" (302). Such assertions demonstrate quite clearly that the cult's logic is one which epitomizes the popular understanding of Descartes' mind-body split, especially in its prioritization of the rational mind to the detriment of the lived body. Tellingly, Owen's observation upon arrival that "the cult was nearly dead" (290) is supported by the fact that the lone woman of the group, Bern, is

"try[ing] to kill herself [by] starvation," an idea which "came to her like a sacred revelation" (292). Bern's chosen form of suicide is a direct instantiation of the cult's denial of the body, and her method of pure denial, despite the "sacred revelation" assertion, more an anti-ascetism in its nullifying death-drive, in her lack of desire to reach any sort of personal transcendence.

In talking with his other interlocutor Singh, who Owen describes as "a talking machine" on "the maniacal edge" (294), the cult member addresses the question of the desert directly:

> The desert is a solution. Simple, inevitable. It's like a mathematical solution applied to the affairs of the planet. Oceans are the subconscious of the world. Deserts are the waking awareness, the simple and clear solution. My mind works better in the desert. My mind is a razed tablet out here. Everything counts in the desert. The simplest word has enormous power. (294)

Singh here reveals in explicit terms how he sees the desert as relating to the cult's project, arguing for a correspondence between the landscape and their own perspective. Indeed, at the end of this same monologue he also discusses writing, proclaiming that "the genius of the alphabet" is that it is "Simple, inevitable. No wonder it happened in the desert" (295). The exact repetition of the phrase "Simple, inevitable" with reference to both the desert and now the alphabet makes the correlation unequivocal: the cult sees the desert's ontological ambiguity as providing a grounds on which they can manifest their ordering vision, which coalesces around the detached signifier. However, their attempt to corral the desert's ambiguous, open-ended chronotopic value into the narrow confines of being a "simple and clear […] mathematical solution" in fact demonstrates a serious misinterpretation, which in turn shines light on their interpretive error in the general sense. Their overemphasis on the disassociated signifier, Emmerich's "logical paradox" of "tracking static letters when we read" (292), highlights their failure when it comes to an ignoring or a denial of the implaced nature of existence, in which the lived body is essential, and which extends into ethical engagement with the world of others. This misinterpretation of the desert and of human existence in general is in the end proven by the fact that the cult is here on its last legs, and that their final act of murder here in this "desert town [which] was like the land reshaped in blocks" (298) is followed by their immediate cessation of existence. Bern's starvation is therefore readable as an analogue for the cult's broader fate, in which a methodology which might appear a "sacred revelation" is in fact a pure denial of existence, the only result of which can be (ontological) dissolution rather than actualization.

4.4.3 In the Heart of the Heart of the Chronotope

While the remaining capable members of the cult thus go off to commit their final act of murder during their last night on the desert village's edge, Owen instead retreats into one of the thatched silos they have been staying in. For Owen, the experience in this heart of the desert chronotope has already been one which reflects the breakdown of linearity I discussed with regards to the random appearance of text outside the novel's narrative flow. Further, this breaking down seems to occur in connection with his entering the stone silos, occurring at first because he visits the silently starving Bern to offer her water and keep her company. For example, he is once set off by the "smell of animal feed" (297) to reminiscing about his childhood, remembering intimate details about the place he grew up – "grain storage elevators and backyard windmills, the Herefords in loading pens" – which he "hadn't thought of [in] thirty years" (298). In another instance, it is stated simply that, upon entering her silo, "he sat across from her, letting his mind wander. His mind had begun to wander all the time" (301). The suggestion is that the enclosed space of the thatched silos have an noticeable impact on Owen, enhancing this effect which is evident throughout "The Desert" section. The enclosed space / desert dichotomy which here arises is one which already appeared in *End Zone*, as discussed in Chapter 2, and which will reappear in *Point Omega*. While the silent and lifeless desert revealed in Gary Harkness' brief sojourn therein in *End Zone* (as opposed to the desert's edge where the majority of it takes place) emphasizes its thematic relationship to the potential ontological nullification inherent in the propagation of weapons of mass destruction, the different reactions to actual immersion within its bounds by various characters in *The Names* demonstrate a more intricate exploration of the chronotope in this later novel. However, as discussed at the outset of Chapter 3, even as Gary flees the encounter with the "nullity" of human excrement (*End Zone* 85) he has in the desert, he reflects on the landscape's potential: "in some form of void freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself. What we must know must be learned from blanked-out pages" (86). This reflection seems to speak to DeLillo's novel of ten years later, as Owen Brademas enters what one might call the void of the "smallest of the [silo] structures" (*Names* 303) and has a powerful experience which appears to be a crucial turning point in his life. Moreover, the epistemological counterpart to this suggestion of ontological renewal is to learn "from blanked-out pages," evading the problem of a static "alphabet of utter stillness" (which Emmerich identifies with writing) by emphasizing *becoming*, the never-ending potential for renewal, which for the writer is indeed manifest in

the blank page. It is thus that at this climactic point in his narrative Owen Brademas retreats into the smallest silo and experiences complete immersion in this effect of a breaking down of time's typical laws, reliving the memory of a day of his childhood which has haunted him throughout his life and perhaps actualizing Harkness' earlier suggestion that "in a void freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself."

Owen's experience upon entering "the silo and [sitting] in the dark" is framed by the small window out of which he can see the night sky: "that was the universe tonight, a rectangle two and a half feet high , three feet long" (303). This narrowing down highlights Owen's retreat inwards into memory, which occurs almost immediately. At this point DeLillo employs a formal technique which serves to accentuate the temporal merging being put into effect, in which the narrative transitions from the present to a memory of the past within the same paragraph: "At the lower edge of the [silo's] opening he could see a narrow band of earth losing its texture to the night. Council Grove and Shawnee. The old storage elevators were frame construction until they switched to silos" (303). The merging which here takes place is between Owen's perspective of the present and his own perspective of the past, enabled by DeLillo's employment of a form of writing which is able to both represent and enact such a fusion, eliminating the typical barriers which prevent such complete integration.[13] Moreover, there is in the same paragraph another sort of fusion hinted at, in that the narrative voice shifts into the plural "we," a move uncharacteristic for the novel: "He was a waterboy in the fields with a straw hat, that's what they wore, and sturdy overalls. It is necessary to remember correctly. This is the earth we dream and childishly color. The spaces. […] We want to get it right" (303). The plural pronoun indicates that the two narrators at this point become a single voice, and thus Axton – the supposed writer of this novel – joins with Owen in this act of remembrance. This is another sign of the ontological ambiguity of the desert chronotope which defines this section, and is further significant in relation to what the remembering means for Owen, both as he himself sees it and as the reader might see it.

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[13] This technique is replicated in 2007's *Falling Man*, in which the perspective shifts in the same paragraph from that of 9/11 terrorist Hammad, who is in an airplane which strikes the World Trade Center, to that of Keith Neudecker, who is in that same building when the collision occurs: "A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it […] skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. He found himself walking into a wall" (*Falling Man* 239).

For his part, Owen is determined to fully engage with the memory because he believes it will serve a purpose:

> In his memory he was a character in a story, a colored light. The bin was perfect, containing that part of his existence, enclosing it whole. There was recompense in memories too. Recall the bewilderment and ache, the longing for a thing that's out of reach, and you can begin to repair your present condition. Owen believed that memory was the faculty of absolution. Men developed memories to ease their disquiet over things they did as men. The deep past is the only innocence and therefore necessary to retain. The boy in the sorghum fields, the boy learning names of animals and plants. He would recall exactingly. (304)

As signaled by the appearance of the word "recompense," this passage must be understood as following a description of his mother which contains the same term: she "retain[ed] a grudging faith [that] the life beyond would be just, it would be consistent with moral right, it would offer a recompense for these days and years of getting by, scraping together, finding and losing homes" (304). Although Owen grew up amongst such religious people, as cited elsewhere he has no faith in any sort of god to speak of, here demonstrating that his "faith" in this sense is put wholly into the power of memory, in its potential to be "the faculty of absolution." I would argue that this particular belief of his, which pushes him to confront this childhood memory which haunts him, must be understood in light of its contrast with that other thing which (in his own words) "haunts" Owen – ceremonies such as the circling of the Ka'bah in Mecca seven times as part of a mass of people. They are indeed opposites: while one is a rapture tied up in physical movement and dissolution into the crowd (and connection with God), the other is comprised of stasis and a focus inwards on one's own self. While Owen's motivation for absolution is thus clear, his inability to confront that other sort of act which haunts him will in the end be a limitation in his desire to break from what holds him back, for personal actualization.

In the paragraph cited in block-quotes above there is also a convenient chronotopic indicator, of the fact that this particular space, the bin, contains "that part of his existence, enclosing it whole." The enclosed structure once again allows a mutual flow between subject and space for one of DeLillo's characters. While the football team and Major Staley's rooms on the desert's edge in *End Zone* are nearly analogous and that of *Great Jones Street* much more extensive, this case is, however, the first exploration of what happens when the character enters such an enclosed space while at the same time actually immersed within the larger desert chronotope beyond its walls. What occurs here – Owen's (and thus the narrative's) full

immersion in a single event of his childhood – is possible due to the temporal and therefore ontological ambiguity which the desert chronotope provides in this novel. The small enclosed space, which wherever located always for DeLillo entails a merging with the psyche of the character therein, here in the desert allows Owen to seek his absolution through an intimate reengagement with memory. Although he is able to maintain enough distance to allow the narrator to reflect that "these early memories were a fiction in the sense that he could separate himself from the character," he reiterates that "it was necessary to get the details right. His innocence depended on this" (305), and the narrative of the memory then switches to the present tense, whereas the rest of the novel is told in the past. Owen's obsession with regaining "innocence" proves that his project is not that far removed from the religion which he fled as a child, and this is thus the limitation of his project of self-actualization through a reengagement with the past out in the desert, sitting in a small bin even as the others are out brutally murdering an old man for arbitrary, alphabetical reasons.

4.4.4 The Phenomenology of Glossolalia

The memory Owen relives is one set in a church "fifteen miles out of town […] lost in the sky behind it" (304), and which entails a visiting preacher encouraging the gathered congregation to "speak with the tongues of angels," to "seal the old language and loose the new" (306). The church "lost in the sky" relates it to the earlier description of the prairie, aligning thus with the desire to leave earth behind and speak as "angels." The method is described by the preacher as one of "be[ing] free in the Spirit," letting go and "jump[ing] in" (306). At his urging, the people of Owen's village engage in glossolalia, in speaking in tongues, and although Owen's narrative cuts off the story, the reader knows from Tap's recounting of the same event in "The Prairie" (the novel's coda) that Owen was unable to participate that day, fleeing the church on foot into the rain. While remembering the event, Owen himself reflects on its meaning:

> In the bin, the inverted lunar urn, he wondered about the uses of ecstasy, see the Greek, a displacing, a coming out of stasis. That's all it was. A freedom, an escape from the condition of ideal balance. Normal understanding is surpassed, the self and its machinery obliterated. Is this what innocence is? Is it the language of innocence those people spoke, words flying out of them like spat stones? The deep past of men, the transparent word. Is this what they longed for with that terrible holy gibberish they carried through the world? (307)

This reflection on Owen's part raises the possibility that the ecstatic expression of glossolalia approaches the "language of innocence," which when combined with "the deep past of men" and "the transparent word" would in a religious context be quite clearly referring to the myth of the Tower of Babel.

In the context of an article exploring "what the ritual use of glossolalia [can] tell us about language, culture, the self, and the sacred" through the specific paradigm of embodiment, anthropologist Thomas Csordas points out that one interpretation holds that rather than representing "a dramatization of the post-Babel loss of a unified tongue," speaking in tongues is in fact often "experienced as a redemption of pre-Babel lucidity" (24-25). Csordas here is paraphrasing William Samarin's work on glossolalia,[14] which is relevant in that DeLillo's notes at the Harry Ransom Center indicate Samarin as one of his sources on the subject.[15] In this potential for the "redemption of a pre-Babel lucidity" there is a correlation with Owen's interest in epigraphy, which similarly to glossolalia focuses on getting back to the source and thus eventually on aspects of language devoid of the actual semantic content for which it was created. This correlation would in a sense explain his lifelong obsession with this particular memory, in that Owen appears to interpret what he missed out on as achievement of this "pre-Babel lucidity." However, Csordas' subsequent situation of speaking in tongues in the context of embodiment is also relevant here, despite Owen's own failure to see the ramifications, especially given the general focus on the phenomenological origin of place for the human subject which this dissertation takes as its starting point. This also provides another example of DeLillo exploring on his own a subject beyond the reach of his source material, since both Samarin (1972) and Goodman (1972), who both appear in his notes for *The Names,*[16] represent, according to Csordas, two of the three critical approaches to glossolalia available prior to his phenomenological one.

Csordas himself understands glossolalia in a way derived from Merleau-Ponty's approach to speech in *The Phenomenology of Perception*: "Merleau-Ponty [...] sees at the root of speech a verbal gesture with immanent meaning, as against a notion of speech as a representation of thought. In this view, speech is coterminous with thought, and we possess

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[14] See Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (1972).
[15] See container 43.1 of the DeLillo archives – I am indebted to Crystal Alberts for her kindness in providing this information, especially given the cancellation of my own trip to the archives in the face of the 2020 COVID-19 situation.
[16] See Container 43.1 at the Harry Ransom Center

words in terms of their articulatory and acoustic style as one of the possible uses of our bodies" (25). Applying this to speaking in tongues, Csordas thus argues "that *all* language has this gestural or existential meaning, and that glossolalia by its formal characteristic of eliminating the semantic level of linguistic structure highlights precisely the existential reality of intelligent bodies inhabiting a meaningful world" (25, original emphasis). Where this line of thinking leads is to an approach to the phenomenon, here in *The Names* undertaken in its well-known context of Pentecostalism, which unveils a correspondence with the other forms of mass celebration of religion and communitas that Owen is haunted by. Csordas observes, for example, that "the facts that Charismatics typically switch back and forth between glossolalia and the vernacular, and that some of the apparently spontaneous inspirations emerge in verbal form, suggest that speaking in tongues serves the cultural process of self-objectification and is not simply a dreamy state of meditatively emptied consciousness" (26). Here glossolalia becomes part of a "cultural process of self-objectification" (26) which in fact all linguistic utterances are, as Merleau-Ponty himself points out.[17] However, the difference is based in the "absence of the semantic component in glossolalia[, which] again reveals the gestural meaning of language, such that the sacred becomes concrete in embodied experience" (26). Further, speaking in tongues thus "maximize[s] the gestural element of communitas," in that it is "always a pure act of expression and never subject to codification" (27). Csordas here refers to the fact that communitas as per Turner is inherently opposed to structure, which this discussion also usefully reminds applies to language itself, as it is the primary structuring agent which precludes all others.

By emphasizing the gestural element of language and its being brought to the fore in glossolalia, Csordas demonstrates that speaking in tongues facilitates an embodied experience of the sacred as well as, at the same time (and probably relatedly), serving an important social or cultural role as an expression of communitas. Owen's haunting by the absence of these experiences in his life, these important forms of self-actualization, lead him both to the cult and to the heart of the desert chronotope. The fact that Owen is so haunted by these two particular elements – one a memory of glossolalia and one the potentiality of an act which foregrounds the experience of communitas (mass religious events) – combines with his obsession with the cult and their seeming escape from the dominion of structure (whose first expression is

[17] Merleau-Ponty: "thought and objective language [are] two manifestations of the fundamental activity by which man projects himself toward a 'world'" (*Phenomenology* 196-197).

language) to paint a picture of a man in search of a way to alleviate the sense of alienation inherent to contemporary life. While for Owen neither the speaking in tongues with its religious association nor the cult's misguided, abstract and violent methodology ever provide a satisfying answer, he does hold to the belief that in confronting memory he may "repair [his] present condition" (*Names* 304). There is therefore an argument to be made based in the way the memory ends for Owen.

The reader assumes that, for Owen, the emphasis of this haunting memory was traditionally on the pain caused by his inability to take part, as demonstrated by the fact that Tap's story – with its finale of Owen's flight from the church – is based on Owen's own sharing of the tale with the child *before* these events in the desert take place. Now, however, the narrative cuts off before the point of his flight, and the focus at the end of this version (as its given to Axton and to the novel's reader) is on the community with which he shared the church: "Those were plain and forthright people […] Those were honest people, struggling to make a way, full of the heart's own goodness and love" (307). The story then ends with the words "Bless them" (308). Owen's final take from the experience is therefore to reconcile the memory with the community he had there, actually removing the emphasis from his own frustrated experience; he is able to belatedly feel compassion for this community that he could not feel before, regardless of his inability to join them in the act of glossolalia. In fact, his ability to make this gesture might even be related to his location within the desert chronotope in the first place: Csordas writes that

> Because glossolalia lacks the lineality of semantic utterance or music, but also because it highlights the gestural meaning of language as a pure act of expression, it allows language to exist outside time. To the speaker in tongues, temporality becomes eternity, because there is no logical progression, but also because every moment is an existential beginning. (28)

Speaking in tongues is here described as an act which exemplifies the same temporal value as the desert chronotope, lacking "lineality." Beyond the resemblance of glossolalic language "existing outside time" to Owen's similar such experience in the silo, the idea that "every moment is an existential beginning" for the speaker in tongues corresponds exactly to this chronotope's relationship to the ontological process of becoming, and thus Owen in his own way is able to lend some truth to his argument that memory can be "the faculty of absolution;" it is, to an extent, in light of his chronotopic circumstance. It is this reading which thus sheds light on the state Axton finds him in, ensconced in his one-room living quarters in the old city

of Lahore: Owen appears to have achieved some sort of transformation through the desert experience.

Seeing as the desert chronotope is one which provides the possibility for ontological actualization, the question which must be asked is: what do each of the characters who seek it out achieve as a result? Before returning to answer this question with regards to Owen and Axton, a final word on the cult is due. As has already been suggested, the cult's trajectory from the island to the mountain to the desert is one which represents a vector in which they move from more relevance to less, resulting in their diminishment to nonexistence the day after they murder Hamir Mazmudar while Owen sits in his earthen structure. This trajectory is related to (and through) the values of these chronotopes; whereas in the island the cult has the most influence due to the relationship both group and place have with processes of abstraction, their move to the mountain chronotope and its reincorporation of time into the flow of history clashes with their project, and they begin to lose momentum. Their final stand occurs in the desert because of that chronotope's inherent (ontological) potential; the breakdown of linear time might on the surface seem similar to the temporal isolation of the island chronotope of Part I. However, these chronotopes are of course of a wholly different nature – the ambiguity or nonlinearity of "The Desert" allows for an integration into the world, or an integration of *worlds*, whereas "The Island" emphasized removal or isolation from the world. This value is of course what makes all sorts of people and groups seek it out in their projects of self-transformation (within both DeLillo's *oeuvre* and beyond), and the cult is here not excluded – I refer to the perception that the desert is an ontological *tabula rasa* upon which utopian or otherwise ideological projects can be written. However, what the desert proves in this case is that the cult's project of pure mind fails for precisely this reason, that the abstraction inherent in their methodology and their related denial of the lived body, embedded as it is in the world, is an insufficient response to the increasing existential disorientation felt in the time contemporary to the novel's composition.

As for Owen, it is instructive that he finishes his story to James with the line "Bless them," since the phrase is repeated at the opening of the next paragraph, syntactically enacting the merging that Axton therefore suggests occurred:

> 'Bless them.' […] The eyes were still involved in that old and recollected business, the head tilted toward his right shoulder. There was a strange radiance in his face, the slightest separation of the man from his condition, the full acceptance, the crushing belief that nothing can be done.

> Motionless. The telling had merged with the event. I had to think a moment to remember where we were. (308)

This is a significant passage when it comes to the interpretation of what sort of result the desert experience has for Owen; there is an indication that the assertion that the "telling had merged with the event" is doubly applicable. For one, Owen's reencounter with the childhood event and the "strange radiance in his face" it provokes suggest he has healed a schism in his being which finally allows him some peace; further, this first merging is echoed in his recounting of that very experience, here incorporating the third party of James Axton into its fold. In other words, through the act of storytelling – especially given the fact that Axton and Owen are still located within "The Desert" at this point – a similar phenomenon takes place, in which the audience is also enabled to benefit (through the power of the imagination) from the retold experience. This potential for narrative to play such a role is foreshadowed by Owen's final words to Axton before he begins to recount his story, which seem almost out of place at the time: "The ragged mob squats in the dust around the public story teller [...]. Someone beats a drum, a boy wraps a snake around his neck. The storyteller begins to recite" (276).

4.4.5 Heidegger's Jug: Objects and the Role of Sacred Place

Beyond the importance of narrative signaled here, which will be returned to in the context of James Axton's own process of transformation, the outcome of Owen's journey which culminates in the desert is best understood through attention to the details of his embodied inhabiting of this place in which Axton finds him, expressed as it is in a way which strengthens my arguments for the necessity to bring such representational aspects to the fore in a critical appraisal of DeLillo's work. When Axton first enters Owen's room, just after the older man looks at him in "a speculative manner" in the "moment of silent urging" discussed earlier, Owen tells James that he has "been preparing for this all [his] life" (274-5). The "this" he has been preparing for is presumably his situation, both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense this refers to the room in which he reclines, first described as such: "The door to his room was open. He reclined on a wooden bench covered with pillows and old carpets. There were some books and papers in a copper serving tray on the floor. A water jug on a small chest of drawers. A plain chair for me. Not much else in the room" (274). This is the first of a number of references to particular objects within the room which, when taken all together, lead to a striking parallel with the later writings especially of Martin Heidegger. Whereas David Cowart convincingly argues for a Heideggerian influence in *The Names* with the regards to language

and Being – "For DeLillo as for Heidegger, language affords insight into Being, and DeLillo, like Heidegger, may see that 'what we usually mean by language, namely, a stock of words and syntactical rules, is only a threshold of language" (*Physics* 165) – I contend there is also a constructive correlation to be found with Heidegger's late thought with regards to "dwelling" (and thus to the role of place in human experience), expressed through his concept of the fourfold and in the potential for places and things to "gather." Heidegger discusses this in both "The Thing" (1950) and "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951), focusing on "things" such as a jug in the former, and on "things" such as a bridge (which is also a place) in the latter.

The most relevant for the current discussion due quite simply to the recurrence of a water jug in this part of DeLillo's novel is Heidegger's essay "The Thing," published in English in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971), in which he writes at length about "things" (using the earthen jug as his primary example), which are to be distinguished from "objects": "the jug differs from the object" as containing a "self-supporting independence of something independent" ("The Thing" 164). It is also distinguishable as something which "gathers," which in its "gift of the outpouring" allows what he calls the "fourfold" – earth, sky, divinities and mortals – to "dwell *together all at once*" (171, original emphasis).[18] In this sense, the "jug *presences* as a thing" (171, my emphasis). The emphasis is therefore on this bringing together, on "nearness" (163), in a way which is in the end intimately related to the existence of humans (who Heidegger calls "mortals" in this essay): mortals "alone […] by *dwelling* attain to the world as world. Only what conjoins itself out of world becomes a thing" (180, my emphasis). The exploration of dwelling as integral to being is significant for its departure from his earlier emphasis on the role of language; this will be returned to, however, at the end of the discussion. Though the essay focuses at length on the jug, Heidegger does mention other objects which are in fact "things" as per his definition: "the jug and the bench, the footbridge and the plow […] mirror and clasp, book and picture, crown and cross" (180). Three of these are present in Owen's sparsely filled room – the book, wooden bench, and water jug – while the rest are similarly the sorts of things which Heidegger would likely include in an extension of this list. Significantly, however, just as in Heidegger's essay, in the entirety of Axton's time in Owen's room it is the jug which plays a repeated role whenever the two interrupt the telling of the

[18] For a more in-depth discussion of the fourfold as it relates to my discussion here, see J.E. Malpas' chapter "The *Topos* of Thinking" in his 2012 study on *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (pp. 13–21).

archaeologist's tale. Beyond DeLillo's own known engagement with Heidegger's thought, it is both this repetition and a correspondence in the underlying philosophical implications which suggest the utility of this particular reading.

As an illustrative example, between the narrative of Brademas' journey through India, which ends with the line "In three days he would walk into the desert," and his entrance into the Thar, there is a four-line interlude:

> 'There's some water in that jug.'
>
> 'Here,' I said.
>
> 'Take some.'
>
> 'Is it safe?' (285)

When this jug is viewed in light of Heidegger's extensive discussion of it, the question "Is it safe?" turns from one of literal to philosophical meaning; what it means for Axton to ask such a question is related to the role of the jug (and the other "things") in Owen's room. Owen tells James that in coming into that room he has "been preparing for all [his] life" he left behind most of the world, reducing it to what he has therein:

> Not that I knew it. I didn't know it until I walked into this room, out of the color and light, the red scarves worn as turbans, the food stalls out there, the ground chili and turmeric, the pans of indigo, the coloring for paint, those trays of brilliant powders and dyes. The mustard, bay leaf, pepper and cardamom. You see what I've done, don't you, by coming into this room? Brought only the names. Pine nuts, walnuts, almonds, cashews. All I can tell you is that I'm not surprised to find myself here. The moment I stepped inside it seemed right, it seemed inevitable, the place I've been preparing for. The correct number of objects, the correct proportions. For sixty years I've been approaching this room. (275)

By bringing "only the names" of these colorful spices and items, Owen reduces the conditions for his being to this "place [he's] been preparing for," with its "correct number of objects" and "the correct proportions." His citing of the "inevitab[ility]" of his being in this place, and the fact that "for sixty years [he's] been approaching this room," together suggest an actualization of the self which reflects the dwelling or "implaced" ground for human existence that Heidegger and those who come in his wake argue for as primary.[19] After understanding Owen's experience in the desert silo as providing at the least a partial breakthrough regarding his coming to terms with that which has haunted him throughout his life, the fact that he is here so

[19] I refer to the influence of Heidegger in the work of particularly Edward Casey and Jeff Malpas, as discussed in my opening chapter.

emphatic that this is the "right" place serves as solid evidence that the room represents this desert "success," this desert actualization of the self. The fact that Owen essentially declares that he is prepared to die by stating that he is "Ready as [he]'ll ever be. Counting the cracks in the wall" (275) furthers the sense that man and room have representationally merged, and that Owen has reached a state of acceptance regarding his imperfections (the cracks in the wall). The question Axton asks, therefore, of whether the jug "is safe," is informed by both Heidegger's discussion of the jug as thing and this current state in which he finds Owen.

It is important to clarify further that Owen is therefore offering the water in the jug in the Heideggerian sense, as containing the "gift" of water, but which gift is connected in turn to "the spring," which "stays on in the water of the gift," as well as the "rock [which] dwells" in the spring, and thus the "earth," the "rain and dew of the sky" in turn ("The Thing" 170). Axton is asking if the water "is safe" in the context of this role the jug plays in this almost ecological sense of gathering, in *presencing*, which Axton has also slowly been working towards throughout the novel. That is, the sort of "nearness" or "presencing" that Heidegger discusses in these essays is opposed explicitly by Heidegger to "remoteness" in the context of "the abolition of all distances" (163); this discussion is, crucially, connected to all that I discussed as represented by the island chronotope in which Axton and the rest start out the novel. It is therefore no surprise, and is in fact significant support for this line of thinking, that Heidegger's essay "The Thing" stems from the impetus encapsulated in its opening sentence: "All distances in time and space are shrinking" (163). In other words, Heidegger's meditation on "things" such as the jug and on "nearness" is a result of the exact same problem which DeLillo has been responding to over the course of his career, the sense of "shrinking" time and space which has been discussed at length in the previous chapters via David Harvey and Paul Virilio. However, whereas Harvey and Virilio both write their analyses with a focus on the economic, sociological and psychological effects of this phenomenon, Heidegger's philosophical trajectory includes an interest in the balance of the sacred and the secular relatively absent in the writings of the other two. It is in this distinction that *The Names* shows its thematic scope, for it is precisely this question of the sacred and the secular that further informs the complex knot which is this novel.[20]

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[20] Cult-member Emmerich tells Owen that "The Sanskrit word for knot […] eventually took on the meaning of 'book.' *Grantha*. This is because of the manuscripts. The birch-bark and palm-leaf manuscripts were bound by a cord drawn through two holes and knotted" (291).

Returning then to the jug, this is an object which plays a repeated role throughout Axton's visit with Owen: at one point "the jug is empty" so James must fill it at "a tap two houses down" (290); at another it is simply stated that Owen "poured water from the jug" before taking up his tale again (300); finally, it reappears in Axton's own listing of the objects in the room at the end of Owen's story (which shows his increasing realization as to their representational importance): "The twig broom. The muted colors of the pillows and rugs. The angles of arranged objects. The floorboard seams. The seam of light and shade. The muted colors of the water jug and wooden chest. The muted colors of the walls" (308). Combined with the earlier reference in which James asks "Is it safe?", the first two of these three listed above together suggest that the outpouring of Owen's confessional story is paralleled by the outpouring of the jug's water, lending strength to the argument that this jug is of the Heideggerian type. More evidence is to be found when Heidegger's jug is contextualized into a discussion of place, particularly sacred place. In his erudite treatise on *Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism* (and in the contemporary moment), L. Michael Harrington discusses Heidegger's late turn to objects:

> Heidegger discovers a *via media* between the consecrated world of the sacred place and the world of use objects, though it is really a rediscovery of the late medieval approach to things developed by, among others, Meister Eckhart. Where there is no consecrated place, things may still gather the divine into themselves, but they do so by making space for a god who remains absent, and manifests himself in the hidden nature of these things. (205)

Harrington argues that in the environment of increasing secularity in the postwar period, Heidegger focused on the ability of things to "gather the divine into themselves," similarly to what was outlined in my discussion above. This particular context is important to *The Names* in that the lifelong angst evidenced in the character of Owen Brademas is tied up in an inability to engage with the sacred: both the memory in the church and the haunting idea of the Ka'bah ceremony in Mecca are experiences of such a nature. Moreover, these experiences of the sacred are at the same time instances of what Victor Turner calls communitas, from the undermining of language's structure in glossolalia to the dissolution into the anonymous crowd in the circling of the Ka'bah. Although Owen is never able to actually physically take part in this sort of experience, the repeated references to the jug (as well as his sense of completeness in the room with the "correct proportions," etc.) suggest he has, through his desert experience, in some way finally found access to a form of the sacred, even in spite of his continued belief that "There is no God" (*Names* 296). As Harrington helpfully points out, "Though consecration is

no longer possible for us [moderns], who are not a historical people, the jug may still retain a sacred character" (32).

In this sense DeLillo echoes Heidegger in the relocation of the sacred from a consecrated place – which requires a religious belief increasingly lacking in today's secular societies – to particular objects, Heidegger's "things." Furthermore, and crucially, there is an inherent link between this sense of sacredness and that of the communal aspect of life:

> The jug, then, does not just allow the storage of water or wine. It gathers us together in a community. The gods are present in this community as the givers of the gift, but they remain absent because the communal context has no names for them. We treat the jug as sacred in this context not by consecrating it, but by freeing it so that it may gather the earth, sky, immortals, and mortals. (Harrington 32)

The jug thus literally becomes a locus for the sacred within the everyday, a thing which embodies the sense of spontaneous communitas that DeLillo represented so well in *End Zone's* football game in the snow, but which also finds its way into his fiction throughout his career.[21] The relationship between Heidegger's relocation of the sacred place in certain objects (things) and communitas is explained by Harrington:

> The real origin of the sacred place, which may or may not constitute a theophany, is an experience of unity with all other people, what Turner calls "spontaneous communitas." The attempt to capture and preserve this experience requires that it be rooted in a place. Regular visits to the place build up habits, and eventually social structures that may replicate those of the historical people from whom the sacred place initially appeared as an escape. But the sacred place, if it remains sacred, never becomes the mere ape of the historical people. It possesses what Turner calls "normative communitas," a structure which aims always at universality, the transcending of the historical people. (39)

While there are of course different types of sacred places,[22] the pilgrimage center (as long as it remains on the periphery of society and does not become its center) is, for Turner, a liminal space, and thus one of anti-structure. There is something to be said for the argument that in the relative absence of meaningful sacred spaces (especially ones to which one could make a pilgrimage), characters such as Owen, James Axton and Frank Volterra latch onto the cult as a possible replacement. Turner indeed includes "millenarian movements" in his discussion of

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[21] See also *Underworld,* where people come together to see the image of the murdered girl Esmeralda on a Minute Maid billboard ad (818–24), or Eric Packer's joining the art piece of naked bodies in *Cosmopolis* (174–77).

[22] See Harrington pp. 38-39 for more on this, in which he discusses the difference between the ideas of sacred place in Turner, Mircea Eliade and more contemporary anthropologists such as John Eade.

contemporary manifestations of the liminal, including some traits which could also describe the language cult: "homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property, [and] disregard for personal appearance" (*Ritual* 111). Of course, this particular cult is ultimately an inversion of this impetus towards the undermining of structure, *imposing* (an arbitrary, alphabetical) structure rather than undoing it: Turner writes that "communitas has an existential quality," involving the whole human in her relation to other whole humans, while "Structure, on the other hand, has a cognitive quality; as Levi-Strauss has perceived, it is essentially a set of classifications, a model for thinking about culture and nature and ordering one's public life" (127). As evidenced in the earlier discussion of the cult's argument to Owen that murdering the old guide is permissible because "his memory is gone," the cult is primarily concerned with this cognitive aspect of the human. Regardless of this inversion, they nonetheless have a draw on these characters, seeming to suggest as they do an alternative to an attenuated world lacking in both healthy experiences of communitas and, relatedly, of the sacred (especially as through places).

In the context of this discussion, a rather enigmatic statement by Owen Brademas during one of their interruptions of his narrative makes more sense. Talking about Singh's declaration that "the desert is a solution" (*Names* 294), Owen tells James: "I was afraid of the desert but drawn to it, drawn to the contradiction. Men will come to fill the empty place. This place is empty in order that men may rush in to fill it" (296). The language of the last two sentences, which is at odds with Owen's normal speech and which almost seems to be a quotation, could be pulled straight from Heidegger's "The Thing," which includes language as such: "When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as a holding vessel" (173). The similarity in syntax, where the same idea is repeated in a slightly different way, suggests a correlation between all that the jug represents (for both Heidegger and DeLillo's novel) and the desert chronotope, where in the absence of sacred place the desert and its potential for ontological becoming represents another possible alternative. The empty space of the desert becomes like the vessel of the jug, which in its very potential for "holding" provides the "contradiction" to which Owen refers – Heidegger's declaration that "the empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is" is precisely this sort of contradiction. The desert thus provides, for Owen, the very possibility for the experience of sacredness and affiliated communitas whose absence he is haunted by; its collapse of the

traditional linear rule of time and related opening onto ontological actualization is therefore intimately related to the sense of communitas inherent in this certain type of sacred place.

4.5 James Axton and the Chronotopic Journey

This discussion of Heidegger's jug lends support to the role of narrative in this novel which I mentioned earlier; throughout this crucial exchange between the two Americans there is the constant suggestion, channeled through the sharing of the gift of water in the jug, that Owen is offering the narrative (and all it represents) to Axton in a similar fashion, as a gift. This possibility therefore at least partially helps to explain the otherwise rather difficult to parse statement which Axton makes at the close of this chapter, in which he writes: "I came away from the old city feeling I'd been engaged in a contest of some singular and gratifying kind. Whatever he'd lost in life-strength, this is what I'd won" (*Names* 309). The only way to interpret this statement which really makes sense is to decouple the idea of Axton gaining something ("life-strength") from Owen's loss of it; Owen indeed seems to be on death's door and Axton certainly gains something from the experience lived through Owen's tale, but the correlation that the one directly feeds into the other as a result of "a contest" does not necessarily follow, even if Axton – unsurprisingly as a risk analyst – interprets it that way. What Axton gains are lessons learned from both Owen's recounting of his tale and from Owen's existence – his way of being – within his room in the wake of his desert experience. Near the end, Axton writes:

> We sat watching the room go dark. I judged the amount of time that had to pass before he would be ready to recite the ending, before the stillness would yield. This is what I was learning from the objects in the room and the spaces between them, from the conscious solace he was devising in things. I was learning when to speak, in what manner. (308)

Although (similarly to Heidegger) there is not yet an explicit attention to the lived body[23], Axton is in fact demonstrating an increased awareness to the older man's new manner of dwelling-in-place. Further, his assertion that he is "learning when to speak, in what manner" in the context of a novel overtly obsessed with language suggests a significant shift in Axton's

[23]Although DeLillo expresses a certain interest in questions of embodiment throughout his career, it is not until 1988's "The Ivory Acrobat" and then 2000's *The Body Artist* that he explicitly explores the more phenomenological side of it in-depth. As in this scene, however, I would argue that his characters' embodied inhabiting of the spaces described plays an implicit role.

way of being in the world. Whereas Owen's life has been defined by his haunting by a lost sense of the communitas experience inherent to sacred place, Axton's trajectory in the novel has alternatively been one from disengagement in "The Island" towards an awareness of his involvement in the wider world, and this awareness is reflected here.

My argument is that beyond his observing of this new at-peace Owen, perhaps the most important shift in Axton as a character results directly from his experiencing Owen's narrative through the act of storytelling. When Owen finishes recounting his memory of speaking in tongues and comes back to the present moment with the "strange radiance" in his face, Axton too must "think a moment to remember where [they] were" (308). Crucially, the "telling had merged with the event" (308) for *both* characters; further, this merging is undoubtedly facilitated by their location within the larger desert chronotope of this third section of the novel. Thus it is not the content of Owen's tale so much as the actually *experiencing* of it that has a significant effect on Axton. The impact of storytelling is enhanced by the desert chronotope such that the ontological flexibility already inherent to the human capacity to be immersed within a narrative can here have a more transformative effect; while I will not delve into it at this point, here the recent explorations of the relationship between narrative studies and the science of embodied cognition outline interesting empirical support for this argument.[24]

A seemingly innocuous comparison from this chapter with the Axton / Brademas encounter unveils the ultimate distinction between them. Whereas Owen has found a limited peace through healing the personal schism caused by past wounds, James has actually gained the capacity to begin to see beyond himself; although Owen's wounds are related to a failure to dive into the communitas experience, his resolution is still directed inwards, limited to his own self. This distinction emerges in the contrast between Owen's earlier cited description of how he has "brought only the names" of an array of vibrant things into the room with him, such as "pepper and cardamom[,] ground chili and turmeric, the pans of indigo, the coloring for paint, those trays of brilliant powders and dyes" (275), and what Axton does upon departure. Axton declares at the end of Owen's tale that "there would be no further commentary and reflection," and thus leaves Owen sitting there "in the room he'd been arranging all his life" (309), giving instead a description of what he encounters outside when he departs:

> The alleys were full of people and noise. Bare bulbs were arrayed on strings over tiers of nuts and spices. I paused every few feet to see what was here, nutmeg and scarlet mace, burlap bags

[24] For further reading on this fascinating topic see Caracciolo (2013, 2014) and Kuzmicová (2014).

> of coriander seeds and chilies, rock salt in crude chunks. I lingered at the trays of dyestuffs and ground spices, heaped in pyramids, colors I'd never seen, brilliances, worlds, until finally it was time to go. (309)

This repetition of the inventory of vibrant spices and dyes signals its role as a foil for Owen's version. Whereas the archaeologist brings "only the names," James here "lingers," "pausing every few feet" to take in this rich, sensorial variety of resources on display. The final embrace of "colors I'd never seen, brilliances, *worlds*" (my emphasis) is key to this discussion; the plural form of "worlds" points directly towards a sense of ontological multiplicity. While Owen (despite his reconciliation with the community of his memory) limits his world to the singular of a man in a room with a few (Heideggerian) things, that which James has "won" (309) from his experience with Owen is more than just "life-strength," but rather this capacity to grasp ontological multiplicity.

The question of what James Axton has "won" from this experience brings the discussion back around to the broader picture of what is represented by the novel's progressive chronotopes and the characters' passage through them. Critics have tended to focus on the argument that, despite this progression I have traced with regards to his character, Axton's transformation at the end is a limited one. He is unaware, for example, that for the entire year he has been working for a political risk insurance company which "has maintained a link with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency since its inception" (315), only finding out when his friend Charles Maitland, assuming Axton is in the know, admiringly informs him that the has found out about the connection. Heather Houser discusses the resulting process of realization that Axton has regarding his role:

> It is at this near end-point in DeLillo's narrative that Axton recognizes his blindness to how policy decisions founded on risk assessments affect political and social structures and those who inhabit them. […] The text cloaks this discovery in ambivalence, however, as Axton's epiphany betrays a certain narcissism. For this reason, we can see that the text does not advocate a retreat into individual self-reflection; rather, by depicting Axton's failure to do so, it encourages readers to plumb how America has altered the material conditions of others around the globe and thereby made 'America(n)' a metonym for negligent intervention and manipulation. (146)

Houser's interpretation of the novel through the lens of risk assessment is excellent, but what I find in this discussion is a misplacement of Axton's "epiphany." While I would not argue that Axton suddenly transforms into the opposite of everything he is at the novel's outset, I would locate any epiphany he may have as better represented in the novel's final three pages, in which

he at last visits the Acropolis, which I will return to shortly. Further, while I agree that the text "does not advocate a retreat into individual self-reflection," to her placing of the responsibility for such reflection in the reader's hands I would add this new capacity Axton demonstrates for accepting ontological multiplicity. This acceptance is indeed a major step forward (chronotopically speaking, from the island's ontology), and its realization does cause Axton to shift his stance. After the CIA connection is revealed, Axton feels "a dim ache, a pain that seemed to carry toward the past, disturbing a number of surfaces along the way. This mistake of mine, or whatever it was, this failure to concentrate, to occupy a serious center – it had the effect of justifying everything Kathryn had ever said about me" (*Names* 317). The pain "disturbing a number of surfaces along the way" towards "the past" implies a restructuring of self, resulting from the dawning awareness as to his lack of responsibility in general, his failure "to occupy a serious center." It is not just the revelation as to the CIA link that allows this retroactive assumption of responsibility, but rather the restructuring which he experienced previously through his encounter with Owen Brademas.

The last three pages of the novel's main text (excluding the four-page coda which is Tap's rendition of Owen's glossolalia experience) contain the concluding elements for my own analysis as well. For one, the last paragraph before the novel's final Acropolis scene reads:

> I see them in the primitive silkscreen the brain is able to produce, maybe eight inches in front of my closed eyes, miniaturized by time and distance, riddled by visual static, each figure a dancing red ribbon. These are among the people I've tried to know twice, the second time in memory and language. Through them, myself. They are what I've become, in ways I don't understand but which I believe will accrue to a rounded truth, a second life for me as well as for them. (329)

Axton is here referring to all the characters of this novel, and it is at this point that it becomes most clear that the entire narrative is a retrospective account written by Axton himself. The paragraph alludes again to the role of storytelling, to narrative; just as Axton lived the experience of Owen both in the desert and in his memory, here it is revealed that the reader has been doing the same thing through Axton. In the reader's journey with the narrator through these events (and thus *through these chronotopes*), the effect which Owen's assumption of the narrative voice and the "telling merging with the event" had on Axton translates as well, at least in potential, to the novel's readers. That is, the formal enactment of the desert chronotope to correspond to its structural value within the text creates the possibility for it to have the same effect on the reader as it does on the characters, and thus Houser's call for the reader to consider

"how America has altered the material conditions of others around the globe" (146) is enabled (or even enacted) by this instantiation of the potential of fictional narrative. Further, Axton supports this argument for narrative's potential in the personal sense, indicating that in trying to know himself through "these people [he's] tried know twice," they are in fact "what [he's] *become*" (my emphasis). This reencounter through narrative with others has allowed him to become something new; in other words, a grasping of multiplicity and its enactment through writing (storytelling) has caused a second transformation of self.

My reading of the novel's significance as understood principally through both Brademas' and Axton's characters and its chronotopes varies from other critical interpretations due at least in part to the difference in approach. The direction this chronotopic reading has taken the analysis is, however, supported even into the last scene, which as mentioned entails Axton's trip to the Acropolis he had been avoiding since the outset. Most critics read the scene through the formal importance of its final sentences, which conclude that "our offering" to the temple, rather than "prayer or chant or slaughtered rams […] is language" (331). While this conclusion obviously signals the relevance of language to the general meditation on implaced and ethically-engaged being that this novel represents, limiting the discussion to language here, as elsewhere, ignores the tension inherent in the co-emphasis on (sacred) place and communitas, whose linguistic counterpart is the speaking in tongues which haunts Owen. This tension is again helpfully understood with reference to Heidegger, especially in light of these final lines. Heidegger's famous assertion that "Language is the precinct *(templum)*, that is, the house of Being" (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 129), expressed as such in 1946's "What are Poets For?", recurs again in 1947's "Letter on Humanism" as "Language is the house of being. In its home man dwells" ("Letter" 193). This elevation of language to the location for human dwelling – and thus Being – is echoed here in novelistic form, and the final lines therefore represent James Axton coming to the same realization as does Heidegger here.

However, the tension between language and place is one inherent to Heidegger's thought itself, seeing as the series of essays from the 1950's[25] I discussed regarding the jug and "dwelling" resituate what it means for Being "to dwell" from within the house of language to that of place: "Man's relation to locales, and through locales to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, thought essentially"

[25] Besides "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "The Thing" I also refer to "…Poetically Man Dwells…," all published in *Poetry Language Thought*.

(“Building” 359); “Dwelling, however, is *the basic character* of Being” (362, original emphasis). Although Heidegger’s thought in this matter remained limited due to his avoidance of incorporating thinking of the lived body when it comes to this discussion of dwelling, as Edward Casey has discussed at length[26], this shift has in fact been crucial in the development of thinking on place as represented by Casey, Jeff Malpas, and others in the discussion of this dissertation’s opening chapter. DeLillo at this point in 1982 is also not as focused on the role of embodiment, but there is evident in the novel this tension between this earlier Heidegger formulation and the shift the German thinker’s thought sees in the following decade. Further, DeLillo himself will subsequently take his own step in the direction Casey does in his re-situation of the body in questions of being through place, as evidenced in the previous chapter’s discussion of 1988’s “The Ivory Acrobat.” Regardless, there is here in Axton’s concluding visit to the Greek temple (the Acropolis) an emphasis on unity – on a sense of unity with other humans of the past and the present – which goes beyond the sense of language as the *only* house in which human beings dwell.

This perspectival shift represented through Axton is thus traceable in this final scene of the novel, which is also where I would alternatively place the location of Axton’s epiphany. For one, Axton opens his description of his approach to the Acropolis by shifting the narrator’s pronoun from “I” to “we” for a second time, even though he is referring to his lone presence within an anonymous crowd:

> We approach hypnotically, walking on the smooth stones, not watching where we step. The west facade rears before us. It would take a wrenching effort to avert our eyes from it. I’d seen the temple a hundred times from the street, never suspecting it was this big, this scarred, broken, rough. How different from the spotlighted bijou I’d seen from the car that night, coming back from Piraeus, a year ago. (*Names* 329-330)

Also evident in this passage’s recognition of difference from how he saw it “a year ago” is the fact that the temple itself – or, rather, Axton’s idea of it – encapsulates the progression the character has made through the novel’s chronotopes; the idea of the pristine temple presented at the novel’s outset, remaining eternal and untouched by history, is proven to be an illusion in light of the “scarred, broken [and] rough” structure he sees before him. The temple is thoroughly immersed in the everyday struggle of time and human activity, an assertion

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[26] See Casey’s chapter on “Proceeding to Place by Indirection: Heidegger” in *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1997, pp. 243 – 284).

poetically bolstered by the fact that its fallen stones and "mingled debris" lying around are "wasting in acid rain" (330). Axton further conjoins the view of the city with the narrator's future geopolitical knowledge to fuse the ancient temple with the spreading of "the great city" below, "ringed by mountains, heat struck, steeped in calamity. […] Bombings will become commonplace, car bombings, firebombings of offices and department stores. A blind might will seem to shake things, to course headlong through that entire year" (330).

Crucially, then, what Axton himself claims that he "learned up there" is "that the Parthenon was not a thing to study but to *feel*. It wasn't aloof, rational, timeless, pure. [It] wasn't a relic species of dead Greece but part of the living city below it" (330, my emphasis). The statement reflects the transition from the chronotope of "The Island" ("aloof, rational, timeless") to that of "The Mountain" ("part of the living city"), and the realization is made possible by Axton's experience in "The Desert." Axton himself is not directly conscious of this change, but its results are obvious:

> 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 aft 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. (330)

It is important to underscore that the Acropolis (and DeLillo's precision in referring to it as "the temple") is informed by the concept of sacred place introduced in the preceding pages, especially Harrington's delineation (via Heidegger and Mircea Eliade) of its source: "The real origin of the sacred place […] is an experience of unity with all other people, what Turner calls 'spontaneous communitas'" (39). With this in mind, these lines encapsulate this other emphasis I refer to beyond the implication of the novel's final line of "our offering is language" (331): that of shared humanity. Axton here reveals quite explicitly that beneath the veil of the "mathematics embodied in the structure" there lies "a human feeling," a "cry for pity." This evokes the entire novel's treatment of this tension between structure (logic) and an embedded, embodied life, implicated in the world of others, open to multiplicity and affect, and represents thus a crucial point for understanding the novel's conclusion. The final sentence in the citation above, referring to "this open cry, this voice we know as our own," *brings about* this openness by gathering the narrator and the reader together in the plural, demonstrating and even *enacting* a recognition that the pronoun "we" should be an open rather than a closed signifier, reaching out to encompass humanity as a whole.

This reading of these final scenes is therefore what informs those last two lines, that "what we bring to the temple" as an "offering is language" (331). While the statement might echo Heidegger's famous dictum, rather than declaring that language *is* the temple in which humans dwell, DeLillo here writes that language is our offering *to* the temple. Perhaps what the distinction best underscores is that language is not all, but rather that it is what allows for this fundamental aspect of human life that Axton has here at the end come to terms with – the role of community. Language allows communication, allows community, and the two are in fact inseparable. Only focusing on language, however, is the error represented by the contrast between Owen's bringing in of "only the names" and James' immersion in the multiplicitous "worlds" they represent in the spice market outside. This distinction finds a correlate in the dichotomy of structure and communitas, for as anthropological analyses such as Victor Turner's expose, the issue of finding a balance between the two is one which is not merely a modern problem, just one which shifts in context as historical circumstances fluctuate. Anne Longmuir and Heather Houser are therefore not incorrect to explore the specific and oft-ignored contexts in which this novel deals with this more general problem, which though not new is certainly complicated in ways never before seen by the advancing tides of capital, technology, and globalization. However, it would also be negligent to ignore DeLillo's serious engagement with the ontological counterpart (with the subject's needs) in light of these more societal-level or geopolitical circumstances. The acknowledgment of ontological multiplicity is in the end a realization which is vital to any sort of positive political project, and thus DeLillo's exploration of the role of narrative (and the chronotope) in this process is more of a political engagement on the author's part than is generally acknowledged. Whereas previously "nothing stuck" for Axton, now, to the contrary, "Everything clings" (256).

It is in this context, finally, that the four-page coda consisting of Tap's rendition of Owen's haunting glossolalic experience becomes a reflection of this positive political aspect of the novel. Tap's text is full of "spirited misspellings" (313), and the break from the rigid structures of grammar and orthography has allowed Tap to create something new, confirming the power of narrative to work within the limiting structures of language to nevertheless have a significant impact on the reader's perception. Further, Axton writes that Tap's "mangled words" taught him that words are both "ancient" and "reshapable" (313), encompassing their integral role in the entire history of human existence but also emphasizing their living, breathing nature, that they can indeed adapt to shifting necessities of individuals and societies.

Conclusions

The preceding pages have outlined at length the implications of the series of chronotopes DeLillo presents to the reader in this novel, whose intricacy and representative power are testament to the argument that this period was for DeLillo a significant turning point in his literary imagination. *The Names*, with its chronotopic and thematic richness, stands out in his *oeuvre* in this sense, arguably due to the probability that it is through its pages that DeLillo actively explored this perspectival shift that he himself was undergoing in the face of experience abroad. This suggestion is reinforced by the fact that the high level of importance given to the chronotope in this novel (signaled by its own section headings) takes more of a backseat in the acclaimed novels which follow as DeLillo once again switches his thematic focus. However, in the context of the dissertation thus far, *White Noise* should be read as the result of returning from the experience abroad and all which that implies in terms of perspective to be confronted with the reality of 1980s consumer America, and although the 1985 novel's more explicit focus is on the technological and imagistic aspect of this reality, the critique in the text is often aimed at the absence of places which can be called sacred in the sense one finds abroad (and in the pages of *The Names*) – in this context the famous supermarket scenes of *White Noise* come to mind.[27] DeLillo's range of thematic concern is in other words extremely broad, but I would argue that it is whenever his fiction ends up aimed at the more philosophical questions or ramifications of contemporary life his texts increase the chronotopicity of their representation; moreover, this quite often corresponds with his characters somehow finding themselves in the desert. At this point this tendency should be understandable, for it is the desert and its seeming *tabula rasa* status which allows characters and groups to pursue their varying projects of ontological actualization or transformation therein.

Just as in *The Names*, DeLillo's characters are often seeking that something beyond, that something which is just beyond the grasp of rational cognition, as Owen does while in Rajsamand: "What was it about the letter-shapes that struck his soul with the force of a tribal mystery? The looped bands, scything curves, the sense of a sacred architecture. What did he almost understand? The mystery of alphabets, the contact with death and oneself, one's other self, all made stonebound with a mallet and chisel" (284). That which Owen "almost understands" is what David Cowart refers to when he writes that DeLillo "senses in language

[27] See also Harack (2013): "*White Noise* diagnoses the dangers of forgetfulness, placelessness, and non-consideration of the other in America" (305).

(in *naming,* that synecdoche for language) something impervious to the clumsy reductions of pentecostalists and linguistic theorists alike" (*Physics* 172), citing a Frost poem which reads "We dance round in a ring and suppose / But the Secret sits in the middle and knows" (173). However, as I've tried to show up to this point, also within DeLillo's fiction there lies an equal interest in the possibility that this "secret sitting in the middle" is not something expressible through language at all, but rather something which inheres in the nonverbal aspect of a person's embodied dwelling within the world. This possibility is one which will hover in the background of DeLillo's fiction in the following decades, but will return in full force to be explored explicitly in the post-millennium context of *The Body Artist,* the play *Love-Lies-Bleeding,* and the novel *Point Omega*. The latter novel, with its return to the desert and its attempt to adequately respond to the same issues of war and capital in a post-9/11 landscape, is the enigmatic text which is tackled in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5 The Black Hole of Abstraction: *Point Omega*

CHAPTER 5
The Black Hole of Abstraction: *Point Omega*

The theme that seems to have evolved in my work during the past decade concerns time—time and loss.

Don DeLillo, "Notes"

Evil is movement toward void.

Bucky Wunderlick

Although nearly thirty years elapse between the publication of *The Names* and 2010's *Point Omega*, this chapter will only briefly pass over DeLillo's work of the intervening period before looking in-depth at the latter novel. This decision is related to the argument that I have been working towards over the course of the thesis, that while DeLillo's texts are always engaged to a greater or lesser extent with the cultural and political milieu from which they spring, it is specifically in his texts which seek the vast landscapes of the desert that its concerns tend more explicitly towards the ontological, towards an engagement with philosophies of being – although this sort of questioning is of course not wholly limited to the desert fiction. This tendency is nevertheless always tied up in varying ways with the geopolitical and cultural contexts which push characters in that direction in the first place, and thus the early *End Zone's* dual concern with technologies of mass destruction and the individual attempting to formulate a coherent ontological stance in response foreshadows the fate of deserts in his texts for the duration of his career. Although this thesis does not take *Underworld* as one of its major focal points, in that novel too the desert has a role to play, but with what I would argue is a rather distinct emphasis; in the 1997 magnum opus, the desert is more a backdrop onto which is writ the devastation of Cold War nuclear testing and the industry of waste management which character Nick Shay is involved with. *Point Omega* is the first novel to return the desert as a

chronotope which inheres the possibility of ontological becoming. This return is reflected in the fact of first-person narration; with the exception of the short story "The Ivory Acrobat," all the texts this thesis deals with are ones which DeLillo elected to compose in the first-person. This coincidence is in fact not arbitrary – the turn to the first-person coincides with those texts in which a more subjective exploration of an appropriate ontological stance to the varying pressures of the contemporary world is sought, [1] and the majority of these involve deserts.[2]

What I argue in this chapter can therefore be understood as following the previous in unveiling what the text presents through its characters' seeking of an adequate response to the world around them, this time updated to reflect the world in a post 9/11 context; similarly to *The Names*, the resulting immersion in the desert landscape is related to the needs of characters to find an ontological stance suitable to the times they live in. Further, there is a repeated importance given to structure, in which the macro-scale relationship of chronotopes has an important impact on the meaning of the text. Whereas *The Names* was linear in format, I will discuss the way in *Point Omega* DeLillo employs structure in order to speak to the thematic play at work in the novel. Specifically, then, I argue that with this spare, enigmatic novel DeLillo toys with varying concepts of (space)time in order to try and shine light on the unrepresentable, on the resulting sense of void caused directly by 9/11 and indirectly by what I call processes of abstraction, which have generated both that event as well as contemporary geopolitical reality more broadly construed. The result is a novel which invites two levels of analysis, though its important to point out that this is always a tactical maneuver, in that the two are of course mutually informed. In terms of these two levels, my argument is thus that DeLillo's interest in cosmic phenomena and different theories of time is a crucial intertext for this novel, informing the larger structure, and that his varying interests in cosmological theories, so to speak, are further played out within the narrower context of the novel's main narrative in its own desert chronotope. More specifically, the discussion of the novel is framed by the multidisciplinary concepts of Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*, the timeless universe interpretation of the many-worlds theory of quantum physics, as well as the possibilities represented by the related region of spacetime known as the black hole and its event horizon. Paying close attention to the textual and chronotopic indicators within the house-

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[1] Two clear exceptions to this rule seem to be "The Ivory Acrobat" and *The Body Artist*, though the fact that these two texts coincide in hosting the rare DeLillo female protagonist might have something to do with it.
[2] The only first-person texts DeLillo writes without including a desert are *Great Jones Street* and *White Noise*, as well as the Nick Shay sections of *Underworld*.

in-desert setting, in what follows I explore the structural metaphor of the black hole thematically, suggesting that the character Jessie's disappearance reflects a closing down of the horizon of possibility; this narrowing down is associated with the masculine-coded processes of abstraction I work to show are significant intertexts of the novel, including especially the already-conflated forces of capital and war discussed in previous chapters.

In terms of those intervening three decades, the period after *The Names* boasts DeLillo's most acclaimed novels, including *White Noise*, *Libra, Mao II* and *Underworld.* Critic and university lecturer favorite *White Noise* is written in the first person, correspondingly exploring potential subjective responses to the insidious, deracinating effect of a post-Fordist consumer America of flexible accumulation. *Libra* and *Mao II* are arguably DeLillo's most overtly political novels, while the sprawling *Underworld* puts a capstone on the Western world as understood through the decades of its framing by the looming conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States. I would agree with Thurgar-Dawson's diagnosis that, in *Underworld*, "the Arizona desert becomes a construct, even a chronotope […], of the event-laden narratives of nationhood" (369); the idea of "America" is written onto the desert by the different characters who interact with it. Klara Sax writes her aesthetic vision onto it, and Matt Shay first sees it as a vision of "the otherness of the West," related to ideas of "nation and spaciousness, […] bravery and history" (*Underworld* 449), though it soon after becomes associated with his work developing weapons for the U.S. military. In the end, the desert in *Underworld* is perhaps best defined by Nick Shay's trip to a remote Kazakh location to "witness an underground nuclear explosion" utilized to destroy "dangerous waste" (788). The conflation there of the desert spaces of the former Soviet Union and the United States as exploited landscapes – "white space[s] on a map" (789) – represents the main role the desert plays in this novel, a cultural, geopolitical backdrop onto which is written the final triumph of the capitalist west, and though there are still affinities it is thus a noticeably distinct chronotope to the deserts in the other novels under consideration. The general trajectory is well-expressed by Peter Boxall, who writes:

> DeLillo's oeuvre […] can be read as a symptom and a critique of a millenarianism generated in part by the cold war, and by the gathering of a fin de siècle apprehension. Time becomes heavier and heavier in his work, until it is released into the thin, unbound chronology of a new century, in which narrative itself is uncertain of its co-ordinates, and in which the technological and political forces which govern the passing of time become strange, new and unreadable. (*Twenty-First-Century Fiction* 29)

In this context, then, *Point Omega* is of primary interest for its exploration of a post-millennial American culture and the significant shift in narrative direction which DeLillo's fiction evinces after that turning point, especially in its abandonment of the broadly sweeping novels of the late 1980s and 90s and the renewed focus on the individual response to the rapidly changing, globalized world.

5.1 DeLillo, Space, and Time in the 21st Century

While my emphasis on DeLillo's use of place and chronotope in his earlier fiction is not a common focus for his critics, DeLillo's post-*Underworld* texts present such a marked interest in questions of embodiment, place, and especially temporality that it has become something of a primary target in this later work. Although deserts do not play much of a role in *The Body Artist, Cosmopolis* or *Falling Man,*[3] the marked return to its arid reaches in *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, *Point Omega* and *Zero K* are informed by his varying explorations of the experience of time in the former texts. James Gourley, for example, has produced a book specifically examining *Terrorism and Temporality in the works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo* (2013), in which his arguments for DeLillo's shifting treatment of time are often based in research in DeLillo's Archives at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. He argues for an influence which evolves from that of George Steiner (*In Bluebeard's Castle*) in *Mao II* (1991) to that of Paul Virilio's *Open Sky* in *Cosmopolis* (2003) – I have already introduced the latter novel's representation of Virilio's accelerated time in Chapter 3. Gourley argues that *Cosmopolis* shows a world in which "the future has already begun to impinge upon the present, precisely because there is no longer, in Virilio's view, any means of differentiating past, present, and future" (43). Not dissimilarly, Crystal Alberts argues that "*Cosmopolis* is a thought experiment, of sorts, in which DeLillo considers the '[t]wo forces in this world, past and future'," although her focus is on the way he does so by "illustrating the tension between them through his use of strange attractors and quantum entanglement" (6); the importance of this

[3] It is worth noting that *Falling Man's* Keith, who was in the North Tower when the airplane struck, seeks relief from the traumatic event in the anonymity of gambling in Las Vegas, that surreal city located squarely within the desert. It is, however, this more surreal, removed chronotope of Las Vegas which is there important rather than the desert itself. Linda Kauffman also makes an interesting connection here: "Since life now is nothing but a crap shoot, Keith joins the pros, playing cards in the desert. […] DeLillo's symbolism initially seems heavy-handed, until one realizes that he is implicitly invoking another group on a desert mission: the troops sent to Baghdad were armed with decks of cards featuring Al Qaeda's Most Wanted" ("World" 653)

interest in time in terms of classical and quantum physics will be returned to at length in the context of *Point Omega*. Alberts' analysis is similarly framed by extensive research at the DeLillo Archives, demonstrating an even more thorough familiarity with the author's working material than Gourley, and the joint picture which emerges from their research and analyses is that the array of criticism which reads DeLillo's novel as ever more intrigued by the experience of time is supported by the author's own records.

DeLillo's first post-millennial text, *The Body Artist* (2000), is a meditation on embodied being-in-time specifically in the wake of a traumatic loss, as it entails the character Lauren Hartke, eponymous Body Artist, struggling with the recent suicide of her partner Rey Robles; Peter Boxall sums it up quite well when he writes that "*The Body Artist* works to [reveal] the separated components of unmoving time and space to which grief delivers us" ("A Leap" 530–31)[4]. While many focus on this subjective experience of time presented through Lauren Hartke, the short novel is in fact an exploration of embodied (and thus *placed*) being, which Cornel Bonca is right to signal by evoking specifically Heideggerian "Being, the spatiotemporal envelope which provides the conditions for consciousness to be conscious [at] all" (62) in his discussion of the novel. This emphasis is evident from the novel's very first paragraph:

> Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments, and you stop to glance at a spider pressed to its web. There is a quickness of light and a sense of things outlined precisely and streaks of running luster on the bay. You know more surely who you are on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. The wind makes a sound in the pines and the world comes into being, irreversibly, and the spider rides the wind-swayed web. (*Body Artist* 9)

While many write about the opening line that "time seems to pass" – which does clearly set the novel's interest in the unreality of time from the outset – the last two sentences signal the equal importance of the body's immersion in its environment to this "happening" of the world; echoing the phenomenological project, the multi-sensorial description of light, wind and the sound it makes in the trees are what here allow the "world to come into being" (9). Moreover, DeLillo's rare use of the second-person here serves to further accentuate this phenomenological effort, as it works to narrow the experiential gap between reader and character. It is in this light that, although some critics focus more exclusively on the issue of time, I would therefore agree strongly with Katrina Harack's general assessment that "[r]epeated concerns in *The Body*

[4] See also Smith (2006) for a more in-depth exploration of what she calls "Grief Time" in *The Body Artist*.

Artist, Cosmopolis, Falling Man, and *Point Omega* include the nature of embodiment (or consciousness as contained in a physical form), how human beings experience time, city spaces as opposed to natural landscapes like the desert or the country, and how the author might represent pain or trauma" (304). While I invoked Harack's astute readings of these later novels in my discussion of "The Ivory Acrobat" in order to contextualize that short story as proof of a longer-abiding interest in embodiment than is normally attributed to DeLillo, she is correct to signal especially the increased interests in both time and trauma (and the city versus the desert is evidently another long-standing interest as well) at the outset of DeLillo's late period.

Of course, the most obvious origin of the link between trauma and temporality in this general period signaled by Harack and a number of other scholars is situated squarely in the attacks of September 11th, 2001. That being said, both *The Body Artist's* 2000 publication and the fact that DeLillo was almost done with 2003's *Cosmopolis* when the attacks occurred[5] prove that he was *already* delving deeply into an exploration of both trauma and temporality at that point, and thus what follows must take into account both the previous trajectory of this thought as well as the sudden introduction of a deeply traumatic event, which was both cultural and personal for an author born and based in New York City. Gourley in fact argues that *Cosmopolis*, composed as it was both before and after the attacks (albeit mostly before), "stands right on the cusp" of a shift in the perception of time, as the "September 11 attacks have, for DeLillo, completely altered a temporality that seemed unable to be changed. Rather than inhabiting the future, the West now has the possibility to reassess its engagement with time" (53). It is, however, important to remember that DeLillo's engagement with the human experience of place (of space and time) began in the 1970s.

The continuity of those early novels with this later context is suggested by certain arguments, such as Nicole Merola's discussion of the way, in *Cosmopolis*, "DeLillo rescripts Marx's concept of alienation for the contemporary age, illustrating the ways cyberlabor estranges its workers from themselves, their fellow workers, and the natural and built worlds" (830). This chimes with my preceding analysis of the varying texts placed under scrutiny thus far in this dissertation, which generally identifies DeLillo's connecting of the experience of compressed space-time to social alienation and attenuation, all at the hands of an increasing

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[5] In a 2003 interview, DeLillo is cited as saying that "I was fairly close to finishing when the terrorist attacks happened […]. When that happened, I took a long pause. I just didn't want to work for a while, although I wrote an essay on the attacks themselves. The attacks didn't affect the novel directly, but they certainly affected me. In effect maybe two months was added on to the work" ("Cosmopolis" n.p.)

technological development as pushed by the dual forces of capital and war. Relevantly, then, Merola's own argument foregrounds technology:

> Throughout *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo exposes the extent to which the compression of time and space and materiality constitutes contemporary technoclass experience. And, although typically DeLillean technophile moments pepper the novel, the predominant suture of technospace with attenuated socioecological relations marks the tone of the novel as critical of the particular compressions that make possible and emerge from the digitization of contemporary life. (831)

Matt Kavanagh focuses Merola's "digitization of contemporary life" to the more specific context of the digitization of money, emphasizing in a 2017 chapter on DeLillo's critique of what the American author ironically calls "the utopian glow of cyber-capital" (DeLillo "Ruins" 34) that this digitization is a major cause behind the contemporary experience of compressed time: "As the circulation of capital speeds up, it increasingly abolishes distance as a constraint on its reproduction, resulting in a uniform spatiality where we are all equidistant to one another" (Kavanagh 31). As an extended exploration of this theme, which has operated to a greater or lesser extent in the background of many of his novels up to this point, *Cosmopolis* therefore represents a sort of culmination of this line of thinking[6], although as the dominant sociopolitical paradigm it is of course impossible to eliminate it entirely from the field. The broader trends Merola and Kavanagh indicate here are in fact inseparable from DeLillo's increasing interest in the subjective experience of time, especially in the added context of trauma which comes surging to the fore after 9/11.

Where *The Body Artist* already demonstrated DeLillo's desire to represent the nuance of embodied experience (in place) through a phenomenologically-attuned fiction as brought into sharp relief by the onset of personal trauma and grief, 2007's *Falling Man* goes beyond his 2001 essay "In the Ruins of the Future" to search for an adequate response to the traumatic attacks on the World Trade Center. While similarly to *Cosmopolis* the novel failed to gather a positive collective response from its early reviewers, it is in fact a powerful exploration of the personal side of trauma, including especially the effect this has on the subjective, embodied experience of place; as Hamilton Carroll argues, *Falling Man* "is not a novel about September 11 so much as a novel about what the events that go by that name might mean for those who survived them" (110). This focus on the personal experience of trauma is what disappointed

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[6] I here temporarily ignore the recurrence of the significance of money to time in a different form in *Zero K,* partially because *Zero K* arguably represents a different sort of culmination, a return to every theme that DeLillo has dealt with in his almost fifty years of writing; see the following chapter for more detail.

those who expected DeLillo to come out with a solvent for the cultural trauma of the event. In her article on "9/11 and the Psychic Trauma Novel," Sonia Baelo-Allué helpfully clarifies the difference between the two: whereas "cultural trauma occurs when members of a community feel they have been subjected to a dreadful event that affects their group consciousness to the extent that it marks their memories and changes their future identity in fundamental ways" (64), Baelo-Allué invokes Cathy Caruth to situate individual, psychic trauma as "a wound inflicted upon the mind that breaks the victim's experience of time, self and the world" (64). As Caruth explains in her book *Unclaimed Experience*, personal trauma is marked by an impossibility of representation of an event to the person who experiences it, where the event "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (4). This inexpressibility, a break in time, self and world, as well as the return of the event in nightmare and repetitive action, all find their correlative in *Falling Man*.

In general, Baelo-Allué argues, "the literary techniques that tend to recur in trauma narratives mirror, at a formal level, the effects of trauma and include intertextuality, repetition and fragmentation" (69). As a case in point, Jenn Brandt argues that, in *Falling Man,* "the reader becomes actively engaged with the post-9/11 pathos DeLillo is cultivating in the text" through the novel's "mimicry" of trauma (587), which she supports by citing Kristiaan Versluys: "the reading experience itself mimics the violent lurching back and forth between the (imperfectly engaged) present and (the vividly relived) past, which is typical of traumatic memory" (cited in Brandt 586-7). Thus what DeLillo accomplishes with the individual characters – Linda Kauffman points out that "Keith's condition is precarious, because he is manifesting all the symptoms […]: psychic splintering, paranoia, emptiness, and humiliation" ("World" 653) – is, importantly, echoed in the text's formal structure. Kauffman herself points out that the "novel's circular structure compresses the action of the novel into a few minutes between the moment the plane approaches the north tower and the moment Keith stumbles onto the street, miraculously alive" ("World" 652) – although, as will be seen presently, this is not the only interpretation of *Falling Man's* formal design. The slow progress evinced in this circular structure, which defers typical narrative progression, echoes a strategy for an individual response and a denial of the need to progress forward blindly into the future, as it is this attitude which – as DeLillo suggests in "In the Ruins of the Future" – led to the attacks in the first place. I am therefore in accord with Katrina Harack's broad argument for the novel that DeLillo here shows "how concepts of body, space, memory, and time changed after the

towers fell, by implicitly critiquing aesthetic approaches to the event, and by questioning how we might move forward" (320). James Gourley similarly argues for such a fundamental shift in the wake of the event:

> in *Falling Man*, the fact that the traumatic events of the September 11 attacks are replayed and returned to over and over again implies not only the power of the event: crucially it proposes a complete reconsideration of the nature of time. Time, after the September 11 attacks, can no longer by simple and linear. Instead the absolute power of the event, and indeed the compulsion to talk, think, and write about the event, renders time nonlinear. Past, present, and future coalesce into one multidimensional phenomenon. (83)

While it would be mistaken to argue that September 11th did not have a profound effect upon the general perception of time within American society, it is important to remember that DeLillo was already on the path towards an exploration of nonlinear time and this coalescing of past, present and future, which Gourley here signals, long before the fateful attacks took place. Overall, in terms of DeLillo's representation of the experience of time and space, it is the impact of this trauma on both a personal and cultural level which is what is the most obviously represented by the 2007 novel.

In general, then, in the wake of this contextualization of DeLillo's varying, novelistic treatments of time from *The Body Artist* to *Falling Man* – as embodied, as compressed, as fragmented by trauma – it is also useful to remember that DeLillo's interest in time transcends the incidental to span a career-long interest in temporality, including both its subjective experience as well as its theoretical reality. Writing in the pre-*Zero K* context of 2012, Peter Boxall argues that "DeLillo's novels of the twenty-first century—the first novels, perhaps, of DeLillo's own 'late' phase—evince an extraordinary lack of spatial or temporal awareness, a sudden and drastic failure of the bonds that hold us in time and space, an unraveling of what both David Bell and Zygmunt Bauman think of as 'bound time.'" ("Late" 689–90). Randy Laist's signaling of an ontological shift in DeLillo's late writing in his discussion of DeLillo's 2005 play *Love-Lies-Bleeding* is further helpful to emphasize the importance of the phenomenological gaze to this project: DeLillo's "twenty-first century novels follow a trajectory of phenomenological reduction, focusing in on the minutest flickers and nuances of perception. Even when these novels point towards mass-cultural subjects […] DeLillo's stylistic thrust has been inward and minimalist" (157). This general focus – on the "failure of the bonds that hold us in time and space" and on the "inward and minimalist" style used to represent it – is, when combined with a mathematical interest in theories of time as well as the

sharp increase in importance given to the effects of trauma in light of 9/11, the context which must be brought to bear upon any attempt to understand the seemingly sparse text of *Point Omega*.

5.2 Quantum DeLillo

As should be clear from the variety of readings of DeLillo's post-*Underworld* novels discussed above, the specific arguments one can make regarding temporality alone through a reading of DeLillo's late texts are varied, and *Point Omega* is a case in point; this is all the more true due to its refusal to provide any narrative resolution. As an example, while in general terms some take DeLillo at his word that the novel is "not at all political" (Cowart "Lady" 42),[7] others argue that it "tacitly responds [to] the September 11th attacks" (Naydan 95). Specifically in terms of the issue of time, the variety in approaches are a testament to the novel's richness. Kate Marshall, Bradley Fest and Peter Vermeulen all argue in their own ways that the novel's "peculiar temporality [puts it] in dialogue with discourses of cultural geology and the Anthropocene" (Vermeulen 75)[8], whereas Scott Dill focuses on the novel's use of the "slow time" of waiting in the *saeculum* (174) and both Gourley and Maciej Maslowski unveil different aspects of its engagement with the possibilities inherent in cinematic time[9]. The fact that all of these readings bear scrutiny is a validation of DeLillo's thematic range over the course of his career. Therefore, rather than attempt to corral the novel into one of the frameworks suggested by this variety of readings or indeed to impose a new one, the purpose of this chapter is to invoke the chronotope – aided by knowledge of DeLillo's research interests and deeper exploration of the novel's intertexts – in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of what *Point Omega* accomplishes.

The novel itself consists of two short sections, titled "Anonymity 1" and "Anonymity 2," which stand on either end of the longer main narrative set in the Anza-Borrego desert of

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[7] The statement that the novel is "not at all political" is one DeLillo makes in an interview, and which Cowart cites in order to argue that we "should take him at his word" on the matter. ("Lady" 42).
[8] Marshall's article "What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene? American Fiction in Geological Time" was introduced in the previous chapter, wherein she places *Point Omega* in a group of novels which present "geologically inscribed histories of the future" (524). See also Fest (2016).
[9] Gourley puts DeLillo's novel into dialogue with the film theory of Arnheim and Eisenstein (90) whereas Maslowski convincingly argues for the influence of Antonioni, especially 1960's *L'avventura* (198–208).

southern California.[10] The "Anonymity" sections follow an unnamed man who attends a fictionalized version of the Douglas Gordon exhibit *24 Hour Psycho*, which as per its title slows the classic Hitchcock film *Psycho* (1960) down to a frame-rate which extends its two-hour runtime to twenty-four. The novel's situating of the exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in September of 2006 corresponds to its actual presence there at that time, as DeLillo indicates in an "Acknowledgment" on the novel's final page, and it is known from various interviews that DeLillo himself was fascinated enough by the piece to return several times.[11] The "Anonymity" sections indeed portray a man obsessed with the exhibition's "radically altered plane of time" (*Point Omega* 15), and take place on September 3rd, 2006 and September 4th, 2006, respectively. In this sense the linearity of the novel's timeline is broken, as the entire middle section in the desert takes place at an unclarified, *later* point in time. The desert narrative features an elderly academic named Richard Elster, who has recently been involved in the Iraq war as a "defense intellectual" (35), and is narrated in the first-person by a younger man named Jim Finley, there because he quite obsessively wishes to make a film of Elster talking about his experience against the backdrop of a blank wall[12]. Elster and Finley mainly just talk, with Elster waxing philosophical about the nature of time and humanity, until they are joined by the older man's daughter, Jessie. The reader learns that Jessie was sent to the desert by her mother to gain some separation from a man she's been seeing, who the reader later suspects from the contents of "Anonymity 2" is the anonymous protagonist of these museum scenes. Jessie's sudden disappearance some days later undermines all Elster's philosophizing as he is stricken intensely with grief, and eventually the two men leave the desert with never a real clue as to where she might have vanished.

It is my argument that due to the novel's own structure there are two distinct (though interwoven) levels of analysis which must take place: the first is on the macro level of chronotopic structure, and the second focused on the specifics of the central narrative. While the bulk of the novel and its main (non)event of Jessie's disappearance take place in the desert,

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[10] These sections comprise 16 pages, 105 pages, and 21 pages, respectively.

[11] See DeLillo's 2010 interview with Thomsa DePietro: The *24 Hour Psycho* exhibit "seemed to me a kind of meditation on such subjects as time and motion, what we see, how we see, what we miss seeing under normal circumstances. I returned the next day and then again a few days later, staying a little longer each time and beginning to realize by the third or fourth visit that a piece of fiction might spring from this experience" ("A Conversation")

[12] This set-up makes another clear intertext for the novel Errol Morris' 2003 film *The Fog of War;* the relationship between Elster and Robert McNamara's interview in that film has been discussed by scholars such as Bieger (2018), Cowart (2012), Melnyczuk (2010) and Shipe (2016).

the short sections on other side of this main one and the nonlinear structure they present make them fundamental to a complete reading of the novel, despite their sometime classification as merely “bookends” (Boxall, “Leap” 527) or “prologue and epilogue” (Bieger 11). In terms of DeLillo and structure, Crystal Alberts relevantly argues that, in *Cosmopolis,* “DeLillo returns to mathematical tropes and formal structures, like those presented in *Ratner’s Star*, and expands them to reflect more recent developments in science and technology to contemplate time” as well as to highlight “the unpredictable, uncertain, interconnected, and illusory nature of the contemporary world” (6). Indeed, DeLillo’s well-documented interest in structure – LeClair’s 1987 study *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* is an early case in point – arguably reached its height with *Ratner’s Star*, but has continued to play a role in all his writing, as Alberts’ article works to prove. DeLillo’s statement in an interview regarding the 1976 novel usefully shows the extent to which the author considers structure:

> It seems to me that *Ratner's Star* is a book which is almost all structure. The structure of the book *is* the book. […] I was trying to build a novel which was not only about mathematics to some extent but which itself would become a piece of mathematics. It would be a book which embodied pattern and order and harmony, which is one of the traditional goals of pure mathematics. (“An Outsider” 68, emphasis in original)

In the post-millennial context, this return to mathematical structures signaled by Alberts in *Cosmopolis* has been argued to apply to *Falling Man* as well; while as I mentioned above many have discussed its looped structure, where the ending brings it back to the moment just *before* the novel begins, Jenn Brandt makes a compelling case for the 2007 novel to be alternatively read as inhering the structure of the Möbius strip. She employs the figure to “demonstrate the ways in which narrative structure, space, and the bodies of characters function in *Falling Man* to reveal the futility of binary logic as it relates to identity, language, and nation in response to terror” (580-1), arguing that the novel’s return to the beginning is best understood in terms of the Möbius strip’s impossibility of ever returning to the same point twice. It is with these readings of the preceding novels in mind that I argue that this exploration of structure also extends into *Point Omega*, which must be therefore held up alongside the novel’s treatment of the topical theme of trauma as well as DeLillo’s equal and consistent interests in phenomenological observation, metaphysical thought, and the cinematic image. Further, while these latter elements are all related in some way to temporality, one must also take into account the trajectory developed in the preceding chapters, in which DeLillo explores the social alienation inherent in the conflated pursuit of capital and war as in tension with the opposing

desire for community and a sense of the sacred. Such a wide range of motifs may seem excessive to attribute to such a spare text as *Point Omega*, but upon close examination they are all in fact relevant.

Regarding DeLillo's interest in scientific theories of the universe, Crystal Alberts suggests that

> In the decades since Einstein's death, scientists have not satisfactorily resolved the apparent irreconcilable differences between the physics of the super- and subatomic worlds. More than one has attempted to unite them through, among others, string theory and parallel universe (multi-verse) theory—both of which DeLillo was aware of. But, while scientific proponents of these theories must prove that they satisfactorily meet accepted criteria, DeLillo is not subject to these standards and, as such, is free to present what might [be] considered thought experiments in his work, where behaviors of the quantum world creep into the super-atomic one that we experience every day. (11)

Her suggestion that DeLillo, as a writer of fiction, is not constrained by laws classical or quantum and the resulting capacity for "thought experiments" this permits is important to keep in mind. In addition to the research conducted by Alberts, Samuel Coale's 2011 article on "DeLillo's Entanglements with Quantum Theory" similarly proves through investigation of the DeLillo Archives that DeLillo's long-standing engagement with current events in mathematics and physics research plays a role in his thinking, and therefore in his fiction. For his part, Coale indicates that DeLillo returns repeatedly to a line from physicist Hermann Weyl in his notes, which reads "The objective world simply *is*: it does not *happen*," implying that "it is our *perception* which makes things happen, that creates a narrative, which is based on and in our sense of time's passing. Narrative resides in human consciousness, in our perception of the world, not in the world itself" (Coale 273, my emphasis). A line is therefore established in terms of this fictionalizing of quantum theory and cosmological phenomena from *Ratner's Star* (where the references are self-explicit) to *Underworld, The Body Artist,* and *Cosmopolis*,[13] and its thus no stretch to posit in *Point Omega* a continuation of this experimentation. Alberts in fact indicates, rather crucially for my argument, that two of DeLillo's main references during the writing of the latter two novels were Richard Morris' 1985 *Time's Arrow: Scientific Attitudes Towards Time* and Julian Barbour's 1999 *The End of Time: The Next Revolution in*

[13] See Coale (2011) for DeLillo's notes regarding *Underworld* and *The Body Artist* and Alberts (2016) for both the latter and *Cosmopolis.*

Physics (4). It is this more recent work by Barbour, which propounds the theory that time in fact does not exist as such, that I wish to explore as one of the significant intertexts for DeLillo's 2010 novel.

Barbour, a British physicist, wrote *The End of Time* to present "the argument from physics" that "if we could see the universe as it is, we should see that it is static. Nothing moves, nothing changes." This is followed by his outlining, "through the notion of time capsules, a theory of how a static universe can nevertheless appear to teem with motion and change" (39). In this understanding of the universe, the linearity of time's arrow becomes "redundant" (34), and an "alternative picture, suggested by quantum mechanics," is presented, in which "[t]here are no paths with unique starting points conceived as creation events. Indeed, there are no paths at all" (50). Integral to this vision is Barbour's explanation for the perception of time's passing, whose lack is of course difficult for the mind to grasp given the combined effect of our (apparent) perception of physical motion as well as the nature of what he calls "records," which includes the objective (from geological strata to handwritten notes) and the subjective, i.e. memory. Barbour argues that these "things we call records are real enough, and so is their structure. They are the genuine cause of our belief in time. Our only mistake is the interpretation: time capsules have a cause, but time is no part of it" (31). This way of thinking is predicated on the idea that there are many "Nows" – that there are only "instants" – which is itself intimately connected to the "many worlds" argument of physics.[14] As Barbour indicates,

> In [this] timeless many-instants interpretation, […] Our past is just another world. This is the message that quantum mechanics and the deep timeless structure of general relativity seem to be telling us. If you accept that you experienced this morning, that commits you to other worlds. All the instants we have experienced are other worlds, for they are not the one we are in now. (324)

Given DeLillo's earlier repetition of Weyl's statement in his notes – that the "objective world simply *is*: it does not *happen,*" it is no surprise that he is interested in Barbour's book: both speak to the idea that "narrative resides in human consciousness, in our perception of the world, not in the world itself" (Coale 273). What I wish to suggest at this point is that DeLillo found in the experience of Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* an analogue for this theory of a timeless universe, using the parallel to artistically explore the relationship in a way only fiction allows.

[14] For a more recent overview of the ramifications of the many-worlds interpretation of quantum physics, see Sean Carroll's *Something Deeply Hidden: Quantum Worlds and the Emergence of Spacetime* (2019).

This argument is more substantial when considered in light of Barbour's description of how it is possible that the brain might perceive motion where there is in fact none. He argues:

> I suggest that the brain in any instant always contains, as it were, several stills of a movie. They correspond to different positions of objects we think we see moving. The idea is that it is this collection of 'stills', all present in any one instant, that stands in psychophysical parallel with the motion we actually see. The brain 'plays the movie for us', rather as an orchestra plays the notes on the score. (29)

In this sense, the creation of history through the linking up of what Barbour calls "records" represents a macro version of this same phenomenon; human perception creates a narrative through a series of linked "images." One way of interpreting this theory would therefore suggest that if one were able to slow things down enough it would be possible to see time as it really is, at least as according to Barbour. The correlation is that it is precisely this potential which seems to be signaled by the anonymous viewer and the "radically altered plane of time" (*Point Omega* 15) of Gordon's exhibit in the novel's "Anonymity" sections. *Point Omega's* narrator observes that the time of the slowed movie is "like bricks in a wall, clearly countable, not like the flight of an arrow or a bird" (6). The countability of the bricks suggests the timeless instants outlined by Barbour, who of course specifically opposes this conception of time to that which sees it as like the "flight of an arrow." This is then reinforced in the narrator's direct conflation of time and film: "What he was watching seemed pure film, pure time" (7).

5.3 'Anonymity' and the Event Horizon

When one approaches these "Anonymity" sections with a mind to the chronotopic, what the dark, silent room with the slowed movie screening suggests is therefore a correlation with a world straining to reduce the supposed flow of time to the absolute stillness which Barbour's theory would suggest lies beneath; Barbour writes that the "notion of time capsules may help us […] to see perfect stillness as the reality behind the turbulence we experience" (32). The tendency for DeLillo's chronotopes to influence the characters therein applies here as well – eventually, the anonymous man's "visits to the gallery mingled seamlessly in memory. He could not recall on which day he'd watched a particular scene or how many times he'd watched certain scenes" (*Point Omega* 128). While the novel's ending and its implications will be returned to in due course, it is important to further situate this anonymous watcher in his chronotopic environment. Simply put, the man is obsessed, completely absorbed by the

installation to the point that he returns every day and, as indicated above, loses track of any sense of time. Another line in the second Anonymity section tells that “He was in place, as always, his place, in body contact with the north wall” (128), demonstrating in addition to temporal assimilation an embodied, place-based attachment to the installation’s chronotope as well. His disconnection from the reality of the shared world of human society – which eventually leads to his implied comparison to Hitchcock’s titular psychopath – is indicated in various ways; comparing himself to a French couple who enters the exhibit, for example, the man thinks “They were outside him, people with lives, it was a question of actuality” (140-1). A question of “actuality” translates to a question of being real, or even just *being*, and the man is thus presented as distinctly – even ontologically – alien.

Understanding the character of the anonymous man as alien is a useful way of looking at it, in that the man emerges as one of the novel’s various analogues for the correlation between processes of abstraction, obsession, alienation, and violence, all of which are recurring issues in DeLillo’s fiction. Linking all of these is a sense of remove, of a distancing from an embodied, shared existence of the world; this is suggested by lines such as the following from “Anonymity 1”: “Everybody was watching something. He was watching the two men, they were watching the screen, Anthony Perkins at his peephole was watching Janet Leigh undress. Nobody was watching him. This was the ideal world as he might have drawn it in his mind” (10). For one, referring to the actors by their real names rather than that of their characters is a small detail which emphasizes that the action of the film pushes on the boundaries of reality. Secondly, DeLillo here makes the reader complicit by placing them in a similar position as the final watcher in this chain. The sense of complicity imposed upon the reader with this watching and the violence it connects to – through both the subsequent murder of *Psycho’s* Marion Crane as well as Jessie’s disappearance in the novel – has been commented upon variously by critics; Brian Chappell, for example, describes the novel as a “dense meditation on the nature of time, violence, and moral complicity” (3).[15]

The idea of distancing which DeLillo presents to the reader is explored through a combination of the novel’s three male characters. The anonymous man is attracted to the film’s “abstract moments, all form and scale, the carpet pattern, the grain of the floorboards,” which bind “him to total alertness, eye and mind” (*Point Omega* 127-8). Beyond the man’s obsessive

[15] See also Cowart (2012), Ingram (2019) and Melnyczuk (2010) on the question of complicity with the Iraq war the novel suggests.

viewing of the film and attraction to its "abstract moments," he also reveals after obtaining Jessie's phone number in the second "Anonymity" section that while waiting to call her in "two days, three days" time he will "sit and think about what they'd said, what she looked like, where she might live, how she might spend her time" (144-5). Beyond the increasingly suggestive connection to *Pyscho's* Norman Bates, Liliana Naydan effectively outlines the way this obsessive behavior portrayed here is linked to fundamentalism in the novel as a whole, referring at one point to the way "the unnamed man at the wall's narrow perspective of seeing 'a revelation' in '[e]very action' in *24 Hour Psycho* is evocative of ways by which fundamentalists flatten existence and see the stuff of Revelation in all history as it evolves around them" (101). While yet to broach the main narrative and the similar manifestations of the linked qualities of obsession, abstraction and violence to be found there in the forms of Jim Finley and Richard Elster, what this discussion of the unnamed man of the "Anonymity" sections sets up is my structural argument for this text.

What has been established thus far is that the joint chronotope of "Anonymity 1" and "Anonymity 2" is one inflected by both the potential of cinematic time to reflect the possibility of a timeless universe as presented by Barbour in *The End of Time*, as well as the sort of multi-faceted distancing embodied in the unnamed viewer of Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*. Though of course fundamentally different, there is therefore a sort of similarity to the chronotope of "The Island" in *The Names*, which was also centered in a sense of temporality as removed from the flow of linear time, from the arrow of history, though in that case it did not have so much to do with a slowing down as with an isolating inwardness. However, whereas it might be argued that *The Names'* own structure in the end reasserted the role of narrative through its linearity and thematic revindication of storytelling's potential, *Point Omega* does something quite different and more enigmatic. The way into this difference is provided again by Julian Barbour, who in his discussion of the timeless universe is led at multiple points to discuss black holes.

Referencing physicist Kip Thorne's *Black Holes and Time Warps*, Barbour refers to the fact that "in the singularity the laws of quantum gravity destroy time" (cited in Barbour 336) in order to advance his argument that "the evidence, as I read it, is that timelessness permeates the whole universe, not just the vicinity of singularities" (337). Thus there is an analogy set up between the timeless universe and the singularity, or the black hole; the black hole represents a currently accepted phenomenon in which the case Barbour makes about the entire universe has an observable correlative. While the two topics – black holes and the timeless universe – seem to be of a categorically different nature, the leap made here by Barbour is one which I

also argue is made by the structure of *Point Omega.* In other words, I argue that the representational slowing of time to approach the "perfect stillness" (32) of a timeless universe found in the Anonymity sections (and all the thematic baggage that goes with it) suggests the status of an event horizon, the contours of which trace the outline of a black hole. Correspondingly, then, it is useful to explore the possibility that the central narrative set in the desert is in a certain sense a representational black hole, at the center of which is the true singularity into which Jessie disappears without a trace.

While I will support the argument for this general event horizon / black hole structure in a thematic way, it would be baseless to do so if there were not also structural clues that this might be the case. That being said, its important to point out that the argument being made is not for a simplistic correlation in which the "Anonymity" sections equal the event horizon and the desert narrative equals the black hole, but rather that DeLillo plays with this idea on multiple levels. In his 2012 book *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Dylan Trigg includes an engaging chapter in which he applies the metaphor of "the event horizon to the human body" in order to "attend to the body memory of trauma" (233). The metaphorical discussion of the event horizon / black hole relationship therein is therefore relevant to the present discussion; Trigg writes:

> Once material enters the event horizon it never returns, is never seen, and no longer affects the external viewer. Rather, through being assimilated by the massive gravitational field of the black hole, into which even light is pulled, all materiality is reduced to a homogeneous void. Moreover, since no light can withstand the pull of the black hole, thus concealing itself in deep space, the light surrounding the event horizon on the other hand assumes a privileged role for the viewer. In this way, the whirlpool of light and gas associated with the black hole is nothing more than a symptom of its core, framed by the border of the event horizon. As a living, breathing void, therefore, the core of the black hole is beyond space and time. All communication with the core is prohibited, all theory speculative. (233-4)

If we follow this metaphor of the event horizon into the text of *Point Omega*, DeLillo's insertion of the drawn-out narrative of the days in the desert between the short "Anonymity" sections – which the reader knows take place *before* the desert narrative, on the exact dates of September 3rd and September 4th of 2006, respectively – provides these short framing sections with the "privileged role" Trigg indicates of defining the spacetime anomaly situated between them. Importantly, before broaching the thematic, the argument that these sections represent an event horizon is suggested in the first place by the text in a formal sense, through their

respective transitions. That is, both the transition from "Anonymity 1" to the beginning of the main narrative and then from the ending of the main narrative to the opening of "Anonymity 2" suggest this connection, that there is a bleeding over from one to the other.

"Anonymity 1" closes with the narrator describing the unnamed man's reflection on what is real, suggesting a dialectic between physical reality and the movie screening: "It felt real, the pace was paradoxically real, […] things barely happening, cause and effect so drastically drawn apart that it seemed real to him, the way all the things in the physical world we don't understand are said to be real" (18). This reflection on what is real – where "all the physical things in the world we don't understand" bring to mind phenomena such as the black hole – then leads to the final lines of the section, which read: "The door slid open and there was a stir of mild traffic at the far end of the floor […], an intimation of life-beyond, world-beyond, the strange bright fact that breathes and eats out there, the thing that's not the movies" (19). Contrasted with the breakdown between "the physical world" and the "paradoxically real" world of the film screening, the final line's "world-beyond" is explicitly correlated to that "thing that's not the movies." The reader is then taken directly to the desert with the main narrative's opening lines: "The true life is not reducible to words spoken or written, not by anyone, ever" (21). The direct juxtaposition is therefore "the thing that's not the movies / The true life" (19/21), implying an inverted narrative continuity even where on the surface level there does not seem to be any (different characters, different place). The contrast between the world – the chronotope – of the film screening and this "world-beyond" thus returns: here in the main narrative, the reader is promised insight into "the true life," and is thus wont to dismiss the unreality of "Anonymity 1" and its unnamed man as a strange aside. However, a subtle hint reinforces the link between the two, when we read in the following sentence that "the true life takes place when we're alone, [in] *the submicroscopic moments*" (21, my emphasis) – the "submicroscopic moments" further suggest the slowed time of the Gordon screening.

When the desert narrative winds around to its conclusion one hundred pages later, the transition to "Anonymity 2" makes this relatively subtle relationship much more explicit. The narrative ends with Jim Finley and Richard Elster returning from their extended stay in the desert, both traumatized (though Elster much more so) by the disappearance of Jessie. Finley narrates the final lines: "I thought of my apartment, how distant it would seem even when I walked in the door. My life at a glance, everything there, music, movies, books, the bed and desk, the seared enamel around the burners on the stove. I thought of the telephone ringing as I entered" (126). "Anonymity 2" then opens as such: "Norman Bates, scary bland, is putting

down the phone" (127). Here the text belies the earlier implication that the first "Anonymity" was a strange aside, for the desert narrative is wrapped neatly back up to spill over directly into the second. The much more explicit linking in this second instance, found in the inverse ringing of Finley's phone and Norman Bates then putting one down, solidifies the argument that these are more than merely "prologue" and "epilogue," seeing as the textual cues indicate otherwise. This being established, if the relationship is to be understood as metaphorically approximate to the "Anonymity" sections as joint event horizon and the desert narrative as singularity, it is important to unpack thematically why this may be the case.

If the "Anonymity" sections suggest an event horizon, then the argument goes that their contours inform what might lie on the other side. However, whereas Trigg signals that "once material enters the event horizon it never returns, is never seen, and no longer affects the external viewer" (*Memory* 233), here DeLillo gives the reader an extended look at what it may look like on this other side, so to speak. What I wish to argue that this central narrative represents is a double correlation with the black hole: firstly, as a deeper exploration of the traits signaled above with regards to the unnamed man – indeed that both Elster and Finley are complicit with the anonymous figure's suggested violence – and how the idea of a black hole emerges from this discussion of abstraction, obsession, violence and trauma. Secondly, there is an intertextual dialogue played out in the novel between these metaphors of quantum physics (both black holes and the timeless universe of Barbour) and the theological/philosophical theories of Teilhard de Chardin signaled by the novel's title. Similarly to the preceding chapters, close attention to the text is the backbone of this analysis, here regarding the characters' interactions through the desert chronotope and that of the house set therein.

5.4 War, Abstraction, and the 'force of geologic time' in the Desert

The desert in this novel again emerges as a chronotope which characters seek out in their personal projects of transformation. It is established early on that Richard Elster is in the desert, "out beyond cities and scattered towns," to "feel the body itself, reclaim the body from what he called the nausea of News and Traffic," to "eat, sleep and sweat, […] do nothing, sit and think" (*Point Omega* 22). Elster's project thus appears to be related to a search for what he calls "the true life" in the section's opening lines, which takes place "when we're alone, thinking, feeling, lost in memory, dreamily self-aware" (21). Elster is generally seeking to

break away from his involvement in the broader world of geopolitics, for though he is an academic, he was directly involved in the Iraq War for two years as a "defense intellectual" (35), recruited to "conceptualize" the war, "apply overarching ideas and principles to such matters as troop deployment and counter insurgency" (23-4). As Finley relates, now, in the desert, he'd "exchanged all that for space and time. These were things he seemed to absorb through his pores. There were the distances that enfolded every feature of the landscape and there was the force of geologic time, out there somewhere, the string grids of excavators searching for weathered bone" (24). Some critics, such as David Cowart, read in the novel an explicit authorial awareness on DeLillo's part: Elster's "Delphic pronouncements, hovering at the verge of incoherence," are a "parody [of] the studied indirection of the DeLillo style. […] With this burlesque, DeLillo reminds himself not to indulge in the vice of those who, achieving some prominence or popularity, begin to deliver themselves of opinions more or less remote from actual expertise" ("Lady" 41). While I would be hesitant to make such a strong claim as this, the above passage with its direct reference to Elster's seeking of "space and time" and the "force of geologic time" (*Point Omega* 24) does read as a self-aware commentary on his more subtle use of the desert throughout his career. In this sense I would agree that the novel presents a questioning of associations which DeLillo himself has made over the years, and indeed which this thesis has gone at lengths to unveil. In typical DeLillo fashion, however, the answer will not be an easy confirmation nor denial of such associations.

Similarly then to the cult in *The Names*, Elster sees in the landscape a suggestion of ontological openness, onto which he believes he can therefore impose his will and rewrite the state of things. However, as in *The Names*, this waxing philosophic must be taken by the reader with a grain of salt. Just as cult member Avtar Singh's discourse on the "self-referring" world (*Names* 297) – which reads as remarkably similar to certain postmodern writings on contemporaneity – is undermined by the cult's flawed approach and ultimate dissolution, Elster's discourse is likewise subverted by his actions and the course the narrative takes. This puts to question the relationship between the desert as a chronotope and how the characters understand it, which is an important distinction to make in a novel as self-reflexive as *Point Omega*. The desert in the first part of this main narrative is generally only described obliquely, and usually in relation to the old house the characters occupy there. Finley, the section's narrator, writes that Elster had "invited me to join him here, old house, underfurnished, somewhere south of nowhere in the Sonoran Desert or maybe it was the Mojave Desert or another desert altogether" (25). The place is thus indistinct: "There was the house and then

nothing but distances, not vistas or sweeping sightlines but only distances" (22). The nondescript quality of the desert will remain until after Jessie's disappearance, and this general indistinctiveness is in fact a reflection of the two men who are at first alone there. It is also what allows Elster to speak so confidently what Cowart calls his "Delphic pronouncements" ("Lady" 41), which though at times containing the ring of truth are also undermined by his general unawareness.

As an example, Elster says such things as "Time slows down when I'm here. Time becomes blind. I feel the landscape more than see it. I never know what day it is. […] I don't get old here" (30). Elster's suggestion of escape from the forward flow of linear time and thus a veiled hinting at immortality is a part of his desire to leverage the desert to his own desires, forecasting a more intricate such project in *Zero K*. Further, in lines such as this a connection between the slowed-down time of "Anonymity's" *24 Hour Psycho* and this main narrative is suggested. However, in the context of the eventual correlation between the slowed time of the chronotope of the museum exhibit and the disappearance of his daughter, Elster emerges as the one who is in fact blind. A telling example of this blindness occurs later, after Jessie's arrival. "Look at all this," Elster says, "not looking at it, the landscape and sky, which he'd indicated with a backwards sweep of the arm. We didn't look at it either. 'Day turns to night eventually but it's a matter of light and darkness, it's not time passing, mortal time. There's none of the usual terror. It's different here, time is enormous, that's what I feel here, palpably'" (56). Elster's use of the desert to support his conception of time as "enormous" and not "mortal" is belied by his refusal to actually see the landscape itself, and in fact represents a fateful misreading of the chronotope.[16] The eventual result, of course, is to put to the test his confident assertion that "there's none of the usual terror" to be found there.

The house set in the desert is described in more detail than the landscape which surrounds it, and it is through both a look at the house as well as certain clues Finley provides that the reader is able to understand what might be called Elster's Aristotelian *hamartia*.

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[16] This is not to say that characters can ever actually become aware of the chronotopes in which they exist, or through which they pass. Bakhtin explicitly states that "the relationships themselves that exist *among* chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships that exist *within* chronotopes" – this chronotopic "dialogue cannot enter into the world represented in the work" ("FTC" 252, original emphasis). It is perhaps similar to the joke David Foster Wallace used in a letter to DeLillo to describe his take on *The Body Artist*: "two young fish are swimming along and meet an old fish and he says 'morning boys how's the water?' as he passes, and the two young fish look at each other and go 'What the fuck is water?' (quoted in Alberts 4) – a chronotope for a character is like the water for these young fish.

DeLillo's career-long tendency to explore character through enclosed spaces – his famous men in small rooms[17] – recurs here with Elster and the house; however, whereas Owen Brademas "counting the cracks in the wall" (*Names* 275) of his room in Lahore demonstrates a (chronotopically expressed) awareness of his condition, Elster remains blind to the implications. At one point, he says to Finley, "The house is mine now and its rotting away but let it" (*Point Omega* 30). Further, Finley describes the house as such: it "was a sad hybrid. There was a corrugated metal roof above a clapboard exterior with an unfinished stonework path out front and a tacked-on deck jutting from one side. This is where we sat through his hushed hour, a torchlit sky, the closeness of hills barely visible at high white noon" (23). These descriptions of the place as a "sad hybrid" and Elster's conscious decision to let it "rot away" are eventually seen to correspond to him as a character: an intellectual futilely caught between the effort to "conceptualize" and the brutal truth of war – whose delivery of death negates all theorizing – might produce such a "sad hybrid." Moreover, reinforcing this character-to-place correspondence, the decision to let the house rot away is reflected in the way Elster pays no attention to his own body: "He cooked for us every night, insisted on making dinner, showing no sign of the wariness people his age tend to feel about certain foods and how they affect the body that consumes them" (40). This inattention to the state of his own body[18] as correlated with the "rotting away" house is indicative, especially in the context of embodied views of human consciousness. Elster's neglect of the corporeal corresponds to an overemphasis on the human capacity for cognition and reason, following a long Western tradition of prioritizing the mind over the body, indeed of falsely separating the two.

This overemphasis on the power of reason, associated thus with the neglect of the body, is bound up with Elster's eventual involvement in the military invasion of Iraq. In another instance in which his discourse hints at arguments DeLillo himself might make, Elster proclaims that "war creates a closed world and not only for those in combat but for the plotters, the strategists. Except their war is in acronyms, projections, contingencies, methodologies" (35). He highlights then that this means that "their war is abstract. They think they're sending

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[17] In a 1982 interview, DeLillo states "It's a way to take psychology out of a character's mind and into the room he occupies. I try to examine psychological states by looking at people in rooms, objects in rooms" ("An Interview" 30).

[18] Another example: Elster "examined the processed cheese that Jessie had bought on our last trip to town. He said it was colored with spent uranium and then he ate it, slopped with mustard, between slices of prison bread, and so did I" (71).

an army into a place on a map" (35). It is ironic that Elster correctly identifies the abstract aspect of war here without realizing that war itself is the result of processes of abstraction. The assertion that "war creates a closed world" in fact chimes with what I have argued 1983's "Human Moments in World War III" represents. Elster is able to logically see this with his powers of abstract thought, but his inability to take the connection beyond this specific situation to include both himself and the problem of war in general – not to mention its synergistic relationship with the global system of financial capital – is, I argue, related to his inattention to his own body, and to his concrete surroundings. Finley narrates at one point that "Elster tended to be everywhere, in all four corners of a room, gathering impressions of himself" (40). Rather than time being blind, as he earlier asserts, it is the man himself who is unable to see.

This troubled relationship to war is solidified when Finley questions him on his involvement, on whether he considers himself to be "in exile" (29). While the reader might here expect Elster, who claims that rather than being in exile he is instead on a "spiritual retreat" (29) to repent his involvement in the war effort, the elder man actually doubles down, stating:

> I still want a war. A great power has to act. We were struck hard. We need to retake the future. The force of will, the sheer visceral need. We can't let others shape our world, our minds. All they have are old dead despotic traditions. We have a living history and I thought I would be in the middle of it. But in those rooms, with those men, it was all priorities, statistics, evaluations, rationalizations. (38)

The similarity of this language to DeLillo's discourse in "In the Ruins of the Future" – his December 2001 response to 9/11 – as well as the eventual *denouement* of the novel support Cowart's argument that in *Point Omega* "DeLillo presents […] an indirect anatomy of Americans' acquiescence to the Iraq War and its spurious rationale. Whatever the degree of deception on the part of Bush and company, many a 'tribal elder' must feel the retrospective guilt of self-deception" ("Lady" 46). Especially striking in Elster's comment is the "need to retake the future" from the "old dead despotic traditions" of the attackers, as compared to DeLillo's similar assertions that "The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future" and that, in response, the "terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past" ("In the Ruins"). However, with the intervening years DeLillo's thinking on the events seems to gain nuance, for Elster's perspective is undermined even before the devastating disappearance of his daughter takes place.

Elster talks, for example, as if "the sheer visceral need" for striking back, for joining "living history" (*Point Omega* 38), is counterposed to this focus on an "abstract" war with "a

place on the map" (35) he derides, thus implying that what he wanted was to feel more actively involved. However, with no sense of self-irony, he later tells Finley in a different context that "I hate violence. I fear the thought of it, won't watch violent movies, turn away from news reports on television that show dead or wounded people. I had a fight, I was a kid, I went into spasms […]. Violence freezes my blood" (63). What this demonstrates is that the war is in fact abstract for him as well, in that he does not see the other, does not see the truth of violence that war entails; war is just as abstract for Elster as it is for these men in Washington he criticizes. In this sense, Elster and those involved in the Iraq war become no different than DeLillo's 2001 questioning of the terrorist mindset: "Does the sight of a woman pushing a stroller soften the man to her humanity and vulnerability, and her child's as well, and all the people he is here to kill? This is his edge, that *he does not see her*" ("In the Ruins," my emphasis). When Finley later writes regarding Elster's daughter Jessie that "It was natural for [Elster] not to notice" her "stunted response to his love" because "I'm not sure he understood the fact that she was not him" (*Point Omega* 71), the line from "In the Ruins" that "he does not see her" makes the correlation quite literal; Elster is unable to see his own daughter due to his own inflated sense of self, to his own self-absorption, a not uncommon problem in a society which promotes hyper-individualism. The conflation of the terrorist and the Western institution of power, represented here by Elster, demonstrates that, with distance, DeLillo has regained a sharpness of perception which is perhaps difficult to maintain when overwhelmed by the event; as a native New Yorker, there is no doubt that DeLillo himself experienced the attacks as a personally traumatizing event, and thus "Into the Ruins," *Falling Man* and *Point Omega* would represent different parts of the process of dealing with that. In the 2001 essay, for example, DeLillo writes: "In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space" ("In the Ruins"). While the empty sky is reminiscent of the image of the timeless hawk repeated in both *End Zone* and *The Names,* the "howling space" of the void, of the event's "singularity," is a timely return to signaling the validity of Trigg's black hole metaphor for embodied trauma. However, whereas DeLillo engaged with the personal response to trauma in *Falling Man*, focusing specifically on a return to embodiment and community,[19]

[19] Again, see Harack (2013) for the most in-depth discussion of this.

Point Omega deals with the perhaps more difficult question: what does one find in the wake of having passed through the void?

Having thus established that the character of Richard Elster remains complicit with the "abstract" war he was involved in, before returning to the text's engagement with different conceptions of time it is important to outline the way Jim Finley is the third male figure in this novel who embodies the processes of abstraction and obsession which lead to the violence both systemic and direct of contemporary capital and war. As a matter of fact, while Elster is often the focus due to the factors that he is the one involved in the war and that it is his house, his grandiose talk, and eventually his daughter who disappears, it is actually Finley who often presents a more troubling case. Reminiscent of the unnamed protagonist of the "Anonymity" sections, the young filmmaker's most notable trait is that he is obsessive. In the desert to convince Elster to let him shoot an unedited video of the older man talking about his experience in these war rooms against the backdrop of a blank wall, Finley is willing to spend an extended period of time in the desert – the narrative begins on day ten of his time there – in the hope that Elster will eventually acquiesce. Finley's obsession also translates into a negation of the body, though in a different sense; when Elster asks "how [he] got so scrawny?", Finley replies: **"**I seem to eat. I do eat. But all the energy, all the nourishment gets sucked up by the film […] The body gets nothing" (31). Whereas Elster's ignoring of the body is more a result of a singular focus on abstraction and the processes of rational thought, Finley's is directly equated with his obsessive focus. Further, whereas Elster wishes to use the desert for his own project but does not actually see it, for Finley it is an explicitly alien place: "The desert was outside my range, it was an alien being, it was science fiction, both saturating and remote, and I had to force myself to believe I was here" (25). Finley's inability to engage with the desert as a place is presented as a symptom of his obsession; even when he goes exploring in his car, he remains focused inwards: "I took drives of my own looking for remote trailheads and then just sat in the car, conjuring the film, shooting the film, staring out at sandstone wastes. Or I drove into box canyons, over hard dry cracked earth, car swimming in heat, and I thought of my apartment, […] the separated wife, the crackhead janitor, the elderly woman who walked down the stairs backwards" (41). The passage exemplifies both Finley's single-mindedness as well as what is certainly related: a definitive sense of alienation. While one assumes a distance from his "separated wife" and his "crackhead janitor," the reader also learns that though this elderly woman always walks down the stairs backwards, an action visually suggestive of an off-kilter temporality, Finley has never even "asked her why" (41). The suggestion thus is that his

inwardness and his obsession are correlate with this social alienation, which here is further equated to an inability to engage with the desert as a natural environment, with place, in the phenomenological sense of the term.

Crucially, then, in a paragraph of its own, markedly set apart by extra spacing from the text on either side of it, Finley narrates: “My wife said to me once, ‘Film, film, film. If you were any more intense, you'd be a black hole. A singularity,’ she said. ‘No light escapes’” (34). Both thematically and stylistically, then, this affirmation stands out as a significant representation of what is happening in this novel as a whole. The obsession of Finley, which I have been arguing is equatable with processes of abstraction, war, and global capitalism, makes of him a metaphorical black hole, and this seemingly innocuous comment from his wife will come to represent a much more serious, even sinister, quality. There is here as well another iteration of the connection to be drawn between the unnamed man and Finley, as both are specifically portrayed in their obsessive behavior with regards to the medium of film. The further correlation between the two men will be that which is most disastrous for Jessie, for my argument is that it is when this obsession is turned upon her directly that she becomes yet another victim of the varying forces of abstraction these men represent.

5.5 The Timeless Universe and the Omega Point

Elster, of course, is not excluded from this culpability. To understand more his unwitting complicity in the forces which seem to implicitly come together to vanish his daughter into thin air, it is worth examining in some detail the competing theories of time at work in the novel. As I have suggested above, whereas some critics have explored the dialogue with cinematic time that the novel engages in, attention has yet to be paid to the correlate to be found in theoretical writings on quantum physics such as Barbour’s *The End of Time*, and especially how this might interact with Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the Omega Point, whose relevance to the text DeLillo makes explicit. Leaving aside the fact that one is speculation based on an interpretation of quantum physics while the other is more a creative exercise in speculation which blends biology, theology and philosophy, there is a direct connection between the two in that Barbour mentions the Jesuit priest’s concept near the end of his book. Writing early on that his conception is that time “opens out from Alpha to infinity” (Barbour 46), he later adds that “It is not for nothing that I emphasized in the early part of the

book that [my conception] has an Alpha but no Omega. The idea of a Point Omega was introduced by the Jesuit biologist Teilhard de Chardin, who conceived of it as some kind of consummation of evolution in the ultimate future, 'on the boundary of all future time;'" Barbour adds that "I search in vain for Omega […] and find only Alpha" (328). DeLillo stated in a 2010 interview that in writing *Point Omega* "it occurred to me that some of Richard Elster's developing thoughts on certain subjects might be related to Teilhard's visions of transcendence. I reread his book and decided to make a direct link between the Jesuit theologian and the scholar in exile" ("A Conversation"). Though an interesting speculation, whether or not DeLillo himself noticed the reference in Barbour and was reminded of the Jesuit's writings is less important than their competing senses of time which are actually played out in the novel.

Elster's recurring references to "geologic time" (*Point Omega* 24), "slow" time and "blind" time (30) – as contrasted with the "dimwit time, inferior time" of cities (57) – eventually lead to his more explicit endorsement of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's writings in *The Phenomenon of Man*.[20] Elster tells Finley that when he was a student, he "studied the work of Teilhard de Chardin[, who] went to China, an outlaw priest, China, Mongolia, digging for bones. […] He said that human thought is alive, it circulates. And the sphere of collective human thought, this is approaching the final term, the last flare" (65). This understanding of a "last flare" of the collective sphere of human thought (which Teilhard calls the *noosphere*) is apocalyptic in persuasion, and it is this eschatological sentiment that Elster repeats, even to those at the Pentagon he worked with:

> Iraq is a whisper, I told them. These nuclear flirtations we've been having with this or that government. Little whispers […]. I'm telling you, this will change. Something's coming. But isn't this what we want? Isn't this the burden of consciousness? We're all played out. Matter wants to lose its self-consciousness. We're the mind and heart that matter has become. Time to close it all down. This is what drives us now. (63-4)

Elster relates this interest in Teilhard's ideas to a conception of his own youthful "pure mind," saying to Finley that "We want to be the dead matter we used to be. We're the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter. When I was a student I looked for radical ideas. Scientists, theologians, I read the work of mystics through the centuries, I was a hungry mind, a pure

[20] Following DeLillo's cue in the interview cited here, I will from here on out shorten "Teilhard de Chardin" to "Teilhard" for the sake of brevity.

mind" (64). Though it is a manner of speaking, in the context of the embodied theory of consciousness and knowing Elster's negation of the body, the idea of a "pure mind" should ring a warning bell; this sort of thinking is in the end related to the overemphasis on reason discussed previously. Elster expands on his assertion that "we want to be the dead matter we used to be" several pages later:

> We're a crowd, a swarm. We think in groups, travel in armies. Armies carry the gene for self-destruction. One bomb is never enough. The blur of technology, this is where the oracles plot their wars. Because now comes the introversion. Father Teilhard knew this, the omega point. A leap out of our biology. Ask yourself this question. Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field. (66-67)

While Elster's passionate thought is perhaps a well-intentioned response to the sense of helplessness or impotence he feels in the wake of his governmental experience, it is of course crucial that all this represents a serious misreading of the French Jesuit's writings in *The Phenomenon of Man*.[21] Seeing as DeLillo has confirmed that he did in fact re-read Teilhard's book while writing *Point Omega*, it seems certain that this misreading must be attributed to the character and not to the author.

Rather than consciousness being "exhausted," and wanting to go back "to inorganic matter," Teilhard for his part writes of a transcendent point of *convergence*, a very different sort of eschatological vision from Elster's: "All round us […] 'souls' break away, carrying upwards their incommunicable load of consciousness," towards a point of "emersion" – that point at which "the noosphere […] will reach collectively its point of convergence - at the 'end of the world'" (272). In comparison to Elster's "paroxysm," in which humans would "pass completely out of being" (*Point Omega* 92), Teilhard's vision is of "a paroxysm leading ever higher," a "paroxysm of harmonised complexity" (Teilhard 276, 262). Thus Elster's interpretation of the "leap out of our biology" (*Point Omega* 67) in Teilhard's writings on the Omega point represents a complete reversal; where the French priest saw transcendent possibility, Elster's vision is closed-off, a narrowing down of the horizon of possibility. While this will be seen to have a correlate in the realm of culture and politics, it has one in a

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[21] Though it is not my main argument, it seems from comments such as "We're a crowd, a swarm. We think in groups, travel in armies" that Elster's misinterpretation might even be a result of his confusing Teilhard's writing on insects with his writing on humans: cf. Teilhard de Chardin, pgs. 153-155, wherein he writes that insects "group together in a single living machine[,] the swarming hive or ant-hill. This could be called a paroxysm of consciousness, if you like, which […] become[s] materialized in rigid arrangements" (155).

cosmological sense as well. Elster's conception is one in which "Consciousness accumulates," in which "There's almost some law of mathematics or physics that we haven't quite hit upon, where the mind transcends all direction inward. The omega point" (91). This vision and its *inward* transcendence towards "inorganic matter" (67) in fact suggests more the phenomenon of the black hole than Teilhard's idea, and it seems therefore that here there is a play with the idea of a *point* Omega and the astrophysical singularity, which grows outwards from collapse to a point with subsequent absorption of matter. Thus, whereas it is known that black holes have a "staggeringly large" amount of entropy associated with them (Barbour 319), Teilhard's Omega point, to the contrary, "finds its shape and its natural consistency in gravitating against the tide of probability towards a divine focus of mind which draws it onward. Thus something in the cosmos *escapes* from entropy, and does so more and more" (Teilhard 271, emphasis mine). Laura Bieger writes that, in contrast to Teilhard's Omega point, in "DeLillo's abysmal toying with it this end point is rather a state of entropic stillness, and hence a lifeless counterpoint to such revelations—the deadly silence of inorganic matter" (13). Both a "staggeringly large" amount of entropy due to its absorption of whatever passes in range or indeed entropic "stillness," as Bieger here attributes to Elster's conception, are equally opposed to the "escape" from entropy which Teilhard suggests. A closer look, then, at what happens when Elster's daughter Jessie joins the two men serves to make more thematically concrete this suggested reversal of the Omega point to the collapse inwards towards the singularity.

5.6 'Sylphlike' – Chronotopic Transgressions and Jessie's Disappearance

It is when Jessie arrives that the grandiose talk of the retired academic begins to be undermined. The alteration which takes place as a result of her arrival is subtly indicated in the narrative by a phenomenon of weather, which as I remarked in the previous chapter is often a method for indicating chronotopic shifts: "A great rain came sweeping off the mountains, too strong to think into, leaving us with nothing to say. We stood in the covered entrance to the deck, we three, watching and listening, world awash. Jessie held herself tightly, each flung hand clutching the opposite shoulder" (49). Her arrival is marked by the rainstorm, the first thing Elster is unable "to think into, leaving [him] with nothing to say," and thus her presence is immediately associated with the uncommunicable. Her protective posture of holding "herself tightly" also speaks to that which will happen some days later; already a feeling of insecurity

is suggested. Jessie is described as "sylphlike," which with its connotations of slender grace brings to mind Kyle, the besieged female protagonist of "The Ivory Acrobat." However, whereas Kyle eventually finds a solution of sorts to her metaphysical predicament, Jessie is denied such an opportunity.

Finley goes on to describe her by writing that "her element was air. She gave the impression that nothing about this place was different from any other, this south and west, latitude and longitude. She moved through places in a soft glide, feeling the same things everywhere, this is what there was, the space within" (62). Such a description quite explicitly situates Jessie as an already extremely deracinated figure; she is presented as having no connection to place, quite literally so, with the emphasis on "air" and "glide," focused instead inwards, as this is "what there was, the space within." This detachment from the grounding element of place – which is categorically distinct from that seen in *The Names* – is informed by descriptions such as the following: "she didn't mind sitting in the waiting room, she liked waiting rooms" (50); Jessie is therefore presented as a liminal character, and the mythological connotation of "sylph" here adds to the sense that she is a figure possibly already situated between-worlds, a quality which takes on relevance in light of her enigmatic disappearance.

However, though these qualities are presented as defining her character, it is also impossible to ignore the fact that she is her father's daughter. At the outset of her time there, Finley narrates:

> Elster's possessiveness, his enclosing space, made it hard for me to set her apart, to find some semblance of an independent being. He wanted her near him all the time. When he said something meant for me, he always included her, drew her in through look or gesture. His eyes showed an eager glow that was not so rare, father regarding child, but it seemed to have the effect of smothering a response, or maybe she wasn't interested in making one. (49-50)

Elster's "enclosing space" is reminiscent of the way he is described as tending "to be everywhere, in all four corners of a room, gathering impressions of himself" (40), and thus his overwhelming ego is the cause of this "smothering" of her response; the "eager glow" of his fatherly attention is one which is stunted by the inability to see beyond himself. The fact that Finley has difficulty finding "some semblance of an independent being" in Jessie is thus the first suggestion that this lifelong association with Elster and his inability to see the other, so extreme that it encompasses his own daughter, has had a significant effect on her being, in the ontological sense. Jessie's status as a liminal figure is furthered by subsequent descriptions from Finley: "We shared a bathroom, she and I, but she rarely seemed to be in there. A small

airline kit, the only trace of her presence, was tucked into a corner of the windowsill. She kept soap and towels in her bedroom" (62). Her non-presence emphasized by the fact that the only trace of her presence is an "airline kit," Jessie is thus solidly established as a figure already in danger of disappearance, as it were, as she is already hardly there.

One morning the two men go shopping for groceries in the nearest town, and what they find upon their return is given as a single sentence paragraph which changes the entire course of the narrative: "When we got back to the house she was gone" (95). The conclusion one is led to make based on DeLillo's subtle hints and the traditional expectations of storytelling is that it is the unnamed man from the "Anonymity" sections who has somehow found her in her desert retreat and consummated the deep affinity he feels with *Psycho's* Norman Bates by the end of "Anonymity 2." However, beyond the fact that DeLillo simply does not provide enough information to ever support that argument to full satisfaction, there is in fact another, more enigmatic possibility which emerges in light of an increased attention to chronotopic indicators. I argue that Jessie's disappearance is tied up in the earlier-cited comment that Finley's wife makes to him, in which she says that "If you were any more intense, you'd be a black hole. A singularity" (34), playing as well upon the reversal of the Omega point seen in Elster's desert discourse. Finley's obsession combines with Elster's egocentric personality (and related complicity in the war) and his overbearing attitude towards Jessie to jointly smother her to the point that she vanishes into the metaphorical black hole at the heart of this narrative.

The argument I make as to the joint culpability of the two men – and, as will be seen, the third, unnamed man is complicit as well – emerges from a certain portraying of events through the medium of the house itself. It is known that the house is Elster's, rotting away as it is, and that his presence tends to dominate this interior space. However, it is in fact Finley who eventually makes what amounts to – when read in this chronotopic way – serious transgressions. While Jessie is already portrayed as "sylphlike" and describes herself even outside the context of the desert in this liminal, detached way, here in the house which is like an extension of Elster she is given the possibility for little ontological agency. Finley thus begins to invade her space, which for DeLillo becomes an existential affair, doing so no less than five times in the space of thirty-one pages. At first it is relatively innocuous – "Her bed was never made. I opened the bedroom door and looked several times but did not enter" (62) – but quickly escalates:

> The bathroom door was open, midday, and Jessie was in there, barefoot, wearing a T-shirt and briefs, head over the basin, washing her face. I paused at the door. I wasn't sure whether I

> wanted her to see me there. I didn't imagine walking in and standing behind her and leaning into her, didn't see this clearly, my hands slipping under the T-shirt, my knees moving her legs apart so I could press more tightly, fit myself up and in, but it was there in some tenuous stroke of the moment, the idea of it, and when I moved away from the door I made no special effort to leave quietly. (70)

The paradoxical assertion that Finley is able to give extended detail into a sexual assault he "*didn't* imagine" committing of course belies the negation, and the way he makes "no special effort to leave quietly" at the end points towards the imposition of power through fear. The final three invasions of her space occur on the very last night of her existence in this desert narrative, and their immediate juxtaposition to her disappearance the following morning strengthens the suggestion that this must be considered as a cause.

The third invasion of her space is the only one which passes to the physical, and occurs out on the deck after Elster has gone in to bed:

> I reached over and took her hand, not sure why […]. She let me do it, giving no sign that she'd noticed. It was part of her asymmetry, the limp hand, blank face, and it did not necessarily make me think the moment might be extended to include other gestures, more intimate. She was sitting next to anyone, talking through me to the woman in a sari on the crosstown bus, to the receptionist in the doctor's office. (88-9)

Whatever may have occurred next in the wake of this bodily breach of space and Jessie's passivity is unknown, as Elster comes back outside and interrupts the scene. However, after she goes in to her room for the night, Finley lays on the deck and follows her in his imagination: "Our rooms had a common wall, hers and mine, and I imagined myself lying in bed, in shallow awareness, half hallucinatory, there's a word for this, and I tried to think of the word on two levels, seated on the deck and sprawled in bed, *hypnagogic,* that was it, and there is Jessie only a meter away, serenely dreaming" (92, original emphasis). Beyond the subtle invasion represented here by his imagined dissolving of the "common wall" between them, the reference to the threshold state of consciousness known as hypnagogia is suggestive in the sense that Jessie is already presented as a liminal figure with one foot in some other reality, distanced as she is even from her own embodied self: Elster describes how as a child "she had to touch her arm or face to know who she was […]. She was imaginary to herself" (89). Thus Finley's invasion of her space in this hypnagogic sense takes on importance in the mysterious sort of way that DeLillo develops in the novel, in that perhaps for a liminal figure such as Jessie such an invasion actually reaches her in a way that taking her hand couldn't – this line of thinking

will be returned to in the discussion of the "shadows" and "spirit birds" (148) of the novel's final page.

The last invasion on Finley's part, however, occurs when he actually goes inside shortly after this scene above:

> I went inside and turned off a couple of lights and then stood outside her room. There was space between door and jamb and I eased the door open and stood there, waiting for the dark to soften to the point where I could make out shapes. Then there she was, in bed, but it took some time before I realized she was looking at me. She was under the bedsheet looking straight at me and then she turned on her side and faced the far wall, pulling the sheet up to her neck. (93)

This is the last that Finley and Elster will see of Jessie, though for the reader she does reappear in "Anonymity 2" at the novel's ending. This triple assault in one night on her personal space is the final thing which happens to her, chronologically speaking, and the immediate juxtaposition of this scene with her disappearance the following day strongly suggests the correlation developed in the preceding paragraphs. Her passive response to his taking of her hand while outside is here repeated as she silently witnesses his intrusion and then simply turns away. Emphasized by the fact that she is not a character the reader has access to, her agency is undeniably negated, or at least greatly reduced, making her into a victim whose ability to defend herself is thoroughly dismantled from the start. Her embodied existence is put to the question even as a child, as she is "imaginary [even] to herself" (89), and this series of often chronotopic assaults is what pushes her beyond some unseen limit. I define these invasions on Finley's part as "often chronotopic" as they are indelibly caught up in this house-in-desert as chronotope, especially in its association with Elster. Finley, however, is the truly obsessive figure, the "singularity" who enters the picture and causes this final collapse. The desert is thus the stage for this ontological hole to open up, and Elster's arrogant attempt to bend the chronotope to his will through his abstract thinking is shatteringly rebuffed. It is in fact, I would argue, due to the house's location in the first place that this sort of occurrence is possible; as has been demonstrated elsewhere in this dissertation, the desert is a space of ontological becoming, a space in which time is open to an infinity of futures. However, as I will argue shortly, the metaphorical black hole which here opens to vanish Jessie without a trace is the result of a multi-faceted denial of this horizon of possibility, a narrowing down of what Franco Berardi has called "futurability" in his 2017 book with the same title; this is an argument I will pursue shortly.

Importantly, though, Jessie's character as a woman denied agency and subject to repeated breaches of her existential space is further informed by the fact that the other three characters in the novel are all men who perpetrate this imposition – the reader knows Jessie is sent to the desert to get some distance from someone she's been seeing named Dennis, who one assumes from the contents of "Anonymity 2" may be the unnamed man watching *24 Hour Psycho*. Thus the two men who are physically present with her and imposing on her being in various ways (Elster blindly so) are conflated with the third man, whose obsessive behavior is evident both in his method of viewing the exhibit as well as in his troubling identification with Norman Bates at the novel's finale. The argument correlate with this conflation of these men is a joining together of all the traits they represent – obsession, abstraction, domination, the pursuit of war – to create the perfect storm for a figure such as Jessie; these are all traits which are traditionally coded as masculine, and the fact of a novel containing only three men and a woman and this particular constellation of events makes it clear that this gendered coding plays a role in this text. Whether conscious or not, there is an acknowledgment on DeLillo's part as to the relation of such traits – these processes of abstraction – to that which is coded as masculine, and by extension to the wider context of 9/11, the war in Iraq, and beyond. Though she is denied agency as a character, DeLillo here subtly explores the ramifications of this excess by figuring Jessie to stand-in as a victim of these processes, as well as for the similarly passive and pacified, from the Iraqis who faced war to the nullified political will of the Iraq war protestors whose pleas fell upon deaf ears in their own halls of power.

5.7 Into the Void: The Singularity and the Horizon of Possibility

What this discussion leads to is the suggestion that this metaphorical black hole I argue Jessie disappears into is a response to the state of the post-9/11 world the author sees unfolding. The black hole is read as a shutting down of the horizon of possibility, as a stand-in for the closing-off of the openness of time, an effect which occurs at the hands of the complex, masculinely-coded forces of abstraction just discussed. Further, the clarity of distance from the events of September 11th appears to have led DeLillo away from his discourse in "In the Ruins of the Future" enough to at least obliquely and enigmatically acknowledge the role of these different modes of (masculine) thought – including an Elster who often appears to echo an earlier DeLillo – in a context wider than merely indicting the attackers themselves. This implied

critique is thus tied up in what Naydan calls the novel's "tacit" (95) response to 9/11, in that the perseverance of trauma is brought into dialogue with the wider cause of that trauma; the void created by the falling towers is contextualized by a surrounding cultural void created by the continued pursuit of capital and war and all the damaging social and psychological effects this has. In contextualizing this discussion to the representational significance of the black hole, Dylan Trigg is again helpful:

> On an aesthetic and cultural level, the phenomenon of the black hole occupies a central role in its signification of the "dark entity" at the heart of space and time. Beyond this darkness, the language of black holes tends to refer to that which is beyond representation, formless, nameless, other, unknowable, abject, primal, and, above all, traumatic. In each of these terms, there is a tension between the black hole and subjectivity. As pure negativity, the language of black holes is a void carved within the depth of presence, the trace of which is evident only as the absence where something once was. (*Memory* 234)

In terms of 9/11, for those who read *Point Omega* as a response to the attacks on the World Trade Center, trauma naturally becomes the most important element at play in the novel. Hamilton Carroll reads the text in this manner, writing that "The primary action of the novel is literally trapped between the two towers at the moment of their collapse" (111), which suggests for his part another sort of inescapable void. Somewhat similarly, Naydan writes that "Jessie's disappearance "makes of her an absent presence akin to the physical void left at Ground Zero and the felt void left by 9/11 – so palpable that everything that happens after her disappearance is 'marked by her absence'" (99). In fact, DeLillo's own language in "In the Ruins of the Future" is representative of the association:

> But when the towers fell. When the rolling smoke began moving downward, floor to floor. This was so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened. We could not catch up with it. But it was real, punishingly so, an expression of the physics of structural limits and a void in one's soul, and there was the huge antenna falling out of the sky, straight down, blunt end first, like an arrow moving backwards in time.

The event as "so vast and terrible it was outside imagining even as it happened" resonates with the "that which is beyond representation" Trigg signals, the "expression of […] a void in one's soul" indicates the personal nature of the trauma, and the "arrow moving backwards in time" directly references the powerful effect the event had in disrupting temporality on a cultural

level. I would thus agree with critics such as James Gourley[22] and argue that, while the "void in one's soul" left by the attacks remains relevant, *Point Omega* does, however, go beyond the personal in its reach, despite the refusal of the text itself to provide any clear answers. The simplest way to frame this is that the black hole, this inverted point Omega into which Jessie disappears, is therefore composed of both the personal, traumatic void signaled directly in "In the Ruins" and explored in *Falling Man,* as well as the wider, harder-to-directly-identify elements which are implicated in the creation of a world in which such attacks are led to occur.

As a chronotope in which an ontological openness towards becoming is the default suggestion, the desert is therefore a logical choice for somebody like Elster to pursue their "spiritual retreat" (*Point Omega* 29). However, what his involuted understanding of the Omega point reveals is in the end yet another eschatological vision, one which rather than embracing this ontological openness of the desert actually effects a closing down of possibility: "The desert was clairvoyant, this is what he'd always believed, that the landscape unravels and reveals, it knows future as well as past. But now it made him feel enclosed and I understood this, hemmed in, pressed tight. We stood outside and felt the desert bearing in" (109). This is another example in which Elster's conception of the desert is similar to the chronotopic value it often contains, but in which his blindness to deeper errors renders him unable to see what is there; the desert's ontological openness is also subject to foreclosure. This line of thinking holds interesting parallels with recent arguments made by Franco Berardi, especially in his 2017 book *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*. Reflected in Elster's response there is an acknowledgement of the general sense of impossibility and impotence which today permeates American and Western culture more generally, and they are analyses such as Berardi's which help to illuminate the causes for this sense. Writing on the state of the world seven years after *Point Omega's* publication, Berardi contrasts a teleological understanding of history to "a materialistic vision of immanence," in which "the present reality contains the future as a wide range of possibilities, and the selection of one possibility among many is not prescribed in a deterministic way" (*Futurability* 13). This is otherwise stated, in Deleuzian terms, as "the multiplicity of immanent possible futures: becoming other which is already inscribed in the present" (13). This vision of time has correlations with a variety of

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[22] Gourley's general argument is that "In *Point Omega*, DeLillo's focus is no longer on the peculiar time in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Instead, he is aware of a broader change which effects the perception of time throughout the world" (86).

thinkers, from the quantum understanding of time – from which Barbour makes his interpretation of the timeless universe – to Walter Benjamin's "Messianic" time as discussed regarding *End Zone*, to that of feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz[23]; all similarly emphasize such an openness to this "multiplicity of immanent possible futures" Berardi signals.

The dismay inherent in Elster's declaration that "consciousness is exhausted" (*Point Omega* 67) is a symptom of the foreclosure of this openness and a narrowing down to a seemingly inescapable *telos*. As Berardi indicates, "there is a conflict between emergent possibilities and the dominant paradigm" (*Futurability* 16), to such an extent that the dominant paradigm seems to preclude all other possibility: "The present depression (both psychological and economic) obscures the consciousness that no determinist projection of the future is true. We feel trapped in the tangle of techno-linguistic automatisms: finance, global competition, military escalation" (21). As evidenced here, Berardi associates this generally increasing sense of depression and its resulting foreclosure of other futures with this "tangle" he refers to of global finance capitalism and military escalation, as well as the increasing social reliance on technology in a way which DeLillo will treat more directly in *Zero K*: "The hyper-stimulated body is simultaneously alone and hyper-connected: the more it is connected, the more it is alone" (*Futurability* 50). Thus, the social attenuation which results from the increase in what he calls "technique" (as in the "technicity" which Bernard Stiegler writes about at length[24]) means that the general sense of "impotence of subjectivity is an effect of the total potency of power when it becomes independent from human will, decision and government – when it is inscribed in the automated texture of technique and of language" (21). DeLillo seems to be responding to this same difficulty, with the main difference that Berardi is writing at the beginning of the social and political hurricane which is the era of a Donald Trump presidency – which coincides with "the explosion of the semiotic sphere" (28) – whereas *Point Omega* was conceived when 9/11 still resonated more strongly in the social field. They align, however, in a response to the seeming "inescapability of financial violence," whose resulting "frustration has reduced the general ability to feel compassion and act empathically" (23).

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[23] Grosz writes, for example, that if "the present is the actuality whose existence is engendered by the virtual past, then the future remains that dimension or modality of time that has no actuality either. The future too remains virtual, uncontained by the present but prefigured, rendered potential, through and by the past. The future is that over which the past and present have no control: the future is that openness of becoming that enables divergence from what exists" (*Architecture* 142).

[24] I refer to Stiegler's three volumes on technics and time, the first of which is *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (1998).

Berardi's analysis of the current state of affairs also usefully emphasizes the role of misogyny in "the history of modern politics and civilization intended as the imposition of a technological order" (72). He shows the correlation between masculinity and the standard, Machiavellian view of potency as the "will which subjugates the possible and reduces it to order," which then corresponds with a view of the feminine as related to "the proliferation of possible events," the "sphere of possibility" (72-3), upon which the masculine must impose order. The state of reactionary nostalgia of today he then associates with a sense of masculine impotence resulting from "technology exceed[ing] the political sphere to the point that technology has become the master of potency, replacing political will" (73). As I have suggested, the role of such conceptions of gender and the actual oppressions which result are implicit in the text of *Point Omega*, as the three men of the novel, with their joint complicity in Jessie's fate, are all representatives of varying facets of this generalized misogyny here indicated. Relevant, for example, is Linda Kauffman's reminder that it "is remarkable how few books on 9/11 consider the ramifications of what Zillah Eisenstein calls 'global misogyny.' As Eisenstein succinctly puts in, 'The male military mentality operates on both sides of the ill-named East/West Divide… [P]ost-September 11 has also become a very manly moment'" (Kauffman "World" 651). Eisenstein elsewhere writes that the "terrorists are named for us as Arab, or Muslim, but there is no accounting for them as men. There is too much silence on this point for it not to be important" (93). Such commentary in a sense dismantles the "us versus them" mentality which Elster continues to espouse, effectively resituating in his blindness his own daughter as the "them." Elster is also guilty of faith in his powers of reason or intellect, which feminist thinkers have long since demonstrated is supported by a false sense of neutrality and universality; Val Plumwood usefully clarifies the issue:

> Much feminist theory has detected a masculine presence in the officially gender-neutral concept of reason. In contrast, my account suggests that it is not a masculine identity pure and simple, but the multiple, complex cultural identity of the master formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination, which is at issue. (5)

Elster's chronotopically represented tendency for domination aligns him with this "complex cultural identity" of "the master" Plumwood identifies. Elster still supports the distant conflict in the Middle East even after retreating to the desert in his disappointment at the war's abstraction, its reducing of warfare to "sending an army into a place on a map" (*Point Omega* 35). This disappointment at war's abstraction suggests that his conception of domination or of "the master," as Plumwood would see it, transforms into the masculine impotence that Berardi

argues is a result of "technology exceed[ing] the political sphere to the point that technology has become the master of potency, replacing political will" (*Futurability* 73).

In their article "Targeting the Ontology of War," Nordin and Oberg build on Jean Baudrillard's argument "that war has disappeared into the *processing* of warfare" (399) in a way which speaks to the discussion at hand. Summarizing his view from a variety of texts, they write that, for Baudrillard, "we are faced with a situation in which subjectivity, social relations and will are essentially liquidated by operational practices. They are not supplanted by a higher will or a higher purpose. Rather, they vanish into processing entirely devoid of symbolic meaning" (399). The fortuitous syntactic correlation of "vanish" with Jessie's fate in *Point Omega* is constructive, in that the argument which emerges from Berardi to Baudrillard is that she is a victim of the complex set of forces which has led to this idea of *processing*; although Berardi argues that the technological process has exceeded (a coded-masculine) political will, it is the historical trajectory of imposition of these intertwined elements of reason, war and an increasingly abstract system of globalized capital which has brought the world to the state in which it finds itself today. Thus the vanishing of *Point Omega's* lone female character is reminiscent of Baudrillard's vanishing of the subject indicated here, pointing towards a defining of this metaphorical black hole as one composed of the violence and oppression which results from all this. Further, the correlation of both these processes of abstraction and the technological takeover of the masculine political will which Berardi indicates with the foreclosure of the horizon of possibility adds to the definition of this symbolic black hole. The refusal of narrative resolution as to Jessie's disappearance reads to the tune of cultural despair; as in an astrophysical black hole, from this monstrosity that is the current state of things there is no magical escape, no line of flight, especially for women and any who do not fall into what Plumwood calls the role of "the master." While DeLillo is certainly not known for his critique of gender roles, not dissimilarly to the way his claim that the novel is "not at all political" (at least consciously so) is belied by such analyses as my own, there does seem to be an instinctive awareness as to the deeper role gender plays in this overall sociopolitical situation.

While I suggest just above that there is "no line of flight" proffered by the novel, this is not to say that there are not subtle indications outside the realm of the possible. Berardi's book is itself written in a tone of despair, with the difference that it is conceived with the intention of actually finding a way towards a reopening of the horizon of possibility: "When society enters a phase of crisis or approaches collapse, we can glimpse the horizon of possibility. This horizon itself is hard to distinguish, and the territory that borders this horizon is hard to describe

or to map" (*Futurability* 28). DeLillo's work, on the other hand, is a poetic response to this sense of impossibility, and in Jessie's disappearance and the negation of narrative resolution there is no alternative sought after, neither for Jessie nor for those she has left behind. While I will thus return to the novel's potential suggestion of a line of flight in the novel's final pages, in terms of both the characters' experience and a more realist interpretation of the text the black hole into which Jessie disappears never yields up its mystery to the reader – no "solution" is provided for. The last thread which must be addressed is therefore a possibility inscribed in those she leaves behind, in that which I have argued emerges continuously over DeLillo's career as a potential vehicle for redemption: the role of shared life, of community.

5.8 Lines of Flight

In a recent chapter, Scott Dill has argued convincingly for a portrayal of "the end of secular time" in DeLillo's late novels, specifically in the original Christian context of secular as emerging from the *saeculum*, "the present age of everyday life[;] the period of waiting for Christ's return" (175). Dill argues that the sense of time in *Point Omega* is one "in which the end of the present is entirely indecipherable yet absolutely imminent" (175), aligning with my argument that the metaphorical black hole referred to is a product of time's inherent openness to a multiplicity of futures being foreclosed; this closing-down of the horizon of possibility would create this sense of an imminent ending, returning the Western secular world to that which it lost when the Christian worldview was displaced. He argues that this sense of time is thus one of waiting, and further that it "is a time of waiting *together*" (184, original emphasis). Dill's discussion of the sense of intimacy gained between the two men in light of Jessie's disappearance is interesting, arguing eventually that the novel is in fact "a creative gesture toward the experiences of meaning portrayed in its human relationships" (184). While I find value in this argument as there is indeed a noticeable shift on Finley's part[25], the denial of agency for Jessie and the lack of narrative resolution makes it difficult to read this as the primary conclusion to the novel with regards to this topic. Regardless of the significance of the relationship between Finley and Elster – their culpability is hard to forget – Dill's referencing of the importance of human community and love is pertinent. Dill writes:

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[25] Cf. the scene where Finley cuts Elster's hair (*Point Omega* 112–114).

> DeLillo's stylistic endings point toward a guarded humility about the contemporary novel's capacity to truly redeem contemporary time from either its rationalized violence or its frantic speed. In refusing to affirm any vision of time outside of the time of possibility, *Point Omega* finally points beyond itself. In this novel it is not a novel's words or a film's images or any other creative cultural form that finally provides meaning, but the human contact that comes with human love. (181)

I would argue, however, that the emphasis on the importance of love is less to be seen in the increasing intimacy between Finley and Elster (who is in fact a traumatized shell for the remainder of the desert narrative) than in its lack, which is expressed through the various relations of the novel. Jessie does not seem to express emotion, Elster's attempts to show his love to his daughter are clumsy and remain unseen, Finley is separated from his wife due to the obsessive traits which led her to call him "a black hole" in the first place, and the unnamed man is clearly meant to border on the psychopathic.

All these inabilities are precisely what writers like Berardi diagnose at length, a result of this complex array of forces which increasingly attenuate society and alienate the individual. It is in this sense that DeLillo's novel resonates with both Berardi's text and, in a certain respect, in Teilhard de Chardin's writings in *The Phenomenon of Man.* Berardi writes that "what we lack today [is] not hope, not faith, but friendship. […] This is why humanity is teetering on the abyss of war and suicide" (*Futurability* 99). The Jesuit too places the capacity for love and compassion above all else, in fact arguing that "considered in its full biological reality, love [is] a general property of all life" (Teilhard 264). He also recognizes already in the 1950s that the increasing pressure of alienating, oppressive attitudes of abstraction and warfare are inimical to human community, as community in the most basic sense is founded on love. "Love," Teilhard writes, "dies in contact with the impersonal and the anonymous" (269). Relevantly, the unnamed man of "Anonymity 1" – who will later identify with a psychopath – is in fact excited when he feels an affinity with the two men in the gallery who we later learn are Elster and Finley: "He felt they shared something, we three, that's what he felt. it was the kind of rare fellowship that singular events engender" (*Point Omega* 11) – the linguistic shift to "we three" emphasizes this hoped-for transition from the lone "I" to the plural "we." However, when Elster and Finley leave suddenly, the man is hurt: "Then they left, just like that […]. He didn't know how to take this. He took it personally" (12). A thin thread is thus drawn between the rejection of these men and the later supposed relationship the man has with Elster's daughter – a rejection of communal feeling leads to a full immersion in psychopathic

tendencies, into the eventual "pore by pore" dissolution "into the figure of Norman Bates" (148) in "Anonymity 2."

After writing that love "dies" in contact with the anonymous and the impersonal (which could equally read "the abstract"), Teilhard continues: "With equal infallibility [love] becomes impoverished with remoteness in space – and still more, much more, with difference in time. For love to be possible there must be co-existence" (269). The "impersonal and the anonymous" elements at play have killed the possibility for love in the novel, and the resulting black hole is representing precisely this, the creation of an irreversible remoteness in space and difference in time, a symbolic representation of what happens when the trajectory the world seems to be on is taken far enough; Jessie has fallen into the "abyss" Berardi signals above. Teilhard de Chardin's transcendental Omega point is, as Finley himself suggests, "narrowed, here and now, to the point of a knife as it enters a body" (*Point Omega* 124). This visceral suggested conclusion to Jessie's desert narrative is categorically opposed to any sort of line of flight from that which causes the abyss in this narrative to open up. This opposition is also hinted at in terms of the related sense of sacred place discussed in the context of the previous chapter on *The Names*; not long after he feels rejected by the sudden departure of Elster and Finley, the man in "Anonymity 1" plays "with the idea that the gallery was like a preserved site, a dead poet's cottage or hushed tomb, a medieval chapel" (15). As the man himself notes, "But people don't see this" (15). His seeking of sacred place is thus denied three pages after his seeking of community, and the novel gives no more such openings.

The final (and seemingly contradictory) suggestion to explore, then, is that there *is* a possible poetic line of flight suggested by the text. On the one hand, the structure of the novel strongly suggests a black hole with two glimpses of its event horizon on either side, with the increasing obsession of the anonymous man merely adding to the definition of the singularity at the heart of the central narrative as defined at length above. On the other, certain suggestions in "Anonymity 2" as well as its very last lines open onto a possibility of the relevance of other worlds. With a text as rich and enigmatic as *Point Omega* it would be folly to attempt to reduce the implications to one or the other, as it is precisely fiction's ability to represent the impossible and the contradictory that DeLillo is powerfully reasserting with this text. A couple playful hints are found in the dialogue between the anonymous man and Jessie; when he asks if its her "first time," she responds "Everything's my first time" (135). Then, when he asks whether she can "imagine [her]self living another life," she responds: "That's too easy. Ask me something else" (141). When read in the context of the relationship of DeLillo's thinking on time in this

novel to Barbour's *The End of Time*, these responses might suggest subtle allusions to the possibility of many worlds – if everything is Jessie's "first time," and its "easy" to imagine herself living another life, might not there be a hint that she is somehow alluding to a knowledge of her multiplicitous existence? This might even explain her unreality to herself as a child, her need to touch "her face to know who she was" (89). In this sense, then, a line of flight would open up; Jessie may have disappeared from this world but continue in others. The black hole may be unknowable to those on the outside, as Trigg has indicated, but perhaps her disappearance therein merely brings her to another world.

This suggestion of other worlds is, finally, also inherent in the novel's final lines, which are even more enigmatic than the rest of the text. After the unnamed man and Jessie part ways, with the man memorizing her phone number, he returns to his final hours at the *24 Hour Psycho* exhibit. There is first a moment which underscores the violence and negation of human life inherent in the involution of the Omega point in the face of love's death at the hands of abstraction: the man "imagines all motion stopping on the screen, the image beginning to shudder and fade. He imagines the guard removing the sidearm from his holster and shooting himself in the head." (147). The stoppage of time is here correlate to the closing down of the horizon of possibility, rather than an opening onto the multiplicity inherent in the quantum view of a timeless universe; the result he imagines is suicide, life's self-negation, echoing Berardi's argument that lack of friendship is what has humanity "teetering on the abyss of war and suicide" (*Futurability* 99)[26]. Immediately after this imagined scene there is then a suggestion that the man dissolves his being in order to assimilate that of Norman Bates, that there is a merger of the two fictional characters, bringing one fictional world directly into the realm of another; this is a demonstration, coincidentally, of the validity of the concept of possible worlds, only here when applied to realm of human thought (art) rather than to that of physics. This apparent assimilation of being is then followed by a few lines in which the speaker is unclear; I quote the text in full in order to discuss properly:

> It makes him think of his own mother, how could it not, before she passed on, two of them contained in a small flat being consumed by rising towers, and here is the shadow of Norman Bates as he stands outside the door of the old house, the shadow seen from inside, and then the door begins to open.

[26] In fact, Berardi sees this as such a significant contemporary problem that he has written a whole book on it: see *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (2015)

> The man separates himself from the wall and waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates, who will come into the house and walk up the stairs in subliminal time, two frames per second, and then turn toward the door of Mother's room.
>
> Sometimes he sits by her bed and says something and then looks at her and waits for an answer.
>
> Sometimes he just looks at her.
>
> Sometimes a wind comes before the rain and sends birds sailing past the window, spirit birds that ride the night, stranger than dreams. (148)

The reference to the "small flat being consumed by rising towers" is that which makes critics such as Naydan and Carroll read in the novel a response to 9/11, retroactively informing the text as this appears on the very last page. The confusion in speaker is produced by that which follows the paragraph of assimilation "into the figure of Norman Bates," for it is known that the anonymous man's mother has "passed on" (and that Norman Bates' mother in *Psycho* is also dead in her room). The lines "Sometimes he sits by her bed and says something and then looks at her and waits for an answer" and "Sometimes he just looks at her" could be referring to either Bates or to the unnamed man; if it's the latter, it means that he too has a dead mother in his room that he talks to. The answer is unclear, and it is even possible that the assimilation actually occurs at this point – here the anonymous man *becomes* Bates, just as Bates becomes his dead mother, and the question of whether he had this particular situation before the merger or not is irrelevant. While the potential that the anonymous man becomes Bates and thus retroactively colors the entire desert part of the novel as a shadowy reenactment of *Psycho* is therefore presented, the preceding pages have worked to demonstrate that there is of course much more than this going on. DeLillo's multi-faceted play with allusions, temporalities and possible worlds in a sense makes the novel itself living proof of the value of fiction as a potential response to the very problems it grapples with.

That which is perhaps most interesting of these final paragraphs, however, is that which is inherent in the references to "shadows," "spirit birds" and "dreams." In the fall of 2003, DeLillo published a short piece in remembrance of William Gaddis in volume 41 of *Conjunctions*, alongside a number of writers including friends Paul Auster and Siri Hustvedt. Also included in that volume, whose theme was duality, was a poem by Stanley Plumly called "Spirit Birds." While David Cowart reads the birds in the last line of DeLillo's novel as a reference to the famous Hitchcock film with the same title ("Lady" 34), and Brian Chappell sees in these last lines more proof for his argument that the "Anonymity" sections are authored

by character Jim Finley (16), I would here like to explore a connection between the spirit birds of *Point Omega's* enigmatic final lines and Plumly's poem. The first two of the poem's three stanzas read as such:

> The spirit world the negative of this one,
> soft outlines of soft whites against soft darks,
> someone crossing Broadway at Cathedral, walking
> toward the god taking the picture, but now,
> inside the camera, suddenly still. Or the spirit
> world the detail through the window, manifest
> if stared at long enough, the shapes of this
> or that, the lights left on, the lights turned off,
> the spirits under arcs of sycamores the gray-gold
> mists of migratory birds and spotted leaves recognize.
>
> Autumnal evening chill, knife-edges of the avenues,
> wind kicking up newspaper off the street,
> those ghost peripheral moments you catch yourself
> beside yourself going down a stair or through
> a door—the spirit world surprising: those birds,
> for instance, bursting from the trees and turning
> into shadow, then nothing, like spirit birds
> called back to life from memory or a book,
> those shadows in my hands I held, surprised. (Plumly)

The poem plays with the idea that there is a "spirit world" which is "the negative of this one," and which resonates with *Point Omega* in its likening to what happens when a picture is taken of someone and they are captured "inside the camera, suddenly still." The suggestion is then of a shadowy spirit world, visible in "soft outlines" and the "shapes of this or that," connected to the idea of a second self: "those ghost peripheral moments you catch yourself / beside yourself going down a stair or through / a door" (Plumly). Together the impression of the poem resonates with the ending of *Point Omega*, especially with the disappearance of the man into the film and lines like the description of "the shadow of Norman Bates as he stands outside the door of the old house, the shadow seen from inside, and then the door begins to open" (*Point Omega* 48); in this sense, it is almost as if the door opening for Bates is opening onto this other, "spirit" world.

Plumly's continuation of the poem illuminates the spirit world with the titular birds, "bursting from the trees and turning / into shadow, then nothing, like spirit birds / called back

to life from memory or a book, / those shadows I held in my hand" (Plumly). These birds "bursting" forth and "turning into shadow, then nothing" are markedly similar to the birds in the final lines of DeLillo's novel: "Sometimes a wind comes before the rain and sends birds sailing past the window, spirit birds that ride the night, stranger than dreams" (*Point Omega* 148). The specific occurrence of "spirit birds" in both texts and the privileged position of occupying the final line of DeLillo's novel signals the potential importance this correlation holds, especially in that it thematically echoes the possibility of other worlds already suggested and which is inherent to the multiple worlds interpretation of quantum physics the novel is in dialogue with. The spirit birds of *Point Omega* would thus represent a literal line of flight, and the final sentence of the novel therefore troubles further any reading which tries to situate the text within a single paradigm; the last lines cited of Plumly's poem – "like spirit birds called back to life from memory or a book, / those shadows in my hands I held, surprised" – refer to the "spirit worlds" found in remnants of the past in either memory or writing. This is not unlike Barbour's argument that every memory of the past is merely a "record," from which we construct a narrative despite the fact of a timeless universe; the ontological difference between a memory and a fictional world is eliminated in this view.

The overall argument which thus emerges is that Jessie disappears into the black hole created at the extreme limit of the narrowing down of the horizon of possibility, with the possibility left open that she has vanished from this world to take refuge in another. Regardless of this possibility, however, in a realist sense the final emphasis of the novel is undoubtedly dark, for if the only refuge for an oppressed subject such as Jessie is this inaccessible "spirit world" then there is little solace to be found. Despite this, though, what the novel does represent is DeLillo's reaffirmation of the power of fiction to explore precisely what Trigg refers to as the "unknowable," as "that which is beyond representation" (*Memory* 234); to explore what lies at the center of the black hole of representation resulting from the specific trauma of 9/11 and the more general cultural and political circumstances which frame the world in its wake. While the power of community is once again presented as significant, it ultimately falters, in this text a weak anodyne in the face of an overwhelming, driving force. Liliana Naydan writes that "like readers, characters know little other than the feeling of being at *a* or *the* threshold" (99, original emphasis). With this I agree, in that the threshold is one which gives onto something else, something beyond direct representation. The core of the text is thus the unrepresentable, and all the characters in their own way veer towards its depths; the anonymous man wishes to merge with the cinematic Norman Bates, Elster wishes to become "stones in a

field” (*Point Omega* 67), Jessie vanishes, and Finley, immediately following his final violation of Jessie’s space on her last night, returns outside to narrate: “Then I adjusted the reclining chair to full length and lay flat on my back, eyes shut, hands on chest, and tried to feel like nobody nowhere, a shadow that's part of the night” (93). The only glimmer of light is found in the possible line of flight suggested towards other worlds, towards the possibility of an other existence, a possibility which is inherent in the shape of the book itself, its linearity broken and its final lines suggesting the flight to the spirit world, a world paradoxically “stranger than dreams” (148) – the world to which one is taken in the reading of fiction, the reality which emerges from “those shadows I held in my hand” (Plumly).

CHAPTER 6 Alienation, Immanence, and Transcendence in *Zero K*

CHAPTER 6
Alienation, Immanence, and Transcendence in *Zero K*

In vain do individuals hope for immortality, or any patent from oblivion, in preservations below the moon

Sir Thomas Browne

If we can't think of space without time, we can't think of time without death

Don DeLillo, “Notes”

While the sparse text of *Point Omega* indicated DeLillo’s return to the concerns of the desert chronotope after many years elsewhere, in his very next novel DeLillo is once again drawn to the remote landscape. However, rather than a repeat of the enigmatic 2010 novel’s play with quantum ontologies, *Zero K* presents a desert in opposition to another chronotope in the course of a more thematically dense text. In conversation with poet Kae Tempest in 2017, DeLillo reflected on his writing of *Zero K*, published the year before. Besides indicating that the novel took a long time for him to write because its content is “quite challenging,” he also commented: “At this point in my writing life, there’s a line that goes backwards to when I started. And it all seems to be contained in the moment in which I’m now working somehow, it’s all compressed between that” (“Don DeLillo in conversation”). The idea of a line going back to his early work and all the intervening time “compressed within that” rings true both thematically and chronotopically, for the novel reads as a text which takes up a considerable array of threads which DeLillo developed at various points of his career and weaves them all together into a single work; the result is a novel so suggestive that it is in fact difficult to limit the scope of the analysis. Fortunately for the project at hand, *Zero K’s* engagement with DeLillo’s recurring thematic concerns is carried out in a way which in fact foregrounds the chronotopic more so than any previous novel, and thus provides a clear frame through which it might be approached.

In terms of narrative content, *Zero K* is organized around narrator Jeff Lockhart's contrasting experiences in two oppositional places: a maze-like, semi-subterranean compound constructed in the middle of the remote Kazakh desert and an urban New York of the very near future, set in what might be described as an alternate tomorrow. The desert compound is associated with the group which calls itself the Convergence, whose general goal is to transcend the limitation of human mortality through cryogenic freezing. Jeff's father Ross is a billionaire who has invested heavily into the project, and thus Jeff is there at the desert compound at the beginning of the novel because Ross's wife, Artis, has a terminal disease and will therefore undergo the process of cryogenic preservation, with the idea being that she will be reborn at some later date; in her words: "I have every belief that I will reawaken to a new perception of the world" (*Zero K* 47). The place itself, the Convergence compound, is filled with long hallways of closed doors, mannequins in strange positions, and a host of such avant-garde surprises which are meant to echo the transhuman ideology of the group responsible for it. Structurally speaking, the novel is divided into two main parts, where all of Part One takes place in this surreal desert location, while Part Two is divided between Jeff's experience back in New York – after Artis has undergone the procedure of cryogenic freezing which puts her into a liminal state somewhere between life and death – and Jeff's return to the desert when his father decides to undergo the same process and follow Artis prematurely to his cryonic "death." Between Part One and Part Two there is a brief interlude section, which in a short five pages purports to present Artis's disembodied monologue as she floats indefinitely in her body pod. This is a composition which thus demonstrates DeLillo's continued interest in creating symmetrically structured texts, as the two main sections of the novel are each ten chapters in length, with this middle section forming a bridge of sorts between the two; the opposite, in fact, of *Point Omega's* structure.

Just as in the plot of the novel itself, my approach to this text is focused through the novel's liminal narrator, Jeffrey Lockhart, who throughout seeks to walk a middle path between the different extremes the text presents. In her article on "The Uncanny Ordinary in Don DeLillo's *Zero K,*" Laura Barrett has also signaled this in-between status of Jeff's, writing that he "represents a liminal figure" in that he is "unable to fully engage with others but not willing to accept the solipsistic state of cryopreservation" (114). Barrett's observation of his position between the two is accurate, but in what follows I would like to draw out the correlation further, in that I see Jeff as a figure caught in some ways between the two distinct worldviews encapsulated in the chronotopes of the novel's two main sections. Jeff in this sense reads as a

chronotopic explorer, conceived with the privilege of wandering in a relatively detached fashion between the two worlds represented in the text, thus illuminating both; his navigation between them is, in fact, crucial to the meaning one takes from this text. It is important to note that this does not mean that Jeff is a completely passive figure, trapped forever in the in-between of existential isolation, as by the end of the chapter it will be seen that he does in fact exercise a certain amount of agency. This agency is nonetheless relatively subtle, and does not detract from the fact that as the privileged narrator he does overall represent a steady walking-of-the-line between two diametrically opposed ways of being in the world.

In terms of this chronotopic opposition I will explore in this chapter, it is, briefly stated, between the desert environment of the first section, which is imbued with a value related to the Convergence's utopian attempt to transcend the limits of human mortality through cryogenics in the face of planetary crisis, and the second section's urban chronotope of New York City, including especially all the embodied, petty, and imperfect humanity that it represents. While other analyses are effective in their particular thematic approaches to this rich text[1], my critique remains centered on these chronotopic dialogues as they emerge. The broad argument I make is that the narrative logic of the city is carried along with him by Jeff when he revisits the Convergence; in other words, Jeff acts as a vector which allows the urban chronotope to infiltrate the desert one. I will further argue that this infiltration is of the utmost significance, as besides representing a clear break from the result of the chronotopic play between the urban and the desert in *Point Omega* (in which the human is ultimately humbled), it leads towards the final pages of this novel, which conclude this recent DeLillean engagement with the problem of humanity's evolution – the posthuman versus the transhuman, for example – in its subversion of the transcendental goals of the Convergence with a new convergence of its own: that between the urban and the natural. DeLillo's fictional search for an embodied ethics to match the quandaries of the moment contemporary to his writing is here stretched to the extreme, as the novel emerges alongside a range of texts which theorize the current taut state of the world with reference to either endings or beginnings, be it the end of capitalism or the dawn of the posthuman.[2]

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[1] I refer particularly to Barrett's analysis through the uncanny (2018), Boxall's focus on the tautology (2017), and Cofer's exploration of the transhuman/posthuman distinction (2018).

[2] I refer to a surge in texts with topics such as Rosi Braidotti's *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1992), Srnicek and Williams' *Inventing the Future* (2016), Wolfgang Streeck's *How Will Capitalism End?* (2016), McKenzie Wark's *Capital is Dead* (2019), or Žižek's *Living in the End Times* (2018).

The chapter's organization therefore follows that suggested by the novel, which as mentioned clearly separates its two halves into a Part One and Part Two. After establishing the sociopolitical context of late capitalism as the context to which both halves respond, I develop the argument for Part One and its desert narrative corresponding to a chronotope of crisis, to which the Convergence group seeking immortality in their remote location are forging a techno-utopian response. The narrator Jeff's time there elucidates the same logic of abstraction I have argued in the preceding chapters is relevant to DeLillo's work as a whole, which the Convergence project embraces in a way which in fact undermines its utopian dream, demonstrating at the same time the depersonalizing effects it has on the individual. I argue for a deep connection between the ideological orientation of the Convergence with the overall chronotope of crisis in which the first half of the novel resides, which leads to a productive contrast with that of its second half. Contrary to the sense of crisis of Part One, Part Two of the novel explores what I argue is a chronotope of immanence, of the everyday, and in the second half of the chapter I closely examine the juxtaposition of the two chronotopes in order to unveil DeLillo's portrayal of an ontological response to the contemporary world which avoids the extremes found in both the desert "utopia" and New York's technologically alienated world.

Crucially, the importance of reading this novel through the two chronotopes I propose is not one which I attribute arbitrarily: it is signaled directly by DeLillo himself in the headings of the two sections. The title of Part One is "In the Time of Chelyabinsk," while that of the second is "In the Time of Konstantinovka"; both are *in the time of a place*. While Chelyabinsk is the name of the place in Russia where an actual meteor struck the earth in 2013, creating a blast in the atmosphere roughly thirty-times the size of the atomic bomb, Konstantinovka is the name of the fictional location of a scene shown to Jeff on a screen near the end of the novel, in which he appears to witness the death of Stak, the son of his girlfriend Emma. Knowing that the whole novel takes place circa 2020,[3] what the almost mythic framing of the "In the Time of Chelyabinsk/Konstantinovka" dichotomy therefore emphasizes are rather the *events* which take place there, as well as the alternative worldviews suggested by those events. This pairing thus speaks directly to the concept of the chronotope in and of itself, implying a different semantic logic encapsulated by two different events which take place, both temporally and

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[3] This inference is based on both a reference to Vladimir Putin (*Zero K* 187), as well as to "the scars on the wall caused by an anarchist's bomb a hundred years ago" (179) on Wall Street; the unsolved Wall Street bombing took place in September of 1920.

geographically speaking, not too distantly from each other. While in the second half of the chapter I will return to the implications of Stak's on-screen death "somewhere near a road sign reading Konstantinovka" (270), the current task is to explore the Chelyabinsk implication and its entanglement with the Convergence project located somewhere in the remote Kazakh desert.

6.1 'In the Time of Chelyabinsk' and the Foreclosed Future

While from the second paragraph of the novel the reader is brought along with the narrator Jeff to the remote reaches of the Convergence compound, the first paragraph is typographically set apart from the rest with an extra space, thus acting as a framing of sorts for the entire novel. The italicized first sentence, quoting Jeff's father Ross, resembles an epigraph: "*Everybody wants to own the end of the world*" (3). As opposed to the thematic opacity of *Point Omega*, in this single line there is a definitive situating of the world as one in which capital is reaching for the final victory, absorbing within it even the eschatological vision, the possibility of apocalypse. This is a final victory in the sense outlined in the preceding chapter, in which the varying processes of abstraction of which capital is arguably the strongest driver seek to close off the horizon of possibility, to submit the openness of the future to the whims of the subjugated present. "Owning the end of the world" would therefore represent the ultimate triumph of the ideology of progress already critiqued in the 1940s by Walter Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," as discussed at the outset of the thesis in relation to DeLillo's *End Zone*. In his *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson expands on Benjamin's lament that "not even the past will be safe" to add that, in the 21st century context, "the future is not safe either," in that the ideology of progress entails "an attempt to colonize the future, to draw the unforeseeable back into tangible realities" (228). Whereas the apocalyptic visions of the end which preoccupied a great number of DeLillo's early texts seemed to fade away with the turn of the millennium[4], the issue returns in *Zero K* in this context of its final absorption by the dominant ideological form. The "colonization" of apocalypse echoes both the limiting of the utopian vision to the dystopian starting in the 1980s as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as the more recent capitalization on the genre itself; beyond the proliferation of dystopian or apocalyptic films, this is evidenced in the mainstream success of

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[4] For probably the best discussion of apocalypse in DeLillo, see Elizabeth Rosen's chapter on DeLillo in her *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (2008).

big-screen adaptations of examples such as Collins' *The Hunger Games* series, the television version of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* and the troubled story of Roth's *Divergent* saga. It also echoes a now-famous line variously attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Fisher *Capitalist Realism* 2)[5]. While works such as Berardi's *Futurability* or Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* seek a potential way out of the death-grip which late capitalism has on the imaginary of (at least Western) global society – Jameson through the revindication of "the Utopian form itself" (232) – DeLillo's situating of the novel in this context is done neither to pursue the dystopian reality it suggests nor to actively promote a utopian response to it. As is typical of the author, his fictional treatment of the situation is a centered around a questioning of the effects it has on the individual – an exploration of possible ontological stances one may formulate in response.

This framing of the novel as occurring in the shadow of an ideological system which forecloses any possible future beyond the current state of affairs is reinforced in the following pages. Referring to his father Ross, Jeff narrates: "I was aware that he'd put major sums of money into this entire operation, this endeavor, called the Convergence, and the office was a gesture of courtesy, allowing him to maintain convenient contact with his network of companies, agencies, funds, trusts, foundations, syndicates, communes and clans" (*Zero K* 7). Ross is a member of the global elite class of billionaires, and Jeff's reference to his "network of companies, agencies, […] syndicates, communes and clans" represents a telling conflation of what are supposedly disparate elements; he conjoins terms referring to groups both complicit with the workings of capital (companies, agencies, etc.) as well as to groups prior to its existence (clans) and those supposedly in opposition to it, especially "syndicates" and "communes." This is thus the second in a series of examples which demonstrate that the Convergence project is well-named, implying here that the "convergence" referred to is based in – or at least partially so – this tendency for capital to incorporate all which resists it into its fold; this tendency is a central impetus behind works such as Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* and Guy Debord's two books on the spectacle.[6] The Convergence therefore becomes an

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[5] While I quote the line in Fisher, the use in this context probably begins in Jameson's *The Seeds of Time* (1994), in which he writes: "It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (xii)

[6] An example Fisher gives of this builds on Zizek's statement that "anti-capitalism is widely disseminated in capitalism" by pointing out that its now a common trope in Hollywood movies for the villain to "turn out to be the 'evil corporation.' Far from undermining capitalist realism, this gestural anti-capitalism actually reinforces it"

analogue for this pattern in which all apparently opposing dichotomies become conflated beneath the late capitalist umbrella; in this sense, the novel is an alternative, more-grounded exploration of the same cultural situation I outlined regarding 2010's *Point Omega*. Whereas that novel sought to poetically trace around the contours of the unrepresentable void which this situation suggests, *Zero K* makes concrete what *Point Omega* treated enigmatically. The 2016 novel opposes its predecessor's minimal chronotopes of a ramshackle house in a featureless desert and the still time of the *Psycho* exhibit to an elaborate, underground complex in the desert and the concrete reality of New York City, blaring traffic and all. This more rounded-out approach is already evident in this discussion of the explicit role given to capital and the relationship the Convergence has to it; whereas in *Point Omega* one had to read between the lines to find it, here the issue is foregrounded in the novel's very first sentence.

The task begun here of understanding what the Convergence represents is key to defining the first of the novel's two principal chronotopes, and it is therefore useful to look at a couple more of these early examples of the conflation of supposed opposites associated implicitly with the term "convergence." When Jeff comments that the name "sounds religious," his father responds: "Faith-based technology. That's what it is. Another god. Not so different, it turns out, from some of the earlier ones. Except that it's real, it's true, it delivers" (9). The seemingly paradoxical conflation of faith and technology, the material result of the same scientific pursuit which once upon a time replaced the sacred with secular, repeats the logic of a transcendence of dichotomies already seen. This is then extended into the realms of capital and the environment when Jeff describes his father: "He was a man shaped by money. He'd made an early reputation by analyzing the profit impact of natural disasters," further referencing at one point "the ecology of unemployment" (13-14). The problem with this apparent transcendence is that it is still locked into the logic of the dichotomy, the logic of binaries, and further does not escape the reach of the capitalist ideology; talk of the "ecology of unemployment" only serves to incorporate nature itself into the fold of capital. Though Ross and others discuss this "faith-based" nature of their approach to the cryogenic technology, his own words contradict his intent when he says "Nothing here is speculative. Nothing is wishful or peripheral. Men, women. Death, life" (8). The clear upholding of these binaries, reflecting

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(*Capitalist Realism* 12). Debord, for his part, argues that even those "rebels" who "wish to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric" can end up "us[ing] its syntax," effectively putting them "at the service of the established order right from the start" (*Comments* 30-31). See also Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

in fact the increasing digitalization of contemporary life, works against the proclaimed goal of the Convergence project.

6.1.1 Chronotope of Crisis

Before commenting further on this sort of discourse as espoused by the varying representatives of the project Jeff meets during his stay there, its important to return to the fundamentals of chronotopic analysis and examine those clues which emerge both in the titular framing as well as through the narrative's description of the place itself. Regarding Part One's "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" title, again, one would be hard pressed to formulate a phrase which more obviously signals a chronotopic value. My argument is that Chelyabinsk's role as the location of a real meteor strike of 2013, whose unexpectedness opened the world's eyes to the potential for such a catastrophic event from beyond earth's boundaries, immediately situates Part One within a context of disaster, or rather of *planetary crisis*. The nature of the event as a threat of extra-human origin hypothetically shifts the focus from one internal to the workings of human societies (as in, a conflict between political groups) to one of external threat, an existential threat on the level of species. Thus whereas the context of *Falling Man* and *Point Omega* was the political situation Jacques Rancière has outlined regarding the post-9/11 world in the various essays collected in *Dissensus*, in which the "infinite justice" proclaimed by the Bush administration reduces all distinctions "to a stark ethical conflict between Good and Evil" (74), here the reaction of the Convergence group is to retreat to the desert in order to construct the Good of a new, transcendent world, one which purports to escape politics by reimagining the human relationship with space, time, embodiment, society, and cognition. They are, in essence, seeking a new form of being, with the desert acting as an ontological canvas for these utopian desires. The problem, however, is already signaled in the supposed erasure of dichotomies presented above, where such opposites as faith/technology, ecology/capital, and companies/communes are deliberately brought together. In this sense there is an oblique correlation with Rancière's discussion of the "erasure of the distinctions which formerly defined the field of justice in general" in the name of establishing the Good versus Evil conflict (which in actuality merely serves to maintain dominant power structures); the erasure of distinctions in the end only serves to, paradoxically, reaffirm the ethical binary of Good and Evil. For those of the Convergence, however, the conflict is reframed in a way

captured well in Ross's words: "Men, women. Death, life" (8); death becomes the enemy that must be vanquished at all costs. What I wish to argue then is that this reframing of the "conflict" is one which emerges as a response to the state of planetary crisis into which the idea of Chelyabinsk throws the world, and that the "convergence" – which can alternatively be read as the "erasure" – of such dichotomies is a response to this species of ontological crisis.

In the 2013 article "The Space of Time: Chronotopes and Crisis," Peter Hitchcock discusses the potential of the literary chronotope to reflect crises in the wider world outside that of the text; he clarifies that by "the space of time" in his title he refers to "the extent to which literary chronotopes are caught within, produce and are produced by, specific crises of time and space which may have more than the literary in mind in their fullest extent" (68), something I nevertheless believe is already evident in Bakhtin's own writings.[7] Relevant for *Zero K,* and indeed DeLillo's work in general (he references *Underworld* and *Falling Man* in passing), Hitchcock writes:

> The space of time is where literary chronotopes are not only descriptive but critical of crisis, about what they purport to explain, reframe, or presage. Indeed, one could conjecture the space of time is not simply *a posteriori* but in its imaginary schema can be *a priori* (the crisis it measures might also compose a crisis to come). (68)

This suggestion resonates with my arguments throughout this thesis that DeLillo has consistently portrayed differing embodied relationships to place – to space and time – as the cultural context shifts over the course of his career, tellingly writing novels which contemporaneously explore the same problems (crises) more theoretical-minded thinkers are tackling in a critical context. The shift thus from the time-space compression identified in texts of the pre-millennium 1970s and 80s to the post-9/11 theoretical concerns with the foreclosure of future possibility is here brought to a present moment in which DeLillo is compelled to face this foreclosure head on; in other words, any fictional gesture DeLillo makes towards the future is a telling one. Whereas the vast majority of his work is set in a fictionalized present, with some notable explorations of the past such as *Libra* and parts of *Underworld,* DeLillo has very rarely set his texts in the future. In a sense this might explain the "prescience" often attributed to him; where other writers exploring the same phenomena do so in fictionalized futures (i.e. in science fiction) DeLillo tends to insert his observation on society's directionality into his novels set in the present.

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[7] See my discussion of the relation between literary chronotopes and living experience in Chapter 1.

Zero K and its alternate tomorrow setting (as mentioned, the novel was published in 2016 and is set roughly in 2020) is thus a significant break from this pattern, where the only other fiction of his which really corresponds is "Human Moments in World War III" and now *The Silence* – I would argue that 1976's *Ratner's Star* exists in a surrealistic field of its own. Just as the combined pressure of the Cold War's arms race and the shift to flexible accumulation present in the background of texts such as *End Zone* and *The Names* pushed DeLillo to dedicate the 1983 short story to fully exploring its ramifications for the embodied subject, DeLillo's ability to represent what Boxall calls the "unbound chronology" (*Twenty-First* 29) of the new millennium maxes out with *Point Omega*. The enigmatic approach to the void in the 2010 novel would thus seem to signal a breaking point, the reaching of a limit when it comes to the ability to accurately represent the present moment - the fact that DeLillo's most recent novel *The Silence* (2020) similarly represents an alternate tomorrow reinforces this argument.

In terms of *Zero K*, it is the combined effect of the Chelyabinsk imaginary with the repeated references to worldwide disasters – at the hands of both climate change and more direct human violence – which defines the context for the Convergence project; their transhuman discourse and underground complex constructed in the remote desert are therefore inseparable from this overarching chronotope of disaster or crisis represented by the "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" title. This chronotope of crisis is, further, one which suggests a trajectory towards the dystopic, which will be contextualized shortly via the discourse of the Convergence's representatives as well as in the discussion of the project itself as a certain sort of utopian response. In general, what should be understood from these paragraphs is that everything which occurs in Part One of the novel is therefore nested within this chronotope defined by the Chelyabinsk event, a world defined by the logic of existential threat on the species-level. Chelyabinsk here acts as a representational focal point for the actually-existing atmosphere of existential danger in the face of the currently accelerating climate crisis; this "exaggeration" from today's standpoint of this threat is another part of what impelled DeLillo's narrative into the near future. In this climate of crisis verging towards the dystopian, then, the utopian response represented by the Convergence group is in accord with its chronotopic environment.

The Convergence chooses the remote desert somewhere near the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan border as its ideal location; the first descriptions of the setting are given upon Jeff's arrival, after he is dropped off: "The car was headed back to the private airstrip and it was the only thing moving out there, soon to be enveloped in land or sinking light or sheer horizon"

(*Zero K* 4). The enveloping of the car in land or its disappearance into "sheer horizon" function to interrupt the typical suggestion of connectivity to other places embodied in the car's movement, thus serving to set the place apart. Jeff then continues: "I completed my turn, a long slow scan of salt flats and stone rubble, empty except for several low structures, possibly interconnected, barely separable from the bleached landscape. There was nothing else, nowhere else. I hadn't known the precise nature of my destination, only its remoteness" (4). Already in this description there is a familiar DeLillean emphasis on the "remoteness" of the desert space, taken here to the limit with the line "There was nothing else, nowhere else" – the implication is that the complex is located outside the boundaries of mappable space, *elsewhere*, almost in the same sense as the effect "once upon a time" has for framing folktales in mythic time. In this sense the "alternate tomorrow" pairing with "Human Moments in World War III" finds another correlation, where this framing, especially when combined with the textual effect of chapters separated by a blank white page, suggests more the form DeLillo takes with the short story rather than the novel.

The appearance of the term "stone rubble" in this description and the almost inseparability of the built structures "from the bleached landscape" further suggest another sort of connection, this time to the ruin; this is a suggestion echoed throughout the novel, in the first place on the same page: "I imagined it as a city to be discovered at a future time, self-contained, well-preserved, nameless, abandoned by some unknown migratory culture" (4). Much later in the novel, Jeff relates his reluctant awe at seeing the underground collection of bodies preserved in pods: "was there something nearly prehistoric about the artifacts ranged before me now? Archaeology for a future age" (256). The similarity of this last phrase to Jameson's study of utopia and science fiction titled *Archaeologies of the Future* is cogent in that the Convergence consciously seeks to enact their own utopian vision, transcending the limitations of humanity as precursor to the creation of a future state. In his introduction to that text, Jameson writes that thanks to the "amphibiousness of being and its temporality," utopia becomes "philosophically analogous to the trace, only from the other end of time." Thus, "Utopia, which combines the not-yet-being of the future with a textual existence in the present," is equally "worthy of the archaeologies we are willing to grant to the trace" (xv-xvi). DeLillo here seems to play with this same idea, providing the Convergence group with a reflexive self-awareness of their ontological goal. Broadly speaking, while the general direction of the novel's chronotopic argument is towards an undermining of said utopian goals by the chronotope of the embodied, living city of Part Two, DeLillo's novel unsurprisingly – given his critique of binary thinking

I outline above – refuses such a simple, dichotomous reading which completely negates one or the other, and this moment in which Jeff looks in awe at the bodies in the pods is in fact one of the clearest moments in which the Convergence project is potentially validated.

While that structural difference will be returned to in due course, there is much to be said regarding the Convergence itself, in both its stated values and the way these are translated into the built structure of their desert site. In what I'd call a chronotopically hyper-aware text, there are a number of instances in which the semiotic value of the space is referenced directly by characters. Ross, for example, tells Jeff:

> Don't be quick to draw conclusions about what you see and hear. This place was designed by serious people. Respect the idea. Respect the setting itself. Artis says we ought to regard it as a work-in-progress, an earthwork, a form of earth art, land art. Built up out of the land and sunk down into it as well. Restricted access. Defined by stillness, both human and environmental. A little tomblike as well. The earth is the guiding principle […]. Return to the earth, emerge from the earth. (*Zero K* 10)

The reference to land art and the sunken feature of the installation brings to mind DeLillo's 2005 play *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, in which artist Alex Macklin retreats to the desert to create a cavern in the earth painted entirely black. In his recent, insightful chapter on the play, Randy Laist argues that "The desert is a place where Alex can achieve a level of subjectivity that is beyond 'consciousness' and 'awareness,' a kind of animalistic body-life that is integrated in a fundamental way with the non-human entities in the landscape" (161). There is an apparent correlation here to the idea Ross outlines, which includes "stillness, both human and environmental" and the principle of "return to the earth, emerge from the earth." Another character later makes this goal explicit, claiming that "one of our objectives is to establish a consciousness that blends with the environment" (*Zero K* 64). However, the similarity between Alex's project in *Love-Lies-Bleeding* and that of the Convergence is troubled by the nature of their respective connections to the earth. Regarding the 2005 play, Laist writes:

> While the conventional Westward American pilgrimage signifies a gesture toward a transcendent mastery of the land, for Alex, the movement into the desert, as a home and as an artistic medium, pursues the project of effacing the separation between self and world in a way that simultaneously depersonalizes the individual and personalizes the landscape. (165)

What Laist correctly signals is that Alex's move to the desert is one which makes it both "home" and "artistic medium" – at no point throughout *Zero K* does the reader get the impression that this desert location of "stone rubble" is "home" to the group; the desert is more

this blank ontological canvas than anything else. Alex's interest in plants and the landscape represents a wholly different relationship to the desert, one which supports Laist's argument that the artist wishes to "efface the separation between self and world." Alex explains his reasoning for being in the desert as such: "I'm just here. In winter the sharp-shinned hawk comes down to the scrub. I can sit and watch a hawk in a tree for unnumbered hours. I'm on his time" (*Love-Lies-Bleeding* 52). In contrast to the temporal disorientation signaled by the hawks wheeling the empty sky of *End Zone* and *The Names,* his watching of the hawk and getting "on his time" represents an ontological move towards the non-human, and therefore supports the effacing of separation between self and environment Laist indicates. This contrasts with the Convergence's inward focus, despite their own claim to want to "establish a consciousness that blends with the environment" (*Zero K* 64); this claim only makes sense when "the environment" is understood in terms of the mythic remove signaled earlier – "There was nothing else, nowhere else" (4). The Convergence is in no way moving away from anthropocentrism.

In this sense, then, there is already a hindrance established regarding the Convergence's goal, at least from a philosophical standpoint which sees the sort of ontological merging Alex seeks as valuable. When Jeff asks his father why they choose to be so isolated, Ross responds: "This is what we want, this separation. We have what is needed. Durable energy sources and strong mechanized systems. Blast walls and fortified floors. Structural redundancy. Fire safety. Security patrols, land and air. Elaborate cyberdefense" (30). Rather than any sort of merging with the environment, here represented is a fortressing off from the world, a willful distancing, which – as should be clear from my previous chapters – DeLillo consistently explores as problematic; the Convergence has the same issue as Richard Elster from *Point Omega*, caught up in the logic of abstraction (here explicitly connected to the logic of capital) despite their discourse claiming the contrary. See for example the words of one of the project's "vital minds": "This is the future, this remoteness, this sunken dimension. Solid but also elusive in a way. A set of coordinates mapped from space" (64). In what works as a concise definition of the place (in that it refers to values of both space and time), the man offers a description which abstracts the Convergence both spatially and temporally; being a "set of coordinates" and existing in "the future" – outside the present – epitomizes its disconnection from the concrete idea of place which has emerged, for one, from the phenomenological project.

6.1.2 Design and Resistance in the 'shaved space' of the Convergence

The preceding discussion serves to introduce the idea that the Convergence as an ideological project is strongly connected to the overarching chronotope of crisis (with its vector towards the dystopic) framed by the "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" title; in other words, the Convergence's discourse is well-suited to its chronotopic environment as a utopian reaction to a dystopian prospect. Beyond the commentary of the "vital minds (64) of the project and the setting itself, I will discuss the way this chronotopic situation is hammered home repeatedly by the actual construction of the place as well as by the effect of a series of projector screens, which periodically lower as Jeff is wandering the halls to depict varying scenes of silent catastrophe. In terms of the first of these, the design of the place, from the outside Jeff describes "buildings in hiding, agoraphobically sealed. They were blind buildings, hushed and somber, invisibly windowed, designed to fold into themselves, I thought, when the movie reaches the point of digital collapse" (4-5). The description echoes the willed isolation Ross and others signal, with the final suggestion that the buildings are designed to fold into themselves "when the movie reaches the point of digital collapse" reflecting the time approaching a standstill of the "Anonymity" sections of *Point Omega*; the dreams of immortality of the Convergence indeed point toward the stasis of eternity.

Once inside, Jeff also finds a complex designed to evoke the particular utopian vision to which the Convergence aspires. For one, the half-above and half-underground complex he explores there is built specifically to echo these theoretical goals established by the various mouthpieces for the project. The decision to go underground, echoing former such moments in *Ratner's Star*[8] and *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, separates those within from the rhythm of day and night, the primary means of marking time's passing. Relevantly, Dylan Trigg notes in *The Memory of Place* that from "the light of morning to the darkness of night, and then during the blackness of sleep, our bodies become the vehicle for the reality of the earth's movement. Without exposure to this shift in shadow and light, the experience of time would undergo massive augmentation" (8). It is this experience of time as embodied which is precisely what is disrupted in this place, where it is thus no surprise that his supposedly twenty-four hour stay is drawn out as a result of a delay in the moment Artis will pass on – this is an echo of what

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[8] The character Endor, a "brilliant astrophysicist," ends up going "to live in a hole in the ground" (*Ratner's Star* 47) as a result of becoming overwhelmed by "the size of the universe" and his "failure to interpret the message" (85) of supposed extraterrestrial origins which motivates the novel's plot.

happens in *Point Omega*, where Jim Finley's short stay is continuously extended. Jeff explicitly highlights this effect at a later point, when his father makes the preliminary decision to accompany Artis into "immortality" before his time:

> I didn't know what else to say, what to do, where to go. Three, four, five days, however long I'd been here—time compressed, time drawn tight, overlapping time, dayless, nightless, many doors, no windows. I understood of course that this place was located at the far margins of plausibility. He'd said so himself. No one could make this up, he'd said. This was the point, their point, in three dimensions. A literal landmark of implausibility. (*Zero K* 115)

Here DeLillo signals both the disruption of the embodied experience of time through the cycle of day and night that Trigg refers to, as well as the way this and the "time compressed" are connected to the landscape of "many doors, no windows." While his father had said that "no one could make this up," the truth of course is that this place is purposefully designed; the temporal effect Jeff refers to aligns with their particular utopian dream of escaping the bonds of temporality, living directly in the future, as a Convergence spokesperson signals elsewhere: "Why not follow our words bodily into the future tense?" (253)

Beyond the underground construction, the interior design of the spaces themselves also plays a significant role; there is, for one, a noticeable emphasis on the depersonalization of the space. Jeff describes his room in such a way: "The room was small and featureless. It was generic to the point of being a thing with walls. The ceiling was low, the bed was bedlike, the chair was a chair. There were no windows" (20). Peter Boxall, in his focus on the tautology in late DeLillo, responds to this "tautologous room" by arguing that "This is the revelation that lies at the heart of this novel—the encounter with a limit condition in which a chair is a chair, in which things are what they are. The prose arrives here in the sealed space that Beckett discovers in his own late historical, late stylistic works" ("A Leap" 547). The comparison with Beckett is certainly apt, especially given the repetition of the phrase "There was nowhere else" in both *Zero K* (4) and Beckett's *Endgame* (14), as well as the marked similarity of the "spare room" provided to his father and the setting of Beckett's 1958 play. The latter's staging is described as such: "*Bare interior. Grey light. Left and right back, high up, two windows*" (*Endgame* 11), and it is out of these windows that the character Clov repeatedly describes a vague and dead landscape[9]; compare this to Jeff's description of the spare room:

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[9] As Clov looks out the window at the world in which "the light is sunk" (25), Hamm asks him, "The waves, how are the waves?" to which Clov responds "Lead." Similarly, when Hamm asks "And the sun?" Clov's response is "Zero," and the sky is grey "from pole to pole" (26).

> I got up and walked across the floor to the spare room, where I went directly to the window. Stood and looked. Spare land, skin and bones, distant ridges whose height I could not estimate without a dependable reference. Sky pale and bare, day fading in the west, if it was the west, if it was the sky. I stepped back gradually and watched the view reduce itself within the limits of the window frame. Then I looked at the window itself, tall and narrow, top-ended by an arch. A lancet window, I thought, recalling the term, and this brought me back to myself, to a diminished perspective, something steadfast, a word with a meaning. (*Zero K* 116)

Reminiscent also of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955), the clear lack of reference causes Jeff to doubt even "if it was the west, if it was the sky" – to doubt his perception itself. This species of doubt, I would argue, is the most potent effect of the Convergence space, and all of Jeff's tactics for battling this destabilizing effect are that which then take on importance. Taken together, his stepping back "to watch the view reduce itself" within the frame, then looking "at the window itself" and finally bringing himself "back to [him]self" through recalling the correct term for the particular type of "lancet" window foregrounds the role of perception, the phenomenological emphasis on the always already situated (*placed*) nature of being. Boxall's suggestion that rooms such as Jeff's express "both an end state and the terms of a new mode of consciousness" (547) can, in my view, therefore only be referring to the possibility inherent in a planing away of all other "distractions" which obscure the essence of being. However, while Boxall's identification of this function in DeLillo's late prose rings true, the space's function as related to this Convergence project makes it more suspect than not, and thus Jeff's defense throughout his time there is to reassert the role of embodied being; this defense is, crucially, often predicated on an insertion of both his embodiment and his personal memories into the spatiotemporal sterility of the place.

Whatever the Convergence's intent, the spare nature of the room has an effect which is not new for DeLillo. Just as Owen's immersion in the earthen bin in the desert scenes of *The Names* allowed him to escape time's arrow and seek absolution through full engagement with childhood memories, Jeff's room in the desert enables a similar merging of past and present. Similarly to the 1982 novel, DeLillo represents this effect syntactically, shifting from the present to the past tense with no external indication of the change in setting: "The Monk had said that he could get out of the chair and raise a hand and touch the ceiling. In my room I tried to do this and managed, on tiptoes. The moment I sat down I felt a shiver of anonymity. Then there I am on the subway with Paula from Twin Falls, Idaho" (57). Jeff's "shiver of anonymity" which results from the lack of distinction he perceives from the Monk is immediately countered

by a present-tense experience of a memory on the train. This happens again in the same scene, this time thinking about his mother: "She *was* Madeline Siebert, originally from a small town in southern Arizona. A cactus on a postage stamp, she called it. She *drapes* her coat on a hanger whose hooked upper part she twists so that it fits over the top of the open closet door. Then she runs the roller over the back of the coat" (58, my emphasis). Whereas Owen Brademas' similar such experience served to finally provide him with much-needed solace regarding a haunting memory, Jeff's reads less as absolving than as a natural defense against the Convergence's dehumanizing intent, a defense that he cannot help but employ; this is Jeff's way of being in the world. This merging of past and present in fact reads as a fictional representation of the phenomenological argument that the embodied human does not distinguish on a conscious level between the past and the present; it is all blended together in our constantly unfolding experience of the now. Further, the "roller" his mother "runs over the back of the coat" in the second quote above is a lint roller, which Jeff earlier introduced as such: "My mother had a roller that picked up lint. I don't know why this fascinated me" (55). Although Jeff does not understand it, the fascination with the lint roller is most likely related to the idea of accumulation, reflected in these pages through the portrayal of Jeff's accumulation of memories, definitive of a human life. The memory of the simple object of the lint roller and the dust it collects (often literally the cast-off skin of human beings) is therefore in direct opposition with the few objects the Convergence presents, especially the hairless, lifeless mannequins Jeff finds scattered randomly about the place. Passages such as the above demonstrate the importance of the phenomenological approach to human existence as a direct counter to the abstracting logic of the Convergence.

Unsurprisingly, then, in his initial response to the design of the place shortly after arrival, Jeff narrates: "I was disoriented. This was the morning of what would be my first full day here and this was my father across the desk and none of it was familiar, not the situation or the physical environment or the bearded man himself" (8). When combined with the difficulty Jeff has in making sense of the built environment of the Convergence, the line suggests that a process of defamiliarization is at work. Laura Barrett has focused her critique of this novel on this particular aspect in her 2018 article on "The Uncanny Ordinary in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*," writing:

> This extraordinary space, the literalization of Descartes's mind-body split, exhibiting suspicion of and estrangement from the body, recalls the uncanny, a trope that manifests in domestic disturbances—a sense of unhomeliness and disorientation, a disquieting transformation of the

> familiar into the strange, the return of the repressed, and a confusion between the animate and inanimate. (107)

The place indeed promotes an “estrangement of the body” and the “mind-body split,” and I would even argue that the construction of hallways and rooms with different color doors also reflects the sense of social isolation, estrangement *between* bodies, which the Convergence’s rhetoric of abstraction aligns with. At one point, for example, Ross and Jeff are discussing the nature of the project when Ross says: “Your life in seconds. Think of the age of the earth, the geologic eras, oceans appearing and disappearing. Think of the age of the galaxy, the age of the universe. All those billions of years. And us, you and me. We live and die in a flash” (34). Jeff’s response to this invocation of deep time – a reversal of its typical depiction in contemporary philosophies which employ such time-scales in order to *de*-emphasize the human[10] – is to focus on the opposite of seemingly insignificant details: “He wore a blue dress shirt, no tie, top two buttons undone. I played with the idea that the shirt’s color matched one of the hall doors of my recent experience. Maybe I was trying to undermine the discourse, a form of self-defense” (34). The idea Jeff plays with subtly suggests the correlation between the complex’s rooms and individual people, where the hallway and the closed doors represent the fundamental isolation of the human being; beyond Jeff’s own experiences in his room, this is hinted at when during an earlier point he decides to knock on doors to test his idea that “There was [actually] nothing behind the doors. I walked and thought. I speculated. There were areas on certain floors that contained offices. Elsewhere the halls were pure design, the doors simply one element in the overarching scheme” (23). He tests this theory, knocking on six doors without a response until finally a “door opened and a man stood there in suit, tie and turban.” When Jeff says “I must have the wrong door,” the man responds: “They’re all the wrong door” (25). The suit and turban-wearing man seems the surreal echo of the later New York’s cultural diversity – perhaps even of the Afghani taxi driver (169-178) – and his response shuts down Jeff’s metaphorical attempt to “find out whether there was anything behind the doors” (25); if the doors represent access to the other, this man definitively illustrates the incongruity of that sort of endeavor in this place.

Returning to Jeff’s contemplation of the color of his father’s shirt in response to the discourse about “the age of the universe,” Jeff thinks that “maybe [he] was trying to undermine

[10] I refer to both the New Materialisms exemplified by Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* (2010) and the object-oriented ontology as per Graham Harman; see *Tool-Being* (2002) or *Object Oriented Ontology* (2018).

the discourse, a form of self-defense" (34), an idea which is in fact upheld by the text; this can be read as his direct rebuttal to the mentality exemplified in Ross's earlier insistence that in order to understand the Convergence's project he "think about the end of all the petty misery [he's] been hoarding for years," or that he "Think beyond personal experience" (33). Jeff's consistent response while spending time at the desert location is precisely this, to counter such abstractions and transcendental discourse with which he is presented with his personal experience, be it observations such as the details of his father's shirt or memories of his own "petty" past. This is perhaps best captured in another such pairing of the transcendental and the everyday, which occurs in the wake of Jeff's reflecting on his relationship with his father, "a man shaped by money" and known for "analyzing the profit impact of natural disasters," who had "left" (13-14) his mother when Jeff was thirteen. This reminiscing leads Jeff to reflect on his current situation, there to bear witness to Artis' passing:

> And Artis now in this barely believable place, this desert apparition, soon to be preserved, a glacial body in a massive burial chamber. And after that a future beyond imagining. Consider the words alone. *Time, fate, chance, immortality*. And here is my simpleminded past, my dimpled history, the moments I can't help summoning because they're mine, impossible not to see and feel, crawling out of every wall around me. (15, original emphasis)

Jeff as a narrator is reflexively aware of his reaction to the Convergence's design, which is to reassert the primacy of the phenomenological – where the Convergence seeks to escape the body and its various limitations (temporal, cognitive), Jeff reasserts the stark opposition such goals have to his own nuanced existence by literally peopling the empty halls with his memories, "crawling" as they are "out of every wall" around him. Jeff elsewhere accomplishes the same with a reassertion of the physical body, which Laura Barrett has commented upon as well: after "listening to [a] scripted sales pitch" and "'an incantation' about dying, immortality, and myth-making, Jeff responds by jumping and squatting […] and imagining himself as 'an arboreal ape flinging long hairy arms over its head, hopping and barking in self-defense, building muscles, burning fat'" ("Uncanny" 118). This clear countering on Jeff's part, here expressed physically, is evident throughout his time there; even on the same page as his contrast of the "future beyond imagining" with his "simple-minded past" (*Zero K* 15), Jeff immediately puts into practice the tactic of inserting his own memory. He remembers going to church on Ash Wednesday, despite his irreligious background, and receiving the "holy ash thumb-printed to [his] forehead," accompanied by the priest's standard incantation that "*Dust thou art* […] *and to dust thou shalt return*" (14, original emphasis). The memory here placed evinces –

despite Catholicism's own belief in immortality – the tension between the two modes of perception, between a faith in technology's capacity to deliver transcendence and a reminder that mortal existence is transitory.

This contrast has prompted Eric Cofer to focus his critique of the novel through an engagement with "posthumanist scholarship [in order] to elucidate the networked, embodied existence functioning as a productive counterweight to the transhumanist ethos exemplified by the Convergence" (460). While Cofer bases his discussion in N. Katherine Hayles' seminal *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), as will become clear at the close of the chapter the issue is also helpfully illuminated by Rosi Braidotti's more recent (2013) treatise on *The Posthuman*; I refer particularly to her argument which situates the embodied subject as the starting point from which to approach a "non-dualistic understanding of nature–culture interaction" (3). As should be clear by now, despite its name the Convergence group continuously upholds a variety of dichotomous distinctions. Cofer therefore accurately identifies the novel's emphasis on embodiment, pointing out that "It is through the possibility of *dis*embodiment, with its accompanying risks, that the choice of embodied living takes on added resonance" (465, my emphasis). In fact, I would argue that Jeff's entire time at the Convergence in this first Chelyabinsk-defined chronotope should be viewed as a *process*, for him and for the reader, which is brought to the sort of conclusion Cofer here signals. In this sense, the suggestion of defamiliarization is again relevant as the agent which activates this process. As Barrett puts it, "DeLillo's reliance on realistic rather than supernatural explanation places him in the tradition of the American Gothic, for whom the ordinary world is extraordinary enough. The uncanny, then, is the unexplainable and mysterious everyday that confronts us after we return from our search for clarity and certainty" ("Uncanny" 121). However, though Jeff assiduously maintains his defense against the transhuman ethos through the different sort of tactics described thus far, he is by the end of Part One beginning to weaken in his ability to resist the depersonalizing effects of these "tautologous" spaces; this is a point I will return to shortly.

While critics such as Barrett and Cofer have accurately identified the tactics of what one might call existential defense in the focus on embodiment and memory seen above, I argue that even Jeff's wandering of the halls is a tactic in and of itself. The spatial assault Jeff is defending against is clarified again in his own words when he writes: "The room in the long empty hall. The chair, the bed, the bare walls, the low ceiling. Sitting in the room and then wandering the halls I could feel myself lapsing into my smallest self, all the vainglorious ideas around me shrunk into personal reverie because what am I in this place but someone in need

of self-defense" (*Zero K* 56). Jeff correctly identifies here that the problem lies in the pure discrepancy between the individual person and the "vainglorious ideas" which shape the Convergence as a place, where its depersonalizing design pushes him into his "smallest self." Though at this slightly later point Jeff feels himself "lapsing" even in wandering the halls, what the act of wandering indeed represents is another such form of resistance. At the outset of the novel he writes that he

> spent time walking the halls. The halls were nearly empty […] Down one broad hall, turn into another. Blank walls, no windows, doors widely spaced, all doors shut. These were doors of related colors, subdued, and I wondered if there was meaning to be found in these slivers of the spectrum. This is what I did in any new environment. I tried to inject meaning, make the place coherent or at least locate myself within the place, to confirm my uneasy presence. (10)

The process of "injecting meaning" is attempted in various ways, with a standout example being his naming of all the anonymous characters he comes across[11] – the Convergence figures rather pointedly never give their own names. The act of naming is thus a rebelling against the abstraction of the place and the discourse of its spokespeople; for example, a man discussing the way those who are frozen will "emerge in cyberhuman form into a universe that will speak to us in a very different way," Jeff decides to name "Miklos Szabo," to suit "his bulging body" (67). As Jeff later narrates, "I was beginning to understand that every act I engaged in had to be articulated at some level, had to be performed with the words intact. I could not chew and swallow without thinking of *chew* and *swallow*. […] Maybe I could blame the *room*, my room, the introspective box" (89, original emphasis). The reason Jeff must articulate everything is as a reaction to the Convergence's pull in the opposite direction, towards the anonymity of epitomized alienation inherent in the idea of bodies preserved in a pod to be awakened to the "new" reality, which Jeff is perhaps not wrong to interpret as a completely inhuman reality. The naming of the anonymous characters and the internal articulation of his actions to "chew and swallow" is in tension with the local project of setting "philologists [to design] an advanced language unique to the Convergence. Word roots, inflections, even gestures. People will learn it and speak it. A language that will enable us to express things we can't express now, see things we can't see now, see ourselves and others in ways that unite us, broaden every possibility" (33). What DeLillo's anonymous spaces and people combined here highlight is therefore twofold; on the one hand, it unveils the often hidden truth that the design of space plays an

[11] Cf. *Zero K* pp. 67 – 77, in which Jeff names a series of characters.

integral role in structuring and controlling human reactions and interactions, while on the other it accentuates the counter-process of "injecting meaning" involved in all aspects of human life, laying bare the often disconcerting truth that meaning is not in fact inherent to any place, person or thing, but rather that it is given through human action and interaction.

Returning then to my suggestion of the resistance implied in the walking of the halls, the argument is that Jeff's wandering itself situates him in opposition to the place. He reads as a subterranean flâneur in the surreal space, a Deleuzian nomad who opposes the striated space with his own enactment of the smooth, fighting the value of the chronotope – specifically, that is, he fights the chronotope of the Convergence, itself situated in and in fact inextricable from the broader chronotope of crisis of Part One. In other words, his wandering is more active than passive; beyond the insertion of his personal memories along every step of the way, this act of walking in and of itself is informed by Michel de Certeau's discussion of urban movement in his *The Practice of Everyday Life.* De Certeau argues that

> The act of walking is to the urban system what enunciation (the *speech act*) is to language or to the system of available utterances. At the most elementary level it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system by the pedestrian (in the same way that the speaker appropriates and assumes language for himself); it is a spatial *realisation* of place (as the speech act is sonorous realisation of language); and finally it implies certain *relations* between differentiated positions, that is, certain pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (in the same way as verbal enunciation is [a] 'positioning of the other' in relation to the speaker, and establishes a contract between speakers). Walking would therefore find its primary definition as a site of enunciation. (97–98, original emphases)

In de Certeau's terms, Jeff's walking the halls fits into all three of these functions which make the act a "site of enunciation." Jeff's walking is, for one, inherently geared towards "appropriation of the topographical system," which as de Certeau makes clear signifies "assuming" the space (similarly to language) for himself, opposing its anonymity by writing in his own being through movement. Further, both his walking understood as a "spatial realization" of the place and as establishing "relations" between "differentiated positions" – analogous to a "positioning of the other" – are in fact radically opposed to the Convergence's spatiotemporal goals of accentuating separation, isolation and alienation. Jeff's walking as a site of enunciation is therefore an integral part of his process of "injecting meaning" into the "shaved space" (*Zero K* 250), a crucial element in his resistance. This ambulatory resistance, moreover, pairs quite clearly with his linguistic tactics I discussed above, from the naming of

the anonymous characters to the need to actively think the words "chew" and "swallow" as he performs those actions (89). Lastly, while there are many aspects one could use to demonstrate what DeLillo himself calls the "twin[ned] identities" (Boxall "A Leap" 546) of the novel's two halves, I will later return to the opposition this walking of the halls implies with an important scene of wandering the streets of New York City in Part Two, as the pairing is one of the keys to the fundamental chronotopic distinction I argue for between the novel's two halves. Before arriving at that second major chronotope, however, it is important to outline the function of the projector screens here in the "Chelyabinsk" section, as they too play a role in the novel's chronotopic opposition.

6.1.3 Silent Screens and the Spectacle of Crisis

As Jeff spends his time walking the hallways throughout this first half of the novel, there are repeated instances in which these large projector screens suddenly lower at apparently random times, portraying exclusively scenes of disaster. This occurs no less than six times during this first visit to the Convergence, the first of which I quote at length to establish context:

> At the end of the last hall there was a screen jutting from a niche in the ceiling. It began to lower, stretching wall to wall and reaching nearly to the floor. I approached slowly. At first the images were all water […] then people everywhere running, others helpless in small boats bouncing over rapids. There were temples flooded, homes pitching down hillsides. I watched as water kept rising in city streets, cars and drivers going under. The size of the screen lifted the effect out of the category of TV news. Everything loomed, scenes lasted long past the usual broadcast breath. It was there in front of me, on my level, immediate and real, a woman sitting life-sized on a lopsided chair in a house collapsed in mudslide. […] It was hard not to look. Finally I glanced back down the hall waiting for someone to appear, another witness, a person who might stand next to me while the images built and clung.
>
> There was no audio. (*Zero K* 11)

The screens repeatedly depict these scenes of unfolding disaster of various sorts, this one focusing on different images of catastrophic flooding, while the next instance depicts the destruction of tornados: as Jeff thinks at that point, "here was our climate enfolding us" (37). The screens' potency lies in what Jeff describes in this first passage: the "size of the screen lift[ing] the effect out of the category of TV news," making "everything loom" (11). The size of the screen and its lack of audio is of course reminiscent of the *24 Hour Psycho* screening of

Point Omega, but its impact is different; rather than a slowing-down to alter the viewer's perception, these screens show images that make what they present "immediate and real" – more real, perhaps, than the surreal surroundings into which they are silently projected. After the initial two screenings of disasters apparently connected to the climate crisis, the content begins to mix with more explicitly human-caused events, including three men setting themselves on fire in protest (61) and a mosaic of human and natural catastrophe: "air tankers [spraying] a thick layer of chemicals" over "scorched treetops," "homes imploded by heat and flame," people "wearing facemasks, […] a disease, a virus," "grass fires sweeping across the flatlands," "enormous ocean waves approaching" and, finally, "screen about to burst with flames that jump a stream and appear to spring into the camera and out toward the hallway where [Jeff] stand[s] watching" (120-121). Where the facemasks and the virus hit strikingly close to home in a 2020 context of global pandemic, another potential moment of DeLillean "prescience," the effect of the piling up of catastrophic scenes of causes both human and natural (though the "natural" disasters themselves blur the nature/culture divide in the Anthropocene) is accentuated by the final description of the flames which "appear to spring […] out toward the hallway."

Bringing images of external chaos into the Convergence environment is clearly a tactic of those responsible meant to bolster the argument for a detachment from the outside world; the images are matched by such declarations – this one by the Jeff-named Miklos Szabo – as "Catastrophe is our bedtime story," and "It's an escape from our personal mortality. Catastrophe. It overwhelms what is weak and fearful in our bodies and minds" (66). Catastrophe is thus framed as a mechanism which triggers the same "escape from our personal mortality" that the Convergence seeks with their multi-faceted cryogenic project, making it an integral part of their ideological framing. As Szabo says in more detail: "To some extent we are here in this location to design a response to whatever eventual calamity may strike the planet. […] Are we adjusting the future, moving it into our immediate time frame? At some point in the future, death will become unacceptable even as the life of the planet becomes more fragile" (66). A critique embedded in this situation understands the Convergence group and the elite class it represents as constructing an exclusive ark to flee the flames of a landscape that they themselves have set on fire, they and their forerunners bearing the torch of capital. The detachment from ethical responsibility is presented repeatedly, albeit obliquely; in another telling example from the presentation Jeff overhears after witnessing the three men burning themselves alive on the screen, Szabo's colleague speaks about "great human spectacles, the

white-clad faithful in Mecca, the hadj, […] and Hindus gathered on the banks of the Ganges, millions, tens of millions, a festival of immortality" (63). DeLillo's career-long interest in the *hadj* and Mecca is here reincarnated, although this time in a way which represents a significantly different perception thereof; the dialogue echoes the desires of Owen Brademas in *The Names*, but the crux of the distinction lies in the word "spectacle." Where Taft Robinson in *End Zone* was fascinated by the power in the idea of all the bodies facing in the same direction, Owen Brademas was attracted to the possibility of losing himself in the crowd, in the ritual, of letting himself go into the communitas experience whose childhood stifling he suffered from his entire life. However, the discourse here defines such mass rituals as "spectacle," a term which serves to definitively separate the speaker(s) from identification with the phenomenon. The *hadj* is not presented as something to imagine oneself joining, but rather as something to be seen from the outside in opposition to what the Convergence project represents, which is, alternatively, "small, painstaking, and private" (64).

In a critical context, moreover, "spectacle" is of course a loaded term. Rather than acknowledge both the cultural and natural destruction caused by the unbridled development of capital, the Convergence carries the logic of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* to its limit, in that "the spectacle's function in society is the concrete manufacture of alienation" (23). It is important to note that alienation, a fundamental aspect of the Situationist writings on the spectacle, is not of course limited to the Convergence – it is the wider societal context out of which the group has emerged as well. DeLillo represents this well in the way Jeff describes how, years after Ross leaves he and his mother, he is confused by the sight of his father on TV speaking in French: "Did I know my father spoke French? Was I sure that this man was my father?" (*Zero K* 14). This serves as a representative example of Debord's early definition of the spectacle as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12), and is another reminder that existential alienation is still a core concern of DeLillo's socially acute fiction in this 21st century context. The logic of the spectacle is abstraction, and the row of bodies in a pod Jeff is eventually shown provides another nicely encapsulated example of "the lonely crowd" (22) Debord references: "There were rows of human bodies in gleaming pods […]. This was *pure spectacle*, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing" (*Zero K* 256, my emphasis). Overall, the Convergence's spokespeople demonstrate their inability to see beyond what Debord would call the logic of the spectacle, and their project is thus irrevocably stuck within this framework.

Returning then to the screens, the discourse represented by Szabo's discussion of future calamity reinforces the overall context as a response to the chronotope of crisis – in this section, the logic of this looming catastrophe brings the future directly into the present, and the Convergence deftly appropriates this effect. However, while the screens appear designed to reinforce this argument, there is also the possibility that they function in ways beyond their intent. Although as 2-D projections they are subject to all the critique directed at the distancing power of the image, the vivid reality of what they depict as juxtaposed with the anonymous space into which they are projected serves to increase their representational potency. That is, just as the space itself is planed down to provide the stage for a new form of becoming, their status as mere image is elevated within this "shaved space" (250). There are two potential results for this particular juxtaposition of reality and the image, one serving the purpose of Convergence and the other undermining it. It is likely the danger of the second option which causes Ross, when Jeff brings them up in conversation, to dismiss the screens as "a distraction" (85); Ross senses that their potential to bring the outside in is inherently dangerous to their project of isolation and escape. In this sense the screens play a decisive role in a chronotopic reading of the text, for as windows to another world they prove in a sense to be the staging ground for a clash of chronotopes – the other staging ground being Jeff himself. This is an argument which emerges from a comparison of two particular screenings, the first on the final pages of the "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" chronotope and the second near the end of the novel upon Jeff's return to the desert in the "In the Time of Konstantinovka" section.

While I will return to the latter – a depiction of Stak's on-screen death – in the second half of this chapter, the former converts the suggestion of the image entering into the Convergence space – implied in the projected flames which "appear to spring [out] toward the hallway" (121) – into a reality. At the very end of Part One, after Ross and Jeff have borne witness to Artis' "passing" and Jeff is on his way to his room to pack his bag, he is stopped by a final screen lowering to fill the hallway. Jeff narrates what he sees: "People running, crowds of running men and women, they're closely packed and showing desperation, dozens, then hundreds […]. I back away instinctively. There's no soundtrack but it's almost possible to hear the mass pulse of breath and pounding feet (151-2). After noting that it seems these runners are "trying to escape some dreadful spectacle or rumbling threat" (152) – based on the terms used, one naturally thinks of the *hadj* or the disasters shown on other screens – Jeff ponders the idea which suddenly comes to him that this and all other screenings are a fiction:

> Is it possible that this is not factual documentation rendered in a selective manner but something radically apart? It's a digital weave, every fragment manipulated and enhanced, all of it designed, edited, redesigned. Why hadn't this occurred to me before, in earlier screenings, the monsoon rains, the tornadoes? These were visual fictions, the wildfires and burning monks, digital bits, digital code, all of it computer-generated, none of it real. (152)

What I argue is that the longer Jeff spends in the surreal space of the Convergence complex the longer its chronotopic logic is able to work its effect on him, wearing him down despite his concerted efforts to reassert his embodied individuality along every step of the way. Such an effect leads him to here question the reality of these vividly real images of the outside world, wondering if they are digital creations, "visual fictions;" the Convergence's alienating space is beginning to color his perception. However, this idea he comes up with is immediately refuted, and in a striking way:

> I watched until the images faded and the screen began to lift, soundlessly, and I'd gone only a short way along the hall when there was a noise, hard to identify and rapidly getting louder. I went a few more paces and had to stop, the noise nearly upon me, and then they came wheeling around the corner charging in my direction, the running men and women, images bodied out, spilled from the screen. (152-3)

What was previously suggested by the flames almost jumping out of the screen is here enacted, where the projected runners manifest into the physical space of the Convergence, "spilled from the screen" into the hallway. At the tail end of the runners Jeff sees two of the project's "vital minds," whom he calls the Stenmark twins, causing him to acknowledge that they were "out-thinking [him], these several days, this extreme sublifetime. What was it beyond a concentrated lesson in bewilderment?" (153). Jeff's suggestion that they were "out-thinking" him refers to the way he has perceived the various surreal experiences he has had there as concentrated efforts by the likes of the Stenmarks to convince doubters such as himself.

His admittance that he is now bewildered is then significantly reinforced by the closing lines of this first half of the novel, which read: "I stood away from the wall now, mind and body buzzing and the hallway seeming to tremble with the muffled thrust of the runners. On the way back to my room I realized that I was limping" (154). Both the "mind and body buzzing" and the "limp" are crucial here, as until this point what Jeff experienced in the Convergence was predominantly an experience of the mind, a logical occurrence given the abstraction inherent in the all aspects of the Convergence's transhuman project. The fact that his mind *and* body are "buzzing," and further that he is "limping" thus demonstrate definitively

that Jeff's defenses are weakened. Whereas the body was consistently his site of resistance – from the enunciative act of walking the hallways to his squat-jumps to a wordless sexual encounter he has with a guide[12] – the limp proves that Jeff feels he is in danger of existential diminishment. This is an argument reinforced by Jeff's earlier discussion of the way he "developed a limp" (101) when he was fourteen years old, as this adolescent limp was an affected gesture, "set between quotation marks," and Jeff explains that he "wasn't sure whether it was intended to make me visible to others or just to myself" (102). The limp thus emerges as a plea for visibility, and frames a long section in which Jeff outlines his adolescence with his mother and reveals the importance attention to the minute details of a life has always had for him. The section in general and the limp in particular speak to the deep sense of alienation which sets the cultural backdrop for the novel, as everything described refers to particular practices effected in the pursuit of a defining of the self. Jeff writes that "The limp was my faith, my version of flexing muscles or jumping hurdles," something "to cling to, a circular way to recognize myself, step by step, as the person who was doing this" (103). In this light, his sudden limp in the wake of the experience with the runners in the hallway has a double reading, in that it can be read as both a physical expression of the attack on his sense of self as well as a return to his adolescent defense mechanism, itself designed as a means to define himself in the world. In either reading of this latter limp's cause the result is the same, in that Jeff feels his sense of self is under attack. The first half of the novel concludes on this note, with Jeff's extended stay within this nest of crisis-based chronotopes beginning to wear him down.

6.2 'In the Time of Konstantinovka' – Defining the Chronotope of the Everyday

The second half of the novel exists in a chronotope which is categorically distinct to that of Part One, and understanding both the distinction so clearly identified in these headings DeLillo assigns them as well as the nature of the chronotopic dialogue they present is, again, crucial to the text's significance as a whole. Beyond DeLillo's earlier-mentioned acknowledgment that the two halves of the novel represent "twin identities," this relationship is amply evident in the text itself; just as the Part One opens with Jeff's father "standing by the

[12] See *Zero K* pp. 78-79, as well as Barrett's 2018 discussion of the scene (118).

contoured windows in his New York office" (3), Part Two begins with the phrase "The office belonged to a man named Silverstone" (165). The example, for one, signals that the sections' twinned status and chronotopic values go beyond the desert/city dichotomy, as both of these openings take place in New York City. It also serves as a timely reminder as to the sociopolitical context of this novel, which despite the transcendental and transhumanist rhetoric of the Convergence is still, as evidenced by the doubled New York offices seen here, 21st century (American) capitalism. Further, the scene sets the stage in terms of Jeff's role as well; just as he was a figure of resistance in the Convergence environment, here too he resists the role others try to push him into. Although he is in the office of the "man named Silverstone" for an interview set up by his father, and therefore a guaranteed placement, he already knows – despite the fact that he "needed a job badly" – that he "would turn down the offer, any offer, whatever the rank or role" (165-6). Jeff questions why he goes through the process already knowing he will turn it down, wondering "why was I here? […] Was I defying a persistent urge to submit to the pressures of reality? There was only one thing I knew for certain. I would do it this way because it made me more interesting. Does that sound crazy? It showed me who I was in ways I did not try to understand" (166-7). Though back in society, Jeff's problem is still one of defining himself in an alienating world; the "reality" Jeff defies the "persistent urge to submit to" is precisely that of late stage capitalism, of what Fisher calls capitalist realism, in DeLillo's alternate tomorrow which arguably represents an even more precarious world stage than the reality at the time of his writing.

Although the sense of global catastrophe which provides the ideological thrust for Part One is necessarily the same backdrop for Part Two of the novel, it is crucial to emphasize that the chronotope itself does not embody a logic of catastrophe or crisis; despite the reader's knowledge from depictions of the Convergence's screens and the speeches of its representatives, the unfolding worldwide disasters are not brought into the foreground in this second half of the novel – they are in fact hardly mentioned at all. Alternatively, Jeff is now given the chance to set his intricate detailing of everyday life, earlier seen in his trips into memory, in the present tense. What is at stake in these seemingly banal narrative threads he chooses to unwind is in fact quite the opposite – Jeff is in fact responding to the planetary crises of Part One, but doing so by outlining an ontological response to said crises based in attention to the details of the everyday, in attention to the embodied, petty and imperfect humanity immanent in every one of us; in other words, one might say, to immanence. His experience at the Convergence was defined by that project's embodying of a logic of transcendence in

response to the chronotopic setting of planetary crisis and the eschatological impulse which that drags back up, and that logic is thus repeatedly juxtaposed to the New York chronotope of the second half. Rather than representing an attempt to escape – and thus an abandonment of ethical implication – the second half emphasizes the effort to counter both the abstractions which lead to alienation and the wide-spread violence which background the text with a reassertion of the autonomous individual, always already implicated in her social surroundings. In this vein, this latter chronotope is thus inimical to the former, and this is an opposition seen on a variety of levels, from Jeff's internal narration to external factors including other characters and even the spaces themselves. At the heart of this opposition of differing ways of existentially responding to the world-as-it-is – that is, to *life* – lies the contrast at the opposite pole: *death*; a different approach to life naturally signifies a different approach to death. This differing approach, finally, is one which also implicates the political; where detached life is (supposedly) apolitical, an immanent life such as this second chronotope implies cannot avoid ethical involvement in the world. What I will develop in the following pages is then the nuances of this chronotope of the everyday, which emphasizes immanent life as emerging from embodied engagement in the world, despite the continuing increase of alienating factors.

Returning to the "twin identities" of these two halves, in light of the earlier discussed role of defamiliarization and the uncanny (see Barrett 2018), Dylan Trigg's *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* is particularly useful in establishing the approach to the relationship between them. As introduced in the opening chapter, Trigg's work in this text builds on the phenomenological understanding that the self extends out from the body into place, such that "the materiality of the environment becomes constitutive of who you are" (8-9). In this context, "as our bodies reach out into the world, so a mimetic interplay arises, in which our sense of self becomes fundamentally entwined with the fabric of the world" (9). In a way which speaks to Jeff's experience between the two places, Trigg opens his book-length discussion of this mimetic relationship between memory and place by, after acknowledging the oft-claimed role of "home" as a "locus of memory" (9), showing the way other places can also play such a role:

> Places can, for instance, become singular in the library of our memories through their very *unfamiliarity*. Indeed, precisely through their strangeness, places become memorable by disturbing patterns of regularity and habit. In doing so, a given narrative is broken while another one begins. Such moments tend to impart significance into our lives, even if that significance is realized only belatedly. (9, original emphasis)

Even as Jeff's tendency at the Convergence was to fill the "shaved spaces" of his room and the halls with his memories – memories based explicitly in places of his youth – his time back in New York shows that the experience there did have this effect Trigg here signals, belatedly imparting significance into his life, albeit in a different way than the Convergence would have hoped. Further, the suggestion that the unfamiliar "disturbs patterns of regularity and habit" resonates with Jeff's narration, where in Part Two's opening pages he indicates that since his return it has been "mostly bloated time since then, for [him] at least, two years of it, slow-going and unfocused" (*Zero K* 166); the reader understands that this "unfocused" way of being is standard for Jeff's character. As will be seen in what follows, Jeff's interaction with the "normal" world of New York City in Part Two is affected by his previous time at the Convergence, which acts as Trigg indicates to redefine his present through an intervention in the regularity of his "slow-going" life. I would even argue that the Convergence might be read as a deliberate shadow of the urban chronotope of New York, crafted specifically to create this sense of disturbance and defamiliarization through any number of elements which eerily echo those on the outside. In the end, the reverberations of the place's strangeness do "impart significance" (Trigg, *Memory* 9) into Jeff's life by allowing him to take steps towards autonomy, that which is the opposite of alienation; generally speaking, the arguments suggested here will be borne out over the course of the discussion which follows.

In terms of contrasting the chronotopes, Jeff quite conveniently narrates at the opening of Part Two:

> When we returned from the Convergence I announced to Ross that we were back in history now. Days have names and numbers, a discernible sequence, and there is an aggregate of past events, both immediate and long-gone, that we can attempt to understand. Certain things are predictable, even within the array of departures from the common order. Elevators go up and down rather than sideways […] Taxicabs are yellow, fire trucks red, bikes mostly blue. I'm able to return to my devices, data roaming, instant by instant, in the numbing raptures of the Web. (*Zero K* 167)

The passage encapsulates a number of elements which define modern life. The description of history as an "aggregate of past events we can attempt to understand" and the remark that "certain things are predictable" speak to the suggestion made by Trigg above, that Jeff's experience in the "landmark of implausibility" (115) of the Convergence have sharpened his awareness of his more standard, urban reality. Contrasted as it is with the Convergence's altered spatiotemporality – days have "a discernible sequence," "elevators go up and down" – this

reality described in the passage in fact serves as a clearly marked indicator for the section's chronotope. What the chronotope thus consists of is the "predictable" environment of a 21st century city, which DeLillo emphasizes by going back to the basics of world-formation; "taxicabs are yellow, fire trucks red, bikes mostly blue" speaks to the early childhood recognition of primary colors and the cityscape's most commonly seen objects.[13] Further, the final sentence in which Jeff indicates he is able to "return to [his] devices, data roaming, instant by instant, in the numbing raptures of the Web" exemplifies another crucial aspect of the chronotope of the everyday in a 21st century life (I here purposely leave out the "Western" modifier); the temporality of everyday life is deeply entrenched in the instantaneity of digital technology, and much of the general populace's time is indeed spent immersed in what DeLillo quite poetically calls "the numbing raptures of the Web."

Generally speaking, the early value suggested here is of an immersion in some idea of "history," predictable urban spaces and sights, and a temporality dominated by the rule of the instant. Demonstrating an abrupt about-face from his role at the beginning of the novel, Jeff's father Ross becomes decidedly detached from this chronotope after his failure to prematurely go through with his "death" and join Artis in a body pod; Jeff writes that "it turns out my father was not interested in history or technology or hailing a cab. He let his hair grow wild and walked nearly everywhere he cared to go, which was nearly nowhere" (168). This detachment, enhanced by Jeff's description of the way "his mind" often "tunnel[ed] back to the dead lands where the bodies are banked and waiting" (168), foreshadows his later decision to actually go through with the premature submission to the cryogenic process, which will eventually cause Jeff's return to the desert complex, where his own identification with the city's chronotope will be put to the test.

The long scene which immediately follows these short four pages of introduction depicts Jeff with his girlfriend Emma and her adopted son Stak in a taxicab in the busy streets of New York. The scene is emblematic in a number of ways, introducing the place, the characters and the themes which preoccupy this second half; the setting is, as Jeff describes, a "Traffic jam, downtown, Sunday, senseless" (174). Jeff narrates that upon entering the cab, Stak "checked the driver's ID and immediately began to speak to the man [in] Pashto" (169). He then describes Stak and the scene in more detail:

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[13] Even the syntactic choice of "fire trucks red" is telling in this sense, as the term "fire truck" is generally a more childish way of referring to fire engines.

> He was fourteen, foreign born, a slant tower, six-four and growing, his voice rushed and dense. The driver did not seem surprised to find himself exchanging words and phrases in his native language with a white boy. This was New York. Every living breathing genotype entered his cab at some point, day or night. And if this was an inflated notion, that was New York as well. (169-170)

DeLillo here emphasizes the cultural diversity New York is famous for, signaling from the beginning that an incorporation of multiple worldviews is a fundamental part of its chronotope. Also in the scene is a TV screen in the backseat of the cab "speaking remotely about bridge and tunnel traffic" (170) which both Jeff and Emma try to turn off multiple times and eventually give up on, another reminder of the inescapability of digital intervention in contemporary life. Further, Jeff adds to the "This was New York" comment the sense of the everyday introduced above: When he tells Emma that they "were riding in a taxicab with a driver who enters the bus lane illegally and drives at madman speeds with one hand on the wheel while he half-looks over his shoulder and converses with a passenger in a far-flung language," and then asks "What does this mean?" (170), he answers his own question by affirming that "It means this is just another day" (171). Counterbalanced to the sterile precision of the Convergence is the chaotic flux of life in the city as exemplified by a New York City cab ride; where in the desert halls Jeff finds "a figure standing" in a "recess in the wall," a "mannequin, naked, hairless, without facial features" (24) from inside the taxi he observes "two young women" who cross "the street at the light, heads shaved" (176). The women with their heads shaved suggest that the mannequins are dead echoes of living forms, the Convergence's attempt to statically fix its opposite here represented, which is life understood as a continuous process of becoming.

Just as the cryogenics-based group seeks to restore transcendental meaning through their "faith-based technology" (9), in the urban chronotope such meaning is sought elsewhere: while in the cab, Jeff narrates that "I spoke to Emma about my money. […] the small discrepancies that turn up on the withdrawal slips that are spat out by the automated teller machines. I go home and look at the check register and do the simple arithmetic and there's an aberration of one dollar and twelve cents" (171-2). When Emma suggests that its probably "a bank mistake," Jeff responds that "Maybe it's not even a bank mistake but something in the structure itself. Beyond the computers and grids and digital algorithms and intelligence agencies. It's the root, the source, I'm almost serious, where things fit together or slip apart. Three dollars and sixty-seven cents" (172). In an "almost serious" way Jeff ponders the possibility that the "structure itself" is flawed, imparting a sense of some sort of mystical

beyond to the material and immaterial foundations of late capitalist society. While such a theory is equally flawed, its form represents an alternative, inside-out based approach rather than the opposite. That is, Jeff's attempts to establish meaning in his fundamentally alienating circumstances refuse the escapist philosophy of the Convergence, instead seeking meaning in the information he has immediately available to experience; this phenomenological approach in a general sense corresponds to the "everyday" aspect of this chronotope he is here immersed in.

6.3 A Chronotopic Interlude: Three Representational Hearts

6.3.1 Ben Ezra and the 'spun-glass garden'

With this cab ride through New York having provided an initial defining of the "In the Time of Konstantinovka" chronotope – as one based in the immanence of everyday life – it is now possible to digress in order to delve into several scenes which are of heightened importance, as I argue they occupy the heart or core of the novel's two chronotopes. In this section of the chapter I will therefore look at one of these scenes from each section of *Zero K* before returning to the overall discussion, including both Part One and Part Two as well as the five-page interlude which depicts Artis' disembodied thoughts in her cryogenic pod. The two scenes from Part One and Two are Jeff's finding of Ben Ezra's garden in the former and his wandering the streets of NYC with Emma in the latter, which occurs just after the cab ride described above. Beyond their thematic content, these two scenes – as well as a third from Part Two which will be returned to at the close of the chapter – have their significance signaled to the reader in similar ways: through the act of wandering, a nondirectionality of movement associated figuratively with a blank state of mind. If walking is a "site of enunciation," as de Certeau holds, then walking randomly – wandering – is a specific *type* of enunciation. Its effect is suggested by Mike Savage in his discussion of "Benjamin's fascination with the flâneur," in that it is a "figure whose aimless wanderings can reveal things hidden to those intent on purposive linear goals" (40). Just as Benjamin's spatialization of time in *The Arcades Project* was a tactic to disrupt the "historiographic chain" (Gregory 234) he later critiques in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," the wandering enacted by Jeff in the context of the tightly controlled Convergence environment allows him to reveal what is hidden at its heart.

Returning the analysis briefly then to the chronotope of Part One in the remote desert compound, Jeff writes:

> I walked randomly for a time, seeing a woman open a door and enter whatever kind of space was situated there. I followed a work crew for fifty meters before I detoured into a corridor and went down a long ramp toward a door that had a doorknob. I hesitated, mind blank, and then turned the knob and pushed open the door and walked into earth, air and sky. (*Zero K* 121-2)

The place Jeff finds by "walk[ing] randomly" and then opening a door with "mind blank" is his only experience while there of briefly escaping the semi-subterranean enclosure of the place. What he finds is "a walled garden, trees, shrubs, flowering plants," though he soon realizes that "this was not a desert oasis but a proper English garden with trimmed hedges, shade trees, wild roses climbing a trellis" (122). However, the plants are not actually alive: "Something even stranger then, tree bark, blades of grass, every sort of flower—all seemingly coated or enameled, bearing a faint glaze. None of this was natural, all of it unruffled by the breeze that swept across the garden" (122). Of the few commentators thus far on this novel, only Laura Barrett has mentioned the garden, rightly describing the way its "audacious artificiality […] is just another manifestation of the facility's grand illusion" ("Uncanny" 110). While Barrett's argument that "the garden cannot but recall Eden" as "an inversion of Genesis, [in which] Convergence clientele eagerly trade consciousness for immortality" (111) is interesting, there is further to unpack here, especially in the as yet unanalyzed figure of Ben-Ezra, the old man who Jeff finds sitting there.

Upon entering the garden, Jeff describes a "still figure seated […], apparently human, in a loose gray shirt, gray trousers and a silver skullcap" (122). This figure then invites Jeff "to share the bench, which resembled a foreshortened church pew. His name was Ben-Ezra and he liked to come out here, he said, and think about the time, many years away, when he would return to the garden and sit on the same bench, reborn, and think about the time when he used to sit here, usually alone, and imagine that very moment" (123). Beyond the wandering which brings Jeff to these respective places, it is the experiences he has there which emphasizes their value as chronotopic cores or hearts. Ben-Ezra is, even from this very first comment of his, intimately connected with the philosophy of the Convergence project; encapsulated in his comment that he likes to "think about the time" in the future when he would return, "reborn, and think about that time when used to sit here […] and imagine that very moment" is one of temporal circularity. The present always referring to the future and the future present always referring to the past represents an infinite deferral of the present moment; this is a stance

inimical to the concept of immanence, and one in which the horizon of possibility is once again foreclosed. As Ben-Ezra says a few pages on, "The site is fixed, we are fixed" (129). In these comments on time in this "proper English garden with trimmed hedges, shade trees, wild roses climbing a trellis" (122) there is also a potential intertextual play with T.S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," published in *Four Quartets* – but one of a number of references to past poets in this "spun-glass garden" (132). In Eliot's 1936 poem the speaker enters a garden and has what appears to be a transcendental vision, which opens in a way reminiscent of Jeff's arrival at this glazed garden: "Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened / Into the rose-garden" ("Burnt" I. 11-14) After being led by birds to a "drained pool" in which the vision manifests, the speaker is bid to leave: "Go, go, go, said the bird : human kind / Cannot bear very much reality. / Time past and time future / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (I. 44-48). The same circularity expressed by Ben-Ezra is seen here, where DeLillo's character adds to the implication ensconced in Eliot's "what might have been" the more recent concept of the multiverse. What is significant of the experience Eliot's speaker has in the garden is the possibility that "the event in the rose garden may still be a 'religious' experience in the sense that the speaker has been converted to see things from a new perspective," in that "his subjectivity has been challenged by a counter-experience that has made him shift his way of seeing things" (Hart 255–56). It seems that DeLillo is presenting a similar such experience for his own narrator, Jeff, in that the experience he has both in this garden as well as in the Convergence more generally involves precisely this sort of "counter-experience" which promotes a shift in perspective.

Another reason this Ben-Ezra character and his "spun-glass garden" is clearly at the heart of this chronotope is his direct mention of Chelyabinsk:

> One minute, calm prevails. Then there's a light in the sky and a sonic boom and a shock wave—and a Russian city enters a compressed reality that would be mystifying if it weren't so abruptly real. This is nature's thrust, its command over our efforts, our foresight, every ingenuity we can summon to protect ourselves. The meteor. Chelyabinsk. (127-8)

All his subsequent talk with Jeff is therefore framed by this comment, seeing as the "compressed reality" caused by this event, by "nature's thrust," refers to the overarching chronotope as indicated by Part One's "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" title. He then reaffirms his centrality to the project by indicating his knowledge of Jeff's reason for being there, which as Jeff describes is to be "faced with the death of a woman I admire and the rashly premature

death of the man she loves" (123-4). In discussing Ross's decision to prematurely end his life, Ben-Ezra asserts that "People who spend time here find out eventually who they are. Not through consultation with others but through self-examination, self-revelation. A tract of lost land, a sense of wilderness that is overwhelming. These rooms and halls, a stillness, a state of waiting" (124). For one, with the reference to an overwhelming "sense of wilderness," Ben-Ezra situates the place as seeing itself aligned with the early Christian desert of the ascetics I discussed regarding *End Zone*, solidifying the argument that this chronotope is one which abandons the embodied and embedded in its pursuit of the abstract. Further, in the light of such a comment Jeff's eventual conclusions in Part Two take on meaning, in that they represent an alternative sort of response to that of his father's eventual decision to abandon life; Ross's "self-revelation" only unveils his deep involvement in the business of abstraction as described earlier, which plays no small part in his eventual rejection of life.

Ben-Ezra is further marked as significant in that he is the only character in the entire Convergence to actually give himself a proper name; although Jeff decides "the name was itself an invention" he also thinks it "suited the man, suggesting a composite of biblical and futuristic themes, and here we were in his post-apocalyptic garden" (125). The man in fact expounds to Jeff on this theme of apocalypse, without the hyperbole of the other representatives he encounters:

> I listened to him speak about the hundreds of millions of people into the future billions who are struggling to find something to eat not once or twice a day but all day every day. He spoke in detail about food systems, weather systems, the loss of forests, the spread of drought, the massive die-offs of birds and ocean life, the levels of carbon dioxide, the lack of drinking water, the waves of virus that envelop broad geographies. […] Then there was biological warfare with its variant forms of mass extinction. Toxins, agents, replicating entities. And the refugees everywhere, victims of war in great numbers, living in makeshift shelters, unable to return to their crushed cities and towns, dying at sea when their rescue vessels capsize. (126-7)

Such talk of course speaks directly to the fears of activists, scientists and concerned citizens across the globe today, and depicts one potential future which is not very far distant, indeed in some senses already here. Ben-Ezra's discourse then gains in expansiveness, eventually arriving as such statements as "those of us who are here don't belong anywhere else[, w]e've fallen out of history," in the future they will speak "a language isolate [which] will approximate the logic and beauty of pure mathematics," even referring to the "universe, the multiverse, so many cosmic infinities that the idea of repeatability becomes unavoidable" (129-130). Ben-

Ezra follows this last mention of the multiverse with the suggestion that "the idea of two individuals sitting on a bench in a desert garden having the conversation we are having[,] word for word, except that they are different individuals, in a different garden, millions of light-years from here – this is an inescapable fact" (130). However, as discussed with regards to *Point Omega*, DeLillo is certainly aware that this is another misinterpretation of an existing theory, not unlike Elster's twisting of Teilhard de Chardin's words; the idea of the multiverse is not one of infinite repeatability of the same, but rather one which emphasizes infinite *difference*. Also similarly to Elster, Ben-Ezra at one point "blows his nose, unconditionally, with follow-up swipes and blots," which makes Jeff "feel better" that he has real "body functions" (129); just as the "handful of mucus" Elster coughs up into his own hand (*Point Omega* 122) is a physical correlate to the way his grief at Jessie's disappearance brings him violently back to earth, so to speak, emphasizing the fundamental truth of his always-embodied existence, the man expelling mucus in a similar way here subtly undermines his own transcendental discourse.

When Jeff responds to the above idea of the inevitability of the same scene being acted out "millions of light-years" from their garden by reasserting the mortality of humans – "if you're born or hatched or sprouted, then your days are already numbered" (131) – Ben-Ezra responds with a quote from Sir Thomas Browne: "It is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man to tell him that he is at the end of his nature, or that there is no further state to come" (131). Ben-Ezra's direct citation of Browne's *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial* opens a gateway to a series of past writers and poets contemplating the nature of time and human mortality. Browne's own writings have, for one, enjoyed considerable life in the literature of the centuries after their composition, from Samuel Johnson to Jorge Luis Borges to W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, the latter which plays with the idea of the *memento mori* by implicating through its relocation Browne's own skull in the question of the significance of one's mortal remains. Sebald's narrator's indication that Browne "saw our world as no more than a shadow image of another one far beyond" (18) refers to the same 1658 contemplation of human mortality and the Christian conception of immortality which DeLillo's Ben-Ezra quotes. Moreover, Ben-Ezra's own name itself refers back to previous literary figures related to this theme, in the first place to a poem by Robert Browning entitled "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

The poem, composed circa 1864, fittingly to its use in DeLillo's novel reflects a long tradition of poets grappling through religion with the anxiety of the process of aging and the eventual death to which it leads. Browning's own poem is assumed to stem from familiarity

with the historical figure of that same name: “Browning is likely to have read the works of Ibn Ezra or Ben Ezra (1092-1167) especially his commentaries on the *Old Testament* in the Vatican library in Rome in 1853 or 1854” (Viswanathan 352). Among the works of the historical Ibn Ezra there is a poem entitled “In a Lifetime” of similar theme, although both Roth (1983) and the more recent collection of Ibn Ezra’s poetry in English *Twilight of a Golden Age* signal that the poem was actually more likely written by another poet by the name of Judah ha-Levy.[14] Regardless, the millennial poem attributed variously to both writers opens with the lines (in Roth’s translation) “Son of the earth, remember your birth / For at the end you shall return to it” (42), establishing the account of aging[15] which follows in the spirit of a *memento mori*. This poem is in fact included in the “secular poetry” category of the Ibn Ezra version, and Roth argues that “Judah ha-Levy, whose later fervor for religion is remarkably absent from most of his secular poetry […], has only tacked on some pious lines rather as an afterthought at the end of his poem” (44). Thus the poem and its the incorporation of its (supposed) author into the Browning piece are notable for a similar such troubling of the piety of the message; Browning’s poem famously uses the metaphor of the potter’s wheel (Viswanathan 349) to refer to the Abrahamic concept of God’s omniscient fashioning of all lives, and thus his pre-knowledge of where all these lives will lead (in short, predestination). However, rather than simple acceptance of this fate, there is also a potential paradox here, where Browning’s Rabbi declares in speaking to God: “And since, not even while the whirl was worst, / Did I,—to the wheel of life / With shapes and colours rife, / Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst” (183–86). Here, there is almost a note of irony in the exclamation that all this suffering while “whirl[ing]” and “bound dizzily” to “the wheel of life” is only incurred to “slake [God’s] thirst;” accepting this truth would require a deep passivity which Browning is certainly not known for: “Browning's belief in individuality and the note of seemingly passive acceptance” is a contradiction which also “constitutes a paradox which is at the center of Browning's philosophy” (Viswanathan 352). Browning, in other words, puts predestination in a bad light.[16]

As a character directly tethered to these past figures, both real and fictional, who struggle to find in the religious belief in everlasting life consolation in the face of ever-

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[14] See Roth (1983), p. 43 and Weinberger’s comments in Ibn Ezra (1997) p. 109.

[15] Roth indicates that the trope the “Ages of Man,” which treats the passage from youth to old age, was “a common one in literature of the classical period, in Jewish rabbinical sources, and in medieval Muslim, Jewish and Christian literature” (41).

[16] For this contextualized understanding of Browning’s response to his predecessors I am indebted to discussions carried out with Bob Shepherd.

encroaching death, DeLillo's Ben-Ezra's surety in his future existence is too yet another example of such faith. Though the means are different, the Convergence knowingly replaces the certainty of a monotheistic God's guarantee of the spirit's immortality with technology; Ben-Ezra and his intertextual relationship with these past figures situates him as the spiritual center of this enterprise. However, embedded in the writings and portrayal of these previous Ben Ezras is the problem presented by the paradox in Browning's philosophy, which balances the individual will against the passive acceptance of a future already writ; DeLillo's Ben-Ezra's comment on the inevitably of the same two men sitting in the same exact garden on other worlds is correlate to this belief in God's pre-knowledge of all that was, is and will be. Further, his sitting and thinking about the future of a time when he will sit and think about the past is actually in opposition to the typical function of the *memento mori* as seen in the words of these previous men, from Ibn Ezra to Browne to Browning, which is to concentrate one's attention on the life being lived *now*, albeit in a way which emphasizes humility. This twisting of the *memento mori* is further demonstrated when Jeff leaves the old man and finds catacombs, "recesses in the walls where bodies were placed, half bodies, mannequins as preserved corpses" (*Zero K* 133), figures he calls "desert saints" and which he interprets as "an ancestral version of the upright men and women on the verge of immortality" (133). In this context, of catacombs echoing the early Christian burial grounds still scattered about the Mediterranean region, it becomes more clear than ever that the Convergence project is, to its very core, an extension of the monotheistic belief in everlasting life in some form of heaven, and this is the overall message to be taken from Jeff's visit to Ben-Ezra's garden.

Before leaving the character of the old man behind, however, the very last thing he says to Jeff is important to examine in that it appears to trouble the very chronotope from which it emerges, its own origin. After Ben-Ezra quotes Sir Thomas Browne, a "true wind" begins to blow, and although the "garden is unstirred," the "scene is not blandly static. There is tone and color, shimmer everywhere, sun beginning to sink, trees alight in the span of waning day" (131). Being outside, Jeff is again able to perceive the earth's movement and the shift from day to night, which as signaled earlier by Trigg is fundamental to an embodied perception of the passage of time. It is thus the setting sun and therefore the earth's movement itself which breaks up the stasis of the scene; it is only this disruption that I can fathom accounts for what Ben-Ezra says next, which in fact plays a part in undermining the entire Convergence enterprise:

> You sit alone in a quiet room at home and you listen carefully. What is it you hear? Not traffic in the street, not voices or rain or someone's radio […] You hear something but what? It's not

> room tone or ambient sound. It's something that may change as your listening deepens, second after second, and the sound is growing louder now—not louder but somehow wider, sustaining itself, encircling itself. What is it? The mind, the life itself, your life? Or is it the world, not the material mass, land and sea, but what inhabits the world, the flood of human existence. The world hum. Do you hear it, yourself, ever? (132).

With these words Ben-Ezra leaves the world of the novel, and one is left to wonder what the intentions are of his uttering them. One possibility is that he assumes that Jeff's answer will be "no" – that one cannot in fact hear the "world hum," that its existence is analogous to a myth that humans can ever leave a state of fundamental isolation. This is suggested by Jeff's intent to hear the world hum a few pages later at the end of the chapter:

> I went to my room, turned on the light and sat in the chair thinking. It felt as though I'd done this a thousand times, same room every time, same person in the chair. I found myself listening. I tried to empty my mind and simply listen. I wanted to hear what Ben-Ezra had described, the oceanic sound of people living and thinking and talking, billions, everywhere, waiting for trains, marching to war, licking food off their fingers. Or simply being who they are. The world hum. (135)

As evidenced by the phrasing of Jeff's "want[ing] to hear" the world hum, the reader of course assumes that it does not happen. However, the world hum and its basis in the sensory apparatus of the embodied human is an important theme in the novel which is returned to throughout. In the discussion of New York's chronotopic heart(s) to come it will become obvious how Ben-Ezra's enigmatic presentation of this idea – the world hum – in fact speaks to the undermining of the very project he represents. In this light, then, perhaps Ben-Ezra is in the end just as contradictory as his predecessors as a result of the inherently paradoxical nature of the attempt to find solace in the present through a faith in that which lies in some static, unknowable future.

6.3.2 Artis Martineau and the Existential Drift

Before moving back to Part Two, the experience Jeff has in the Convergence as epitomized by his encounter with Ben-Ezra in the garden – especially in the enthusiastic declarations of the glory of the brand of immortality they are working to create – is first counteracted by the contents of the five page interlude between Parts One and Two. This interlude, titled "Artis Martineau," is a purported internal monologue of Artis' wandering thoughts as she floats in her body pod in the wake of her cryogenic procedure. While I agree

with Laura Barrett's assessment that this section is likely an "exuberant fabrication" ("Uncanny" 110) created by Jeff himself, it is still significant in a formal sense in that it is in the end the only internal perspective the reader is provided of what Jeff calls these "lives in abeyance" (141); moreover, the entire novel is technically presented as authored by him. The idea that Artis' section is written by Jeff is suggested most obviously in these lines from the end of the novel:

> I think of Artis in the capsule and try to imagine, against my firm belief, that she is able to experience a minimal consciousness. I think of her in a state of virgin solitude. No stimulus, no human activity to incite response, barest trace of memory. Then I try to imagine an inner monologue, hers, self-generated, possibly nonstop, the open prose of a third-person voice that is also her voice, a form of chant in a single low tone. (272)

The five pages of the "Artis Martineau" section are constructed of short groupings of one to three sentences, each separated by a blank line. They in fact present more than a "third-person voice," switching back and forth between the first and third, demonstrating a profound existential disorientation, which is represented for one through reference to the fundamental elements of time and space:

> I think I am someone. There is someone here and I feel it in me or with me. […]
>
> Time. I feel it in me everywhere. But I don't know what it is. […]
>
> The only here is where I am. But where is here. And why just here and nowhere else.
>
> *She is first person and third person with no way to join them together.* (157-160, original emphasis)

The disorientation and what the narrative voice (in italics) also calls "the mind drift" (159) are demonstrative of a self in which the process of alienation, ever-present in these texts, is carried to its representational extreme; this is hinted at even in the recurrence of the term "drift," which I have indicated is related to existential alienation in both *End Zone* and *The Names*. In this sense Eric Cofer is not mistaken in arguing that the "Artis" section "suggests that realizing the transhumanist dream may instead prove the bleakest of nightmares" (467); the narrator indeed writes, in an unpunctuated question, "Is this the nightmare of self drawn so tight that she is trapped forever" (*Zero K* 161). The phrasing of the "nightmare of self" acts as a potent counter to the discourse of the Convergence, which promises a whole new form of perception, an ontological revolution for the human. Although their promise is for *after* these people are awakened from the pod, there is of course no way of knowing if that moment will ever come – the technology has not yet been developed, and the wait they are in for has no end yet in sight.

In that context, this looped state that Artis is in – the section ends with the line with which it begins, "But am I who I was" (157/162) – is decidedly worse than the simple cessation of existence in the profane account of death. The torturous state might in fact go on forever, or at least until something occurs and the body pods are no longer able to be supported properly and the subdued consciousness finally winks out.

Structurally speaking, the five-page interlude is given the privileged position of linking the two main sections of the novel, which, as I am working to demonstrate, though chronological in presentation (with the two year gap between the first and the second) are better distinguished by their chronotopic difference than anything else. The interlude therefore acts formally as a liminal space, a threshold to pass from one chronotope to the other, belonging as it does to neither. One way of looking at it then might be to consider the fact that in the ideology of the Convergence death is seen as a mid-point rather than an ending: death as the occasion for the starting of something new, death as beginning. Thus the structural arrival of the novel to its mid-point, which correlates on the level of plot with the arrival of Artis to her own supposed "mid-point" of induced half-life, corresponds to a middle passage which fittingly consists of Artis' liminal state. However, the nature of this liminal state (or that which follows), were it to follow the desires of those who induced it, would have to somehow represent a being in transition from everyday humanity to the transcendent. On the contrary, what the reader is given is this description of a disembodied voice lost in a spatiotemporal void, a consciousness adrift in nothingness. The fact that the effect of reading the passage is decidedly *not* transcendental, but rather the opposite, inevitably leads the reader to believe the experiment is on its way to failure.

Finally, approached in another way, and keeping in mind Jeff's probable authorial responsibility for the section, the interlude might be read as informed by Maurice Blanchot's discussion in *The Space of Literature* of the "fascination of time's absence" (30) which occurs in the process of actually writing fiction:

> To write is to surrender to the fascination of time's absence. Now we are doubtless approaching the essence of solitude. Time's absence is […] a time without negation, without decision, when here is nowhere as well, and each thing withdraws into its image while the 'I' that we are recognizes itself by sinking into the neutrality of a featureless third person. The time of time's absence has no present, no presence. (30)

It is significant that Blanchot arrives at this discussion in pursuit of "the essence of solitude," for besides the topical relationship to Artis' state in the body pod it is this existential solitude

(through alienation) which forms a backdrop for the novel as a whole. In exploring this sense of time's absence when writing, Blanchot continues: "This time is not the ideal immobility which the name 'eternal' glorifies. In the region we are trying to approach, here has collapsed to nowhere, but nowhere is nonetheless here, and this empty, dead time is a real time in which death is present – in which death happens but doesn't stop happening" (31). The description is markedly close to the content of the "Artis" section, which similarly presents an infinity which is opposed to the glorified idea of "eternal" present in both religious discourse and the updated techno-version of the Convergence. One suggestion is that, in trying to imagine his way into Artis' experience, Jeff is in fact commenting almost metafictionally on the writing process, in which he himself is both engaging as well as in which he is himself created by DeLillo. The implications of this correlation are revealed more fully when Blanchot makes it clear that this issue hinges on the question of self-perception through an always-externalized other, the "They" who is "never anyone in particular, never you and I" (31). As Blanchot explains, "where I am alone, I am not there; no one is there, but the impersonal is: the outside." This outside is the essence of "They," which "belongs to a region that cannot be brought to light" because "it transforms everything that has access to it, even light, into anonymous, impersonal being" (31). Crucially, then, the "They is, in this respect, what appears up very close when someone dies" (31). If the retreat of the first-person and the close encounter with the "They" is an integral part of the writing process, its effect is not dissimilar to the experience of losing somebody close to you. Jeff's composition of this section in this way is thus more complex than a simple attempt to think his way into Artis' experience in abeyance; he is also expressing through an analogous way the form which takes his own grief at the multiple losses he incurs in the course of this novel, including especially the "death" of Artis. Overall, then, whether read as a chronotopic threshold from one half to the other or as an outside, almost metafictional commentary on the novel's theme, this brief section's nightmarish quality emphasizes the nature of the chronotopic dialogue I argue for, in which the second chronotope of the everyday structurally undermines that of the first.

6.3.3 New York City and the World Hum

Returning to the second chronotope of the novel, "In the Time of Konstantinovka," the first of the two passages which present themselves as a counterbalance to the chronotopic heart

of Ben-Ezra's garden occurs in the wake of the taxi ride that Jeff and Emma take with her adopted son Stak. Whereas Jeff enters the core of Part One's chronotope by wandering and stumbling upon the garden by emptying his mind of intention, a similar scene in Part Two is similarly marked by both wandering as well as another example of the weather-based indicator for a chronotopic shift I have mentioned at multiple occasions in this thesis. After their taxi ride is finished and they drop Stak off at his jujitsu practice, Jeff describes how he and Emma begin to "walk for a time, going nowhere, [in] streets that had a feel of abandonment" (*Zero K* 178), which is then followed by a line which suggests this shift into a different sort of space: "We fell into long silences, walking inward, step by step, and a light rain did not prompt a word or send us into cover" (179). The "light rain" here echoes both the blowing sand which marks Owen arrival at the cult's desert location in *The Names* and the rainstorm which indicates the shift upon Jessie's arrival in *Point Omega*. The long passage which follows then begins to give shape to this semantic space Jeff and Emma enter: "We walked north to the antiterror barricades on Broad Street where a tour leader spoke to his umbrella'd group about the scars on the wall caused by an anarchist's bomb a hundred years ago. We went along empty streets and our shared stride began to feel like a heartbeat" (179). It is significant that the first thing they come across in this wordless exploration of New York's chronotopic heart are the "scars" of history, especially seeing as that history is one of an explicitly political nature; the "anarchist's bomb" refers to an anonymous attack of anti-capitalist persuasion on the early Wall Street of 1920. As historian Beverly Gage has suggested in her in-depth study of the bombing's context, the event's extra resonance in a post 9/11 world is based for one in the "coincidence of time and place [as] another attack in downtown New York in mid-September" (4). The deeper resonance is of course its role in the history of the development of capitalism, which as Gage points out was at that point perceived at least by some as "on the verge of collapse" (2). In the context of *Zero K's* alternate tomorrow circa 2020, even the evidence of capitalism's former vulnerability is packaged to be resold as spectacle to the "umbrella'd [tour] group" Jeff and Emma see at the site. In contrast to this image of the alienated spectacle, then, are the "long silences" and the way their "shared stride began to feel like a heartbeat" (179): the passage opens with an emphasis on shared embodiment.

Now solidly within this chronotopic heart, the rain stops and the passage then continues with a series of encounters which together form a menagerie of the cityscape:

> The sun reappeared seconds before the rain stopped and we went past an untended shish kebab cart and saw a skateboarder sailing past at the end of the street, there and gone, and we

approached a woman in Arab headdress, white woman, white blouse, stained blue skirt, talking to herself and walking back and forth, barefoot, five steps east, five steps west along a sidewalk webbed with scaffolding. Then the Money Museum, the Police Museum, the old stone buildings on Pine Street and our pace increased again, no cars or people here. (179)

This scene presents the spectrum of humanity one is able to find in a cosmopolitan city such as New York, and the enumeration of the different types of people and historical periods works as a counter to DeLillo's well-known opening to *White Noise,* which compiles in list form the array of commodities college students bring to campus in "loaded down" station wagons: "the tennis rackets, soccer balls, […] bows and arrows; controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices, the junk food" (3). Whereas the 1985 novel's opening serves to forecast the critique of consumerism one finds in its pages, this scene in *Zero K* enumerates in order to *add* value; the scene as highlighted by the sun's reappearance is more of a revelation to match the speaker of Eliot's "Burnt Norton" than anything Jeff finds in Ben-Ezra's garden. Crucially, the substance of this revelation is implicitly counterposed to Ben-Ezra's miniature world.

Just after the scene cited above, where Jeff and Emma enter an area with "no cars or people" – an almost mystical occurrence in the heart of New York City – Jeff narrates:

A sound around us that we could not identify made us stop and listen, the tone, the pitch, a continuous low dull hum, inaudible until you hear it and then it's everywhere, every step you take, coming from the empty buildings on both sides of the street, and we stood outside the locked revolving doors of Deutsche Bank listening to the systems within, the networks of interacting components. I grabbed her arm and moved her into the doorway of a shuttered storefront and we clutched and pressed and came close to outright screwing. (180)

The phrasing of the "low dull hum" which is "everywhere" and is said to come "from the empty buildings on both sides of the street" offers itself as a direct foil to Ben-Ezra's "world hum," and a dialogue is thus established between one chronotopic heart and another. Rather than "the flood of human existence" (132) Ben-Ezra suggests, Jeff and Emma stand outside a "Deutsche Bank listening to the systems within, the networks of interacting components" (180). The fact that the result of hearing these systems at work is an abandonment to the shared pleasures of embodiment in the doorway of the bank presents an important distinction; whereas Ben-Ezra's supposed emphasis on this "flood" of humanity, on "what inhabits the world" (180), is tethered to the Convergence's contradictory faith in abstraction, here Jeff and Emma are brought to a heightened awareness and celebration of their embodied essence through a perception of the abstract "systems within." When juxtaposed with this scene, Ben-Ezra's world hum is reduced

to hollow discourse, while Jeff and Emma's lived experience unveils a different understanding thereof, redefining it. What their coming "close to outright screwing" as a result of the entire scene described above – from the moment their stride becomes like "a heartbeat" (179) to the "low dull hum" which prompts this experience outside the Deutsche Bank – therefore suggests is an entirely different sort of assimilation with technology. Instead of forcefully aiming its development at the transcendence of human limitations (most notably death), the couple's excitement at the perception of their immersion in the "network of interacting components" demonstrates a more realistic acceptance of the "posthuman" condition of entanglement with digital systems beyond our cognitive grasp; even in the face of such techno-immersion, what is emphasized here is elevation of that which is immanent, of an embodied existence always shared with others. The role this sonic metaphor of the world hum plays in distinguishing between the worldviews opposed in the two halves of *Zero K* in fact goes beyond its more explicit presence here in this scene described above, extending through the dichotomy of silence and sound to DeLillo's engagement with the political in the novel's second half.

6.4 The Politics of Silence and Sound in 'Konstantinovka'

Having clarified the chronotopic dialogue at play through a discussion of these chronotopic hearts, it is now useful to examine further textual elements from the "Konstantinovka" chronotope, especially those which unveil the political argument of the text; this will create a more informed understanding of just what is at stake when Jeff returns to the desert in this second section and the two chronotopes are brought into a direct confrontation with each other. Returning to the suggestion of contrasting "world hums" as presented in these chronotopic hearts, it would in fact not be an unproductive approach to explore this concept's functioning as an overarching theme for the novel, as a case in point for Melba Cuddy-Keane's argument that "formalistically, allusions to specific sounds can function as leitmotifs, giving structural shape to a narrative" (382). The dichotomy between silence and sound hinted at in the contrast between Jeff's failure to hear the world hum in his room after he leaves Ben-Ezra and the scene outside the Deutsche Bank is one which is in fact carried out throughout the novel. In a basic sense, the silence of the Convergence's complex stands in opposition to the waves of sound one finds in a place like New York City, and the natural extension is thus that

silence is associated with the broader Convergence project of detachment while sound is associated with this emphasis on shared embodiment discussed previously.

While the issue is in fact more complicated than this suggests, on a basic level this association holds; sound is another element of the sensorial relationship with the world which embodiment emphasizes. Sound studies pioneer R. Murray Schafer has written that "Touch is the most personal of the senses. Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations (at about 20 hertz). Hearing is a way of touching at a distance and the intimacy of the first sense is fused with sociability whenever people gather together to hear something special" (11). "Total silence," on the other hand, might be viewed, Schafer suggests, as "the rejection of the human personality," where "the ultimate silence is death" (256). An alternative is offered by Baudrillard, who writes on the particular sort of silence found in the desert landscape:

> The silence of the desert is a visual thing, too – a product of the gaze that stares out and finds nothing to reflect it. There can be no silence up in the mountains, since their very contours roar. And for there to be silence, time itself has to attain a sort of horizontality; there has to be no echo of time in the future, but simply a sliding of geological strata one upon the other giving out nothing more than a fossil murmur (*America* 6).

Where sound and touch are brought together in Schafer's formulation, sound and sight similarly come together in Baudrillard's. Both descriptions of silence are reinforced by their applicability to the Convergence project, where the limitation of "human personality" is something they wish to transcend and where the time-value is one which, similarly to Baudrillard's desert, has lost the dimension of verticality in its abandonment of the past and monocular focus on a deferred future: "there are no horizons here" (237), one Convergence spokesperson confidently announces at one point.

While the sound/silence dichotomy thus appears straightforward, there is a complication added when said sound is converted to *noise*. This change is implied in two comments Jeff makes while in the taxi ride described above: "Traffic was stopped dead and I nudged the window switch and listened to the blowing horns approach peak volume. We were trapped in our own obsessive clamor" (172); regarding this honking, he then adds, "the amplified sound bec[ame] an independent force, noise for the sake of noise, overwhelming the details of time and place" (174). The two passages together demonstrate the way that a simple reassertion of embodiment and the sensorial in itself means nothing, as we are capable of "trapp[ing] ourselves in our own obsessive clamor" even as it becomes "an independent force."

The way it "overwhelm[s] the details of time and place" is telling in the context of the phenomenological understanding of subjectivity as grounded precisely in these elements, where this overwhelming therefore translates to a drowning out of the subject, of the human individual. What this all suggests is that a middle path must be sought, that that which is associated with silence and likewise with noise are equally detrimental to lived experience. It is in this context that the novel's treatment of the political emerges, in that the emphasis on silence and noise might in fact be a response on DeLillo's part to a shift in the sociopolitical sphere.

The shift I refer to is one signaled in some recent texts contemporaneous to the publication of *Zero K*. As any contemporary theorist who aims for a complete vision of the cultural sphere must do, in his 2019 work *The Second Coming* Franco Berardi discusses the effect that the influx of digital technology is having on today's societies. Berardi writes:

> Chaos does not exist in nature, it is not an objective reality: it is the relation between the human mind and the speed of events that are relevant to our physical and psychological survival. If we feel as though we are living in conditions of chaos, this means that our minds are unable to emotionally process and rationally decide about events whose speed is intensifying, about proliferating nervous stimulation. (1)

While this is to an extent the same narrative found from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) to the Harvey and Virilio formulations of compressed / accelerated spacetime discussed throughout this thesis, this context of overstimulation is one which has undoubtedly taken a new turn in past decade or so; this is the context DeLillo points towards with his comment about the "numbing raptures of the web" (*Zero K* 167), which one intuits is directed more at the use of mobile technology than a person sitting at home with their computer (though both are of course still relevant). While DeLillo will follow this thread explicitly in 2020's *The Silence*, this sociopolitical landscape is certainly at play here in *Zero K* as well; in the sound/silence dichotomy embedded in these contrasting chronotopes there is a relationship to questions of societal organization. Informing this discussion, then, Berardi writes that in recent times, "power is no longer synonymous with reason and law. Power no longer commands silence. On the contrary, power is now the master of noise. The exercise of power is based on simulation and nervous hyper-stimulation" (*Second Coming* 91). Berardi's signaling of a shift in the relationship of power through the silence/noise dichotomy is echoed by DeLillo's text, especially in the everyday chronotope of urban New York, which though focused on the

immanence of lived experience is nonetheless grounded in a sociopolitical context familiar to the contemporary Western reader.

Revisiting Jeff's cab ride with Emma and Stak introduced earlier, at one point he observes a protestor on the street outside:

> Then, standing on the sidewalk, [a] woman in meditative stance, body erect in long skirt and loose blouse, arms bent above her head, fingers not quite touching. Her eyes were closed and she was motionless, naturally so, with a small boy next to her. I'd seen the woman before, or different women, […] and until now I never wondered what the cause was or why there was no sign, no leaflets or tracts, only the woman, the stillness, the fixed point in the nonstop swarm. I watched her, knowing that I could not invent a single detail of the life that pulsed behind those eyes. (174-5)

Jeff sees either this same woman or others involved in a similar sort of action multiple times. Laura Barrett has focused on the repeated postures of these women and figures in the novel as "gestures [Jeff] cannot decipher" ("Uncanny" 117), arguing that Jeff eventually "realizes" that they are "incarnations of his mother," who performed a similar gesture for relaxation: "The physicality of the gestures gradually allows the memory to unfold. The return of the repressed is, as it turns out, quotidian, even perfunctory, but key to the closest bond he's ever had" (118). While it is not necessarily clear in the text that Jeff does himself make this connection, it is still a sound argument, as the Convergence space of the scene Barrett refers to is one which repeatedly allows his memories – especially of his mother – to surge to the fore. Nonetheless, the women also appear to play another role, a suggestion perhaps supported by the fact that a similar scene of a woman in a defensive posture is found in DeLillo's 2011 short story "The Starveling."[17] While Jeff is convinced the woman (or women) is (are) protesting something, he is baffled by what that may be. However, the closed eyes and the silent form of the protest stand in stark contrast to the chaos of the street which surrounds her, and it is her status as a "fixed point in the nonstop swarm" (*Zero K* 175) which is a telling phrasing in this case.

In a 2017 text titled *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects,* which like Berardi's tackles shifting relations with the advent of digital culture, philosopher Byung-Chul Han expands on his choice to focus on "the swarm":

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[17] The unnamed woman who is painted as in danger of disappearance responds as such when the narrator eventually follows her into a bathroom: "She stood with one arm bent in front of her, but it didn't seem defensive to him. She was not fending, staving off. She was just caught in midmotion, other arm at her side, palm of hand flat against the wall" ("Starveling" 207). This woman is similarly described at one point as navigating "the sidewalk swarm" (193).

> The digital swarm lacks the soul or spirit of the masses. Individuals who come together as a swarm do not develop a *we*. No harmony prevails—which is what welds the crowd together into an active entity. Unlike the crowd, the swarm demonstrates no internal coherence. It does not speak with a *voice*. The shitstorm lacks a *voice*, too. Accordingly, it is perceived as *noise*. (10, original emphasis)

What Han's account does is explore the change suggested in this passage: from the crowd to the swarm. I would argue that DeLillo's choice of the phrase "the nonstop swarm" to describe the people walking in the street is of considerable significance coming from him, seeing as throughout much of his career he has repeatedly returned to the dialectic between the individual and the crowd.[18] The turn from "crowd" to "swarm" that Han indicates, which opposes the "active unity" of the crowd to the swarm which fails to "develop a *we*," resonates with DeLillo's novel; where the masses of people in the streets are a swarm here and at the end of the text – "Beggar in wheelchair, […] gloved hand thrust into the street swarm" (*Zero K* 266) – the term "crowd" is generally used in a quite different context: "So many places elsewhere, crowds collecting, thousands shouting, chanting, bending to the charge of police with batons and riot shields. My mind working into things, helplessly, people dead and dying, hands bound behind them, heads split open" (196). Here the crowd is "elsewhere," and reflects the "we" Han signals as lacking in the swarm, as they are actively involved in some form of joint political agency. In the same passage, Han also opposes the "voice" of a crowd to the "noise" of the digital phenomenon of the "shitstorm," of the swarm, which is precisely what Berardi equates to the new form of power; interestingly, the next time Jeff encounters this silently posturing woman he describes a scene which is evocative of this very discussion: "She was frozen in place. […] A teenage girl stopped just long enough to aim her device and take a picture. A disturbance building all around us, air thick and dark, sky ready to crack open" (210). The clash of the silent figure and the mindless snapping of the photo – arguably one of the most at-fault technological elements when it comes to this dehumanizing swarm effect – immediately leads to "a disturbance building," the "sky ready to crack open" with a wholly different sort of storm.

What this then points towards is the role these silently protesting woman play in the novel, which beyond representing a repressed memory of his mother is therefore also political in nature, for in the context of noise as the new agent of power which both Berardi and Han suggest, the woman's silence and immobility become actions opposed to the logic of the

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[18] For more on this dichotomy, cf. Osteen (1999), Mullins (2010), Luter (2012), or Martín-Salvan (2013)

swarm. This therefore helps to explain Jeff's fascination with them, which is clarified further when he writes: "The woman with her eyes ever closed, she fixed things in place, stopped traffic for me, allowed me to see clearly what was here" (211). The woman here stands in opposition to the overwhelming sense of chaos Berardi opens his book with, silently representing his argument that "As chaos is fed by war, every attempt to overcome chaos by waging war against it is doomed to failure: fighting terrorism ends up reinforcing it, security campaigns result in increasing insecurity" (2). The woman and even the protestors Jeff imagines in the scene cited above are not the ones "waging war" against chaos Berardi refers to; her opposition is rather one of raising awareness, as well as developing an individual stance adequate to the situation. Near the end of the novel, Jeff reflects once again on the woman: "what lesson is there to be learned from a still figure in the midst of crowds? In her case it may be an issue of impending threat. Individuals have always done this, haven't they? I think of it as medieval, a foreboding of some kind. She is telling us to be ready" (267). Read in the way I do here, the threat she is warning against is the loss of individuality which the swarm discussion represents, the disappearance of the individual into the voiceless mass; the typical association of the term "swarm" with the mindless gathering of insects such as locusts is here appropriate. The New York chronotope is one in which the possibility of immanence – of an embracing of shared, embodied humanity – is possible, but in which there is also a battle to be fought against these forces which render the individual a cog in a machine with no real direction.

In light of this discussion, all the quirks Jeff describes about his own behavior are thus contextualized; for example, Jeff describes "a smartphone that has an app that counts the steps a person takes. I did my own count, day by day, stride for stride, into the tens of thousands" (220). The atypical habit is representative of his own resistance against this effect that the digital revolution has on the subject, countering it from the ground up – quite the opposite of the Convergence's goal of forging a transhumanist utopia by remaking everything anew. Jeff's habit of entering a room and shutting his eyes, which he either does or comments on multiple times throughout the novel, within both chronotopes, is also contextualized here: "I told [Emma] that I used to stand in a dark room, eyes shut, mind immersed in the situation. I told her that I still do it, although rarely, and that I never know that I'm about to do it. Just stand in the dark. The lamp sits on the bureau next to the bed. There I am, eyes shut. Sort of Staklike" (199). Discussing this contemporary issue of information overload in his more recently published *Psychopolitics*, Han writes: "Today, our perceptive apparatus itself is incapable of arriving at any conclusion: it just clicks its way through the endless, digital net. Our senses are

completely distracted. Yet only contemplative lingering manages to achieve any meaningful end. *Shutting one's eyes* offers a symbol for arriving at a conclusion" (71, original emphasis). Jeff's walking into a room and shutting his eyes might therefore be read as a reaction to the overstimulation of 21st century life, and his resistance therefore applies to the dominant forms of perception associated with the ideologies of *both* chronotopes. Jeff elsewhere comments that, in his endless job search, "I'd been following the promising leads all along and had no choice but to keep at it, wondering now and then if I'd become obsolete. In the street, on a bus, within the touchscreen storm, I could see myself moving autonomically into middle age, an involuntary man, guided by the actions of his nervous system" (*Zero K* 193). Reinforcing the above arguments with the phrase "the touchscreen storm," Jeff here opposes his own "involuntary" actions – which in light of the wandering in New York scene obtains value – with this digital world, such that he might be "obsolete."

In contrast to a potentially "obsolete" Jeff, then, is Stak, Emma's adopted son from Ukraine, who represents a new generation and thus fresh possibilities when it comes to an ontological stance in such a world of alienation, oppression, and digital interaction; Stak is, again, of considerable importance in that it is his death near Konstantinovka which gives the entire chronotope its bearing. When Jeff declares that his standing in the room with his eyes closed makes him "sort of Staklike" (199), he is positing an intuitive response to this "touchscreen storm" the adolescent was born into. Elsewhere, commenting on Stak's rejection of riding the subway, Jeff wonders: "Was he the species that rejected all the things we were supposed to tolerate as a way of maintaining our shaky hold on common order?" (173). Phrasing the question as wondering if Stak is a different "species" is a telling maneuver, subtly suggesting an *evolutionary* adaptation to this changed world. This mention of "species" is brought up again when they visit the museum exhibit of a large rock, which Jeff frames through Heidegger's argument in "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'" that only humans exist – "rocks are, but they do not exist" (213). In a scene which echoes earlier rocks with a similar role[19] – and in which DeLillo laments the "firm fellowship with Nazi principles" Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* have more recently demonstrated, causing "even the most innocent words, *tree, horse, rock* [to go] dark in the process" (214) – Stak responds by talking to the rock,

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[19] I refer for example to the painted stone Gary Harkness finds in his brief foray into the desert in *End Zone* (40), the stone written upon in *The Names* (188), as well as Elster's comment in *Point Omega*: "Unless stones have being. Unless there's some profoundly mystical shift that places being in a stone" (92).

identifying Jeff, Emma, and himself as "*H. Sapiens*" (216). He tells the rock that it will likely "outlive the species itself" (217). In the syntax there is therefore a suggestion that the rock too lives, and thus Stak is put into dialogue with the recent trend in critical thought which attempts to think around anthropocentrism. What this suggests is Stak as a different sort of response to the various pressures which have sent the Convergence group to the desert: as an adaptation of the human which emphasizes political engagement and ontological humility. This is not to suggest that such an adaptation is not in itself problematic, for Stak also explains in this scene that "We learn to see the differences among the ten million faces that pass through our visual field every year. Right? I unlearned this a long time ago, in childhood, in my orphanage, in self-defense. Let the faces pass through the vision box and out the back of your head. See them all like one big blurry thing" (213) – his unlearning of the ability to distinguish faces is indicative of a social detachment which is hard to reconcile.

This scene with the exhibition of the rock in fact occurs in the wake of the beginning of Stak's own transition which takes place in the text. At first he is obsessed with ordering and categorizing the world around him in order to make sense of it: "He likes to recite temperatures. The numbers tell him something. Tucson one hundred and three degrees fahrenheit. He always specifies fahrenheit or celsius. He relishes both words" (176). This matches with Jeff's own childhood obsession with the dictionary and defining words, which similarly aims to give structure to reality. However, at a later point Stak informs Jeff that "he was no longer involved with the weather," that "some things become de-necessitated" (217). The statement causes Emma to worry, and rightly so, for it is also related to a change which prompts Stak to "not want to go back to school. […] He's saying it's a waste of time. It's all dead time. There's nothing they can say that means anything to him" (208). In addition to this rejection of traditional forms of knowledge, Stak, as if in opposition to the Convergence's efforts to create a new, perfect language, eventually "stopped speaking except when there was a practical matter that needed to be addressed" (219). This act speaks again to the contrast of the two chronotopes, here with regards to the role language plays; language in the Convergence is what sustains the place, as they go to great lengths to both "sell" their ideology as well as to develop their "language isolate" (130). Stak, on the other hand, finds that language has reached its dead-end, where no words can mean anything to him any longer. The overall result is eventually that he disappears just before the narrative sends Jeff back to the Convergence complex, and both the reader as well as the characters find out only in retrospect that he had gone to join some sort of fighting occurring in the region of his birth; leaving words behind, he seeks truth in the physical

act of warfare, demonstrating in his death near the titular Konstantinovka – a death Jeff will witness in real time – a different form of living.

6.5 Return to the Desert and a Clash of Chronotopes

While the impact (both formal and otherwise) Stak's death will have on the text will be returned to shortly, it is important to contextualize that event in the chronotopic sense that I argue it should be viewed. Of the ten chapters of the novel's Part Two, two (Chapters 7 and 8) leave New York to take place back in the Convergence compound in the Kazakh desert, and it is here that the chronotopic dialogue reaches is its climax, as they come into direct contact with each other. Jeff is forced to return there because his father has in the end decided to prematurely join Artis in the cryogenically induced half-life in which they await their distant reawakening. Before going, Jeff admits that he was not sure "how [he] felt about going back there, the Convergence, that crack in the earth" (227), a phrasing which echoes the earlier "sky about to crack open" (210) when the teenage girl photographs the silent woman. It also reflects a line in DeLillo's *Falling Man*, in which an observer of the eponymous artist's performance must "learn how to see it correctly, find a crack in the world where it might fit" (168). Katrina Harack argues that this line demonstrates how DeLillo here "points to the power of art to infiltrate consciousness and instigate a reconsideration of historical events" (327). These various "cracks" – in the sky, in the earth, in the world – appear to all follow this same pattern, representing an opening through which a new perception might appear, the potential for a perceptual shift. In this sense, the Convergence as a "crack in the earth" might be understood as well through Leonard Cohen's lyrics to "Anthem," which similarly posits a "crack in everything." Cohen's song, which counters the Ben Ezras of the Convergence with the line "Do not dwell on what has passed away / or what is yet to be," suggests that it is imperfection which must be valued: "Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack, a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in." What I mean to take from these varying cracks is that the Convergence might be understood as the "crack in the world" of *Zero K* which lets the light in, in the sense that it acts as a necessary foil to the outside context Jeff provides through the New York chronotope. In other words, it is related to my earlier argument that the experience at the Convergence, in its very unfamiliarity, is one of those moments Dylan Trigg signals which

"tend[s] to impart significance into our lives" (*Memory* 9) through its breaking of the habitual perception of the everyday.

When Jeff and Ross finally arrive for the second visit to the desert, the scene is described as such:

> There was a sandstorm wavering across the landscape and the airstrip was unapproachable for a time. […] The plane circled lower and the complex appeared to float up out of the earth. All around it the immense fever burn of ash and rock. The sandstorm was out there, more visibly now, dust rising in great dark swelling waves, only upright, rollers breaking vertically, a mile high, two miles. (*Zero K* 229 - 230)

As should be clear by this point in the thesis, the sandstorm as marking the entrance to the new space is one which holds chronotopic significance, marking the transition from one chronotopic logic to another. This is an important point here, seeing as this is taking place *within* the overall context of the "Konstantinovka" chronotope, that which is associated with New York and the immanence of everyday life. Like the house placed within the desert in *Point Omega*, this speaks directly to the possibility suggested by Bakhtin in his 1973 additions to the "Forms of Time and the Chronotope" essay for a dialogic relationship *among* chronotopes within a novel, here specifically as one chronotope nested within another. While one might be tempted to diagram this, the nature of the relationships is difficult to express in graphic form as the same literary place (the Convergence complex, for example) can be both a chronotope of its own *as well as* one influenced by the larger chronotope within which it is nested. This distinction is crucial to my reading of these final chapters and of this novel as a whole, for I argue that although the Convergence's semi-subterranean compound is intimately tied up in the chronotope of the Chelyabinsk–influenced first half of the novel, here in Jeff's visits in the second half there a clear indications that something is different – a difference I attribute to its situation within the wider "Konstantinovka" chronotope of Part Two.

Jeff introduces the change soon after their arrival:

> I wasn't sure whether this was the same room I'd occupied before. Maybe it just looked the same. But I felt different, being here. It was just a room now. I didn't need to study the room and to analyze the plain fact of my presence within it. I set my overnight bag on the bed and did some stretching exercises and squat-jumps in an attempt to shake the long journey from body memory. The room was not an occasion for my theories or abstractions. I did not identify with the room. (231)

Not only does Jeff once again reassert his embodied self by doing "squat-jumps," he also acknowledges that it "felt different" and, most importantly of all, that he "did not identify with

the room" any longer. Jeff as a character therefore reflects the shift I refer to, as if responding to the fact that although returned to the same Convergence something has fundamentally altered. The distinction possible here between Jeff himself as the principal agent of change versus the overarching chronotope as the main impetus for it is in fact irrelevant; the chronotope is a form of fictional representation inseparable in its impact from the rest of the text, and thus drawing an arbitrary distinction between Jeff as *responding* to the chronotopic shift or Jeff as *causing* it is not a useful method of analysis here. The impact in general is clear, in that Jeff is no longer overwhelmed by the Convergence as a semantic space; no longer immersed in the wider chronotope of crisis, he no longer identifies with this room associated with it. Further, when he returns to walking the halls, "a revisitation" (234), he finds another significant change; when he notices the "welcome sight" of a familiar screen in the hall which always lowered as he passed, he stops and waits for its descent, but this time "nothing happens" (235). The screens which channeled the dominant logic of crisis of the first chronotope in this second half are rendered impotent. Jeff elsewhere declares that he simply "wants the visit to be over. […] The aging son in his routine pursuits. The return of Emma Breslow. The position of compliance and ethics officer. Check the wallet, check the keys. The walls, the floor, the furniture" (238). For Jeff, the place has lost its magic – which I argue is related to his immersion within the chronotope of "Konstantinovka" even as he returns to the desert location – and he is therefore ready to return to the routines of his life, the physical habits of checking his wallet and keys.

In terms of Ross Lockhart and his decision to go through with the procedure, perhaps most significant is what a Convergence spokeswoman says to a gathering of several others who are doing the same, which Jeff is allowed to attend: "Others, far greater in number, have come here in failing health in order to die and be prepared for the chamber. You are to be postmarked Zero K. You are the heralds, choosing to enter the portal prematurely" (237-8). These people submitting themselves to death "prematurely" are referred to as "heralds" of the new world to come, a term which as will be seen sets up an important contrast to Stak's on-screen death. The representative also touches on the same issue discussed above with regards to the "touchscreen storm" the silently postured women are responding to, declaring that "the world above [is] being lost to the systems," to the "transparent networks that slowly occlude the flow of all those aspects of nature and character that distinguish humans from elevator buttons and doorbells" (239). This discourse contextualizes the distinct sort of response the Convergence has to this same problem from the streets of New York, to which the women offer one response while Jeff's counting his own steps while running is another. Thus these "heralds" are leading the

way to a future which counters the “loss of autonomy,” the “sense of being virtualized” (239) of this world outside; they aim to escape the negative social effects of technology through another sort of supposedly emancipatory technology.

Eventually, while his father is “in the process of cooldown” (255), Jeff is taken to see the rows of bodies beneath the earth which are already preserved, naked and hairless, in their upright pods. The mass of bodies “arranged across an enormous floor space” Jeff describes as “pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing,” adding that it “was a form of visionary art, it was body art” (256); it is this scene that he terms “Archaeology for a future age” (256). Near these bodies are “murals of ravaged landscapes, [….] scenes meant to be prophetic” (257). He is finally brought to a smaller room framed by “an arched doorway” with only “two streamlined casings, taller than those [he’d] just seen. One was empty, the other held the body of a woman. There was nothing else in the room,” and it takes Jeff a moment to realize that “The woman was Artis” (257). The special setup of the room with the arched doorway and the extra-large body pods implies, for one, a reference to Adam and Eve, for the empty pod is obviously meant for Ross to take his place at Artis’ side. Jeff acknowledges unironically that Artis here is “a beautiful sight,” a “body in this instance that would not age,” and that “it was Artis, here, alone, who carried the themes of this entire complex into some measure of respect” (258). While Artis is a person who Jeff has found personal value in and made a true connection with, the fact that he is able to find respect at all for this endeavor speaks again to idea that the novel itself does not fall prey to the same habit for absolutes that the Convergence itself does. In other words, although I argue for these distinctions between chronotopes, what I have tried to emphasize especially in regards to this second half is that the path represented by Jeff is one which eschews both extremes, so to speak, be it the direction of the Convergence, abandonment to the touchscreen storm, or the particular path that Stak chooses to take, which will be discussed shortly. Further, the fact that the name “Artis” might be read alternatively as playing off of “artist” or “art is” suggests also a highlighting of art’s role when it comes to the problem of changing perception, of changing one’s approach to the world. Artis, then, brings respect to the whole endeavor, alone in her body pod. However, the utopian Adam and Eve concept attached to this room and its pod waiting for Ross is rejected by Jeff, who ends the passage with the single sentence: “Artis belonged here, Ross did not” (258). Ross is identified as one of the “heralds” of the project, and his Adam-and-Eve setup is due to both this and the fact that he has been one of the biggest financial sponsors of the place.

The scene which immediately follows this one is of considerable importance, as it depicts Jeff returning through the halls and a screen again appearing, this time successfully lowering and beginning to stream video – the only instance in this second visit in which it does so. However, the nature of this video is radically different from the ones Jeff was subjected to throughout the first half of the novel. Whereas those earlier instances focused on the aftermath of disasters both natural and human-caused, this one begins with "Troops in black-and-white [which] come striding out of the mist" and the sight of the "crushed body of a soldier in camouflage gear sprawled in the front seat of a wrecked vehicle" (259). The images are all of armed men, refugees, bombings, violence and warfare. Moreover, Jeff realizes that, crucially, this time "there was a soundtrack. Faint noises, engines revving, remote gunfire, voices barely audible" (259); this is a stark contrast to the silence of the previous screenings in "Chelyabinsk" section. As the images pile up, one after the other, Jeff eventually "notice[s] that the soundtrack has become pure sound. A prolonged signal that rejects any trace of expressive intent" (260). Further, the bodies lined up in pods in the underground space Jeff has just left are now contrasted with "Bodies: slaughtered men in a jungle clearing, vultures stepping among the corpses" (260). Just as these bodies respond to those in the pods, the "pure sound" is a pointed response the silence of the Convergence, where the noise – the new form of exercising power, per Berardi – suggests an intrusion in these silent hallways.

When this particular soundtrack fades away, the shot becomes an extended take of one particular scene of battle, and at this point Jeff writes that "sound resumes, realistic now, explosions everywhere" (262). This scene "looks and sounds like one of traditional war," with "a soldier with a cigarette in his mouth" and a "bearded soldier with a bandaged head" (262). The scene extends, "a sense of something impending," depicting a single soldier "who wears a headband, no helmet" fighting from "the hulk of a wrecked car" (263). Eventually Jeff watches the soldier get shot, and as he stumbles out into the open

> he is hit again and goes to his knees and there is a distinct image of the figure, khaki field jacket, jeans and boots, spiky hair, he is three times life size, here, above me, shot and bleeding, stain spreading across his chest, young man, eyes shut, surpassingly real. It was Emma's son. It was Stak. […] The tanks move along a road that bears a sign with Cyrillic and Roman characters. *Konstantinovka*. There is a crude drawing of a skull above the name. (263, original emphasis)

Knowing that Stak has disappeared from his home in the U.S. shortly before Jeff's trip to the Convergence in which he witnesses this scene, the possibility emerges that this is live footage,

and that Jeff has been witness to the boy's death in real-time. Regardless, the scene would nonetheless be extremely recent, and what is significant are the particulars of people fighting and killing each other combined with the imposition of sound into the previously silent spaces, for what they together hold up to the light is the comparison of the two types of "heralds" juxtaposed within this chapter. The larger-than-life body pods of Artis and Ross in their Edenic grotto are undermined by this scene which follows, which depicts Stak "three times life size" and "surpassingly real," a different sort of herald, dying somewhere near this road sign reading "Konstantinovka." Jeff assumes this is "Stak in Ukraine, a self-defense group, a volunteer battalion. What else could it be?" (264). The boy's epically-portrayed self-sacrifice in the name of the unknown cause associated with this "volunteer battalion" is thus placed alongside the very opposite sort of herald which Jeff's father represents, who pursued his own interests through capital and speculation on natural disasters throughout his life, eventually using that money to fund his escapist, utopian project.

While here it would be reductive to argue that one heraldic death simply cancels out the other, what the shift in video content and the intrusion of sound suggest is that, in a chronotopic sense, the New York chronotope has here, at this very point, punctured its way into that of the Convergence, upsetting its logic as tied to the first chronotope of the "Chelyabinsk" brand of crisis; this is the opposite of the puncturing of the Convergence logic into Jeff's reality which results in his limping on the last page of Part One. This reading is evidenced in that the entire second of half of the novel is titled "In the Time of Konstantinovka," for this signifies that it is this on-screen death of Stak in this place (which Jeff is apparently the sole outside witness to) which retroactively informs the entire section. "In the Time of Konstantinovka" is thus a refutation of the logic of crisis which Chelyabinsk suggests and out of which the Convergence was born, placing the emphasis on active, political engagement in the world, on a seizing of one's political agency, of which Stak's decision and eventual death are extreme examples. What this sort of emphasis on agency suggests in a temporal sense is an opening of the horizon of possibility, of the role that every human can take in attempting to make an idea of change into a reality. Regardless of the level to which such change seems impossible, such actions stand inherently opposed to the temporal reaction of the Convergence to abandon the present for the imagined future. As both Han and Berardi suggest in their own ways in their recent texts tackling this very problem, the only adequate response is in fact a return to immanence, to a focus on the embodied experience of the everyday; to abandon the transcendent and work from

the ground up.[20] While Jeff's own trajectory represents a significantly different path than that of Stak, both are in their own way pointing in that direction. The framing of the entire half of the novel in the context of this death sets up an opposition, finally, to which Jeff himself represents the middle path; DeLillo employs Jeff as a vector to traverse these two opposed chronotopes, elucidating in his passage that which lies on both sides. This is an argument which is finalized in the last scene of the novel.

6.6 – Manhattanhenge, or an Alternative Convergence

After Jeff acts as "privileged witness" (258) to both the death of his father and that of Stak, two brief chapters close the novel. The penultimate is a fragmented collection of short descriptions and observations from Jeff´s life back in New York, and from the contents of one of these there arises the possibility that this textual fragmentation is a representation of the trauma Jeff has experienced in the dual loss of his father and in the witnessing of Stak's death:

> The relief is not commensurate with the fear. It lasts a limited time. You worry for days and then months and finally the son arrives and he is safe and you forget how you could not concentrate on another subject or situation or circumstance in all that time because now he's here, so let's eat dinner. Except that he's not here, is he? He's somewhere near a road sign reading Konstantinovka, in Ukraine, his place of birth and death. (270)

This imagining that Stak has arrived safely is then belied in the chapter's final paragraph, in which Emma calls Jeff while he is "standing at a bus stop" and "tells [him] what happened to Stak;" Jeff does not "tell her that [he] saw it happen" (272). Jeff also indicates in another fragment that he "stand[s] forever in the shadow of Ross and Artis," but that "it's not their resonant lives that haunt [him] but their manner of dying" (266). The term haunting is fitting, in that it refers to traces of the past which the person is unable to let go; the fact that Artis and Ross's death is by definition one which inheres the potential for future rebirth, regardless of whether Jeff believes it or not, fundamentally alters the survivor's relationship with grief, rendering anyone in Jeff's situation therefore incapable of moving on. The fragmented

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[20] While immanence – understood as opposed to transcendence – has played a role in a long history of philosophy, perhaps the one to explore it the most is Gilles Deleuze. In *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life,* Deleuze writes: "We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else" (27), where "a life" refers to that which emerges when "The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens" (28).

selections of text in this penultimate chapter reflect both of these circumstances, while also reaffirming Jeff's commitment to his survival tactic of focusing on the details; he describes variously how he "eat[s] sliced bread because [he] can make it last longer by refrigerating it" (269), sits in his cubicle and "cross[es] things off lists," and checks "the zipper on his pants to make sure that its fastened securely" (270).

The chapter also reveals that although Jeff is content in "the ease of [his] everydayness" (268), his middle path, so to speak, is not necessarily ideal. Jeff in this chapter presents a lack of ground, recalling, for example, a "taxi driver kneeling in the gutter slime, turned toward Mecca," and how he tries "to reconcile the firm placement of his world into the scatterlife of this one" (271). Jeff's "scatterlife" and his focus on the everyday haunts him in that it prevented him from sharing the intimate details of his present and past (including the Convergence experience) with Emma; although earlier he declares that he and Emma "were two individuals exploring a like-mindedness, determined to keep clear of the past, defy any impulse to recite our histories" (175), he later understands his failure to do so is what allows them to drift apart in the context of her anguish at Stak's disappearance: "And then my damning failure to tell her who I was, to narrate the histories of [his mother] and Ross, and Ross and Artis, and the still-life future of father and stepmother in cryonic suspension. I waited too long" (271). Regardless of this disappointment, however, overall Jeff remains comfortably fixed on navigating this "scatterlife," perhaps exemplified by the metaphor inherent in a one-sentence fragment from this chapter: "I walk for hours, dodging a splotch of dogshit now and then" (269). The chapter ends with his admission that he does not tell Emma that he witnessed Stak's death, and then passes to the brief, final chapter.

The final chapter is a description of a single scene; based on the sense of closure provided by Emma's informing him about Stak, as well as the connection implied in the fact that he is at a bus stop when she calls and the final chapter's scene takes place as he rides a bus, a certain continuity is established. In other words, what is represented in this scene should be understood as stemming from the closure provided by the confirmation that what he had seen on the screen had actually taken place. The chapter opens as such: "This was a crosstown bus, west to east, a man and woman seated near the driver, a woman and boy at the rear of the bus. I found my place, midway, looking nowhere in particular, mind blank or nearly so, until I began to notice a glow, a tide of light" (273). While Jeff's finding his "place, midway" between the passengers at either end of the bus reinforces the liminal status of the middle path I refer to, the framing of the scene moreover returns the discussion to that of the chronotopic hearts of the

novel; here is the other scene in this second half of the novel which I argue represents an entering of a chronotopic heart. Just as Jeff finds Ben-Ezra's garden by "walk[ing] randomly for a time" and opening a door with his "mind blank" (121), here he is "looking nowhere in particular" with a "mind blank or nearly so" (273) – the similarity between these two situations is difficult to ignore. Thus contextualized as chronotopically significant in a text whose entire dialectic is indeed organized around the chronotope, this scene becomes crucial to its representational impact as a whole. In fact, in terms of a dialectic the scene might even be considered as a synthesis of what has come before, a resolution of the clashing chronotopic values at play in the novel.

The description of the scene continues as such:

> Seconds later the streets were charged with the day's dying light and the bus seemed the carrier of this radiant moment. [...] I looked and then listened, startled by a human wail, and I swerved from my position to see the boy on his feet, facing the rear window. We were in midtown, with a clear view west, and he was pointing and wailing at the flaring sun, which was balanced with uncanny precision between rows of high-rise buildings. It was a striking thing to see, in our urban huddle, the power of it, the great round ruddy mass, and I knew that there was a natural phenomenon, here in Manhattan, once or twice a year, in which the sun's rays align with the local street grid. (273)

The combination of the phrases "a tide of light" and "this radiant moment" allow a feeling of the mystical to emerge, reminding the reader of other such scenes of DeLillo's oft-quoted emphasis on "radiance in dailiness" ("An Outsider" 70-71) he mentions in an interview in the context of *White Noise*. Given the earlier discussion of the sensorial, it is also telling that he "looked and then listened," as he is keyed-in to the phenomenon by the boy's "human wail." What Jeff refers to as the "natural phenomenon, here in Manhattan" of the "sun's rays align[ing] with the local street grid" is also known colloquially as "Manhattanhenge;" although DeLillo does not mention this moniker, the term accentuates the conflation evident here between the natural and the cultural, and does so, moreover, specifically as associated with ancient peoples' cultivation of the mystical through the power of such natural events as the alignment of the sun's rays. The boy, whose "urgent cries" are paired with his irregular physique of being "thick-bodied" with "an over-sized head" (273-4), is reminiscent of other children of DeLillo's novels; as Amy Hungerford points out, "critics have [generally] agreed that the children in DeLillo's fiction – Wilder in *White Noise,* Billy Twillig in *Ratner's Star*, Tap in *The Names*, Esmeralda in *Underworld* – embody some especially valued, and often

mystical, state of consciousness or being" (368). The boy's "prelinguistic grunts" are another counter to the Convergence in their search to create an ideal language, which Jeff reflects in his comment that "these howls of awe were far more suitable than words" (274). While the boy and his "over-sized head" might be read as problematic, it represents a pattern in DeLillo and beyond to signal some new form of being, something ontologically other, which is fitting with regards to the representational impact of this scene.

Jeff himself emphasizes the contrast here with the context of the novel's outset, narrating that: "Then there is Ross, once again, in his office, the lurking image of my father telling me that everybody wants to own the end of the world" (274). Rather than the end of the world, what is here emphasized is a scene of radiance found in an everyday occurrence, the riding of "a crosstown bus" (273) in the midst of New York City. The novel ends as such:

> The full solar disk, bleeding into the streets, lighting up the towers to either side of us, and I told myself that the boy was not seeing the sky collapse upon us but was finding the purest astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun.
>
> I went back to my seat and faced forward. I didn't need heaven's light. I had the boy's cries of wonder. (274)

While the boy "not seeing the sky collapse upon us" refutes the apocalyptic statement by Ross at the novel's outset, it is also interesting that rather than share the boy's "pure astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun" Jeff makes his final statement: "I didn't need heaven's light. I had the boys cries of wonder." Whichever way the sky or earth or world cracks open, Jeff merely gains perspective from the experience, reinforcing his commitment to his path of immanence; Jeff's not "need[ing] heaven's light" is the counterbalance to his not needing of the Convergence's other sort of fixed solution of immortality.

Conclusions

One suggestion which emerges from the preceding discussion is thus that, in order to be ethically honest, the human must bridge the Cartesian gap and inhabit the threshold not only between the mind and the body, but between their extensions into the broader realms of culture and nature as well. While the abstract techno-logic of the Convergence is potentially countered by the retreat from anthropocentrism hinted at in Stak's conversation with the exhibit of the rock, as a whole *Zero K* does not take its counter of the Convergence's transcendental ideas to the philosophical extreme of rejecting the centrality of the human realm for the human. What

it does seem to do is humbly suggest its definition of the human as one inescapably caught between these two extremes: the event of human existence is one which resides precisely on this *apparent* threshold between nature and culture. While certain nostalgias tend to look to the distant past as a time before such an unfortunate split, just as some tend to project its transcendence into utopic futures, novels like *Zero K* suggest that, existentially uncomfortable as it may be, it is our inevitable lot to constantly inhabit this imagined yet ever-present threshold, to exist in a constant state of becoming.

This argument, then, emerges as the crux of Jeff's middle path, his liminal stance, which in its seeking of a way out of alienation is a rejection of duality, echoing thus Rosi Braidotti's definition of the posthuman. Writing in the context of explaining her move from the human to the posthuman, Braidotti clarifies:

> My point is that this [social constructivist] approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature–culture interaction. In my view the latter is associated to and supported by a monistic philosophy, which rejects dualism, especially the opposition nature–culture and stresses instead the self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter. The boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances. (3)

What Jeff's account here at the end of *Zero K* presents is precisely this breaking down of "the boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural" that Braidotti signals, and DeLillo's novel therefore arrives at similar conclusions in its rich and highly chronotopically-informed construction. This response, in other words, is also always partially represented through the character's movement through place, which as Alexandra Kogl points out in the real-world context, is in and of itself political:

> Ultimately, critical responsiveness to the values embedded in particular places is a more useful tactic than efforts to escape both places and the values they represent. Learning to see the values embodied in places, especially everyday spaces that so easily come to seem natural, becomes a more important goal than seeking means of escape from meaningful spaces. Only once we see the values embodied in places can we begin to work on transforming both in a truly political response to our everyday spaces. (102)

As I have worked to show, part of Jeff's response is to learn to see the values embodied in places, as well as to actively take part in the adding of value as discussed through de Certeau's conception of walking as a "site of enunciation" (98). Echoing Jeff's emphasis on immanence,

embodiment and the non-detachment from place he slowly moves towards, Edward Casey argues (via Merleau-Ponty) in his 2009 introduction to *Getting Back Into Place* that

> the collusion of the natural with the cultural virtually everywhere in the place-world is so deep that 'everything is cultural in us […] and everything is natural in us (even the cultural rests on the polymorphism of wild Being).' To these words of Merleau-Ponty's, I would add only that the convergence of the natural with the cultural in a common 'plane of immanence' (Deleuze) is not only *in us* but is also, and especially, *in places*. (xxiii, original emphasis)

Casey usefully signals exactly that which I wish to highlight in the discussion of this final chapter, and of *Zero K* as a whole: "a convergence of the natural and the cultural in a common plane of immanence." The Convergence project is, in the end, overshadowed by this opposing sort of convergence – of the natural and the cultural, represented through the figure of Jeff as he rides the "midtown bus" and listens to the "boy's cries of wonder" (*Zero K* 274).

At the outset of the chapter I cited DeLillo's recent statement in an interview with poet Kae Tempest that he feels there is a connection between his current writing and the themes he has dealt with from the beginnings of his career. As my analysis of *Zero K* has worked to make clear, this assertion holds up under scrutiny. Leaving behind the enigmatic treatment of themes of *Point Omega*, in *Zero K* DeLillo returns to a foregrounding of the sociopolitical situation of alienation at the hands of a late capitalist system, which itself has undergone significant change since his early-70s publication of *Americana* and *End Zone*. Rather amusingly, in a more recent interview from October of 2020, DeLillo indicates that he in fact only vaguely remembers the process of writing *Zero K*, where one of the only things which stands out to him are "the odd part titles, 'Part 1: In the Time of Chelyabinsk.' 'Part 2: In the Time of Konstantinovka.' I did have a reason for doing that but who the hell knows what it was" ("We All Live"). While DeLillo himself is unable to recall the exact reasoning, I have argued for the titles as an integral part of what is probably the most chronotopically represented text of his career. With the opposition of the two sections, DeLillo balances the competing forces of a logic of crisis – whose temporal effect of reducing the past and future to a narrowed present serves the needs of capital – and the logic of immanence, of the everyday. Further, Jeff's wandering and insistence that he "like[s] to drift into things" (*Zero K* 205) are related to his privileged position of elucidating a middle path between the extremes of what the titular references to Chelyabinsk and Konstantinovka signify – a sense of planetary crisis and the solitary resistance and death of Stak. While not to say that Jeff is held up by DeLillo as representing a solution for the problem of developing an adequate ontological response in complex times, the character does

read as a method of survival for the individual, or at the very least for this individual. The sense of "drift" referred to above and elsewhere in the thesis is by no means of an unambiguous nature, as Rahel Jaeggi demonstrates in her excellent 2014 study of *Alienation*: "Someone who allows herself simply to drift in her life does not only not live a self-determined life; she does not really live it at all" (201). It would be incorrect to argue that Jeff represents a positive example of "self-determination," but what DeLillo does explore is the possibility which lies between the cracks of Jaeggi's argument – Jeff's focus on the immanent experience of his embodied and embedded (in place) existence allows him to, at the very least, maintain his sense of self, to weather intact all the different types of figurative storms which blow his way.

CONCLUSIONS

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Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Conversation is almost dead, and soon so too will be those who knew how to speak.

Guy Debord, *Comments*

Through the course of this thesis, I have charted Don DeLillo's career-long engagement with the conjoined elements of space and time, which the author explores on a series of levels: firstly, regarding the role of embodiment and place in human experience: secondly, on the way this experience shifts in the face of social change: lastly, on how said shifts are best traced through their representation in chronotopic terms. In my analysis of his texts ranging from the early 1970s to the present day, I have outlined the way DeLillo traces cultural shifts through the representation of a subject's interaction with their fictional world by means of time and space (of place), as well as the way his representation thereof is highly chronotopic as a consequence. The works chosen for my discussion all correspond in particularly acute attention paid to questions of ontology, to the subject's attempt to situate herself in a world wracked with any number of destabilizing forces; while DeLillo's other fiction not broached in detail in this thesis is also often highly chronotopic, and indeed warrants further study in that regard, those texts often put emphasis on other concerns, be they epistemological or sociopolitical. In this focus I have shown that a pattern emerges, wherein DeLillo's foregrounding of such ontological questions coincides with significant desert (or desert-like) chronotopes and first-person narration. Five of DeLillo's seven novels written completely in the first-person voice

include deserts, and I have argued that one of the exceptions (*Great Jones Street*) develops an interior chronotope which reflects the deserts of these other novels. The desert emerges in his *oeuvre* as a powerful attractor for characters in search of transformation, of a way to adapt to the shifting tides of cultural and geopolitical pressures, themselves often transmitted through the subjective experience of place.

From *End Zone* to *Zero K*, I have demonstrated that DeLillo's searching inquiry into the what it means to exist beneath the umbrella of the varying forces which press on the Western individual is at its most acute when his characters are led to desert or desert-like spaces. By tracing the evolution of DeLillo's fiction through the emphasis on this particular type of chronotope, I have further cemented the fact that this type of critical gaze is in fact fundamental when it comes to understanding the full representational impact of the work of an author like DeLillo. In each successive chapter I have outlined the way that a chronotopic gaze leads to crucial insights into the way the text both operates and impacts the reader, and thus what meaning can be taken from it. Chapter 4's discussion of *The Names* and Chapter 5's discussion of *Point Omega* stand out particularly in this sense, as it is precisely this chronotopic approach which lead to conclusions markedly different – and even at odds with – analyses which fail to take into account this important structuring element of fiction, both in DeLillo and beyond. In terms of DeLillo's *oeuvre*, what I have attempted to achieve is provide an important reconsideration of the trajectory of his work, or rather of one of its trajectories. In other words, through the emphasis on place and the chronotopes in these chosen novels I have at the same time exposed the core of what one might call DeLillo's philosophical project, the heart of his ontological inquiry through fiction. While other authors have broached the DeLillean brand of subjectivity – see Cowart (2002) and Pass (2014), for example – they tend to do so through attention to character and language. What I have instead elucidated at length is the author's own shifting understanding of the role phenomenological place plays in the human experience, and the way that this is translated, consciously or not, into the very structure of the fictional worlds he creates.

It is in this sense that this thesis has also accomplished the significant goal embarked upon at its conception, which was to both argue for the relevance of the chronotopic approach to fiction by demonstrating its inextricability from human experience itself while, at the same time, proving the validity of said approach through an extended, practical exercise thereof. Bakhtin's "Concluding Remarks" of 1973 to the "Forms of Time and the Chronotope" essay brought the concept into proximity with the more recent phenomenological arguments for place

as primary to experience, and my task was to begin an updating of the concept in order to demonstrate its relevancy in a 21st century context. The thematically and chronotopically rich fiction of Don DeLillo has proven perfect for the task, since, as I have shown in a number of ways, his work is often explicitly concerned with questions of space and time. In this vein, the thesis has also traced a career-long dialogue on DeLillo's part with different approaches to both elements, and it is therefore no surprise that DeLillo's most recent novel at the time of writing continues this engagement. The timely publication of *The Silence* in October of 2020 in fact provides a useful capstone to this thesis, since it is explicitly concerned with the relative nature of space and time as first expressed by Albert Einstein. Given the continuity here between the space/time concern and the conception of the chronotope itself as stemming from Bakhtin's inspiration in Einstein's General Theory of Relativity,[1] the short novel is appropriate to examine briefly in order to both revisit some of the topics addressed in this thesis as well as to, more broadly speaking, validate the line of arguing pursued throughout. I thus deviate for a time from the traditional format of a dissertation's conclusion in order to reflect through analysis on what has come before, and will subsequently return to the broader lines of research opened up by this project.

The Silence, finished shortly before the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic situation,[2] is not unlike *Zero K* in its revisitation of themes which have preoccupied the writer throughout his career. While no deserts emerge in the novel, this return to the themes discussed throughout this dissertation make it a fitting text through which to weave the conclusions of the preceding analysis as a whole. *The Silence* furthers the sense in which DeLillo's late style holds parallels with especially the middle to later phase of Samuel Beckett's work (including plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* and the novels *Molloy, Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*), exploring the tension between hope (life) and despair (death) through pared down spaces and an indeterminate sense of time.[3] Especially when read in the wake of *Zero K's* final upholding of a possible middle path of immanence as a tactic of survival, *The Silence* suggests

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[1] I discussed this in the context of Chapter 1; Bakhtin writes" "This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)" (*FTC* 84).

[2] Information indicated on the inside panel of the dust jacket for the Picador hardcover version of the novel.

[3] While I mentioned this correlation with regards to Beckett's *Endgame* in the previous chapter, see also Boxall (2006; 2012) for extended explorations of the similarities between the two writers' (late) work.

that the forces of abstraction and alienation – as signaled most clearly through the duo of capital and war – have finally pushed culture over the edge into a state of exhaustion.

Set in the near future of 2022, the novel is centered around a sudden failure of all electronic systems, a failure which coincides with Super Bowl Sunday, the famous American football championship event for which the three disparate groups of the novel's characters are drawn together in New York to view. *The Silence* revisits a series of themes discussed throughout the thesis: the ideas of football/war and eschatology of *End Zone*, the possibility of World War III of "Human Moments," the liminality of air travel and fascination with mass spectacle of *The Names*, the tension between the spacetime of physics and the "true life" of *Point Omega*, and the increased alienation of contemporary technolife of *Zero K*. Moreover, the main impetus behind *The Silence* is this sense of cultural exhaustion, a result of the driving force of abstraction / alienation which has provided a principal backdrop for all the previous texts dealt with in this dissertation. While early scenes of the novel depict two of the characters – Jim and Tessa – on a transatlantic flight on their way back to New York and then at a vaguely described help center after their emergency landing, the majority of the novel takes place in the high-rise apartment of their friends Diane and Max. This apartment is the chronotopic center of the novel, and what both it and the overall structure of the novel represent is, as in Yeats' "Second Coming" cited in my epigraph, a sense of things – including space and time – in the process of falling apart.

Before the critical event which suddenly eliminates technology from the lives of the characters, DeLillo again signals the relationship between capital and war, this time through football: Max "had a history of big bets on sporting events and this was the final game of the football season, […] the national anthem sung by a semi-celebrity, six U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds streaking over the stadium" (*The Silence* 19). The passage joins gambling and celebrity, the two flashier sides of capitalism, with the military jets flying over the stadium. Later though, in what seems a wink at DeLillo's earlier *End Zone*, Max declares that this military flyover is an "outdated ritual. We've gone beyond all comparisons between football and war. World Wars in Roman numerals, Super Bowls in Roman numerals. War is something else, happening somewhere else" (28). While the comparison may be outdated, the sense of war Max describes as "something else, happening somewhere else" is precisely the critique inherent in the earlier DeLillo texts I discussed in this thesis, especially "Human Moments in World War III" and *Point Omega*; this distancing is an important part of the overall sense of alienation in the 21st century globalized context.

Beyond Max and Diane, the second of the two middle-aged couples of the novel, the fifth and final character of the novel is a younger man named Martin Dekker, who was a student of Diane's in a university physics course and who now teaches the same subject at a high school. Descriptions of Martin approximate him in different ways to earlier DeLillo characters such as Kyle from "The Ivory Acrobat," Mr. Tuttle from *The Body Artist*, or Jessie from *Point Omega*:

> For the past year Diane has been telling the young man to return to earth. He barely occupied a chair, seemed only fitfully present, an original cliché, different from others, not a predictable or superficial figure but a man lost in his compulsive study of *Einstein's 1912 Manuscript on the Special Theory of Relativity*. He tended to fall into a pale trance. Was this a sickness, a condition? (22-23)

Like Kyle after the earthquake or Jessie throughout *Point Omega*, Martin is a character who physically and figuratively speaking is hardly present, although the direction he goes – into Einstein's manuscript – is distinct to these others. In one sense he is the opposite of Kyle, who eventually finds aid in the sense of embodiment and the mystery of the Minoan figurine. In another sense though, this is also a similarity, as Martin's obsession with Einstein which becomes more and more pronounced as the novel goes on – he eventually begins speaking in a German accent and then in German proper – is also related to a search for something which will provide stability in an increasingly destabilized world. It is when the "superscreen TV" (19) Dianne, Max and Martin are staring at prior to the football match suddenly goes blank that his obsession with Einstein begins to increase in thematic relevance.

The sudden loss of function of all technology, which the reader and characters assume is widespread since it is also what causes Jim and Tessa's plane to lose all functions and emergency land, initiates the novel's probing of 21st century subjectivity, representing DeLillo's most concentrated attempt to come to terms with the crutch technology has become in the contemporary context. For example, shortly after the outage Diane says, "I am foolishly trying to imagine all the rooms in all the cities where the game is being broadcast. All the people watching intently or sitting as we are, puzzled, abandoned by science, technology, common sense" (29). The final juxtaposition of "technology" and "common sense" is crucial, as it demonstrates the extent to which human sensibility has been infiltrated by or at least grafted onto the technologies which are fundamental to everyday life. This sudden disappearance, of technology and common sense, is what the novel explores in what is perhaps best described as a cold or frigid tone; the novel's cover is black and white, and this sense

dominates the novel, which is mostly devoid of descriptions of color, instead dominated by the dark of night, blank screens and talk of the "semi-darkness" (65). Once the screens stop working the characters are forced to face the fact of their existence in its bare form, and all struggle with this in their own ways. Overall, the sensation is one of distinct alienation, as characters are unable to orient themselves in a world in which their crutch has been suddenly stripped from them.

The Silence is broken like *Zero K* into two parts, although in this case there is less of an obvious opposition of chronotopes to be had. However, there is a noticeable shift from Part One to Part Two, where the effect of unmoored space and time which begins to take hold in the former becomes accentuated in the latter. To touch on the chronotope of this first half, it is centered around the apartment they all meet in, which in fact resembles the empty space of a theatre stage more than anything else[4] – the reader gets the impression that it is isolated in a surrounding darkness. This sense of the theatrical is reinforced in various ways throughout the text. In an opening description, for example, DeLillo narrates: "On this day, Super Bowl LVI in the year 2022, Diane was seated in the rocker five feet from Max, and between and behind them was her former student Martin, early thirties, bent slightly forward in a kitchen chair" – and then, in a paragraph all to itself – "Commercials, station breaks, pregame babble" (20). The overwrought description of the first sentence and the fragmented syntax of the second suggest stage directions more than a typical novelistic setting of scene. Further, attention is repeatedly paid to the positions of the characters with respect to the objects in the room, just like in the passage above. In the first section Jim and Tessa experience the world outside on their way to the apartment (55-63), Martin looks out the window (66), and Max leaves to walk in the streets (98-99). However, even with those externally-aimed elements there is little actual description of the outside world: Jim and Tessa only describe a help center full of injured and lost people, which at one point is plunged into darkness (60), and Martin's view as he looks out the window is denied to the reader altogether. Similarly, the description of Max's experience while outside is limited – "the crowd, a thousand faces every minute" (99) – and he even denies the images to the other characters upon his return, speaking only of his climbing the stairs of the apartment building after he leaves "the crowds in the streets" (109). The effect is thus that the gaze is directed pointedly inwards, an effect which accentuates the representational power of the

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[4] Peter Brook's classic *The Empty Space* (1968) famously lays out this spatial concept of the stage.

apartment and its chronotope. This chronotope is one which, again, resembles a theatre stage, and whose spatiotemporal value is therefore one of distance; the chronotope of the theatre stage is an entity in and of itself, one in which temporal and spatial clues are absent, ready to be filled with whatever is placed therein. DeLillo populates this stage almost exclusively with chairs and five distinct humans. However, the problem for the characters who live in this fictional world is that this not a stage, but rather a part of their lives, and what this stage-like chronotope therefore represents in the novel is the sudden sense of unmoored place which the characters feel in the face of technology's disappearance.

This sense of unmoored space and time is one which brings the discussion back to my opening chapter's description of place, which situates the human subject as ineluctably defined by her experience. In this context, what the characters experience – this spatiotemporal unmooring – is in fact the catalyst for a profound sense of crisis. Where one's orientation in the world is tied to a greater and greater extent to the varying forces of abstraction discussed above, what their sudden removal reveals is analogous to a void. The character Tessa is in fact a poet, and one possible explanation for the enigmatic epigraphs which head the six chapters of Part One is that they are lines from the poem the reader learns she is composing in her head during the course of the novel. Related to the above, the first line of this poem, which is "bouncing around her brain for a while," is "*In a tumbling void"* (96, original emphasis). If it is the case that the epigraphs are indeed a part of this poem, then "in a tumbling void" would act, rather fittingly, as a second epigraph to the entire novel. Moreover, shortly after the line is revealed, Tessa's husband Jim says to her: "Home […] Where is that?" (97).

In this context, Martin's obsession with Einstein and his theory of relativity begins to be contextualized, for it was Einstein who first took the disparate elements of space and time and proved their inextricability. This is encapsulated in a simple exchange between Martin and Diane when they first start talking about the German-born physicist: Diane says "Space and time," to which Martin responds, "Space and time. Spacetime" (29). The simple linguistic fusion of the disparate elements encapsulates the entire argument, although Martin expands further:

> I'm sticking with Einstein no matter what the theorists have disclosed or predicted or imagined concerning gravitational waves, supersymmetries and so on. Einstein and black holes in space. He said it and then we saw it. Billions of times more massive than our sun. He said it many decades ago. His universe became ours. Black holes. The event horizon. The atomic clocks. Seeing the unseeable. (30)

Leaving behind the varying speculative theories about spacetime I outlined in my chapter on *Point Omega*, DeLillo here returns to the starting point for different interpretations of the phenomena described in the passage, including black holes and the event horizon. The return to such "basics" reads as Martin's desperate attempt to find his grounding again, and thus it is no surprise that the form it takes is the Theory of Relativity. However, Martin's tendency to "fall into a pale trance" and his description as "only fitfully present" (22) make him more analogous to Jessie of *Point Omega* than to Kyle of "The Ivory Acrobat" or Jeff of *Zero K*, the latter two who in their different ways find a method of survival through different aspects of embodiment.

Despite Martin's obsession, as expressed through repeated dialogues and eventually monologues about Einstein and this theory, in *The Silence* the movement of the novel remains ever inwards. The chronotopic effect described above as a theatre stage, removed of context in time and space, only increases as the novel goes on. Where the first half of the novel consists of numbered chapters with epigraphs, the second half consists of untitled sections broken up only by dividing lines, demonstrating that the narrative logic is itself beginning to break down. This is reminiscent of the similar tactic DeLillo employed in the chronotope of "The Desert" section of *The Names*, where the value of that chronotope affected the narrative regardless of where the action was taking place. This breaking down of plot echoes the breaking down of the logic of time and space I argue for in *The Silence's* theatrical chronotope, making it thus another interior space which, like *Great Jones Street*, holds similarities to the chronotopic value of DeLillo's deserts. What is lacking in this space, however, is the potential for ontological renewal which I have shown is characteristic of DeLillo's deserts, which characters often seek out in their varying searches for transcendence. While Martin does attempt to tie the Jewish Einstein to this sense of the transcendent through quoting his opinion of Jesus, even that is tied back to the same sense of place I argue draws him to the scientist in the first place: when Diane asks him what Einstein would say about Jesus, Martin responds:

> He said, 'I am a Jew but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.' Diane […] knew that the name *Jesus of Nazareth* carried an intangible quality that drew [Martin] into its aura. He did not belong to a particular religion and did not feel reverence for any being of alleged supernatural power. It was the name that gripped him. The beauty of the name. The name and place. (42-43, original emphasis)

Returning to the fundamentals of place and language which are central to DeLillo's work as a whole, this passage only reinforces the argument that Martin's obsession with the scientist is born of his sense of existential instability.

The lack of possibility for transcendence inherent to this chronotope – and thus in this novel – that I argue for is driven home as the novel winds to a close. While in the first half of the novel characters could be outside or look out the window, in this second half even that possibility is foreclosed: multiple times, characters makes reference to what is happening outside without actually looking out the window to confirm. One example relevant to the discussion occurs when Tessa speaks:

> "Has time leaped forward, as our young man says, or has it collapsed? And will people in the streets become flash mobs, running wild, breaking and entering, everywhere, planet-wide, rejecting the past, completely unmoored from all the habits and patterns?"
>
> No one moves toward the window to look. (87-88).

Despite the increasing uncertainty about the laws which define the world they live in, the characters remain focused inwards. However, his inwardness does not imply a joining together, the creation of community or abandonment to the spirit of *communitas* DeLillo has represented at various points throughout his career. Instead, the characters drift further and further apart from each other, where possibly the only alternative response is suggested in another passage featuring the character Tessa: "Tessa begins to separate herself. She seeps away to the sound of the young man's voice. She thinks into herself. She sees herself. She is different from these people. She imagines taking off her clothes, nonerotically, to show them who she is" (96); her method is notably still one of separation. Regardless of this impulse, what the novel eventually narrows down to is a scene of the five characters, all sitting in chairs, giving five sequential monologues. These occur in a series, with no character responding to what any other character says, each revealing something about their inner state to unhearing ears. Taken together, the monologues read as a metaphor for floundering attempts at the fostering of human connection, as if the characters are losing their ability in this context to define themselves to others.

Martin's monologue is the last of the five, and his final words along with the short finale of the novel together leave the reader with a definite sense of the bleakness the novel cultivates. Martin says: "The world is everything, the individual nothing. Do we all understand that?" (115). The young man's response to the situation as encompassed within this final line of his reads like an acceptance of death; however, the death at hand here is just as much the death of culture as that of the individual. The sense of cultural exhaustion which sends Martin to the

pages of Einstein's Theory of Relativity seems to foreclose, for Martin, any possibility of a return to meaning. As Martin says in this final monologue, "I try to think sometimes in a prehistoric context. A flagstone image, a cave drawing. All these grainy shreds of our long human memory. And then Einstein" (115). Although Martin searches in the distant past, unlike Kyle and her Minoan figurine or James Axton in *The Names* he is unable to establish a meaningful link to this human history. The narrowing down of the horizon of possibility I discussed with regards to "Human Moments in World War III" therefore returns here with a vengeance, definitively severing the contemporary human from its history. In this context it is therefore no surprise that *The Silence* features multiple references to World War III; in fact, it is mentioned in the quote attributed to Einstein which comprises the novel's epigraph: "I don't know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones" (n.p). The quote perfectly encapsulates the way that war is employed by DeLillo to represent this narrowing down of possibility, which when taken to its most extreme nullifies culture itself: "World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

The novel's ending after these five monologues must therefore be read in the light of the preceding discussion:

> Max is not listening. He understands nothing. He sits in front of the TV set with his hands folded behind his neck, elbows jutting.
>
> Then he stares into the blank screen. (116)

Staring into the blank screen, an action repeated various times throughout *The Silence* – "blank screen" indeed appears on fifteen occasions in the novel – is an overarching motif for the novel, which when paired with my discussion above becomes correlate to the disappearance of the human, of culture – of meaning itself. On par with *Point Omega* for the most pessimistic of DeLillo's novels – the small line of flight offered by Tessa is overwhelmed by these final scenes – *The Silence* thus faces head-on the deep sense of alienation the author perceives in the context of the contemporary American culture in which he lives. The novel, finally, reads as a fictional exploration of what Rahel Jaeggi signals in her work on *Alienation:*

> An *alienated* relation is a *deficient* relation one has to oneself, to the world, and to others. Indifference, instrumentalization, reification, absurdity, artificiality, isolation, meaninglessness, impotence—all these ways of characterizing the relations in question are forms of this deficiency. A distinctive feature of the concept of alienation is that it refers not only to powerlessness and a lack of freedom but also to a characteristic impoverishment of the relation to self and world. (5-6, original emphasis)

The characters of *The Silence* experience this "impoverishment of their relation of self and world" to an extreme extent, and the sense that things are falling apart, that entropy is having its way with time, space, and meaning itself, sends the characters back to Einstein, he who first posited their inseparable unity. However, not unlike *Point Omega*, it seems that the aspect of his theory which is most relevant to the situation is the black hole, as the characters and their relations disappear into Tessa's "tumbling void" (*The Silence* 96).

The fact that DeLillo concludes the trajectory of his fiction up to the point of the writing of these conclusions with a return to Einstein's Theory of Relativity is a convenient one in the context of this extended exercise in chronotopic analysis. Bakhtin's original statement that the term "chronotope" is "borrowed" from Einstein's "spacetime" for "literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)" (*FTC* 84) is contextualized, for DeLillo does the same thing here in his novel; Martin's interest in Einstein and spacetime stands in for his desire to recover a meaningful (implaced) life, which is, paradoxically, never to be found solely in the pages of theory. What I have attempted to show with this dissertation as a whole is that the chronotope is an indispensable tool for literary analysis, especially when the authors under scrutiny are themselves sensitive to the role which place plays in human experience. Excellent analyses of DeLillo's fiction abound, but the approach I pursued has allowed for new and important conclusions to be drawn about his work. The construction of possible worlds through the writing of fiction is one which inheres a radical potential to reach across the divides of space and time to touch the reader, and the chronotope is an essential element in that process. What I have tried to show is that reading a novel, in this case by Don DeLillo, implies an entering into the different chronotopic world(s) that each author offers in their text, and that the impact said text has is always in part as a result of this dialogue of chronotopes (which, as Bakhtin points out, takes place between the reader and the text as well).

In terms of the future of chronotopic analysis, what this thesis does is to open up a number of lines of research. It would be productive in the first place to approach the rest of DeLillo's work with this attention to the particular organization of space and time each text presents in mind, beyond the particular focus on deserts and rooms I have pursued here. As I have shown, DeLillo's construction of his texts through the chronotope occurs on a variety of levels, and as such his work is a perfect case study for further research in this vein; as seen with the different examples I give throughout the thesis, DeLillo's fiction employs the chronotope in both a micro and a macro sense. Further research would productively examine the particular places which appear in his novels – from the motels of *End Zone, Players* and *White Noise* to

the moving vehicles of *Libra* and *Cosmopolis* to the different types of rooms in *Running Dog* and *Ratner's Star* – as well as the larger, structural organization of his texts. Novels such as *Mao II, Underworld* and *Falling Man* bring ever-shifting (American) urban chronotopes into dialogue with their others – be it an isolated house, a foreign country or a desert waste – in a way which bears analyzing as closely as done with the texts I focused on here. Moreover, pursuing the question of what dominant, macrostructural chronotopes appear in DeLillo's novels most often associated with the postmodern would be useful in determining how exactly the author engages with the prevailing theoretical trends of his time; DeLillo's dialogue with culture is only fully apprehended when the chronotope is also considered.

This approach is equally useful beyond the limited context of Don DeLillo. For one, while a tracing of the evolution in these representational places over the course of his long career was a rewarding task for the context of this dissertation, further inquires are waiting to be made into the wider dialogue that these chronotopes are engaged in beyond DeLillo's own *ouevre*. I broached the topic with Chapter 2's delineation of a relationship between the DeLillean desert and the desert in the Judeo-Christian worldview, but further investigation into the dialogue these deserts have with other writers of fiction and with culture more generally would provide for a fascinating study; DeLillo is certainly not the only artist to take shelter in the desert whenever they wish to engage questions of transcendence and immanence. Tracing an evolution from the deserts of earlier American works such as Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) through DeLillo and its more recent role in works such as Jim Crace's *Quarantine* (1998), Claire Vaye Watkins' *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) and Hannah Assadi's *Sonora* (2017), just to name a few, would allow for a chronotopically-informed view into the shifting tides of the American psyche, and even within that specific purview one could productively distil important conclusions regarding categories such as class, race, and gender.

More broadly speaking, given the chronotope's foundational role in the establishing of fictional worlds, and the way these worlds are themselves born of human perspectives (worldviews) – either real or imagined – the potential chronotopic analysis has to shed light on shifts in consciousness and perception is only limited by the ability of writers themselves to express in this way. Bakhtin's project of a historical typography of the novel is one which cuts off on the eve of modernism and the great cultural revolutions which followed. The chronotopic gaze is one which therefore holds considerable potential when it comes to debates over the direction of culture broadly speaking, from the now-fading question of postmodernism to more

recent emphases on the posthuman, the transhuman and even the nonhuman. The chronotope at its broadest is useful for approaching genre, and an extended inquiry into the literary places which emerge in the context of what is increasingly called a posthuman world would be most effectively organized through the chronotope. The role which certain types of places and landscapes play in the cultural imaginary is a significant part of this task, and thus a chronotopic exploration of the role different sorts of places and landscapes (mountains, oceans, cities), as well as speculative genres more broadly (utopia, dystopia, science fiction), play in this would make for a valuable contribution to our understanding of the different responses currently available to face the complexities of the contemporary world. An exploration, for example, of the shift from the early to mid-20th century's utopias to the dystopias which emerged in the 1980s and the current tentative return to a utopian imagination – William Gibson's Sprawl trilogy (1984-88) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) to Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy (1992-96) and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) come to mind – would be most productive when conducted through attention to the chronotope, as the utopian/dystopian imagination is particularly reliant upon a dominant spatiotemporal logic *other* to our own.

Finally, then, with this thesis I hope to have accomplished two goals. The fresh approach to Don DeLillo's fiction I pursue in this thesis should on the one hand cement the Bronx-born author's status as one of the most insightful writers tackling the complex cultural climate of today, as beyond all the other acclaim directed his way he has a demonstrably rich representation on the chronotopic plane. Given the great importance I attribute to chronotopic expression with regards to the representational impact of a fictional text, this richness is not one to be taken lightly, especially since it is not every author whose work is this semantically nuanced. On the other hand, I also hope to have made a convincing case for the utility and importance of this chronotopic approach more broadly. As visionary and imaginative as his work is, like any artist, DeLillo's personal (embodied and embedded) worldview is necessarily limited to his own experience, and thus an expansion of the critical approach developed in this dissertation to other authors holds the potential for significant contributions to the study of literature and culture. Beyond the worlds of Don DeLillo there lies a whole range of voices and perspectives ripe for analysis in this vein, awaiting their full recognition through the chronotopic gaze.

DOCUMENTACIÓN EN ESPAÑOL

INTRODUCCIÓN

La crítica literaria sobre la obra de Don DeLillo, autor americano del Bronx neoyorkino, ya aborda hoy un amplio rango temático. Esta variedad en enfoques críticos se debe sin duda a la naturaleza de la ficción de DeLillo, ya que su obra – que actualmente incluye dieciocho novelas, con una trayectoria que supera las cinco décadas – invita a múltiples reflexiones por su riqueza temática. Los títulos de una selección de las monografías dedicadas al autor ilustran perfectamente esta diversidad en la crítica dedicada a su obra: *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (LeClair 1987), *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Osteen 2000), *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* (Cowart 2002), *Don DeLillo: Balance at the Edge of Belief* (Kavadlo 2004), *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (Boxall 2006), *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (Martucci 2007), *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo's Novels* (Laist 2010), y *The Language of Self: Strategies of Subjectivity in the Novels of Don DeLillo* (Pass 2014). Desde su tratamiento de la teoría de sistemas y la transcendencia de la cultura del consumo hasta su exploración de los problemas de subjetividad a través del lenguaje, la fe, el temor existencial y la tecnología, la atribución de dicha variedad en cuestiones temáticas es particularmente meritoria de atención, ya que todas estas perspectivas se sostienen bajo escrutinio. La afirmación de Jesse Kavadlo que "DeLillo ha superado prácticamente a todos los demás escritores vivos en cuanto a su creatividad, agudeza cultural, visión, alcance y relevancia" (3, traducción propia) se encuentra reforzada por esta variedad amplia de crítica literaria previamente mencionada, la cual incrementa aún más si se atiende a los cientos de artículos publicados en revistas especializadas y que abordan la obra de DeLillo. Sin embargo, a pesar de esta considerable cantidad de análisis crítico, sigue siendo cierto que, como ha argumentado Randy Laist, "además de ser uno de nuestros escritores más admirados, él a su vez es discutiblemente nuestro escritor menos entendido" (*Technology* 2, traducción propia).

Si me viera obligado a simplificar, podría decirse que el desacuerdo más notable dentro de la crítica sobre DeLillo se produce entre aquellos que leen en su obra una exaltación de lo posmoderno y aquellos que ven en ella una defensa del sujeto Romántico. Como suele ser el caso, la prevalencia de tales argumentos aparentemente opuestos en realidad subraya la riqueza multifacética de la ficción de DeLillo, la cual explora consistentemente ambos extremos de este cisma. La obra de DeLillo encuentra un camino intermedio en varios sentidos, abordando cuestiones de subjetividad al tiempo que se hace eco de las tesis de pensadores que van desde

Heidegger a Derrida o Baudrillard, y explorando sentimientos tanto de alienación como de la pertenencia a la comunidad. La obra de DeLillo, además, fluctúa entre el modernismo alto y el posmodernismo, entre lo sagrado y lo profano, y entre la inmanencia y la transcendencia. Siguiendo esta misma línea de pensamiento, es precisamente este camino intermedio que la presente tesis doctoral subscribe, haciéndolo, además, a través de un acercamiento innovador a un aspecto poco explorado en la obra de DeLillo.

A pesar de la innegable variedad temática de la obra de DeLillo, los estudios existentes sobre este autor, incluyendo las aún escasas monografías y el más extenso número de artículos y capítulo de libros, dejan entrever un vacío reseñable en cuanto a la manera en que la obra de DeLillo explora dichas cuestiones a través de un estilo de representación fuertemente *espaciotemporal*. Un argumento central del presente análisis es que la grandeza de la obra de DeLillo podrá apreciarse de una forma más completa y global si se atiende a su sensibilidad a – y su modo de expresión a través de – el tándem formado por el espacio y el tiempo. En otras palabras, la hipótesis defendida y argumentada en este estudio se basa en un enfoque innovador a la obra de DeLillo, distinto de anteriores estudios, que demostrará que, de manera consistente, este autor se inclina por unos modelos literarios que le permiten abarcar en su totalidad el poder figurativo del espacio y tiempo – del *lugar* – dentro del texto literario. El análisis de su obra en esta tesis parte de un énfasis primario en el papel del concepto de “lugar” (*place*, en inglés) en la experiencia humana y la subjetividad. Al traducirse a la literatura, este énfasis ha sido definido con más exactitud como *cronotopo*: la fusión del tiempo y espacio en una totalidad figurativa dentro del texto. Originalmente desarrollado por el filósofo Mikhail Bakhtin en los años treinta, el cronotopo es un concepto que ha experimentado un uso esporádico desde su introducción al mundo anglosajón en los años ochenta. En el cronotopo identifico una herramienta conceptual sólida cuyo máximo potencial ha sido raramente apreciado, especialmente en el análisis de la literatura contemporánea. De esta manera, tomando como punto de partida el concepto de Bakhtin, tal y como él lo propone, uno de los objetivos principales de esta tesis es poner en práctica un análisis cronotópico que, crucialmente, se base en un entendimiento del concepto como *originado en* la experiencia humana de *lugar*. “Lugar”, en este sentido fenomenológico, solo ha sido conceptualizado en las últimas décadas, y por lo tanto la primera tarea esencial de esta tesis es discutir y defender una versión actualizada del concepto cronotopo, para lo cual es necesario revisar a su vez cuestiones filosóficas y sociopolíticas recientes acerca del concepto *lugar*.

Este marco teórico se desarrolla en dos secciones en el capítulo 1, el cual empieza abordando en más detalle los diferentes hilos de pensamiento que confluyen en el énfasis primordial en la experiencia como eje central en cuanto a la percepción del mundo. Este enfoque parte de nuestra integración en el espacio y el tiempo y, como consecuencia, percibe la ontología humana como cuestión del ser en constante cambio frente al ser como ente estático. Tras esta primera aproximación teórica, la segunda sección del capítulo 1 versa sobre el concepto original del cronotopo de Mikhail Bakhtin con el fin de revisar y actualizar su fundamentación teórica. Principalmente, esta discusión defiende que la raíz del impacto del cronotopo en la imaginación humana nace de nuestra experiencia (integrada y vivida) del mundo. Podría decirse que el motor de este proyecto es el convencimiento de que si no es posible concebir la existencia humana sin los elementos primordiales y unidos del espacio y tiempo, tampoco es posible concebir la representación sin ellos, incluyendo tanto la narrativa como la memoria en si misma. En este contexto, cuanto más sensible sea un autor a este aspecto fundamental de la experiencia, más matizada será su representación del mismo en la ficción. Esto último es cierto en dos sentidos, ya que se aplica tanto al efecto que tiene el lugar ficticio (el cronotopo) sobre los personajes, como el papel estructural que tiene el cronotopo en un texto determinado, lo que a su vez afecta al lector. Lo que sostengo en esta tesis doctoral es que Don DeLillo es precisamente un autor que goza de dicha sensibilidad y, por lo tanto, la escasez de crítica en torno a este aspecto constituye un vacío importante dentro de este campo de estudio.

De hecho, Don DeLillo es un caso práctico ideal para este acercamiento cronotópico actualizado a la ficción, algo evidente en primer lugar por el hecho de que el autor mismo ha expresado reiteradamente su fascinación por los conceptos del espacio y el tiempo. Es cierto que a lo largo de los años, y de manera esporádica, se han visto estudios que partían de este interés de DeLillo por el tiempo y el espacio, pero donde el vacío es innegable es en cuanto a su tendencia a representar *a través de* estos elementos. Algunos críticos han abordado con éxito su interés por y su diálogo con los diferentes conceptos de espacio y tiempo, incluyendo Alberts (2016), Boxall (2012), Coale (2011), Dill (2017), Gourley (2013), Leps (2015) y Maslowski (2017). Estos especialistas se han centrado en distintos aspectos sobre cómo la obra DeLillo presenta la temporalidad – desde la física cuántica hasta el tiempo cinemático y geológico – destacando principalmente la manera en que los personajes de DeLillo están sometidos a experiencias subjetivas distintas de la temporalidad. El núcleo de mi argumento, sin embargo, es que este tratamiento de la temporalidad debe entenderse en la ficción como inseparable de

lo espacial, y que además es crucial entender la manera en que los elementos fusionados se convierten en una fuerza representacional dentro de estos textos. La forma en que los especialistas han discutido el espacio en la obra de DeLillo es en cierta forma similar a la forma en que se ha tratado el tiempo. Existen análisis excelentes, aunque aislados, de los distintos espacios narrativos de DeLillo, incluyendo los de Barrett (1999), Harack (2013), Leps (2014), y Spencer (2006). Se observa en estos críticos cierta tendencia además a discutir el uso repetido de "habitaciones y, particularmente, hombres enclaustrados en habitaciones pequeñas determinados a encontrar la lógica de la historia y su lugar en ella" (Liste Noya 240, traducción propia). Análisis como éste suelen concentrarse en la asociación que estos hombres tienen con la conspiración y los distintos tipos de complot – un crítico hace referencia a las "numerosas habitaciones pequeñas que engendran problemas en el mundo ficticio de DeLillo" (Bieger 12, traducción propia). Estos análisis tienden a centrarse en el personaje, atendiendo menos al concepto de la habitación como cronotopo e implicaciones más profundas. En otras palabras, se debe entender el resultado como un flujo representacional de dos sentidos, entre personaje y habitación: es este sentido de la habitación como cronotopo que analizo en el caso de *Great Jones Street* (1973) para a su vez delinear el aparato teórico en el capítulo 1.

De los críticos que sí abordan el tratamiento del espacio o tiempo en la obra de DeLillo, muy pocos lo han hecho de una manera que se aproxime al argumento que señalo como crucial en esta tesis. Tanto la monografía de Elise Martucci sobre la "conciencia medioambiental" en la obra de DeLillo como su capítulo del 2017 sobre "Place as Active Receptacle" en la ficción corta de DeLillo constituyen la aproximación más extensa al concepto de *lugar* en su ficción, ambos llevando a reflexiones interesantes, como su argumento sobre el hecho de que, en *Americana* (1971), el personaje David Bell encuentra que "el paisaje desorienta su entendimiento del tiempo y lugar y, como consecuencia, su sentido de identidad" (*Environmental* 39, traducción propia). Es sorprendente que Martucci sea la única académica que se haya centrado específicamente en el concepto del lugar en cierta profundidad, dado tanto el contenido de las novelas de DeLillo como algunos comentarios por parte del autor, como sus declaraciones en una entrevista en 1982 en las que confesaba que a él le "interesan demasiado los lugares reales y sus nombres" como para escribir "ficción sin un sentido real de lugar" ("An Interview" 31, traducción propia). En cuanto a la traducción de este sentido de lugar en los mecanismos internos de la narrativa en sí, pocos críticos de DeLillo han buscado abordar el estilo de representación altamente cronotópico que atribuyo a su obra en esta tesis. Algunos de los más destacados que sí lo tratan son Robert Kohn y su uso, aunque sin desarrollo,

del concepto en su artículo sobre *Great Jones Street* (2005), Jacqueline Zubeck y su planteamiento en la introducción a la colección *Don DeLillo After the Millenium* de un "cronotopo del siglo XXI" (3) delineado por DeLillo y, finalmente, Paul Smethurst y su tratamiento de las novelas de DeLillo *Ratner's Star* (1976) y *The Names* (1982) en su delineación general del *Postmodern Chronotope* (2000). Sin embargo, y como desarrollo en mayor profundidad en el contexto de mi explicación teórica del cronotopo, la lectura cronotópica de *Falling Man* (2007) y el *Paradise Lost* de Milton por Rachel Falconer es el único análisis que realmente trata la obra de DeLillo de una manera similar al análisis propuesto en esta tesis, aunque debe subrayarse que se trata únicamente de un solo artículo que versa sobre una única novela. Por lo tanto, podría decirse que, transcendiendo la atención esporádica prestada al espacio, el tiempo, el lugar y el cronotopo mencionados anteriormente, en esta tesis se lleva a cabo un análisis profundo sobre la manera en que distintos espacios literarios funcionan en la obra de DeLillo, para demostrar que la representación a través del cronotopo – sea de escala micro o macro – es un aspecto esencial de la ficción de DeLillo.

Aunque este enfoque cronotópico sería revelador en cuanto a cada una de sus novelas, con el fin de trazar una continuidad en torno a su larga carrera como escritor, esta tesis presta particular atención a las cuestiones temáticas que se agrupan en base a un tipo de lugar ficticio en concreto: el desierto. Desde su primera novela, *Americana* (1971), hasta la reciente *Zero K* (2016), el desierto resurge en varias formas a lo largo de su carrera, y un argumento principal de esta tesis es que solo tiende a hacerlo cuando se encuentran en juego cuestiones temáticas específicas. Contraponiendo el desierto a otros espacios que surgen para crear un diálogo cronotópico – a menudo la famosa habitación pequeña – defiendo aquí la validez de un cronotopo del desierto que evoluciona con el tiempo, un lugar que los personajes de DeLillo suelen buscar por su (supuesto) estatus como una *tabula rasa* ontológica, aunque pocas veces les beneficie el hecho de encontrarlo. De hecho, este enfoque sobre el desierto coincide con la ficción compuesta por DeLillo en primera persona, ya que cinco de las siete novelas escritas en primera persona incluyen desiertos – las únicas dos que no son *Great Jones Street* (1973) y *White Noise* (1985). Además, a pesar de su falta de paisajes desérticos, estas dos últimas novelas se asemejan en lo que concierne a la exploración de las principales cuestiones que identifico como asociadas con la recurrencia de este cronotopo en particular. En juego está el interés continuo de DeLillo de experimentar con las posibles respuestas a las distintas fuerzas que presionan a un individuo en un contexto contemporáneo y globalizado (y especialmente americano). En esta tesis doctoral trazo un paralelismo entre esta recurrencia del espacio

desértico y la evolución de la representación de personajes de DeLillo que luchan por desarrollar una postura ontológica adecuada de cara a una creciente sensación de alienación, cuyo origen frecuentemente se encuentra en la unión de las fuerzas del capital y la guerra. Trazando una continuidad en mi análisis de dichas novelas a través de los cronotopos que éstas emplean, establezco la indispensabilidad de este enfoque crítico para así poder comprender en su totalidad el modo en que DeLillo presenta cuestiones temáticas de vital importancia en la actualidad; el cronotopo facilita una forma innovadora de entender cómo los personajes de DeLillo (y como consecuencia los lectores de sus novelas) pueden buscar estrategias para lidiar con el rango de problemas asociados con el momento contemporáneo, desde un sentido desorientador de la compresión del espacio-tiempo hasta un sentimiento incipiente de alienación social, y desde el estrechamiento del horizonte de posibilidades hasta los impulsos varios hacia lo transcendente e inmanente.

En términos de los textos principales de DeLillo que se han seleccionado para su análisis en esta tesis doctoral, la selección incluye su segunda novela, *End Zone* (1972), tres textos de lo que denomino su "Periodo Griego" en los ochenta (*The Names,* "Human Moments in World War III" y "The Ivory Acrobat") así como su vuelta posterior al desierto en *Point Omega* (2010) y *Zero K* (2016). Más allá de algunos análisis más breves de otras novelas pertinentes a este estudio, como *Underworld* (1997), *The Body Artist* (2000) y *Cosmopolis* (2003), el énfasis temático que articula la selección deja de lado alguna de las novelas más aclamadas (y estudiadas), especialmente *White Noise, Libra* (1988) y *Mao II* (1991). No muy diferente a sus novelas de los setenta como *Players* (1977) y *Running Dog* (1978), estas novelas son las preferidas por los críticos que buscan validar las tesis posmodernistas, ya que en general se centran más en los grandes sistemas de la sociedad y la manera en que un personaje es influenciado por tales sistemas. El hecho de que estos enfoques temáticos coincidan con su narrativa escrita en tercera persona no es casualidad, ya que la mayor distancia entre tanto lector como autor del personaje que este tipo de narración conlleva es más adecuada para llevar a cabo una exploración de esta clase de fuerzas sociales. Aunque esto no signifique que las novelas mencionadas aquí no sean aptas para un análisis cronotópico, un enfoque sobre su uso de lugares ficticios nos llevaría más hacia lo que Laura Barrett indica en su aproximación a los "centros urbanos laberínticos [y] la arquitectura fastidiosa" de *Mao II* ("Here" 789, traducción propia). En general (y dejando de lado numerosos matices), a pesar de que todas sus novelas reflejan una fuerte conciencia sociopolítica, estos textos compuestos en tercera persona muestran un mayor enfoque hacia lo epistemológico, mientras que aquellos compuestos en

primera persona – con su prevalencia de los desiertos – señalan un enfoque más ontológico, ya que los personajes se encuentran en dichos paisajes como parte de sus distintos proyectos de búsqueda de un método razonable que les permita navegar la caótica inestabilidad de la vida contemporánea.

Por lo tanto, en términos de la estructura de esta tesis doctoral, después de establecer el aparato teórico previamente descrito del lugar fenomenológico y el cronotopo en el capítulo 1, el capítulo 2 presenta la tendencia de DeLillo a lo largo de su carrera a emplear el desierto con el fin de representar los intentos de sus personajes de desarrollar posturas ontológicas adecuadas para los distintos tipos de crisis a que se enfrentan. Tomando como caso de estudio su segunda novela, *End Zone* (1972), este capítulo explora la relación que el desierto presenta tanto con la historia del pensamiento occidental (judeo-cristiano) y su tendencia ascética, como con el sentido de temporalidad abierta que el desierto ofrece para aquellos que lo busquen. Aunque esta obra trata ostensiblemente sobre el fútbol americano, los personajes jóvenes de la novela acaban en una ubicación remota como parte de sus intentos varios de asumir el sentido de alienación y crisis provocado por la combinación del sistema capitalista y la amenaza inminente de una guerra mundial. Prestando especial atención a la interacción entre los cronotopos de las habitaciones y el borde del desierto en que se encuentran, el capítulo demuestra la manera en que tal enfoque revela las respuestas variadas que los personajes de la novela barajan en su intento de enfrentarse el sentir creciente de atomización social en los EEUU de los años setenta.

Los capítulos 3 y 4 se centran en creaciones literarias de DeLillo en los ochenta y, vistos en conjunto, incluyen lo que propongo debe entenderse como el "periodo griego" de DeLillo. Para esto, delineo una expansión trazable de la sensibilidad cronotópica como resultado de la experiencia real del autor al residir como extranjero en Atenas durante tres años. Basándome en mis argumentos en relación con la explicación fenomenológica del lugar y el cronotopo literario, ambos capítulos destacan aspectos distintos de esta creciente sensibilidad del autor al concepto de lugar y lo cronotópico. El capítulo 3 es la única divergencia de esta tesis en cuanto al enfoque global sobre el cronotopo desértico, explorando dos de los relatos breves de DeLillo ignorados por la crítica con el fin de elucidar la manera en que el formato breve permite al autor resolver los mismos problemas que por otro lado lo llevan al terreno del desierto. Tanto en "Human Moments in World War III" (1983) como en "The Ivory Acrobat" (1988) hay una exploración íntima del individuo intentando hacer frente a las presiones ejercidas por el eje formado por el capital y la guerra, cuyos efectos conjuntos llevan a un sentido del espacio-

tiempo acelerado o comprimido. Mientras el cuento de 1983 lo representa a través del prisma más abstracto de dos hombres flotando en la órbita del planeta, el de 1988 hace lo opuesto en su presentación de crisis al navegar por un prisma más íntimo de la corporalidad.

El capítulo 4 examina en detalle *The Names* (1982), el ejemplo principal del periodo griego, demostrando a través de una atención rigurosa al texto la suma importancia del enfoque cronotópico para entender esta novela. Mientras la mayoría de la crítica existente sobre este texto se concentra en su tratamiento del papel del lenguaje en la construcción de la subjetividad, este capítulo defiende el brindar la misma importancia a lo cronotópico en *The Names*, una importancia destacada por sus propios subtítulos de "The Island," "The Mountain" y "The Desert." Sosteniendo la existencia de una clara progresión de cronotopos desde el principio hasta el fin, exploro la manera en que este progreso prescribe las acciones de los personajes y el significado general que el lector se lleva de esta novela. Específicamente, se delinean una serie de transiciones: desde la ontología aislacionista (temporal) de "The Island," hasta la reincorporación de la historia en "The Mountain" y la *tabula rasa* ontológica de "The Desert," lo cual llama a los personajes en sus búsquedas personales de transformación. Cabe destacar que este capítulo trata la manera en que el cronotopo funciona en esta novela de una forma macroestructural, influyendo el texto dentro de cada sección aún si la acción no tiene lugar en el espacio nombrado en cada subtítulo (la isla, la montaña, etc.), lo cual representa una ampliación del uso del cronotopo por parte del autor que se normaliza a partir de este punto de su carrera.

Después de tratar brevemente la etapa intermedia, el capítulo 5 se centra en *Point Omega* (2010), la novela posterior a *The Names* que vuelve al desierto con fines parecidos. El análisis de esta novela enigmática desvela que el interés de DeLillo en las cuestiones fundamentales de la ontología, el tiempo y el espacio siguen vigentes, reapareciendo aquí en lo que sostengo es una manera sorprendentemente innovadora. En su intento de representar el trauma continuo de los eventos que se iniciaron con el 11-S – y que incluye las guerras sin fin que lo siguieron – *Point Omega* dialoga con teorías del universo, desde la temporalidad de ciertas interpretaciones de la física cuántica hasta la cosmología especulativa del jesuita francés Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. La novela demuestra el peligro continuo e incluso creciente que es inherente a los procesos de abstracción, lo cual se ha conectado en capítulos previos con la búsqueda tanto del capital como de la guerra. La combinación de este problema con el trauma de los ataques del 11-S se representa en esta novela a través de lo que mantengo se entiende mejor como un agujero negro representativo; DeLillo convierte el concepto astrofísico de la

singularidad en el principal elemento metafórico y estructural de su novela, ofreciendo solo líneas de fuga imprecisas para que sus personajes puedan escapar su llamada inexorable.

Incluso con su novela más reciente *The Silence* (2020) en mente, el capítulo 6 sostiene que *Zero K* (2016) constituye una cumbre en la obra de DeLillo en lo que se refiere a la representación cronotópica del autor en los términos referidos en esta tesis. De forma similar a *The Names*, la novela destaca la importancia del cronotopo en sus dos subtítulos, "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" y "In the Time of Konstantinovka." Sosteniendo la oposición de un cronotopo de crisis existencial (a nivel de especie) a uno de lo cotidiano (de la inmanencia), este capítulo presenta al narrador Jeffrey Lockhart como una figura liminal que busca una vía intermedia, en términos ontológicos, en el contexto de un mundo de respuestas extremas. Dejando atrás el enigmático tratamiento de tales temáticas en *Point Omega*, en *Zero K* DeLillo vuelve explícitamente al contexto sociopolítico de la alienación. En esta novela el autor contrarresta el proyecto llamado irónicamente "The Convergence" con una convergencia de otro tipo, la que ocurre en el umbral entre la mente y el cuerpo, entre la naturaleza y la cultura.

Finalmente, en las conclusiones destaco la progresión trazada a lo largo de esta tesis, concretando a la vez la visión única que proporciona el enfoque cronotópico para un autor tan estudiado como DeLillo. Haciendo referencia a otras posibilidades tanto dentro de la obra de DeLillo como en otros autores, abogo por el gran valor del cronotopo como herramienta de análisis para abordar un texto literario, preparando el terreno para exploraciones futuras más allá del corpus de DeLillo y de sus desiertos.

CONCLUSIONES

A lo largo de esta tesis, he discutido y probado la presencia, importancia y tratamiento del confluir los elementos tiempo y espacio en la carrera de Don DeLillo, elementos que este autor explora a varios niveles: en primer lugar, en cuanto al papel de la integración en el lugar dentro de la experiencia humana; segundo, la medida en que esta experiencia cambia de acuerdo a la transformación social; finalmente, la manera en que tales cambios se trazan de manera más efectiva a través de su representación en términos cronotópicos. En mi análisis de las obras de DeLillo que van de los años setenta hasta la actualidad, he delineado la manera en que DeLillo señala los cambios culturales a través de su representación de la interacción de un sujeto con su entorno ficticio por medio del espacio y tiempo (el lugar), además de la manera en que su representación de ello es altamente cronotópica como consecuencia. Las obras seleccionadas para mi análisis muestran una atención particularmente especial a cuestiones ontológicas, al intento del sujeto de situarse en un mundo inundado por fuerzas desestabilizantes. Aunque el resto de la narrativa de DeLillo que no se ha estudiado pormenorizadamente en esta tesis también contiene rasgos claramente cronotópicos en su representación, y debe señalarse que merecen mayor atención por parte de la crítica en este sentido, estos textos suelen enfatizar otras cuestiones temáticas, desde lo epistemológico hasta lo sociopolítico. Con el enfoque empleado en esta tesis, he demostrado que surge un patrón, a través del cual DeLillo destaca estas cuestiones ontológicas, coincidiendo con la representación de cronotopos desérticos significativos y la elección de la primera persona para la voz del narrador. Cinco de las siete novelas narradas en primera persona incluyen desiertos, y he argumentado que una de las excepciones (*Great Jones Street*) desarrolla un cronotopo interior que se asemeja al de los desiertos de las otras novelas. El desierto emerge en este corpus como un poderoso imán para personajes embarcados en una búsqueda de transformación identitaria, así como de una manera de adaptarse a las mareas fluctuantes de las presiones culturales y geopolíticas, las cuales son a menudo transmitidas a través de la experiencia subjetiva del lugar.

Desde *End Zone* hasta *Zero K*, con el presente estudio he demostrado que la indagación minuciosa de DeLillo en el significado de la existencia bajo la sombra de las fuerzas varias que afectan al individuo occidental alcanza su máxima precisión cuando sus personajes son guiados hacia el desierto. Al trazar la evolución de la ficción de DeLillo a través del énfasis en este tipo específico de cronotopo, creo haber demostrado la importancia fundamental de adoptar este enfoque crítico a la hora de entender el impacto representativo global de la ficción de un autor

como DeLillo. En cada capítulo he delineado la manera en que una visión cronotópica lleva a conocimientos cruciales sobre la forma en que el texto opera e impacta al lector. El tratamiento en el capítulo 4 de *The Names* y en el capítulo 5 de *Point Omega* destacan en particular en este sentido, ya que es precisamente este enfoque cronotópico el que nos lleva a conclusiones notablemente distintas de – e incluso contrarias a – aquellos análisis que obvian considerar este elemento estructural tan importante en la ficción, tanto en DeLillo como en otros autores. En términos del corpus de DeLillo, lo que he tratado de lograr es proveer a la crítica de una nueva perspectiva desde la que estudiar una de las trayectorias más constantes en su carrera. Dicho de otro modo, a través del énfasis en el lugar y los cronotopos de las novelas seleccionadas para esta tesis, he expuesto el corazón de lo que podría denominarse el proyecto filosófico de DeLillo, el núcleo de su indagación ontológica a través de la ficción. Mientras otros autores han abordado el estilo DeLilliano de la subjetividad – véase Cowart (2002) y Pass (2014), por ejemplo – éstos tienden a hacerlo centrándose especialmente en el personaje y el lenguaje. Lo que he explorado y defendido de forma extensa es el entendimiento cambiante del propio autor del papel del lugar fenomenológico en la experiencia humana, además de la manera en que esto se traslada (conscientemente o no) a la propia estructura de los mundos ficticios que DeLillo crea.

En este sentido, la tesis también ha logrado el objetivo significativo que se trató de abordar desde el mismo génesis de este estudio, que era tanto defender con evidencias sustanciales la relevancia del enfoque cronotópico aplicado a la ficción mediante la demostración de su conexión inextricable con la experiencia humana, como validar la utilidad de este enfoque a través de un ejercicio práctico y profundo del mismo. Las "Concluding Remarks" de Bakhtin de 1973 del ensayo "Forms of Time and the Chronotope" acercaron el concepto a las teorías más recientes que sitúan el lugar fenomenológico como aspecto primordial para la experiencia, y mi primer reto fue delinear una actualización del concepto con el fin de demostrar su relevancia en un contexto del siglo XXI. La ficción temáticamente y cronotópicamente enriquecedora de Don DeLillo ha sido validada como perfecta para la presente tarea, ya que su corpus muestra interés explícito en las cuestiones de espacio y tiempo. Lo que he intentado demostrar con esta tesis es que el cronotopo es una herramienta indispensable para el análisis literario, especialmente cuando los mismos autores bajo escrutinio son sensibles a su vez al papel del lugar en la experiencia humana. La crítica existente hasta ahora sobre DeLillo es abundante y excelente, pero el enfoque que he desarrollado en esta tesis ha permitido la obtención de conclusiones nuevas e importantes

acerca de su obra. La construcción de mundos posibles a través de la ficción alberga un potencial radical para superar la brecha del espacio y tiempo para tocar al lector, y el cronotopo es un elemento esencial en este proceso. Lo que he intentado demostrar es que leer una novela, en este caso de Don DeLillo, implica la entrada al(os) mundo(s) cronotópico(s) que ofrece cada autor en su texto, y que este impacto siempre resulta - al menos hasta cierto punto - de este diálogo entre cronotopos.

En términos del futuro del análisis cronotópico, lo que consigue esta tesis es abrir camino a varias líneas de investigación. En primer lugar, sería productivo abordar el resto del corpus de DeLillo prestando atención a la organización particular del espacio y tiempo presentada en cada texto, más allá del enfoque concreto de desiertos y habitaciones que he tratado aquí. Como he demostrado, la construcción de DeLillo de sus textos a través del cronotopo ocurre a varios niveles, y por lo tanto su corpus es perfecto para efectuar un análisis adicional en esta línea; como es evidente en varios ejemplos presentados a lo largo de esta tesis, la ficción de DeLillo utiliza el cronotopo tanto en el sentido micro como el macro. Investigaciones futuras podrían examinar productivamente los lugares particulares que aparecen en sus novelas – desde los moteles de *End Zone, Players* y *White Noise* hasta los vehículos en movimiento de *Libra* y *Cosmopolis* o los diferentes tipos de habitaciones en *Running Dog* y *Ratner's Star* – además del diseño estructural de sus textos. Novelas como *Mao II, Underworld* y *Falling Man* sitúan estos cronotopos urbanos (americanos) y siempre cambiantes en un dialogo con sus *otros* – sea una casa aislada, un país extranjero o un desierto – de tal manera que requiere un análisis igual de exhaustivo que el que he llevado a cabo aquí. Además, el estudio en mayor profundidad de la identificación de los cronotopos dominantes y macroestructurales que aparecen en las novelas de DeLillo más asociadas con lo posmoderno sería útil en el intento de determinar cómo este escritor dialoga exactamente con las tendencias teóricas de su tiempo; el diálogo que mantiene DeLillo con la cultura sólo se entiende en su totalidad cuando se considera también el cronotopo.

Este enfoque es igualmente útil más allá del contexto limitado de Don DeLillo. Por una parte, y aunque trazar la evolución de estos cronotopos a lo largo de su larga carrera ha sido una tarea muy gratificante, quedan pendientes de realizar análisis adicionales sobre el diálogo más amplio entre estos cronotopos y aquellos representados más allá del corpus de este autor. He abordado este tema con la delineación en el capítulo 2 de una relación entre el desierto DeLilliano y el desierto de la cosmovisión judeo-cristiana, pero estoy convencido de que el estudio detallado de dicho diálogo sería fascinante, ya que de ninguna manera debe

considerarse a DeLillo como el único autor que se refugia en el desierto cuando desea abordar cuestiones de la transcendencia y la inmanencia. El análisis de la evolución de desiertos en obras americanas anteriores como *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), de Willa Cather y *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) de Paul Bowles, hasta obras más recientes, como *Quarantine* (1998) de Jim Crace, *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) de Claire Vaye Watkins y *Sonora* (2017) de Hannah Assadi, por nombrar algunas, permitiría el desarrollo de una perspectiva sólida construida sobre el cronotopo aplicable a las mareas cambiantes de la psique colectiva americana. Incluso dentro de este ámbito particular, uno podría destilar productivamente conclusiones importantes en cuanto a categorías como clase, raza y género.

En términos más generales, dado tanto su papel fundamental en el establecimiento de mundos ficticios, como la manera en que estos mismos mundos nacen de perspectivas humanas (reales o imaginarias), el potencial que tiene el análisis cronotópico para alumbrar cambios de consciencia y percepción solo está limitado por la capacidad de los propios escritores para expresarse de esta manera. El proyecto de Bakhtin de delinear una tipografía histórica de la novela es uno que acabó interrumpido durante el periodo del alto modernismo y que, por lo tanto, no llegó a tratar las revoluciones culturales que sucedieron posteriormente. El enfoque cronotópico es uno que representa, pues, un potencial considerable en cuanto a los debates sobre la trayectoria de la cultura en general, desde la cuestión ya en disminución de lo postmoderno, hasta los énfasis más recientes sobre lo poshumano, lo transhumano e incluso el no-humano. El cronotopo, en el sentido más amplio, es útil para abordar el género literario y realizar un análisis profundo de los lugares literarios que emergen en el contexto de lo que se denomina cada vez más comúnmente como el mundo poshumano. El papel que juegan ciertos tipos de lugares y paisajes en la imaginación cultural es una parte significativa de esta tarea, y por lo tanto un estudio cronotópico tanto de lugares y paisajes distintos (montañas, océanos, ciudades), como de géneros especulativos más generales (utopía, distopia, la ciencia ficción) constituirían una contribución valiosa a nuestro entendimiento de las distintas respuestas posibles en la actualidad para hacer frente a las complejidades del mundo contemporáneo. Una exploración, por ejemplo, del cambio desde las utopías de los inicios a mediados del siglo XX, pasando por las distopias que surgen en los ochenta, hasta la vuelta actual y tentativa de la imaginación utópica – como por ejemplo la trilogía del Sprawl de William Gibson (1984-88) y *The Road* de Cormac McCarthy (2006), hasta la trilogía de Marte de Kim Stanley Robinson (1992-96) y *Exit West* de Mohsin Hamid (2017) – sería especialmente productiva al llevarse a

cabo de forma cronotópica, ya que la imaginación utópica/distópica depende particularmente de una dominante lógica espaciotemporal distinta a la nuestra.

Finalmente, con esta tesis doctoral espero haber logrado dos objetivos. El análisis original de la ficción de Don DeLillo emprendido aquí debería, por un lado, resaltar el estatus del autor del Bronx como uno de los más perspicaces a la hora de tratar el complejo clima cultural existente en la actualidad, ya que más allá de toda la consideración que recibe por parte de la crítica, emplea una representación demostrablemente enriquecedora en términos cronotópicos. Dada la importancia que atribuyo a la expresión cronotópica en cuanto al impacto representativo de un texto ficticio, esta riqueza no se debe tomar a la ligera, especialmente porque no es algo común que los autores escriban de una manera tan matizada semánticamente. Por otro lado, también espero haber probado de forma convincente la utilidad y la importancia de este enfoque cronotópico en términos más generales. Tan visionario y imaginativo como es DeLillo, al igual que cualquier artista, su perspectiva personal (integrada y vivida) está limitada necesariamente por su propia experiencia y, por lo tanto, una expansión del enfoque critico desarrollado en esta tesis dirigida a otros autores tiene el potencial de contribuir significativamente al estudio de la literatura y la cultura. Más allá de los mundos de DeLillo hay una gran variedad de voces y perspectivas perfectas para el análisis desde este enfoque y que pueden alcanzar el reconocimiento de su verdadero logro representativo gracias a una perspectiva cronotópica.

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