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Children of Godard and Coca-Cola: Cinema and Consumerism in Don DeLillo's Early Fiction

Coming Attractions: Previews and Pretexts in the Early Short Fiction

I n an interview with Tom LeClair, novelist Don DeLillo was asked the "great bar-mitzvah question"—to name some writers who had influenced him. He eventually listed novels by Joyce, Nabokov, Faulkner, and Malcolm Lowry, but his first response was to cite not a novelist but a filmmaker: "Probably the movies of Jean-Luc Godard had a more immediate effect on my early work than anything I'd ever read" ("Interview" 25). While writing his little-read first novel, *Americana* (1971), DeLillo kept in mind "The strong image, the short ambiguous scene, the dream sense of some movies, the artificiality, the arbitrary choices of some directors, the cutting and editing. The power of images" ("Interview" 25). And indeed, the influence of film on the plot, narrative structures, and themes of *Americana* is enormous, as the second part of this essay demonstrates.

DeLillo's debts to cinema are apparent throughout his work. For example, his 1977 novel *Players* opens with a section called "The Movie," which previews the action and introduces its main characters without naming them; the characters watch emotionlessly as a group of terrorists guns down some golfers. Likewise, in the novel proper, the protagonists, Lyle and Pammy Wynant, cannot experience emotions except through television or movies. After Pammy callously betrays the gay male couple with whom she has been living, causing the death of one of them, she feels no grief until she watches an old movie melodrama on television. At the end of the novel, she is framed against the marquee of a hotel for transients, the star of her

own private movie, now playing to an empty house. The plot of *Running Dog* (1978) concerns the pursuit of an allegedly pornographic home movie of Hitler and his minions in the *Führerbunker* in 1945. The Hitler film inspires all manner of violent machinations and eventually comes to represent capitalism itself. Like DeLillo's acclaimed novel *Libra*, both *Players* and *Running Dog* use cinematic crosscutting to generate meaning through montagelike juxtapositions. More importantly, both early novels thematize the effects that cinematic representation exerts on subjectivity, suggesting that film has contributed to a commodification of consciousness that turns human agents "into actors doing walk-throughs" (DeLillo, "Art" 301).

But the specific influence of Godard first appears in three uncollected early short stories—"Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.," "Baghdad Towers West," and "The Uniforms"—which not only demonstrate DeLillo's debt to avant-garde cinema but also function as previews for DeLillo's later work, introducing situations, characters, and scenes that he later expands and reuses. Presaging DeLillo's novels, these stories also forecast the coming attractions and dangers of postmodern culture that DeLillo anatomizes so brilliantly in his novels: the effacement of historical consciousness; dehumanization by institutions and technology; the "power of the image" to shape human subjectivity and to blur the differences between reality and representations; the totalizing effects of consumer capitalism.

The title of "Coming Sun. Mon. Tues." imitates a marquee advertising coming attractions, as if the story were the plot outline of an upcoming movie. And indeed, with its vague characterizations and detached point of view, the story resembles nothing so much as a film scenario or "treatment." The title is followed by excerpts from an imaginary review by "The Times," calling it a *"social document"* about *"The bitterness and urgency of today's rebellious youth"* ("Coming" 391). Published in 1966 in the "Briefer Comment" section of *Kenyon Review*, the story possesses an essayistic quality that typifies much of DeLillo's later work, which features articulate characters speaking mini-essays in tersely elegant prose. The essaylike format of this early story also echoes the practices of Godard, who has called himself "an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them" (Godard, "Marginal Notes" 171). One of those cinematic essays was the socio-

logical study-cum-romantic comedy *Masculin féminin*, released at about the same time as DeLillo's story, which traces the fortunes of Paul, a pollster and lukewarm Marxist, as he tries to woo Madeleine, a budding pop singer. Along with its light comedy, Godard's film intersperses political placards and descriptions of the action, incongruent episodes of violence, self-reflexive comments on filmmaking, and remarks on the nature of observation. DeLillo's epigraph functions similarly as both a preview or summary of the narrative and as Godardian self-commentary, inviting us to measure our responses against its description: will it be *"evocative and bittersweet"* and *"somewhat controversial,"* as the "review" promises? Like Godard, DeLillo foregrounds the collaboration between *auteur* and audience in making meaning.

The plot of the story is quite complicated, considering that it is only four pages long. It depicts a stereotypical youthful couple doing youthful things—window-shopping, drinking wine, being Bohemian. When the girl gets pregnant, they visit an "abortionist" who "tells them to come back next Tuesday" (392). The boy tries halfheartedly to get a job and fails; the couple attends parties in which everyone speaks the revolutionary cant of the day. He steals a car, they fight, and she goes home to her stereotypical parents. The boy visits a bar where he sees his father with a woman who is not his mother; the boy is sent to jail (apparently for car theft, but we aren't sure). Finally the couple reunite and decide to have the baby. My sketchy outline may seem unfair to the story, but in fact the text does little more to flesh out the action or characters, who are viewed as if through a telephoto lens. The story eschews character development for a studied objectivity and neutrality; connects plot elements simply by "then"; remains vague about setting ("It is Greenwich Village or the West Side. It is either of those or it is Soho or it is Montmartre" [391]), perhaps to imply an allegorical universality or perhaps simply to reflect the vagueness of its protagonists' aspirations. Although told in a single paragraph, the story abruptly and inexplicably shifts from scene to scene, as if to portray the protagonists' disjointed sense of time and causality.[1]

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1. These shifts are not jump cuts, as Douglas Keesey claims, in the only critical commentary on the story (205): jump cuts excise sections of continuous scenes to create tem-

Some of the story's events—the car theft, the girl's pregnancy—
seem to have been derived from Godard's *Breathless* (1959). Like
Jean-Paul Belmondo's Michel in that film, DeLillo's boy constantly
looks at himself in the mirror (392, 394); like Michel's, his rebellion is
the prescripted defiance of movie teens and tough guys. The boy's
cinematic models are clearly exhibited when he "stands in front of a
movie theater looking at a poster of Jean-Paul Belmondo" (393),
mimicking the scene in *Breathless* when Belmondo gazes at a poster
of Humphrey Bogart in *The Harder They Fall*. DeLillo reuses this
scene in *Americana*, when protagonist and novice filmmaker David
Bell looks "at the poster of Belmondo looking at the poster of pur-
poseful Bogart" (287).[2] Like Bell, the boy in the earlier story is "an
image made in the image and likeness of images" (*Americana* 130),
able to see himself only when reflected back from a screen or piece
of glass. At the end of the story the couple look at themselves in
distorted fun house mirrors (394), illustrating the infinite regress of
images that has shaped—or misshaped—their identities. DeLillo's
distancing devices place the characters in a neverland where all
events occur at once, as if in a dream. Similarly, Godard, particu-
larly in his fantasy films (for example, *Weekend*), but to a lesser de-
gree throughout his oeuvre, cuts out connectives and explanations
in order to speak "in a purer present tense" and to create "the im-
pression of an action continually beginning anew," as Susan Sontag
puts it (257). DeLillo's Godardian strategies suggest that the future
for these young people will be an eternal present of instant gratifica-
tion and consumer fulfillment in which psychological density has
been supplanted by endless mirror images.

DeLillo's 1968 story "Baghdad Towers West" seems less cinematic
than the other two stories I am considering, although its predictions
about postmodern culture and its previews of DeLillo's future work
are just as striking. The story concerns a middle-aged man who
comes to rent an apartment in a building called Baghdad Towers
West from three young women, each of whom is seeking success in

poral disjunctions but do not generally operate between discrete scenes. Of course, Go-
dard is famous for popularizing the use of the jump cut in *Breathless*.

2. Unless otherwise noted, all citations from *Americana* are taken from the 1989 reprint
rather than from the 1973 paperback edition. Although the Pocket paperback contains
the full text of the novel as originally published, only the 1989 reprint is now in print.

a field of pop culture. A place without history, Baghdad Towers promises "a new kind of mystery, electronic and ultra-modern, in which the angel of death pushes a vacuum cleaner and all the were-wolves are schnauzers" (198–99). The sterile setting prefigures DeLillo's use of architectural motifs as symbols of postmodern alien-ation in *Players*, where the World Trade Center and the protago-nists' boxlike apartment suggest their self-enclosure. The situation of the story is a virtual replay of a scene in *Masculin féminin* in which Paul temporarily stays in the apartment that Madeleine shares with two other young women. Paul is conducting a survey about the condition of French youth, and thus much of the film consists of "interviews" in which the respondent is framed by a stationary cam-era as another character—sometimes Paul, sometimes one of his interlocutors—asks questions from off-screen. "Baghdad Towers West" borrows this technique, as the three women speak to the narrator "as if [he] were interviewing them for a profile in Look magazine" (200). Caroline: "I sculpt. . . . I am committed to junk. Give me sparkplugs, Maytag washers, jet engines, the teeth of combs. Today all beauty is apocalyptic and it demands new forms for its expression. . . . Doom. Doom. Doom is my medium" (200). Robin: "I want to model. . . . I want to wear long vicious boots. . . . I want to be high fashiony" (200). Melinda Bird: "I want to act. . . . All my life I've wanted to act. . . . I like to walk up and down Broad-way and look at the lights and at the fabulous people" (201). In one of his best-known placards in *Masculin féminin*, Godard dubs his characters "children of Marx and Coca-Cola" for their uneasy alle-giance both to leftist politics and to pop-cultural images. The women in DeLillo's story have a similarly mixed genealogy: over their beds, they have pinned photos of "Bogie, Marilyn, Ringo, Ike, Lurleen, Stokely, Marlon, Ravi and Papa" (196–97).

While the women's responses all seem prescribed from contem-porary pop culture, the narrator's identity is drawn from classic Hol-lywood features. As he first gazes up at the building, a film clip unreels in his mind: "But I knew I was not the young Jimmy Stewart ('I'll lick you yet New York') fresh from the midwest, not the urbane Cary Grant about to trade quips with Rosalind Russell [in *His Girl Friday*]. . . . I was, in fact, nobody" (198). His "sorties into the midst of the Pepsi Generation" (204) send him to a club called Moloch,

where "The spectators seated at tables watched the dancers watching the spectators watching the dancers" (203): as in "Coming Sun. Mon. Tues.," culture has become a Baudrillardian precession of simulacra, that "generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard 166). The narrator thus feels that he is constantly performing; even when ensconced safely in bed he imagines "the eerie kind of background music used in old Hitchcock films to indicate that Gregory Peck is going nuts" (207).

Slowly withdrawing into sleep, the narrator hopes to find "something new, which was myself, or at least the beginnings of myself" (205). His dreams are dictated by the beds: in Caroline's bed he has apocalyptic dreams; in Robin's he dreams of striking poses as "flashbulbs hiss and explode and then Michelangelo Antonioni emerges from the darkness and kisses my hand" (205); in Melinda Bird's he finds himself on-stage in "some cynically modern version of Peter Pan" (207). The narrator's quest for purity and solitude prefigures the ascetic quests of several later DeLillo protagonists, including Bucky Wunderlick, the disenchanted rock star of *Great Jones Street* (1973), Glen Selvy, the soldier without a cause of *Running Dog*, and Shaver Stevens, the disgruntled hockey player in DeLillo's pseudonymous novel *Amazons* (published under the name Cleo Birdwell). His love of sleep also echoes *Masculin féminin*. At the end of the aforementioned scene in the three women's apartment, Paul, suffering over his unrequited passion for Madeleine, apostrophizes sleep "who closes pain's eyes," asking it to "free me a moment from myself." DeLillo's narrator seeks a similar retreat from self-awareness, a safe haven from the bombardment of images and observation.

But after being rebuffed for clumsily attempting to grope one of the women, he plunges even deeper, finally asking the security guards to put him "on permanent security"—to maintain vigilance over the apartment even when he is there. Ironically, his fantasy of security replicates the postmodern panopticon described in *Running Dog*: "Go into a bank, you're filmed. . . . Go into a department store, you're filmed. . . . They're looking into the uterus, taking pictures. Everywhere. . . . Putting the whole world on film. . . . Everybody's on camera" (*Running Dog* 149–50). The result of this ubiquitous camera eye is not security, however, but an insecurity

and paranoia so total that even slumber becomes a performance. The narrator's tranquility thus soon gives way to an undefined terror and dread that presages the nebulous anxiety of *White Noise*'s Jack Gladney: "From bed to bed I went, searching for applause. . . for the Barrymores, Balenciaga, the odd sad hope of fulfillment. But what I found was sheer terror. I would wake up sweating, or screaming, and yet I could not remember a single dream" ("Baghdad" 216). Even earlier, his serenity was accompanied by an urge "to set the whole thing on fire" (211), to bring about the very apocalpytic ending that he most fears.[3]

In this story DeLillo envisions the future as belonging neither to the paralyzed narrator nor even to the young women in the story, none of whom end up attaining their dreams, but to people like Ulysses, the dispirited fourth grader who sets only easily achievable goals ("If I try to achieve a goal that's simply beyond my abilities, I'm bound to be disappointed" [208–9]), and whose epic journey consists of riding the elevators autistically from floor to floor. Just as in *Players*, elevators are represented as "places" (*Players* 24) that connote the emptiness of their inhabitants, so Ulysses' elevator is his version of the narrator's "empty box within an empty box" (208), a domain safe from the hordes and colossal traffic jams reported on the narrator's radio: "From my seat in the helicopter I can see it all, the entire metropolitan area, through the poisonous smoke and fog. It is a scene of unbelievable terror and madness" (210).

This vision of an automotive apocalypse parallels another Godard film, *Weekend* (1967), with its famous seven-minute tracking shot of a huge traffic jam, and its terrifying vision of an amoral, cannibalistic near future. In this film, Godard presents the automobile as the embodiment of the bourgeoisie, and the car out of control as an emblem of what John Orr calls "consumer fascism" (139). Thus the corruption of Corinne and Roland Durand, the repellent protagonists of the film, is displayed as much by Roland's callous disregard for traffic laws as by their plan to murder her parents for

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3. DeLillo develops this paradoxical impulse most thoroughly in *End Zone* (1972), in which protagonist Gary Harkness channels his alienation into a fixation on nuclear holocaust. Like this narrator, he is both drenched in fear and unhealthily fascinated: he desires the apocalypse as a way both to purge his dread and to bring about a cleansing simplicity. For a more detailed examination of DeLillo's treatment of apocalypse, see Osteen.

their money. After a wild drive, they crash; as the cars burn, Corinne screams, apparently in pain. But in fact she is only lamenting the loss of her Hermeés handbag. They later encounter actors playing Rousseau and Emily Brontë, the latter of whom they nonchalantly burn, thus marking the end of "philosophy." But no matter; as Roland says, "they're only imaginary characters. We're little more than that ourselves." These postmodernist touches are not merely gimmicks; they dramatize Godard's didactic message that the bourgeoisie live an imaginary life built upon the unacknowledged exploitation of workers and third world countries. The Durands' "freedom is violence"—merely the "highest stage of barbarism." But their journey toward Ouinville transports them back from "advanced savagery to primitive barbarism": they are hijacked, stripped of their car, and ultimately kidnapped by a brutal gang of roving, cannibalistic—and cinematically literate—revolutionaries, whose radio code names are drawn from the archives of classic cinema (in one scene "Battleship Potemkin" calls to "The Searchers") and whose slogan is "the horror of the bourgeois can only be overcome by more horror," which they are happy to provide. At the end of the film Corinne blandly consumes a stew made of English tourists and, perhaps, some parts of her husband as well. The implication, of course, is that she has always been a cannibal, that her meal merely literalizes the violent consumerism which has always defined her and her class. The terrorists thus merely enable the Durands to act out their savagery without bourgeois trappings. In short, for Godard, the bourgeoisie are themselves terrorists. But so is he: Godard conceives of his films as terrorist acts—as what Robert Stam terms a "theoretical rifle" or a series of "guerrilla raids" (179, 259)—not only upon capitalism and bourgeois culture, but also upon the conventions of classic cinema such as linear plot, character development, structural and visual continuity.

DeLillo's "The Uniforms" (1970) is essentially a gloss on *Weekend*, as he admits in an appendix to a reprint of the story: "I consider this piece of work a movie as much as anything else. . . . the work is an attempt to hammer and nail my own frame around somebody else's movie. The movie in question is 'Weekend,' made of course by the mock-illustrious Jean-Luc Godard" (Appendix 532–33). Some of his

borrowings are obvious: in one scene DeLillo's terrorists eat a pig (452), in imitation of the pig-slaughtering scene in *Weekend*; in another scene, they stop a car and ask the occupants if they'd rather eat bananas picked by oppressed workers or spend a night in a bed full of tarantulas. The man who chooses the bananas is murdered (452–53). This inquisition reenacts a scene in *Weekend* in which the autoless Corinne and Roland are asked by passing motorists if they'd rather be "screwed by Mao or Johnson." When Roland answers "Johnson," the car drives off without them. As the question about bananas indicates, the politics of DeLillo's revolutionaries are little more than a thin pretext for murder and rape. Hence after they kill the occupants of a tank and cut off their genitals, they rationalize that "the tank was full of products made by Dow Chemical" (453).

But the story is no mere rehash of Godard's outrageous movie; for one thing, DeLillo omits most of the cars and concentrates on the terrorists. Moreover, the story is even more plotless than *Weekend*, lacking even the auto journey to give it shape. And while the deadpan depiction of acts of violence mirrors Godard's film, the perpetrators are even more clearly movie-mad: at the beginning, one terrorist, Hassan, edits film clips of their previous attack; another, Jean-Claude, is nicknamed Breathless (451). Yet another terrorist, Bradley, has repeated flashbacks of a "soft-focus childhood" in which he sees himself running in slow motion (453). Likewise, their debates about the meaning of history are really arguments about historical films: they don't care about the righteousness of the bombing of Hiroshima, but only about whether Alain Resnais "faked the film-clips of the bomb victims in [*Hiroshima mon amour*]" (455). The past is just a film; wars and war movies are the same thing. Thus their knowledge of the American Revolution and Civil War is derived solely from "the films of John Ford and John Huston," who have shown that "tight dusty uniforms are most acceptable to the devouring eye of history and the camera" (454). In short, their revolutionary consciousness is a combination of fashion statement and film criticism: "the revolutionary uniform must be tight and spare. . . . We have thrown off the shackles of black-and-white revisionism. We will shoot in color because color is the color of childhood fantasy" (454). It follows that one of their final actions (prefiguring the prologue of *Players*) is to slaughter a group of golfing "middle class

white Protestants," apparently because they have ugly clothes ("Uniforms" 456; cf. *Players* 7).

Ironically, however, after perpetrating all these horrific acts, the terrorists go window-shopping (454). DeLillo's point is perhaps too obvious: these "revolutionaries" are devoted to the capitalism they claim to want to destroy. Not only are they tied by negation to their victims, whose brand-name products ("Gucci wallets," "Tiffany cigarette cases," and "Patek-Philippe wristwatches" [455]) they make sure to steal; in addition, DeLillo's descriptions of the revolutionaries focus almost entirely on their clothes—their "uniforms"—which each one carefully selects for the most striking effect. Thus one wears a fez, a Mau Mau shirt, a safari jacket, granny glasses, and track shoes; another wears a motorcycle helmet, jump boots, a cowhide vest, and bandoliers. Just as history is pastiche, so radicalism consists in the ability to arrange a fashionably outrageous ensemble. The story dramatizes DeLillo's recognition, as formulated by Steven Connor, that in postmodern culture "images, styles and representations are not the promotional accessories to economic products, they are the products themselves" (46). But DeLillo reverses Godard's association between terrorism and consumerism: whereas for Godard the bourgeoisie are terrorists, for DeLillo the terrorists are bourgeois consumers.

DeLillo's prescient vision of terrorist manipulation of the media anticipates the themes of *Mao II* and, more importantly, the media savvy of real-life terrorists. But the relationship between the media and violence works both ways: the constant bombardment of consciousness by images is itself a form of violence. DeLillo has described contemporary violence as "a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment" ("Outsider" 295). In this case, unlike that of *Libra*'s Oswald, it's not that the murderers are alienated from the glorious paradise they see advertised on TV; rather, it's that violent acts have become just another way to obtain and embody the right brand image. Moreover, it's not just that the terrorists are inauthentic; it's that the collaboration of cinema and consumerism has blurred the distinction between commitment and celebrity, between the real and representations, as suggested when DeLillo's revolutionaries see "a film crew shooting a television commercial for a movie about television" (455). If these terror-

ists' crimes are movie crimes, they are no less real for all that. As Baudrillard has observed, "all hold ups, hijacks and the like are now as it were simulation hold ups, in the sense that they are inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their mode of presentation and possible consequences" (179). "The Uniforms" depicts this collapse of distinction as a terrorism of representation that implicates us all.

At the end of "The Uniforms," we learn that a "Godard film was playing at the local cinema" (459). DeLillo seems to be claiming that Godard's vaunted revolution against the bourgeoisie and film conventions is itself just fashion; moreover, the story implies that Godard's deadpan depiction of violence mistakenly conflates political and aesthetic radicalism and thereby desensitizes viewers to actual violence. As Godard has admitted, "the more one indulges in spectacle . . . the more one becomes immersed in what one is trying to destroy" (qtd. in Stam 182). But if so, then how does DeLillo's story, with its neutral portrayal of equally atrocious crimes, escape the same complicity? At the end of the appendix to his story, DeLillo writes, "Thousands of short stories and novels have been made into movies. I simply tried to reverse the process. . . . I submit this mode of work as a legitimate challenge to writers of radical intent" (533). His challenge is most obviously a charge to write "cinematic" stories that dispense with such strategies of conventional fiction as plot, psychology, and closure. But it is also a political challenge that asks whether "radical" techniques necessarily promote radical politics. How, in other words, can one neutrally portray revolution or violence without glorifying it? DeLillo leaves these questions unanswered; indeed, he raises them again as part of a self-critical dialogue that continues in novels such as *Running Dog*, *The Names*, *White Noise*, and, most recently, *Mao II*. Nevertheless, by placing a cinematic frame around this story, he at least acknowledges the potential complicity of his own radical art in the alliance of consumerism and violence.

All three of these stories interrogate the relationships between subjectivity and cinema, between image and identity, between real and reel, prompting disturbing questions about what is in store in the post-postmodern future. Is it the apocalypse of *Weekend*? The aimless anomie of "Coming Sun. Mon. Tues."? The catatonic es-

cape of "Baghdad Towers West"? In exploring the collusion be-
tween cinema and consumerism, DeLillo questions the possibility
of any truly radical aesthetic of filmmaking. By hammering new
frames around these pretextual films, DeLillo presents advertise-
ments for the future that turn the camera back upon novelists and
image makers, as if to ask, "to what degree is our art just another
consumer product?"

"A Lesson in the Effect of Echoes": Interview and Intertext in *Americana*

David Bell, the protagonist and narrator of *Americana*, displays the
same schizophrenia about cinematic representation and consumer
culture exhibited in Godard's films and in DeLillo's earlier fiction.
He also continues the pattern of withdrawal begun by the narrator
of "Baghdad Towers West." Abandoning his high-profile career at a
television network, Bell hopes to discover an authentic origin, a
core identity, a genuine passion. From the outset, however, Bell's
desires are contradictory: he wants both to discover and to destroy
his own past. In fact, his greatest problem may be his awareness of
belatedness—that his identity is not only composed of the psycho-
logical patterns bequeathed him by his parents but also burdened
by the immense weight of the cultural images, texts, and discourses
that have preceded and influenced him. Hoping to liberate himself,
Bell examines his past, revises it by making it into a movie, and then
writes about it in the text we are reading.

Of course, Bell's memoir lies within a long and illustrious literary
history that goes back at least to Saint Augustine (whose *City of God*
is quoted by Ted Warburton, the network's mad memo-writer [21,
100–101]). Similarly, in writing Bell's fictional life, first-novelist Don
DeLillo enters perhaps the most distinguished subgenre in the his-
tory of the novel—the kunstlerroman. Like other kunstlerroman
heroes, Bell composes a work of art—an autobiographical film—
that demonstrates both his talent and his limitations; but that work
is itself "a lesson in the effect of echoes" (58), a pastiche of the styles
and techniques of previous filmmakers—particularly Jean-Luc
Godard—that reveals nothing so much as the impossibility of com-

plete artistic originality. DeLillo ultimately suggests that Bell's quest for originality, for the origin of his neurosis, for the true self beneath the images that have constructed him is futile, partly because it is based upon an outmoded notion of originality and identity no longer recuperable in postmodern America. Instead, Bell's quest demonstrates the inescapability of and interrelationship between cinematic and commercial images, and the profound way that they shape—and fragment—postmodern subjectivity. With its interpolated and multiply framed film, the novel becomes a kind of self-interview, as David's dialogue with himself dramatizes DeLillo's dialogue with postmodern culture.

At his job with the TV network, Bell feels alienated, hopeless, lost, with "no echo for grief" (29). The network strikes him as a series of "test patterns and shadows" (270), echoes of previous images that are themselves unoriginal. At times he imagines he is living in one of those "dull morality tales about power plays and timid adulteries" (20) in vogue during the 1950s—a movie like *Patterns* or *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (both 1956). He imagines that "all of us at the network existed only on video tape. Our words and actions seemed to have a disturbingly elapsed quality. . . . And there was the feeling that somebody's deadly pinky might nudge a button and we would all be erased forever" (23). And yet David's oppression by inherited images is accompanied by a movie-fed narcissism: a man who resembles "a number of Hollywood stars known for their interchangeability" (93), Bell revels in his own image, constantly looking at himself in the mirror and boasting of his handsomeness. As Tom LeClair notes, David is thus torn between his desire to participate in "the Bell system" (41) of mass communication and a desire to flee from it (32). He escapes, ostensibly to make a documentary about the Navajos, with a surrogate family, the most important of whom is Sully, an avant-garde sculptress who stands in for David's demented (and now deceased) mother.

Part 2 of the novel interrupts the linear narrative for a flashback in which David recalls his adolescence and family life. Within the tale of his belatedness we are offered a mini-bildungsroman that follows in most respects the classic bildungsroman conventions: the early life in a provincial town (Old Holly), constraints by family and edu-

cation, movement to the city, a series of love affairs.[4] This section is multiply framed: framed intertextually by the bildungsroman/kunstlerroman tradition and by the "echoes" and patterns from previous films that have helped to create his identity, it also functions as a tale-within-a-tale and hence is also intratextually framed by the narrative of Bell's later life that surrounds it, and finally by the frame around the entire novel, which David, alone on an island, narrates in 1999.[5] These multiple echoes, or frames within frames, themselves suggest the quixotic nature of David's quest to be free from the past.

Unlike earlier bildungsroman protagonists, however, David's education is not literary but cinematic, and his identity has been shaped most powerfully by those "American pyramids" (12) Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas.[6] As Sergeant Warden in *From Here to Eternity*, Lancaster is no echo, but "a crescendo of male perfection"; through him David discovers "the true power of the image," an image into which he dreams of being spliced (13, 12). Warden is an unreachable ideal, "the icon of a new religion" at once private and mass-produced. Perfectly synthesizing the roles of friend, big brother, and father, Lancaster/Warden substitutes for David's less satisfactory real father, fifty-five-year-old ad executive Clinton Bell. Clinton also echoes a number of popular fifties figures, particularly Tom Rath, the protagonist of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Like Rath, Clinton has three children (two girls and a younger boy), strives to balance the demands of corporate and domestic life, and is haunted by his violent actions in World War II. But unlike Rath, Clinton conceives of his family as ad images mirroring those in his basement archive of videotaped TV commercials, which he reruns repeatedly in order to "find the common threads and nuances" in

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4. Marianne Hirsch (296–300) and Jerome Buckley (17) provide helpful summaries of bildungsroman plot conventions.

5. I have borrowed these terms from Ian Reid, who also furnishes useful definitions and examples of these and other kinds of textual frames (44–58).

6. Even Bell's brief marriage (presented in flashback in part 1) to a woman he met at Leighton Gage, the exclusive college where he majored in film, seemed "arranged for the whim of a camera" (30): most of their evenings out were devoted to attending films, always wearing "certain clothes to certain movies" (35), and their sexual encounters "took their inspiration from cinema" (35). A "blend of jump-cuts and soft-focus tenderness" (37), it was "all there but the soundtrack" (36).

those that have achieved "high test ratings" (84). These mass-cultural artifacts, replacing the personal mementos, home movies, and trophies preserved by other middle-class males, are his Americana. Habitué of the Playboy Club and avid consumer of guns, Jaguars, and expensive cologne (152), Clinton boasts that he is successful because he has "the right brand image" (85): having identified himself with stereotypical images from TV commercials and best sellers, Clinton has become a commodity. Hence when David films the commercial that is his life, he also remakes his father, as if to trade him in on a more upscale brand.

In his early years, David believes devoutly in the American dream of the good life, which encompasses "all those things which all people are said to want, materials, and objects and the shadows they cast." He buys "the institutional messages, the psalms and placards, the pictures, the words. Better living through chemistry. The Sears, Roebuck catalog. Aunt Jemima. All the impulses of all the media were fed into the circuitry of my dreams. One thinks of echoes. One thinks of an image made in the image and likeness of images. It was that complex" (130). As the allusion to Genesis 1:26 suggests, cinematic and commercial images are David's sacred texts. But unlike the Divine Word, these intertextual discourses are mass-produced copies, designed and consumed anonymously. David's dreams thus again exemplify Baudrillard's hyperreal domain of the simulacrum, in which signs follow "an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (Baudrillard 170). Marx's commodity fetishism here reaches its ultimate stage, as social relationships yield to relationships not between commodities but between images. Consumer capitalism has engendered new economies of meaning and identity, in which experience, as John Johnston notes, "can only appear to be 'always already' framed, multiply mediated, and available only through sets of competing and often contradictory images and representations" ("Post-cinematic" 97). As Baudrillard writes, the problem is that "Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (177): originality, authenticity, and unitary identity become irrelevant or impossible, because representations refer back only to other representations. Paradoxically, David aims to use cinematic representation to delve beneath the representations that have formed him; he hopes that

by re-presenting himself to himself, he may find the source of his pathology, the glue for his identity, and thereby transcend his oppression by the past.

Thus very early in his journey (which halts in a town called Fort Curtis), David conceives the idea for a "messy autobiographical-type film . . . a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that's part of my life," a work that may "explain the darkness, if only to myself" (205–6). While his father provides the ideological framework, the psychological "darkness" issues from his mother, Ann. Molested by the family physician and then stricken with cancer, she shared the story of her molestation with the immature David, inciting unresolved oedipal feelings in him. At David's "coming out" party, he sees her spitting on the ice cubes used for drinks; later that night, David anticipates an oedipal encounter with Ann that extends "a promise of fantastic release" (196), only to be interrupted by the sound of his father's feet on the stairs. With her patrician Virginia heritage, Ann represents a high cultural legacy at odds with Clinton's commercialized world. Thus her haunting presence comes to David filtered through echoes from his "sacred scroll" at college (145), Joyce's *Ulysses*, rewritten with David as Stephen Dedalus.[7] The conflict between Ann and Clinton thus engenders several conflicts in David—object of oedipal desire versus obstacle to that desire, the literary versus the cinematic, high culture versus popular culture, Godard versus Coca-Cola—and produces the fragmented psyche that David attempts to suture with his film.

Like his entire story, David's film is multiply framed. First, it is framed intratextually within the novel so that we "see" it only through Bell, who, as narrator, interprets it in advance (LeClair 43). Second, because it is presented after we have learned about David's early life, it stands as both artwork and symptom, forcing us to read "through" the cinematic text to apprehend its sources. The film even contains its own intratextual frame—its first sequence, in

7. In *Ulysses* Stephen envisions his mother, dead from cancer, returning from the grave: "her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath . . . a faint odour of wetted ashes" (5). Similarly, David recalls "the vast white silence of my mother's deathbed, candlewax and linen, her enormous eyes. . . . her body . . . little more than ash, crumbs of bone; her hands . . . dry kindling" (97).

which fledgling actor Austin Wakely plays fledgling filmmaker Da-
vid Bell with his back to a full-length mirror, facing the camera (241).
The length he chooses for the framing episode—twenty seconds, a
"popular commercial length" (241)—betrays his father's influence,
as well as his own self-conception as a commodity. More signifi-
cantly for my purposes, the film is also framed intertextually by
numerous films and filmmakers. This "signature" scene is thus also
an intertextual mirror, reflecting both the autobiographical inten-
tion of the film and the derivativeness that David describes to his
friend Ken Wild:

> It's a sort of first-person thing but without me in it in any physical sense,
> except fleetingly, not exactly in the Hitchcock manner but a brief personal
> appearance nonetheless, my mirror image at any rate. . . . It'll be part
> dream, part fiction, part movies. . . . Not quite autobiographical in the
> Jonas Mekas sense. I've said part movies. By that I mean certain juxtaposi-
> tions of movies with reality, certain images that have stayed with me,
> certain influences too. . . . Ghosts and shadows everywhere in terms of
> technique. Bresson. Miklós Jancsó. Ozu. Shirley Clarke. The interview
> technique. The monologue. The anti-movie. The single camera position.
> The expressionless actor. The shot extended to its ultimate limit in time.
>
> (263)

Bell hopes that by addressing and incorporating these cinematic
"ghosts and shadows" he can banish them and the psychic echoes
that resound in his consciousness. For him (and for DeLillo, whose
novel frames David's film) intertextuality here approaches a
Barthesian infinite regress in which even the self who approaches a
text is "already . . . a plurality of other texts, of codes which are
infinite or, more precisely, lost" (10).[8] Bell hopes to create what Der-
rida calls an "iterable" text (315)—one simultaneously derivative
and original, a tissue of citations that is thereby one of a kind. That

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8. The Barthesian/Derridean version of intertextuality argues that "Every sign . . .
can be *cited*, put between quotation marks" (Derrida 320). In this view, looking for specific
allusions is pointless. Other theorists, most notably Michael Riffaterre, claim that in-
tertextuality is meaningful only insofar as specific intertexts can be found and juxtaposed
with the text under consideration (see Riffaterre, "Syllepsis" 620 and "Compulsory" 76).
The "infinite citationality" thesis, though intriguing and undoubtedly true in some
sense, leaves little for the practical critic to do. I am claiming that identifying specific
precursors is crucial for an adequate interpretation of DeLillo's novel.

paradoxical condition is further implied when David prepares actress Carol Deming for segment 5 by mentioning Bergman's *Persona* (1966), a film that movingly examines identity and "the nature of diminishing existence" (277) through the blending and exchange of two female protagonists. David is attempting to execute a similar feat—to split himself into interviewer and interviewee, to undertake a dialogue with himself that will yield a unitary subject. But despite these dizzyingly complicated multiple frames, David's citation of influences shows a yearning to recover "lost" codes that points us toward the techniques and traumas that have inspired his film.

The film consists mostly of a series of interviews with actors playing figures from David's life. Facing the camera directly, they respond to questions posed from off-screen. In most ways it is a very uncinematic movie and seems to bear little resemblance to the work of French filmmaker Robert Bresson. But Bresson is an acknowledged influence on Godard, especially in his use of "expressionless" or uninflected acting (Cook 542); in addition, his nearly dialogue-free narratives proceed with minimal camera movement ("the single camera position") to suggest the social conditions that trap the characters. Like Bresson, Hungarian filmmaker Miklós Jancsó employs a very static camera, while also experimenting with "the shot extended to its ultimate limit in time." (*Winter Wind* [*Sirokko*, 1969], for example, uses only thirteen shots in its entire running time [Cook 705].) Like Bresson and Jancsó, Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu mastered the long take and the static camera, which he usually placed at about three feet high—the vantage point of a person sitting on a tatami mat. Instead of using alternating over-the-shoulder shots, as do American directors, Ozu often has his actors directly face the camera, which thereby assumes the point of view of the addressee. The technique places the viewer within the scene to share the intimacies of the characters. Most famously, Ozu understands and exploits the value of empty space: often when actors leave a room, his camera does not follow them but remains trained on the vacant room for several seconds.[9] Thus

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9. This technique corresponds to a Zen concept called *mu*, in which the spaces between materials are conceived as an integral part of the work (Cook 795–96). Indeed, even watching an Ozu movie is a kind of Zen exercise, as one must shift expectations

while these practitioners of classicist cinema seem antithetical to David's gabfest, the ghosts of their techniques animate his work, joining the spirits of his own past in spectral company. Bell's appropriation of these anti-Hollywood techniques suggests that he wants to produce a film that resists the primacy of Image and instead create one that, to paraphrase Bresson, is not a spectacle but a style.

The "interview technique" and the "monologue" recall the work of another unconventional filmmaker, Shirley Clarke, particularly her influential film *The Connection* (1961), which depicts junkies awaiting their connection, all the while being filmed by a documentary crew, to whom the characters speak directly. Her film, like Bell's, uses intratextual framing to comment on the impossibility of objectivity, the power of the camera, and the blurry line between acting and behaving. For example, in *The Connection* the director of the film-within-the-film claims to want to make "an honest human document" but constantly exhorts the actors to produce some "action"—to perform, to behave unlike their normal selves. Ultimately, the director's quest for total authenticity overwhelms his desire for objectivity, and he allows himself to be injected with heroin. But Clarke (like DeLillo) implies that the real drugs are cinematic images, which we crave as a way of ensuring us that we exist. Near the end of *The Connection* we glimpse the cameraman, reflected in a window, shooting the scene we are watching, an image that David replicates near the end of his own film when he appears "reflected in a mirror as I hold the camera" (347). For both Bell and Clarke, film is not a window but a mirror; objectivity is impossible not only because of one's emotional involvement in what he or she films, but also because the medium ineluctably alters both observer and observed.

All of these echoes are quieter, however, than the one David admits when he calls himself a "child of Godard and Coca-Cola" (269), a witty transmutation of Godard's famous description of his charac-

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away from the mobile camera, quick cutting, and plot-oriented scripts of most American films and cultivate the patience needed to accept meaningful absence. Thus if David seemed to have learned little from his college courses in Zen, his use of Ozu's style implies that he may have gleaned a glimmer of the meaning of "Emptiness is Fullness" (176).

ters in *Masculin féminin* as "children of Marx and Coca-Cola."[10] As I noted earlier, DeLillo is himself a "child of Godard" who has acknowledged Godard's influence on his own style and techniques. In *Americana*, one of the principal Godardian strategies is what Richard Roud calls the "analogical" plot (93)—the inclusion of seemingly irrelevant digressions that function as commentary, collage, and subversions of narrative conventions. As its title suggests, *Americana* is presented as a collagelike assortment of images and mementos that incorporate generic and structural models derived from diverse literary and cinematic sources. Throughout his oeuvre DeLillo resembles Godard in his deconstruction of conventional plot structures and popular genres.[11] For DeLillo, as for Godard, such pretexts "must be dismantled or broken into wayward units" (Sontag 238) before they can be reappropriated. Bell's film also seeks a Godardian spontaneity, exemplifying Godard's view that the best films are those "in which the character conducts a dialectical search, experimenting and discovering his theme and structure as he goes along" (Giannetti 27). The film thus corresponds to Godard's description of one of his early films as "a secret diary, a notebook, or the monologue of someone trying to justify himself before an almost accusing camera, as one does before a lawyer or psychiatrist" (Godard, "Marginal Notes" 179).

Segment 5 contains an instance of such a monologue, as Carol Deming, playing David's sister Mary, admits that her life with a mobster has been modeled after a Godard film: "We saw *Breathless* whenever it came back, at least half a dozen times" (277). David also appropriates some of that film's themes. In one scene from *Breathless*, Jean Seberg's Patricia and Belmondo's Michel read an excerpt from William Faulkner's *Wild Palms* that presents the choice between grief and nothingness. Michel chooses the latter, as would

10. Douglas Keesey and Tom LeClair both briefly note Bell's and DeLillo's debts to Godard, especially his resistance to "the cause-effect sequences of a linear plot" (LeClair 56) and his "strategies of self-examination such as the 'interview technique' and the 'monologue'" (Keesey 26). Neither, however, analyzes this intertextual relationship in detail, and both misquote the phrase from *Masculin féminin* as "Marxism and Coca-Cola" (Keesey 24; LeClair 56).

11. For a treatment of DeLillo's subversion of generic expectations, see Johnston, "Generic Difficulties."

Carol/Mary, who says she "needed death in order to believe I was living" (279). Likewise, Godard's Patricia could be speaking for Mary when she says, "I don't know if I'm unhappy because I'm not free, or not free because I'm unhappy." David's scene is thus again multiply framed: not only is Carol playing Mary, but, David implies, Mary was imitating Jean Seberg as Patricia, who herself assumes various roles in *Breathless*, such as interviewer and thief's moll. Later, in segment 11, David's fellow traveler Bobby Brand and Carol improvise their dialogue so that Carol's "real" life shades into her performance as Mary (306). Here Jean Seberg's tragic story merges with that of Patricia, whose affair with Michel turns out to be just another "act"; Mary's existence becomes a gloss on Patricia's, and Carol's performance as Mary amounts to playing herself. David's projection of his sister's life thus demonstrates not only that Godard's influential film has affected Mary, Carol, and many other women who have watched it, but that behavior and identity are "always already" framed.

Also prefiguring *Americana* in both plot and theme is Godard's 1965 film *Pierrot le fou*, whose protagonist, Ferdinand, flees from his deadening bourgeois existence for an experiment in spontaneity and violence with a woman named Marianne. The stultification of his previous life is dramatized in a cocktail party scene (resembling the early scenes in *Americana*), in which the characters' conversations consist entirely of commercials for such products as Olds Rocket 88 and Odorono deodorant. Like David, Ferdinand is schizoid, claiming to have "mechanisms" for listening and for seeing, but none for unifying his personality. Asked about his previous life, he says, "I was in television." Ferdinand's adventure, like Bell's, is self-consciously patterned after the films of B-movie director Samuel Fuller, who appears in a cameo, talking portentously about film.[12] The psychological purpose of David's film is concisely expressed in another scene in *Pierrot*, when Ferdinand and Marianne watch an earlier Godard film, *Le grand escroc*, in which Jean Seberg

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12. This self-reflexive strategy (used as well in *Le mepris* [*Contempt*], when director Fritz Lang makes pronouncements on the art of film) is employed in David's segment 14, in which Simmons St. Jean, David's college film instructor, appears to offer similarly pompous declarations (315).

says, "we are carefully looking for . . . that moment when the imaginary character has given way to the real one . . . if there ever was a real one."

The style of Bell's film, however, most clearly resembles that of *Masculin féminin*, which is subtitled "A film in 15 precise acts," the same number of segments that David films during the time of the novel, and which uses the "interview technique" virtually throughout its running time. For Godard's characters, as for Bell, nothing exists prior to mechanical reproduction: even Paul's declarations of love are spoken not to Madeleine but to a recording machine. More significantly, Godard dramatizes the conflict between "Marx and Coca-Cola"—the same conflict at work in David's film and psyche—in a variety of ways. In one scene Robert, one of the male protagonists, reads the instructions for becoming a perfect "revolutionary machine," while his interlocutor, Catherine, washes dishes, a box of Tide detergent prominently displayed in the background. The scene prompts us to question not only whether the revolution requires males to help with the dishes but more generally whether becoming a "revolutionary machine" is truly preferable to—or even different from—being a consuming machine. Like those of the revolutionaries in "The Uniforms," the politics of Godard's characters seem as much a matter of fashion as of commitment. So thoroughly molded are they by these two seemingly opposed ideologies that they are not even aware of any contradiction between them.

So much for Godard; but what about Coca-Cola? Segment 4 of David's film dramatizes his views on consumerism through multiple frames. The camera records eight minutes of a TV game show, including the commercials, while Fort Curtis resident Glen Yost (as Clinton Bell) is interviewed from off-camera. He describes television as "an electronic form of packaging" in which the image is the most important product (270). TV and advertising are symbiotically related: both make the viewer "want to change the way he lives" by appealing to the "universal third person" which advertising has discovered and which it exploits "to express the possibilities open to the consumer. To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third

person singular might possibly be fulfilled" (270).[13] This universal third person is not a real person, however, just as the chief products of postmodern society are not commodities; instead, as Guy Debord has famously argued (16), both are images.

Glen/Clinton's formulation also echoes Fredric Jameson's discussion of what he calls "seriality," the characteristic condition of consumer society, in which "the uniqueness of my own experience is undermined by a secret anonymity, a statistical quality. Somehow I feel that I am no longer central, that I am merely doing just what everyone else is doing. . . . [But] *everybody else* feels exactly the same way" (76). The result is an endless circuit in which "everyone project[s] onto everyone else an optical illusion of centrality as 'public opinion' " (77). Through such means, the argument continues, the discourses of consumer capitalism have so thoroughly colonized the self that each individual conceives of him- or herself primarily (if not only) as a consumer. All conditions, states of mind, relationships, and processes are transformed into needs for products, into commodities, or into the results of consuming. Nothing is immune to consumption; nothing is prior to the image. But while advertising discovered this person, it didn't invent him; in fact, says Glen/Clinton, he "came over on the *Mayflower*" (271). Not only is advertising a quintessential form of Americana, but America is no more than an advertisement.

Whether advertising really operates in so sinister and totalizing a way is debatable. Certainly successful commercials aim to incite desires and then illustrate ways to fulfill them, while preying most upon those with limited access to other information and opportunities—children, the poor, the ignorant. And yet, as Judith Williamson has argued, even the most unsubtle ads leave gaps for the viewer or reader to fill with personal images, thereby inviting participation in the economy of meaning created by advertising's "currency of signs" (14). Indeed, Glen/Clinton notes that consuming dreamers realize the limitations on their dreams. Recognizing

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13. DeLillo demonstrates an acute understanding of the adman's mentality. Glen/Clinton's words echo those of advertising executive Jerry Goodis, who declared, "Advertising doesn't always mirror how people are acting, but how they're dreaming" (qtd. in Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 152).

these limits, advertising has learned to exploit the "anti-image"—the slice-of-life commercial bringing movie-fueled desires back down to earth—that counteracts the image (272). This conflict is also reflected in David's psyche and film. While modeling himself after Burt and Kirk—bigger-than-life images of masculinity—he nonetheless makes a film based on the styles of Ozu, Bresson, Clarke—epitomes of the "anti-image." Godard's films encapsulate the conflict: although Godard once defined the cinema as "research in the form of spectacle" ("Marginal Notes" 181), his films aim to explode our passive acceptance of spectacle by constantly upsetting our expectations about plot, form, and character. What does DeLillo think? As usual, he remains elusive: his use of multiples frames in the "Clinton" sequence permits David to editorialize only through an actor pretending to be his father; indeed, DeLillo's voice is audible only as a series of echoes, leaving gaps that force us to question the source and veracity of the argument, as well as our own complicity with the conditions described. DeLillo thus uses Clinton's monologue to generate dialogues between himself and his readers, himself and his narrator, his narrator and his alter egos—this is another lesson in the effect of echoes.

The collision and collusion between image and anti-image, high culture and consumer culture, is forcefully dramatized by David's repeated appropriation of a scene from Akira Kurosawa's 1952 film *Ikiru* ("To Live"). *Ikiru* concerns an aging bureaucrat named Watanabe, whose life, like David's, is an essay in "the nature of diminishing existence." Watanabe's vitality has been crushed by years of toil in the Citizens Section of the city government; when he learns that he has stomach cancer, he is forced to examine that sterile, stultifying life. Rather than simply running away, as David does, Watanabe uses his position to help a group of local women salvage a swampy field and turn it into a playground. In a moving scene near the end of the film, Watanabe is filmed sitting on a swing amid falling snow, softly singing to himself a sad song from childhood. David adapts this scene for the seventh segment of his film, in which Sully, filmed swinging on a snowless playground, substitutes for Watanabe and for David's cancer-ridden mother, herself addicted to "childhood things" (138). The scene constitutes David's attempt to generate the kind of retrospective epiphany that

Watanabe undergoes. Here again Bell attempts to transform in-
tertexual echoes into original sounds.[14] Its effect, however, remains
ambiguous, as Sully's generative force weakens "what was for [Da-
vid] an all too overarching moment" (290).

Ikiru reappears in unexpected places. In segment 4, Glen/Clinton
tells of a mouthwash commercial he once made in which a trium-
phant race car driver gets the girl by using the right oral hygiene
product. But the client turned it down, because in the background
of the celebrating crowd was an aged Asian man who violated the
ad's atmosphere of "health, happiness, freshness, mouth-appeal"
(274). The anti-image intruded upon the image. Of course, the old
man migrated from another archive, David's trove of images from
classic cinema—it is Watanabe. His unlikely presence brings to light
what the ad is trying to suppress: that postwar prosperity was built
upon the (Japanese) ruins of war; the suffering of all those involved
in the war; the fear of death that lies behind ads for personal care
products and behind Clinton's competitive profession. The appear-
ance of Watanabe also explains why David has decided to abandon
the network: he identifies himself with Watanabe and fears his own
living death.

The same fragment of Ikiru reappears in segment 8, in which
Glen/Clinton narrates "his" (actually a blend of Glen's and Clin-
ton's) experiences in the Bataan Death March. Just outside Orani he
and the other prisoners experienced a collective vision of a Japanese
officer who appeared to be an old man swinging, singing a song,
and blessing them (296)—Watanabe again. In one sense, Watanabe
here represents Ann (who also died from cancer) and the peaceful
family life Clinton has lost forever. In another sense, the old man is
Clinton himself, crushed by the war and enduring a death-in-life
similar to Watanabe's. Thus when, in the final image of this se-
quence, Clinton recalls burying a Filipino prisoner alive, we recog-

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14. After filming his initial segment, David phones Simmons St. Jean to ask questions
about the scene in Ikiru: "One: did Kurosawa shoot up at the old man? Two: did he shoot
the whole scene without cutting? Three: did the old man swing on the swing or did he
remain stationary?" (248). St. Jean reveals his fraudulence when he admits that he has
never seen Kurosawa's masterpiece. For the record, the answers are (1) he shoots from
just below eye level; (2) Kurosawa cuts once, when moving from a side-angle to a frontal
shot of Watanabe; (3) the old man swings almost imperceptibly as he sings.

nize it as a symbol of his own voluntary self-interment ("He's buried alive but still breathing" [285]) as well as of David's oedipal wish to kill him. *Ikiru* has mutated into a primal scene in which the son is haunted by the mother-as-Watanabe and wants to replace the father-as-Watanabe. His fixation on the old man demonstrates that David is trying simultaneously to bury and to unearth his parents, at once to assemble and disassemble the montage of the past. Near the end of the Bataan sequence, Glen/Clinton blames his country for treasuring "the sacrifice of its sons, making slogans out of their death and selling war bonds with it or soap for all we knew" (297). The implication is that twentieth-century war is simply consumerism carried on by other means—and vice versa. Thus the insertion of Watanabe—emblem of the "anti-image"—in these sequences signifies David's wish to create a cinematic form that would escape the cycle of consumption, a set of images that would exist, paradoxically, outside of the regime of images that he perceives as false and inauthentic, images that would do for him what the playground does for Watanabe.

With these goals in mind, David interviews "himself" in segments 6, 10, and 12. First "David" interrogates David's project, recalling how he once filmed an aged black couple at a demonstration, believing that he was celebrating their dignity. Now he realizes that he was patronizing them and cheapening their suffering (286): as Paul recognizes at the end of *Masculin féminin*, the "observation of behavior . . . insidiously substitutes an attempt to form value judgments" that may not even echo the observer's real point of view. In these framing segments David confronts, like Paul, what Louis Giannetti calls the "twin dangers of subjectivity and objectivity" (47)—or more accurately, the collapse of the distinction between them. Both 6 and 12 also function as temporal mirrors in which "David" (Austin) addresses the future David: "Hello to myself in the remote future, watching this in fear and darkness. . . . I hope you've finally become part of your time, David" (286). In 12, however, Austin/David just stands silently against a wall, ready to answer questions that the 1999 David (who narrates the novel) might pose. But the older David has no questions; what remains is a silence of twenty seconds—the length of a commercial.

Not only does this mute tableau suggest that the younger David

has no answers for the older one; it also mocks David's exploration of the past. Indeed, while these moments highlight the consistency of identity over time, they also illustrate that Bell's existence has been "twenty-eight years in the movies," a pastiche of Anthony Quinn's strongman in Fellini's *La strada*, the dance of death in Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, Albert Finney falling down the stairs in Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, "Burt Lancaster toweling his chest[,] . . . Bell looking at the poster of Belmondo looking at the poster of purposeful Bogart. Old man on the swing, Watanabe, singing to his unseen infancy," and Shane riding toward the mountains (287).[15] Not simply "images of unchanging male power," as LeClair claims (54), these framed frames are also figures of abandonment, alienation, and death. They reconfirm that David's identity, like that of Belmondo's Michel, remains a performance, an image made in the "image and likeness of images," a copy of a copy.

The final segment of David's film restages the confrontation with his mother in part 2, with Sully playing Ann Bell and Bud Yost as David. Even as he films it, David realizes that his portrayal will be an anticlimactic version of the remembered anticlimax. He perceives that this unified, loving family possesses a quality that he has never known and that his film cannot capture. Watching in the dim light, he wonders if he will ever screen the sequence, and if so, why "this mute soliloquy of woman and boy should mean anything more, even to me, than what it so clearly was, face of one and head of the other, and I wondered of this commercial whether it would sell the product" (317). His "very own commercial, a life in the life" (317) may have been designed to depict the typified and simplified lives offered by advertising (Schudson 215), in which problems are solved easily by consuming, but instead it has enmeshed him further with the past. Placing himself into the third person has been a

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15. In the original version of the novel (Pocket edition 273–74), this passage of self-recognition is considerably longer and contains several additional allusions, including those to Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky, The Agony and the Ecstasy* (with Kirk Douglas), and *Bonnie and Clyde*; to Sydney Greenstreet (misspelled) "twice his size in panama white" (in John Huston's 1942 *Across the Pacific*); to a scene from Richard Lester's *The Knack (and How to Get It)*; to Orson Welles as Harry Lime in *The Third Man*; to the glass ball of snow in the opening scene of *Citizen Kane*; and so on. The edited version sharpens and focuses the thematic point of these allusions.

paradoxical attempt to make his past more real by filming it, fram-
ing it, making it artificial; he has striven to be "objective," to escape
from the proliferation of images. But the transformation of experi-
ence into film images merely reframes them. Still "listening for a
sound behind" him (318), David has heard only the echo of his own
recording instruments. Yet he continues filming, as if "to obliterate
the memory by mocking it, no power at all, spilling seed into the
uncaptured light" (317). The masturbatory quality of his words im-
plies that the light and sounds of the past can neither be captured
nor banished: to abolish the echoes is to silence the singer as well.
Not only is the "actual" experience unrepresentable, because any
representation always leaves a gap between signified and signifier,
but his film has magnified his limitations: like his father, he can
make only commercials. Ironically, in striving to liberate himself
from consumption, he has packaged himself into commodity, com-
mercial, and self-consumer all at once. Moving from real to reel, he
has "consumed" himself but has left the sought-after essence
unreached, unconsumed.

After David's oedipal wish is granted through sexual inter-
course with Sully, he again confronts disappointment when he
learns that she permitted it out of pity for his illness. Thus at the
end of part 3 he leaves Fort Curtis and his friends to seek out "the
final extreme"—an erasure of self somewhere beyond representa-
tion. Part 4 returns us to the narrative frame, as the older, is-
landed David meditates on his experiences from the future. "Lit-
tle of myself seems to be left" (345), he writes, as if his film and
the book we have been reading have used up his stock of images.
The text has sought to create meaning, while the film is "an exer-
cise in diametrics which attempts to unmake meaning" (347); yet
their conjunction has produced no synthesis, but only an "ulti-
mate schizogram"—a conflicted message that mirrors David's psy-
chic fission. Even worse, David soon grasps that his quest has
been "merely a literary venture, an attempt to find pattern and
motive, to make of something wild a squeamish thesis on the
essence of the nation's soul" (349). That is, he understands that
the pursuit of pure origins is itself a clichéd movie image, a piece
of Americana available for consumption.

Traveling across the arid Southwest, David pursues his dream of

liberating purity in an automobile—ironically, perhaps the most po-
tent symbol of twentieth-century consumer technology, one cele-
brated and condemned in Godard's *Breathless, Pierrot le fou,* and
Weekend. On a test track in Texas he experiences the same "montage
of speed, guns, torture, rape, orgy and consumer packaging" (33)
from which he had tried to escape (LeClair 46), albeit in a cruder and
perhaps more honest form; like the characters in *Weekend,* he in-
dulges in a violent orgy that marks his movement from advanced
savagery to primitive barbarism. This grotesque scene and David's
near rape by a traveling homosexual near the end of the novel are
narrated without inflection or comment, a technique that, LeClair
argues, proves the limitations of David's insights: he does not per-
ceive (although DeLillo does) that he is merely replicating the corpo-
rate behavior from which he has fled (LeClair 48). But I think he
does: that's why he runs from it. Nonetheless, David has nowhere
to go. It may be that only the older David, alone on his island, under-
stands the full horror of these "archetypes of the dismal mystery,
sons and daughters of the archetypes" (377). Still, a problem re-
mains: as one character says in *Pierrot le fou,* "once one knows what
one wants, where to go, what one is, everything still remains a mys-
tery." Thus the older David's solution—withdrawal—seems as un-
satisfactory as the younger David's resigned return to the Holly-
wood movie in which he was living. If even the older David has not
learned the lessons of echoes, then his constant reviewing of his
footage—and the memoir we are reading—is merely a sterile exer-
cise in narcissistic nostalgia.

But the older David does seem to have realized that subjectivity is
not a product but a process growing out of a constant surplus of
signification and narrative, that those most abject or "dark" aspects
of the self—also sources of treasured moments of illumination—
may elude representation (Docherty 185). That is, the narrator Bell
may recognize that he cannot master or control even the images of
himself that he musters up in his own work. Instead of adhering to
such outmoded notions of control and identity, he may become
truly "part of his time" by accepting heterogeneity, belatedness,
lack of control—his "postness." He might even accept his schizoid
psyche as a survival tool in a schizoid world and learn to tolerate the
necessity for endless self-dialogue and interview. If he can relin-

quish control of self-representation, then perhaps he can "unmake" the meanings he has inherited and thus understand that "objectivity" is as chimerical as univocal truth. If so, David may in a different respect become the "ultimate schizogram" (347)—a message that paradoxically represents the impossibility of full comprehension.

The structure of *Americana* presents another set of challenges—formal, thematic, self-reflexive—to writers of radical intent. Its series of shifting frames and redoubled echoes relates consumerism to a revolution in economies of identity, while also offering a radical model for characterization in which contradictions need not—cannot—be resolved. It interrogates the possibility of authentic political or artistic activity in a world consumed by cinematic and capitalist representations, asking whether the quest for authenticity, for revolution, for purity inevitably becomes a consumer product. The novel's conclusion, in which David returns to New York, presumably to take up his previous life, also rejects conventional notions of plot structure. Thus in undermining his inchoate narrative of apocalypse—that unveiling movement from "mystification to enlightenment and revelation" (Docherty 184)—DeLillo may be suggesting how novels (and perhaps films) can avoid becoming mere merchandise. By demonstrating the irretrievability of authentic origins, *Americana* also embodies the impossibility of ends—whether of plots, of quests, or of self-making and unmaking. If so, DeLillo's unveiling of the truth that David—and by implication, we, too—need not, and cannot, stop hearing echoes may be the most important lesson of all.

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