

Tension and Tense in Don DeLillo's Art of Prose

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

(DeLillo 2001, 7).

This emblematic *intrada* in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist* sets the tone for the ensuing cadences of the physical and metaphysical quest that Lauren Hartke, the body artist of the title, will undertake. All the elements of an extended metaphor, stretching throughout the whole of the novella, already appear in this compact depiction of a mood. There is 'time', 'wind', 'web' and 'spider', each adumbrating the sense of a conflict between design ('web', 'time') and what is inscrutably beyond that design ('wind', 'storm'), yet affecting it intimately. Design naturally connotes the idea of language, which is pitted against the inexpressible, that something beyond language.

"Time seems to pass" – this declaration in isolation places the word "seems" in an accentuated, or rather, problematic spot in the middle of a statement that starts out with the gradually building force of the letters "t" in 'time' and "s" in 'seems' culminating and at once going out through the repeated pattern of "t" and "s" in a quick, so to speak, aural flash; 'time seems to pass'. "Seems" is underlined here and, as I have mentioned above, sets the key into which everything after this is orchestrated. So the word "seems" is not stamped only between the words "time" and "pass", but between the concepts as well; indicating the metaphysical quest impending. In other words, the copula "seems" and its tensive flare-up as a word as well as a concept indicates a "physical" and "meta-physical" issue that will serve as the dynamism of the text where, as a matter of fact, this dynamism of "seem" ensues not from a "kinetic" but primarily from a strained, static sort of text.

This minute analysis is not only to emphasize the composite nature of the thematic and formal helix characteristic of the novella, but also to draw attention to its poised and focused quality. Don DeLillo in trying to transcend the predicate of "time passes", in trying to breach (the confidence in) this temporal predisposition, by circumscribing its seeming nature attempts to dissolve the imaginative limitations imposed upon humans by his distinct narrative technique. That the attempt may result in failure is beside the point. As Arthur Saltzman had it: "That vision is inconclusive does not disqualify its insights. Say rather that the tentativeness of vision –identified by its liberal admission policies, its eagerness to trope and associate, and all the broad vocabulary of speculation–tries to coax the world out of its mute stringencies" (Saltzman 2000, 15–16). Every "breakthrough" inevitably contains the seeds of its "breakdown", that is (op. cit. 17). DeLillo's thematic concern, that of dramatizing the attempted transcendence of temporality and in that corporality is conveyed, amplified and achieved preponderantly through the formal configurations applied in the text. In tracing how the attempt is built up and terminated, or rather, suspended first I would like to analyze the formal, architectual framework and then the content within that framework, the thematic aspects of the text. Although first of all a frame of reference is needed to the proper sequence of the argument.

The background

DeLillo has never hid it under the bushel that he is strongly connected to the problematics of language, which is not surprising at all, given the basic necessities of his occupation. What could be genuine about him, though, is his excessive tendency in being language-conscious, or rather, word-conscious. It is no wonder then when he says that

...the basic work is built around the sentence. This is what I mean when I call myself a writer. I construct sentences. There's a rhythm I hear that drives me through a sentence. And the words typed on the white page have a sculptural quality. They form odd correspondences. They match up not just through meaning but through sound and look. The rhythm of a sentence will accommodate a certain number of syllables. One syllable too many, I look for another word. There's always another word that means nearly the same thing, and if it doesn't then I'll consider altering the meaning of a sentence to keep the rhythm, the syllable beat. I'm completely willing to let language press meaning upon me. Watching the way in which words match up, keeping the balance in a sentence—these are sensuous pleasures. I might want *very* and *only* in the same sentence, spaced in a particular way, exactly so far apart. I might want *rapture* matched with *danger*—I like to match word endings. I type rather than write longhand because I like the way words and letters look when they come off the hammers onto the page—finished, printed, beautifully formed
(<http://www.perival.com/delillo/ddwriting.html>).

This material attraction is one quality of his deep connection to language. Another, of course, is his metaphysically oriented attraction that manifests itself the most in his novels' recurrent topos. For the platform that DeLillo provides for his (cultural) themes, as David Cowart (in his book titled *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*) also argues, is typically embedded in a meditation on linguistic issues, such as the notion of total interconnectedness¹, the connection between narrative and power², the possibility of redemption³, etc.).

The central issue in these books, I think, is that there is a fundamental tension between reality⁴ and design, or, language, which is inescapable but is not without its, so to say, redemptive merits. What proves essential is that in tension there is a source for dynamism, vitality, or as Bergson terms it an "élan vital". There is, in other words, a gap to be bridged; an impetus to produce, for want of a better phrasing, a platform for a poetic prose propelling poise. Before the analysis, though, let me underpin the rationale behind this tension; for it seems, as James Guetti avers (in connection with Melville, Faulkner and Conrad) that "the greatest success of language itself, is to create a potential of meaning that must remain unrealized, a tension between order and disorder that cannot be resolved" (Guetti 1967, 108).

Given the fact that humankind is capable to see, feel, comprehend or conceptualize only in its own terms (through its own particular biological and mental apparatuses), which does not at all guarantee valid vantage as to the unmediated perception of reality; in all probability there must be a separate sphere of humanly processed world with its own boundaries and reality. Supposedly, within this sphere of reality the orientation is possible through such coordinate systems as the biologically, culturally, or historically determined spatial and temporal dimensions of cognizance. In this vein of thought a constructivist streak is inherent in the understanding of cognition.

¹ "Everything is connected" (DeLillo 1997, 825).

² "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists" (DeLillo 1991, 41).

³ "[T]he fallen wonder of the world" (DeLillo 1989, 339).

⁴ The Reality with the capital, that is, which is not a human(ized) reality

According to the so-called evolutionary epistemology, not only man as species but also man's cognitive apparatus has to be viewed as a product of evolution. By the process of adaptation to the environment this apparatus has become fit for yielding as much knowledge about the world as is necessary for the species to survive. But we are not entitled to assume that the picture of the world as produced by that apparatus is a true and objective mirror-image of the world "an sich". Visual perception, for instance, must not be thought of as a neutral (re)presentation of something immediately given; rather it must be viewed as the organized output of our cognitive apparatus the input of which is a chaotic mass of sensory stimuli

(Sebeok 1994, 230).

In other words, humans should be regarded as similar to operationally closed systems where cognition "coincides with re-cognition and presentation becomes representation" (Nöth 1990, 179); or, like Maturanesque autopoietic systems because (it is inescapable that) humans "behave self-referentially. They form semiotically closed systems ... since their cognition takes place only as the triggering of neural processes that are specified by the system's own structure" (ibid.).

The above mentioned "semiotically closed systems" automatically brings to mind the most important semiotic system of all, which in its ubiquitous presence in the human realm underlies all forms of signification, and which is absolutely relevant in the (literary) case of this argument; and it is language. As I have already mentioned, presumably there is a fundamental disparity between language, the human matrix about reality, and Reality. More than usually this disparity is the seminal diving board for novelists, especially from the modernists onward. But, where exactly can we place DeLillo on a continuum that is stretching along the axis of, say, representation? Is he closer to the side which still believes and looks for the direct representation and thus recuperation of reality or to that side which acknowledges and revels in the impossibility of such a project?

According to the view of those who hold the latter attitude to be the adequate condition for inquiry, and in line with the above mentioned tenets of "evolutionary epistemology" it will be clear that there is an inherent arbitrariness involved in language. This realization partly originates from the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure who in his famous essay, the *Course in General Linguistics*, propounded his views on the arbitrary nature of signs and their systematic interconnection. The most important tenet in this essay was that "in language there are only differences ... [and] [w]hether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistics system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system" (Rivkin & Ryan 1998, 88). The discipline that later assimilated and subsumed these groundbreaking assumptions was structuralism, a field that assumes the presence of an underlying structure and order beneath every phenomena of the world (op. cit. 334), and that, as the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* circumscribes it,

rejects the notion that *ideas* exist in some transcendental realm of their own, independent of language and the various cultural codes which determine the limits of thought at any given time. Structuralism takes the opposite view, that concepts are possible only insofar as they exist within a certain intelligible *structure* of meaning, the effects of which are mostly unconscious but none the less decisive. What counts as "knowledge" will always be determined very largely by selective codes and conventions which work to validate certain kinds of discourse and to exclude others

(Sebeok 1994, 986).

Opposed to this, in defiance of the view of the human cognition as a linguistic prison-house, though, there is an optimistic tradition in search of an organic, unmediated connection to the world. In his book, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Umberto Eco portrays the tradition especially present in the European sphere of culture which is committed to find a cure for the confounded languages of humans by inventing or even trying to discover the common and perfect language

for humankind; the language that is in total accordance and harmony with the world. The most important mainspring for this tradition, we read, is the Bible itself where the myth of a prelapsarian Adamic language can be identified in such passages from the genesis as the following: “out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought [them] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that [was] the name thereof” (Genesis 2:19). And from this point on, until Babel “the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech” (Genesis 11:1), but then “the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9) resulting in the loss of the primordial language. The concept of the postlapsarian language represents therefore the corrupt and misplaced primordial language as a result of which the one-to-one correspondence and immediate relationship with the things in and of the world was ultimately lost. Thus words became signs and signs, in turn, became arbitrary. Hence the hope and hence the faith, in the possibility of harmony between men and cosmos.

Positioning DeLillo along the outlined continuum is not as easy as it may appear. In a score of interviews DeLillo speaks about his concerns regarding the mysterious ways and attributes of language. In an interview with Tom LeClair in 1983 he says: “I do wonder if there is something we haven’t come across. Is there another, clearer language? Will we speak it and hear it when we die? Did we know it before we were born?”. The issue of speaking in tongues, glosolalia, intrigues him very much; and the malleable, open mind of children also. “I think we feel, perhaps superstitiously, that children have a direct route to, have direct contact to the kind of natural truth that eludes us as adults. There is something they know but cannot tell us. Or there is something they remember which we’ve forgotten” (in Letricchia 1991, 64). It is enough to think about the number of infantile characters in the novels to see how relevant this issue is for DeLillo. There is Tap Axton in *The Names*, Wilder Gladney in *White Noise* or Mr Tuttle in *The Body Artist* who all represent a certain form of (linguistic) transcendence, which reminds one actually of transcendentalist tenets according to which innocence, like the innocence of children, and feelings, and intuitions are of supreme importance in attaining deeper levels of truth. In a sentiment like this “the way back into a divine nature [is] through the innocent eye” (Tony Tanner in Barbour 1973, 55); and to gain this clearer vision the rule is to “unlearn reason and behold the world with child-like passive admiration” (ibid.). David Cowart in his book on DeLillo and language claims that his “work represent[s] a rejection of the postmodern subject ... as nearly inseparable from the semiotic ‘signal soup’ [because in DeLillo’s view] the theoretically obsolete individual [is] the only viable site of resistance to the ubiquitous terror of post-modern life (Cowart 2002, 5). Cowart asserts that “If there is a resister it is DeLillo himself. If there is a site of resistance, it is language, the very medium that supposedly exemplifies the hopelessness of laying foundation, making a stand” (ibid.). In sum,

DeLillo does not defer to the poststructuralist view of language as a system of signifiers that refer only to other signifiers in infinite regression. DeLillo’s texts undermine this postmodernist gospel. Fully aware that language is maddeningly circular, maddeningly subversive of its own supposed referentiality, the author nonetheless affirms something numinous in its mysterious properties (ibid.).

Yet, it is important to note in connection with all these that what DeLillo considers most significant is above all the potentiality in language, the elasticity of the medium that, as Jon Roberts puts it, develops “the habits of pluralism in the reader” (Roberts, 2002, 54). Naturally, the idea of elasticity is not to be conflated with a concrete, particular way of speaking, with adopting a certain, definite way of language use. There is no intention of arguing for a trans-

cidental form of language. Understandably, that is an attitude to be opposed in order to avoid, for example, the acceptance of such totalitarian narratives as that of fundamentalists and terrorists. Roberts argues that in *Mao II*. "in stark contrast and opposition to the terrorists of and against language, DeLillo writes his sentences against the emergence of [a] permanently clarifying context, against the authoritarian grand narratives" (op. cit. 57) thus encouraging a pluralist mindset. In DeLillo's version it is put thus: "The book depicts a fight for human imagination - between persons representing individuality, and the anonymous masses, which so often have been the audience for totalitarian and military rulers or terrorists" (in Desalm 1992). The same is true if one considers the linguistic implications in *The Names*. The terror perpetrated by the cult which in a desperate attempt to reify language and even terminably connect it to the "things" in and of the world, ritually kill people based on the initials of their name and the city in which they live. This violent attempt at pre-lapsarization "in order to attempt the binding of symbol and object into one-to-one correspondence through a terminal act of connection [results in that] the killers superimpose uncertainty with pattern" (Bryant 1987, 19), which blows out the most necessary quality in language, its figurative, aleatory nature. The wonder inheres in the leakage⁵ that offers variability, thus momentum to the linguistic presence. The principle of this gratifying potential appears in Tap's blurry narrative. Even if this narrative is freighted with misspellings, it proffers a foil to the terror inherent in the glib semantic associations when using words; in his rapture the father says:

I found these mangled words exhilarating. He'd made them new again, made me see how they worked, what they really were. They were ancient things, secret, reshapable. ... The spoken poetry in those words. ... His ... misrenderings ... seemed to contain curious perceptions about the words themselves, second and deeper meanings, original meanings

(op.cit. 313).

This is the reason behind DeLillo's fascination with the transgressive and transsubstantiative dimensions of language. This is why he can be seen as the apologist for the vicarious and indirect mode in which language (inevitably functions and) is capable of taxing the imagination.

A picture is like the masses: a multitude of impressions. A book on the other hand, with its linear advance of words and characters seems to be connected to individual identity. I think of a child learning to read, building up an identity, word by word and story by story, the book in its hand. Somehow pictures always lead to people as masses. Books belong to individuals

(in Desalm 1992).

To revert to my question then as to where to position DeLillo on a representational continuum, I am confident now in my answer that naturally somewhere in the middle, in between the "paradise" of transparency and the "prison-house" of mediation. The platform for his linguistic endeavour is provided for by its very confines and limitations from whence the motivation to extend and even surpass those confines gains its very momentum. In fact, this is the issue that I see rather aptly dramatized in *The Body Artist*, the structure of which has yet remained to be addressed.

⁵ As Paula Bryant puts it in a neat metaphor, language "is the net [humans] seize upon in order to pull their experience neatly together, yet reality keeps escaping through the warp and weft" (Bryant 1987, 17).

The Body Artist

This mesmerizing piece of prose suspended in both an emotional and intellectual levitation imparts the atmosphere of intense grief and its eventual acceptance. After Rey Robles' suicide his young wife Lauren Hartke, a body artist, is left with nothing but the immensity of grief, a sprawling house isolated in the barrens, and a strange, inscrutable creature appearing after the shocking event, who canalizes her grief into a "redemptive" performance art. Tersely put, *The Body Artist* is concerned with the quest for transcendence on the thematic as well as on the formal level. Importantly, what appears in the content is amplified by the way it is written and then realizing this irrefragable interaction, the way in which the text is conveyed, complemented with the content, communicates the abstract meaning of the text, which is about the success inherent in failure. In the terms of the novella, that is, the emotional condition of mourning is presented through a formal stasis, which in turn implies, by the depiction of the struggle exerted to overcome it, the outcome of the linguistic tension raised in the face of reality. First, let us consider then the frame and linguistic design that renders it possible that an emotionally strained aura is produced.

The design

Let me quote again, at length, the exposition, for the major formal themes immediately occur here. The cadence and the pace of the passage grabs and arrests the attention instantly:

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

(DeLillo 2001, 7).

The world happens, pause, unrolling into moments, pause, and you stop to glance, pause. The recurring "l" and "e" sounds begin to build a lulling quality already. This is enhanced in the following, where the sounds of "s" and "t" are interwoven with the vowel sounds; there is a quickness of light, pause, and a sense of things outlined, precisely, and streaks of running luster on the bay. Next, a fluffy "f" tames the hissing "s" sounds and initiates the sound "w"; on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. Eventually, the pacifying "w" overtaking "s" and riding though a string of "d", "p" and "b" sounds all of a sudden stops short in the final "b"; the wind makes a sound in the pines, pause, and the world comes into being, irreversibly, and the spider rides the wind-swayed web. Pause. Thus through poetic propensities there is an attempt made to evoke the clarity of the moment, which is suspended through the sensuous sounds, like the spider in its web, especially suspended when it returns to its opening image of the spider.

For further random examples note the alliteration in these passages: "It felt like home, being here, and she raced through the days with their small ravishing routines" (op. cit. 32). The iterated "r" in the latter sentence is propped by "p" in the following: "[T]hat was part of the presence, specific to the prowling man", or blended with "s" in "the sky was very near, sprawled in star smoke" (op. cit. 37). Observe the interplay of "f", "w" and "d" in: "there were five birds on the feeder and they all faced outward, away from the food, and identically still" (op. cit. 53), or the "p", "d" and intermittent "g" leading to the exuberance of "i" in: "maybe it went deeper, the

poses she assumed and held for prolonged periods, the gyrate exaggerations, the snake shapes and flower bends, the prayerful spans of systematic breathing, life lived irreducibly as sheer respiration. First breathe, than pant, then gasp" (op. cit. 57). The "b" is softened by the final "t" cadence in: "she walked for miles through the blueberry barrens, in blowing mist, jacket fastened and tape reels turning" (op. cit. 69).

"When she started back she saw a blue jay perched atop the feeder. She stopped dead and held her breath" (op. cit. 21). In addition the rhyming quality also plays an important part; heed, for example, the incremental, more and more rhyming force of "o" in the following passage:

She began to work naked in cold room. She did her crossovers on the bare floor, and her pelvic stretches, which were mockingly erotic and erotic both, and her slow-motion repetitions of everyday gestures, checking the time on your wrist or turning to hail a cab, actions quoted by rote in another conceptual frame, many times over and now slower and over, with your mouth open in astonishment

(op. cit. 58).

There is also a perfect cadence in the tone of "i": "with bags of groceries in a gleaming cart and found him sitting in piss and shit" (op. cit. 64); or of the diphthong "ei": "days the same, paced and organized [...] days that moved so slow they ached" (op. cit. 32).

In short, the abundance of alliteration and rhymes along the lines imparts the sensuous and arresting aura of poetry, which most importantly bespeaks the tendency to dissociate with temporality. Surely, as the reader progresses forward in the text, he confronts a storyline in which the plot is absolutely secondary. The dominance of sequence is absent here, and what sets the pace is, to use John Coyle's expression, a "slowed-down or static aesthetic" (Coyle 2007, 31). In brief, a poised narrative results that in turn increases the tension within its linguistic elements.

"Don't touch it. I'll clean it up later" (81, 85, 93, 98, 100)

Although the poetic aspect of the prose alone would not develop a nearly frustrating tense quality in it were it not for the other narratorial decoys DeLillo deploys. "She wanted to disappear in Rey's smoke, be dead, be him, and she tore the wax paper along the serrated edge of the box and reached for the carton of bread crumbs" (DeLillo 2001, 34). This sole sentence, similarly to a number of others, serves as a nexus for discrete yet intimately bound narrative lines running simultaneously parallel to each other. As a matter of fact, the first mentioning of bread crumbs is on page 33, "There was a package of bread crumbs on one of the shelves in the pantry", which reappears on the next page. As for the wax paper, its sporadic appearance stretches throughout the novella. On page 33: "She knew she'd seen wax paper somewhere in a blue and something box", which after the nexus sentence above and three intervening lines later crops up again when: "The wax paper separated from the roll in a rat-a-tat sequence, advancing along the notched edge of the box, and she heard it along her spine, she thought". Two pages later we read about "an exactitude she knew in the bones that were separated by the disks that went rat-a-tat down her back" (op. cit. 37), which shows a sort of consummation of the metaphoric infusion initiated two pages earlier. Seventy-six pages later on page 113 there is a paragraph embedded within paragraphs also repeating a pattern (Kotka, the birds, ringing phone, etc.), which informs us that "She listened to the sound the wax paper made, advancing along the notched edge of the box when she tore the paper from the roll" (op. cit. 113) circumscribing it as if for the first time. The rhythmic ending of this sentence mirrors in a way the rhythmic, repetitive almost hypnotic pattern characterizing the whole of *The Body Artist*.

Joseph Frank in his seminal essay titled "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" asserts that certain "writers ideally intend the reader to apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (Frank 1991, 10). Somewhat boldly and rather partially I think he proposes a theory according to which "attention is fixed on the interplay of relationships within the immobilized time-area" (op. cit. 17) when the text "asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (op. cit. 15). Though disregarding the temporal aspect, which in its (tentative) progress, in my view, is primary in conveying a tension, is not appropriate, still as Frank observes the underlying principle of such a unitary textual comprehension is "reflexive reference", the emphatic presence of which I see seminal in DeLillo's narrative. A reader of a spatially warped text according to Frank is forced "by continually fitting fragments together and keeping allusions in mind until, by reflexive reference, he can link them to their complements" (op. cit. 20), which in turn results in a poised narrative "frustrating the reader's normal expectation of a sequence" (op. cit. 12). This is a realization I regard substantial in regarding the subsequent features I highlight in connection with *The Body Artist*. As Mr Frank says, in *Nightwood* there is "a pattern arising from the spatial interweaving of images and phrases independently of any time-sequence of narrative action" (op. cit. 52), but before rushing to conclusions about there being a thematic pattern in *The Body Artist* let us consider more thoroughly "the spatial interweaving of images and phrases" involved in it.

The last phrase of the first chapter is the same as the central line of the exposition: "on a strong bright day after a storm" (DeLillo 2001, 7, 25). To use an always handy figure as a comparison to the repetitive pattern observable in this texture consider the building blocks of lego as the elements of the narrative where the force driving it onward, the progressive aspect of it is not represented as a continual, linear construction resulting in, say, a tower of a story but rather in a scattered milieu of set colors strewn on each other, blending still retaining their distinct colors, and at the same time communicating some form of a pattern. The double sentence of "She chopped firewood" and "The dead times were the best" (op. cit. 38) referring to a webcam (in Kotka) constitutes a pattern of meditative lambency when the former is repeated after 22 and the latter after 16 lines. Similarly, a repetition hindering the temporal dimension of the narrative appears when the distinct block of "You separate the Sunday sections" on page 18 regarding the newspaper, after 27 lines gets repeated on the next page. The intervening 27 lines on the other hand are the aimless chunks of conversation between Rey and Lauren that is protracted from the initial "I want to say something but what" (op. cit. 8) 10 pages earlier. Furthermore, from that inchoate comment onward different building blocks of the narrative emerge, such as the strange hair in Lauren's mouth and the subsequent contemplation about it, the toast and the soya (its smell), the viscosity of orange juice, the drone of the radio (turned on and off), Rey's ritual smoking, the demarcation of properties⁶, the birds at the feeder, the old kettle, the intricate lines of retroactive and belated awareness⁷, the milk,

⁶ "It was his coffee and his cup. They shared the newspaper but it was actually, unspokenly, hers" (op. cit. 7-8). Plus "a short pale strand, that wasn't hers and wasn't his" (op. cit. 10); and: "It was her newspaper. The telephone was his except when she was calling the weather. They both used the computer but it was spiritually hers" (op. cit. 11); or in the nexus with the hair-, and bird-line of the narrative: "But it wasn't one of his, the hair she'd found in her mouth. Employees must wash hands before leaving toilet [...] It was his toast but she'd eaten nearly half of it. It was his coffee and cup [...] The phone was his. The birds were hers, the sparrows pecking at sunflower seeds. The hair was somebody else's (op. cit. 20).

⁷ As if enlarging the dreamy quality of the narrative several passages recount the semi-conscious frame of mind of Lauren as in: "She got up to get something. She looked at the kettle and realized that wasn't it. She knew it would come to her because it always did and then it did. (op. cit. 16); or

the fridge, the counter, and some other minor elements. These separate blocks are blended in a way that their loose, fraying ends are interwoven or dovetailed into a homogeneous texture like that of the salted, oiled, onioned and baconed sanctuary of scrambled egg. Hence the preponderance of incomplete sentences, like: "What's it called, the lever. She'd pressed down the lever to get his bread go to brown" (op. cit. 9). Effectively, the first part of this paragraph is indented one page earlier within the fringes of the cereal-, and bird-block of the narrative (alloyed with the block of demarcation): "then the toaster thing popped and she flipped it down again because it took two flips to get the bread to go brown and he absently nodded his acknowledgement because it was his toast and his butter and then he turned on the radio and got the weather" (op. cit. 8). The radio and the birds, in fact, appear almost on every page of this chapter, but

What is more, as it is implicated above, the pattern of recurring blocks is not only local (restricted to one chapter) but generic also, arching through virtually hundred pages, and thus with a much more significant distance the temporal unfolding and dimension of the narrative is hindered almost definitively. In addition, for instance, to the threefold occurrence of the strange hair-line (11, 12, 20) in the first chapter, on page 69 it recurs when Lauren

felt something wispy at the edge of her mouth, half in half out, that could only be a hair. She plucked at it and brushed with her thumb, a strand of hair from the washcloth, and she couldn't feel it on her face anymore and she looked at him and looked at her hand and maybe it was just an itch

(op. cit. 69).

Similarly, the pine-scented Ajax recurs more than eighty pages later after its first appearance. We first encounter the disinfectant in chapter 1 when "She sprayed the tile and porcelain with pine-scent chemicals, half-addicted to the fumes. There were two months left of the rental agreement. They'd rented for six and now there were two. One person, two months. She used a bottle with a pistol-grip attachment" (op. cit. 32); this is echoing two pages later when "She stood in the tub and sparyed high on the tile walls until the depraved pine reek of acid and ether began to overwhelm her" (op. cit. 34). Reverting back in chapter 7 we read: "She cleaned the bathroom, using the spray-gun bottle of disinfectant [...] It was the pine-scent bottle, pistol-grip bottle of tile-and-grout cleaner, killer of mildew... (op. cit. 114).

As for another example, on page 33 we are presented with a Lauren "standing barefoot on the cold floor, throwing off a grubby sweater". Two pages later, as if presenting it for the first time the narrator tells us that Lauren "threw off a grubby sweater. She raised her arm out of the sweater and struck her hand lightly on something above, wondering what it was, although, this had happened before, and then she remembered the hanging lamp, metal shade wobbling ..." (op. cit. 35). As if rehearsing this scene seventy-seven pages later in chapter 7 the narrator tells that "She threw off the sweater and hit her hand on the hanging lamp, which she always forgot was there ..." (op. cit. 112), finally the elements of sweater, lamp, and barefoot are alloyed ten pages later when "throwing off a grubby sweater ... She stands barefoot, raising her arm out of the sweater and striking a hand on something above. She remembers the hanging lamp, totally

when "she sat thinking of something, she wasn't sure what" (ibid.); and: "He was looking at it and she understood this retroactively, that he'd been looking at it all this time but not absorbing the words on the page" (op. cit. 20); similarly: "A voice reported the weather but she missed it. She didn't know it was the weather until it was gone" (op. cit. 24); and: "She said, 'What?' He waited for the question to register" (op. cit. 25); or: "She reached in for the milk, realizing what it was he'd said that she hadn't heard about eight seconds ago" (op. cit. 9); and as a last, typically mundane example: "she remembered to smile" (op. cit. 21).

wrong for the room, metal shade wobbling ... (op. cit. 122). The same sort of repetitive pattern occurs arching over the novella most significantly in connection with the Japanese woman whom Lauren observes (35, 105, 115) and the ascetically strained view the webcam at Kotka offers (38, 72, 107, 113). An important feature pertaining to these instances is the significance inherent in presenting a recurring instance as if for the first time. Clearly a paraphrasing reference that is elliptical and proves conscious of a former use of the phrase-in-question would destroy the effect that is actually intended there. The re-phrasing of the elements of the narrative in a way that seems to be forgetful of the former ones de-suggests a linear comprehension (it happened the way it happened before) to benefit a temporally hindered, poised reception.

The grounding principle in bringing forth and strengthening a poised, tensive quality in narration is the repetitive recurrence of certain elements. As it is perceivable in the micro-narrative of the exposition, the words: world, spider and web, by recurring throughout the passage tend to dissolve the dynamism of linearity there. Similarly, throughout the novella, there is a recurrence of words and phrases even sentences, which is occasionally enhanced further when in particularly tense moments the tense is switched to the present and the continuous. In a metaphoric instance, for example, the rendering of the devastating experience is suspended in the continuous tense inserted within the metaphoric frame of the fist thus:

She was looking at the backs of her hands, fingers stretched, looking and thinking, recalling moments with Rey, not moments exactly but times, or moments flowing into composite time, an erotic of see and touch, and she curled one hand over into the other, missing him in her body and feeling sexually and abysmally alone and staring at the points where her knuckles shone bloodless from the pressure of her grips

(DeLillo 2001, 49).

This is a characteristic feature of DeLillo that John Coyle in analyzing its significant "presence" in crucial moments of *White Noise* and *Underworld*, describes as the process of "the shift into present tense as into another dimension, one of a poise almost angelic" (Coyle 2007, 30).

To approach this sense of tense tense from another aspect consider the following passage from *The Names* where as if describing the interior atmosphere of *The Body Artist* DeLillo implies: "The angels of arranged objects. The floorboard seams. The seam of light and shade. The muted colors of the water jug and wooden chest" (DeLillo 1989, 308). In effect, heightening the sense of presence is also possible in amassing nouns at the expense of the kinetic emission that the use of verbs would incur. Verily, David Cowart says that "[a]mong DeLillo's most characteristic gestures as a stylist, in fact, are all-noun sentences (and even paragraphs) [...] which achieves cosmic heights of predication without benefit of verbs" (Cowart 2002, 163–164). Cowart claims that this "askesis of the verb" (ibid.) aims at a presence "that cannot be represented directly". Let me note in passing that this kind of indirection is, in effect, in line with the assumptions I made about DeLillo's position on a representational continuum.

"She watched it, black-barred across the wings and tail, and she thought she'd somehow only now learned how to look" (op. cit. 21). Another technique on the stylistic palette in bringing forth a tensive quality of narration is the jumbling up of word classes. Not conspicuously but frequently enough to appear significant nouns turn into verbs and, vice versa, verbs into nouns. While the former may serve as a means to weaken the kinetic charge of the resulting word the latter may even freeze it into a form of convulsive stasis. Thinking of the lively aura of motile verbs frozen into the sphere of participles might remind one of an expressive marble sculpture in the Vatican Museums, the Laocoön and his Sons. A representative example from the first page may more clearly support this assumption where the transaction between word classes delivers rather a photographic quality than that of a cinematic one: "still a little puddled in dream melt, [...] she ran tap water over the blueberries bunched in her hand and closed her eyes to

breathe the savor rising" (DeLillo 2001, 7). The sequence here is rather imagistic as in other palpable instances: "He looked at the charred logs collapsed in the fireplace" (op. cit. 45); or, when describing the eerie creature Mr. Tuttle, the verbal depiction of his features imparts a drastic thus arresting quality of them: "His chin was sunken back, severely receded, giving his face and unfinished look, and his hair wiry and snagged, with jutting clumps" (ibid). As opposed to this the flare-up of a verbally rendered vortex in the middle of the following sentence I think softens somewhat the edge of the image: "She set the cloth gently on the water, where it plumed inward and sank" (op. cit. 68).

"The wax paper separated from the roll in a rat-a-tat sequence" (op. cit. 34). Seemingly irrelevant but the relentless attempts at onomatopoeia in trying to seize and depict the clarity of a moment also effect a slowed-down narrative, the occasional self-effacement of which (the narrator's admitted, verbally acknowledged failure in rendering that experiential phenomena) fix it into stasis, if not outright dissolve it. In my contention, though, the abnegation in these instances is an ingenious device to avoid squeezing the image into a delimited frame of definiteness. The focus remains soft thus, paradoxically, sharp, that is, more open to imaginative penetration, and herein lies the crux of their problematized use. "The birds broke off the feeder in a wing-whir that was all *b*'s and *r*'s, the letter *b* followed by a series of vibrato *r*'s. But that wasn't it at all. That wasn't anything like it" (op. cit. 17). The all-iterative repercussion of soaring birds, the birds broke off the feeder in a whing-whir, is curiously subtilized further when the reference to "*b*" and "*r*" divert the reader's attention back to the first half of the sentence and at the same time offers a suggestive, aural extension to it, which it, if not to the fullest, manages to achieve, even if the next two sentences finalize it in a self-erasing manner. The key is, I claim, suggestion, and the suspension of the gap (which in its demand to be bridged motivates imagination)⁸. "He stood shaking the container. He shook it longer than he had to because he wasn't paying attention, she thought, and because, it was satisfying in some dumb and blameless way, for its own childlike sake, for the bounce and slosh and cardboard aroma" (op. cit. 10).

"She moved past the landing and turned into the hall, feeling whatever she felt, exposed, open, something you could call unlayered maybe, if that means anything, and she was aware of the world in every step" (op. cit. 121). Pertaining still to the formal wiring of this intensively poised (aware in every step) narration, mention should be made about the most striking feature of the whole of the text, which in fact bundles up, justifies and amplifies the features discussed so far; and this is the deliberate use of words that veils everything in an aura of insoluble indefiniteness. To this end a set of specific words are deployed which mainly include: some, somehow, something, or, as if, not...but, seemed, and maybe. There is even a passage about this, "Somehow. The weakest word in the language. And more or less. And maybe. Always maybeing" (op. cit. 92). So, "[s]omehow. What is somehow?" (DeLillo 2001, 56,63) – this reflective pause is repeated within ten pages, nudging it, as argued above, into a simultaneous unity. "Now that you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, or sort of see it maybe, or something else" (op. cit. 89) – these are the concluding words in connection with the fall of a paperclip. Note the retr-active sequence of: or, or sort of maybe, or something else. Without doubt there is a conscious destabilization involved in it.

⁸ On the other hand what Philip Nel suggests in connection with the use of onomatopoeia and the other stylistic features of the text is that through its extreme precision it denies the possibility of „organic connection between word and world" (Nel 2002, 748), and affirms that „DeLillo recognizes that these sharp words never quite tell the truth" (op. Cit. 741). Even if I agree with Nel regarding the idea of the impossibility of an organic unity, still I do not quite agree with taking the self-effacing "but that wasn't it at all" at face value, as a plain negation of authentic depiction. In my view, as I try to prove, there is an extensive, 'more-inclusive' motive behind defying definiteness.

A few among the numerous other instances rendered in an indefinite manner include, for example, the situation when Lauren dons a crewneck pullover and “[s]he feel[s] the label scratchy at her throat; [n]ot scratchy but something else” (op. cit. 112); or when Tuttle and Lauren are together in the kitchen, and Tuttle “seemed to be staring but probably wasn’t” (op. cit. 80); or when Lauren calls one of her friends and a generated mechanic voice answers and she ponders on the strangeness of the tone: “One voice for each word. Seven different voices. Not seven different voices but one male voice in seven time cycles. But not male exactly either. And not words so much as syllables but not that either” (op. cit. 67). When Lauren thinks back on the past she thinks about, “looking and thinking, recalling moments with Rey, not moments exactly but times, or moments flowing into composite time” (op. cit. 49). When Mariella calls Lauren she asks her, “But are you lonely?” and Lauren answers, “There ought to be another word for it. Everyone’s lonely. This is something else” (op. cit. 39). A characteristic mood is described this way, “Things she saw seemed doubtful – not doubtful but ever changing” (op. cit. 36). When in the kitchen Lauren washes her hand, “the water ran clear at first and then went not murky exactly but opaque” (op. cit. 8). When Lauren is in the kitchen she sees that “[t]here were five birds on the feeder and they all faced outward, away from the food and identically still. ... They weren’t looking or listening so much as feeling something, intent and sensing. All these words are wrong, she thought” (op. cit. 53). There is a self-effacing conclusion in this one too: “The smell of the soya was somewhere between body odor, yes, in the lower extremities and some podlife of the earth, deep and seeded. But that didn’t describe it. ... Nothing described it. It was pure smell” (op. cit. 16).

What all these instances implicate, in short, is the predominant mood of indefiniteness, a resistance to being exact on the part of the narrator. In fact, the syntax of many sentences is constructed like this: ‘it is this, or that, or not exactly that but something like that’, imparting, in other words, a mood, an aura even, where “[e]verything is slow and hazy and drained and it all happens around the word *seem*” (op. cit. 31). There is a palpable tension, in short, that is engendered by the slowing down of the narration to nearly a still, by freezing it through the application of different stylistic techniques. The result of such a static narrative is like the effect Mr. Tuttle has on Lauren, “She knew it was foolish to examine so closely. She was making things up. But this was the effect he had, shadow-inching through a sentence, showing a word in its facets and aspects, words like moons in particular phases” (op. cit. 48).

The figure

As if speaking about the book, DeLillo assesses through the character of a journalist, Lauren Hartke’s performance act, the *Body Time*, as a piece “obscure, slow, difficult and sometimes agonizing. But it is never the grand agony of stately images and sets. It is about you and me. What begins in solitary otherness becomes familiar even personal. It is about who we are when we are not rehearsing who we are” (op. cit. 109–110). Quite aptly, this is the *figure*, the subject matter, which the central figure Mr. Tuttle, supposedly Lauren’s consciousness, dramatizes. To reach such an understanding it is essential to trace how the formal features I discussed relate to the content.

After her husband’s suicide Lauren encounters in a disused, empty room upstairs an elusive creature whom, in the course of their relationship, she names Mr. Tuttle. On the surface it seems that this figure is merely a perfect mimic whose inscrutability baffles and at the same time (by processing the realization and the gradual acceptance of loss, and inculcating self-awareness) heals the grief-stricken Lauren. As a matter of fact, Mr. Tuttle’s ‘babbling muteness’ is the motor behind the formally tuned “spatializing effect [...] by its constant interruption of the

rhythm of pure chronicity" (Frank 1991, 126). The self-reflection this figure engenders affects not only Lauren but the text and its reader as well.

At first, this strange person seems to be a young kid but over the course of time he always appears to metamorphose into somebody else. It seems that his appearance and even his identity, if there is such a thing, changes and fluctuates, never *is* but always becoming. Sometimes he seems to grow older by the minute. "There was a certain futility in his tone, an endlessness of effort, suggesting things he could not easily make clear to her no matter how much he said; [e]ven his gestures seemed marked by struggle" (DeLillo 2001, 46). Actually, there never occurs a successful act of communication between him and Lauren. Tuttle only iterates sentences he had heard before and says incomprehensible things like: "It is not able" (op. cit. 65), "I am doing. This yes that." (op. cit. 63), which are always out of context, out of touch with Lauren. He seems to linger, in other words, beyond the horizon of Lauren's communicative sphere.

In effect DeLillo contrasts the slackened language use of everyday conversation and the tensive language of deciphering, which sheds light on the impact that disjointed language exerts. As opposed to the linguistically strained efforts that Lauren makes to understand her visitor, in the morning scene she and her husband appears to understand each other almost non-linguistically. They talk (or intend to talk) to each other in half sentences, "You said something. I don't know. The house" (op. cit. 17), and as it transpires there is no need to verbalize their traces to get their intended meaning when Lauren's unfailing nagging ("Weren't you going to tell me something?" (op. cit. 16), "Tell me anyway", "You're sitting there talking. Tell me", "Just tell me. Takes only a second" (op. cit. 17), etc.) culminates in her admission: "Just tell me okay. I know anyway [...] I know anyway. So tell me" (op. cit. 18). In other words, despite the elliptical and fragmented manner in which it is executed there is a complete understanding between the two people. This is definitely enabled by the pragmatics of the situation. "The use of language, for various purposes, is governed by the conditions of society inasmuch as these conditions determine the users' access to, and control of, their communicative means" (Mey 1996, 42). Briefly, the main issues in pragmatics are intentionality (understanding what people mean even if they do not say what they actually mean), presuppositions and expectations (regarding the context and other people's reactions) and the rules of cooperation determined mainly by the maxim of relevance. Thus, when now and then Tuttle chants full sentences without socially intentional and determined envelopment, his meaning, if there is any, is obstructed because there is no context to which his diction belongs; there is no pragmatics available, in other words, in the dimension his communication operates. His words dissolve and his utterances never get sucked in by the gravitational pull of intelligibility.

When Tuttle utters – "Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment" (DeLillo 2001, 74) – Lauren just watches him and wonders whether, "It was pure chant, transparent, or was he saying something to her" (op. cit. 75). In effect, after some encounters Lauren starts to ponder about Mr. Tuttle's weird behavior and resistance or inability to communicate and resolves to the not at all unwarranted thought that "[m]aybe this man experiences another kind of reality where he is here and there, before and after, and he moves from one to the other shatteringly, in a state of collapse, minus an identity, a language" (op. cit. 64). She comes to the conclusion that perhaps "he live[s] in a kind of time that ha[s] no narrative quality" (op. cit. 65), and thus is "defenseless against the truth of the world" (op. cit. 77), which is the reason behind his semantic and physical struggle. Tuttle "laps and seeps, somehow, into other reaches of being, other time-lives, and this is an aspect of his bewilderment in pain" (op. cit. 92).

Tying up the notion of the ultimately exposed individual with the understandings of evolutionary epistemology clearly shows that the issue raised through the character of Mr. Tuttle is the baneful consequences in the absence of the necessary human predispositions. Tuttle's tragedy is his exemption from basic mental structures that by "the process of adaptation to the environment [...] has become fit for yielding as much knowledge about the world as is necessary for the species to survive" (Sebeok 1994, 230). Tuttle is not a "site" where extra-subjective forces, like language and, for that matter, time clash (Hawthorn 1992, 165), he is not situated in a culturally, biologically and historically formed 'rut' which defines the perception and via that the coherent apprehension of the world. What turns out is that Tuttle's cognitive apparatus does not filter reality, that he "is living in another state; [and] it is a kind of time that is simply and overwhelmingly there, laid out, unoccurring, and he lacks the inborn ability to reconceive this condition" (DeLillo 2001, 77). As he self-definingly and self-revealingly stutters "nothings comes between me" (op. cit. 74), perhaps he means that no filter of mediation is available for him in processing the world. He is merely there, everywhere.

No matter how laboriously does Lauren strive to understand Tuttle she always fails when she approaches him from the channel of language. Her resultant frustration sometimes culminates in anger, "All right. Be a Zen master, you little creep" (op. cit. 55). All this happens, DeLillo suggests, because "[t]here is a code in the simplest conversation that tells the speakers what's going on outside the bare acoustics [and] this was missing when they talked ... all they had were unadjusted words" (op. cit. 65). To no avail does Tuttle, therefore, say things; he cannot enwrap the mutterings of his into a relevant context. The addressee (Tuttle) is not able to reduce his cognition (in not being able to reduce his way of existence into linguistic terms) to the addresser (Lauren) and therefore is lost in the act of communication.

Gilles Deleuze's in his essay titled "The Schizophrenic and Language" asserts that "the greatness of language consists in speaking only at the surface of things, and thereby in capturing the pure event and the combinations of events that take place on the surface" (Deleuze in Harari 1979, 285). Deleuze says that schizophrenic individuals, however, tend to experience a state in which there is no surface of things, and "[a]s there is no surface, interior and exterior, container and content no longer have precise limits, they plunge into universal depth" (ibid.) and communicate accordingly. He adds further that "[i]n this breakdown of the surface, all words lose their meaning" (ibid.). In this state:

words ... lose their ... power to set down or express incorporeal effects (events) distinct from the body's actions and passions. All words become physical and affect the body immediately. ...as the pinned word loses its meaning, it bursts into fragments, decomposes into syllables, letters, and above all into consonants which act directly on the body, penetrating it and bruising it

(ibid.).

These ideas are reminiscent of a typically poststructuralist attitude according to which schizophrenia is reconceived "positively as providing access to potentially higher or more complex modes of cognition, and ... normality itself [is seen] pathological" (Rivkin 1998, 337). Indeed, this schizophrenic plight may account easily for Tuttle's frenzied bearings but DeLillo doubtlessly had more in mind than 'simple' schizophrenia. What he tried to depict is a person who is experiencing the depth of existence and is unable to find his way to the surface of a linguistic reality.

According to post-structuralist thinkers we see the world in and through language and it provides a narrative for us that enable our (oriented) existence. This linguistically conditioned perception of the world is ultimately reductive and coercive and we are indelibly marked and

manipulated by it. Tuttle, actually, seems to transcend⁹ this suppressed condition and he enters the excess of chaos of simultaneous presence and suffers from it both physically and psychologically because he is unprotected from its immensity. DeLillo underscores this problem when he says that there "has to be an imaginary point where language intersects with our perception of time and space, and he is a stranger at this crossing, without words or bearings" (op. cit. 99). In a playful metaphor I would say that it is as if ordinary people lived in an unsloughable black skin that is smudged black by biological and ideological polish in which only tiny pores let the excessive light of the infinite reality enter. This unsurpassable surface of skin, under which we slosh and bounce like blood, protects us like the shell of the snail; Tuttle in this respect could be regarded as a slug, "stripped of recognizable language and culture" (op. cit. 107), strewn all over with the biting salt of presence because of his ultimate exposure.

This is the first reading of this mysterious character that offers itself immediately but on a second thought it may turn out that with his elusive presence other significances present themselves for interpretation. A further analytic remove might yield a resolution, as Laura di Prete's insights evince it, of identifying Tuttle with Lauren or that part of Lauren that is inhabited by her affectionate attachment to Rey. What is inferable from the fact that Tuttle appears after Rey's death and disappears when Lauren finally manages to exorcise her traumatic experience of loss (through an extremely physical and straining performance act) may simply be that the presence of this enigmatic creature represents the struggle of coming to terms with vulnerability.

Corporeal implications

On the last pages when Lauren seems at last to have accepted the fact that in order to reorganize herself in the matrix of the external world she has to let go of Rey (s memory) DeLillo in a beautiful passage summarizes the probable reason behind Tuttle's appearance which was to represent Lauren's protracted denial.

Why not sink into it? Let death bring you down. Give death its sway. Why shouldn't the death of a person you love bring you into lurid ruin? You don't know how to love the ones you love until they disappear abruptly. Then you understand how thinly distanced from their suffering, how sparing of self you often were, only rarely unguarded of heart, working your networks of give-and-take [...] Sink lower, she thought. Let it bring you down. Go where it takes you

(op. cit. 116).

This is the sentiment that in the end drives her through the gradation of self-recovery. The crucial step is to let it bring you down: "She stopped at the room's edge, facing back into the hall, and felt the emptiness around her. That's when she rocked down to the floor, backed against the doorpost. She went twistingly down, slowly, almost thoughtfully, and opened her mouth, *oh*, in a moan that remained unsounded" (op. cit. 123); which culminates in eventual acceptance and in a self-reliance of carrying on: "She walked into the room and went to the win-

⁹ Comparing Tuttle to the children in the other novels it can be said that he is the totally unaffectedly natural one, the one whose ego is exempt from clotting. Alluding to Rousseau, he can be seen as the quintessential noble savage, for Rousseau argued "that the complexity and precision of language, suitable for sophisticated scientific inquiry and cultivated letters, are not signs of progress and superiority but of degeneration" (Dent 1995, 183). Degeneration in the sense of diverging from reality. "Under the pressures that have caused then to develop grammar, logic and precision of speech and writing, men have been forced further away from their natural state and mode of life" (ibid.).

dow. She opened it. She threw the window open. She didn't know why she did this. Then she knew. She wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was" (op. cit. 124).

As Laura di Prete in her essay titled "Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*: Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma" quite cogently points out and proves "Mr. Tuttle is at the heart of DeLillo's larger project of staging traumatic reenactment" (Prete 2005, 484). Building on a "notion of 'voice' [...] [that] attends to nonverbal, physical perceptions and a notion of 'body' that, tongued and in touch with what the mind cannot know, will voice its unspoken truth" she shows how in the novella "voice and body function synergistically to force trauma into representation, to make it accessible in the recognition of its expressive limits, and to explore viable forms of working through" (ibid.). In this vein of thinking, the "phantom", objectifying unassimilated experience and thus being responsible for the compulsive repetitions and incapacity for any distinction between self and other that are haunting the split individual until s/he is able to come to terms with its traumatic past, is the embodiment and, in the present case, corporeal detachment of an unprocessed knowledge throbbing within the host, that is, in Lauren. Simply put, Tuttle is Lauren's unprocessed knowledge of loss whom "the dissonance between voice and body [summons]" (op. cit. 502). Quite understandably this is why di Prete assigns the "apparent timelessness or time stagnation" of the narrative to the aspect of grief. Within this narrative "past and future converge—and flatten—in a static traumatic present, a dimension shaped by the compulsive repetition and surfacing of fragments of traumatic memories" (op. cit. 492). Therefore, di Prete understands the recurring images, which I discussed above in connection with the formal features, as basically "the reenactment of a past that has not been cognitively processed" (op. cit. 493), or, in other words, pertaining to the sphere of traumatic experience. Seeing *Body Time*, the final performance act, the exorcisement of the phantom "as it internally recapitulates DeLillo's claim about the power of language in grounding and stabilizing identity" (op. cit. 509), an optimistic conclusion is inevitable.

The corporeal implications this essay offers are rather significant, yet my reading of the text does not allow for the tone of glib resolution I detect there. The struggle and labor that language and its motor, the human body, entails is not merely a 'rite of passage' but the only mode in that it can, may, and has to operate. Embodying the formal features of the novella, Mr. Tuttle, in one of his elusively detemporalized chants epitomizes the theme of, borrowing di Prete's dichotomy, bodily and vocal becoming:

Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left, am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment [...] Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. Leaving has come to me. We all, shall all, will all be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me

(DeLillo 2001, 74).

Internalizing Tuttle and assimilating at last the psychic rubble Lauren also declares that "Being here has come to me" (op. cit. 121), thereby implicating the vital priority of process as opposed to mental and physical stagnation. Jon Roberts in his essay titled "Being Here or Where: Changing the Subject in *The Body Artist*" claims that what the appearance and disrupted utterances of Tuttle furthers is Lauren's gradual abandonment of (her) self which in the end cannot take place, though, because it is "impossible to imagine of a language without a 'person's body' and its actions, actions that produce, reproduce, read, and communicate various meanings variously combined" (Roberts 2005). While emphasizing the materiality of signification there are, as in the latter sentence, hints to be found at the motile aspect involved in its operation as well.

'Mr. Tuttle's words and Lauren Hartke's words and the narrator of *The Body Artist's* words exist as text, but in their refusal to be fixed, in their change and difference, their words always suggest something present and alive, something embodied and living and already here though ever arriving, its utterances imparted with motions and posturings and gestures, all aimed at announcing itself as it is, here and now, yet always on its way

(ibid.).

Just as the narrative cannot get beyond its material base, language, so is Lauren/Tuttle unable to jettison the body and "disappear into a semiotic system" (ibid.). The combination of this doubled state of affairs as regards the book results in a merger and reciprocal enhancement of the content and the form. The content, which is a form, is mirrored in the form, which, in the last analysis, is responsible for the content. What DeLillo dramatizes in Lauren's physical and meta-physical suffering is the unavoidable impossibility of deliverance and yet at the same time the provisionally transfiguring power inherent in language (for "[t]ime is the only narrative that matters. It stretches events and makes it possible for us to suffer and come out of it and see death happen and come out of it" (op. cit. 92)). *Forma dat esse rei* as the adage says, form gives meaning to things. Indeed, on the surface a narrative is a narrative because its content is conveyed through the medium of language, and, in the same way, a person is a person because its existence is contained and conveyed through the medium of the body. Yet, bearing in mind the tenets of evolutionary epistemology and post-structuralism, it is clear that forms take shape in the basic need for coherence and meaning, therefore forms are always suspect and the adequate attitude is to try to maintain a healthy skepticism towards their haven of edifice. Subscribing to these ideas though never absolutely, this is what DeLillo does in the language of *The Body Artist*. Through its static deliverance and under its tensed surface, a dynamism of tension, a taut motility is working against the grain of form. The process (of taking shape) is primarily foregrounded and formal solidified resolutions emphatically disclaimed. Understandably the reason why I say that DeLillo never subscribes absolutely to post-structuralist thoughts is evident in the transitoriness of his narrative. As in the original sense of the word motility surges towards and aims at a fulfillment, thus it becomes sensible to say that vagueness and becoming generates hopeful expectation.

The "dead squirrel you see in the driveway, dead and decapitated, turns out to be a strip of curled burlap, but you look at it, you walk past it, even so, with a mixed tinge of terror and pity" (op. cit. 111) is an incident that destabilizes the authority of (superficial) perception, which, consequently, serves as a metaphor about the issues tackled in the novella itself. To support the skepticism I mentioned with respect to form a careful attention to the metaphorical repercussions involved should be relevant here.

In line with Joseph Frank's organic approach Phillip Stambovsky identifies literary experience as a "processive, integrally unified, dramatically evolved apprehension" (Stambovsky 1988, 17) where, he asserts, "literary metaphor depicts the themes that occasion it, conveying meaning imagistically" (op. cit. 3). By linking metaphors to the themes within the text that occasion them, clearly, Stambovsky argues for a contextual approach to metaphor, which in the present case proves more than appropriate if we consider the embedded metaphors in DeLillo's semantic matrix.

To see the metaphorical ripples running through *The Body Artist* enhancing and conveying the thematic concerns involved in it reverting to its exposition once more may prove helpful since, as I have suggested before, a conflict between design and something beyond design is perceptibly engrained within its imagery:

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

(DeLillo 2001, 7).

Here one can discern a frame within which the clarity of vision is verging on the unmediatedness of perception. Though the image of the web-ridden spider may refer to a need for mediatedness, for a structure (web) that is necessary for beings (spider) to place them securely in the vast immensities they are cast into. The web is the design, that is, securing the ground for levitation, from whence its inhabitant commands its material existence. What is important to realize at this point is the fact that the web is violently swinging and swaying, not being merely stiffly and unaffectedly there, activating the words, to borrow some from Jon Roberts, of ductile, lithe, loose, flexible, yielding, malleable, supple, etc. In other words, there is a form, yet even if there is a form, it has to adapt to the circumstances; for in order to maintain a less insular mode of connection with reality, it has to swing to the rhythms of the wind. Words also, should swing to the rhythm of the fundamental motility underlying them, swinging, that is, in a self-skeptical manner that defy their solidification into, to use Julia Kristeva's term, the symbolic modality. As the recurring images of a leaf (first we see it stabbed with self-awareness and later it is shown to be twirling in front of the window suspended by a gossamer thread) and birds¹⁰ (standing for Lauren's frame of transmogrificative mind) metaphorically suggest there is an essentially transitional character of things physically, and thus more directly, in touch with the habitat.

Similarly, the comprehending mind, that anchors the individual in the world, is shown to be at its overly constructive work in the following incident:

She was in town, driving down a hilly street of frame houses, and saw a man sitting on his porch ... a broad-faced blondish man, lounging. ... When the car moved past the house, in the pull of the full second, she understood that she was not looking at a seated man but at a paint can placed on a board that was balanced between two chairs

(op. cit. 70).

Again this passage can be read as a metaphor of the linguistic deadfall one can fall prey to if the handling of language's helve is not inspected gingerly; so what the fiction of the seated man primarily talks about is the fundamental urge for significance.

The same sort of reading is offered in a passage which is moreover complemented with the idea that occasionally there is even a bleatedness adhering to comprehension.

You stand at the table shuffling papers and you drop something. Only you don't know it. It takes a second or two before you know it and even then you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body. But once you know you've dropped something, you hear it hit the floor, belatedly. The sound makes its way through an immense web of distances. You hear the thing fall and know what it is at the same time, more or less, and it's a paperclip. You know this from the sound it makes when it hits the floor and from the retrieved memory of the drop itself, the thing falling from your hand or slipping off the edge of the page to which it was clipped. It slipped off the edge of the page. Now that you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, or sort of see it maybe, or something else. The paperclip hits the floor with an end-to-end bounce, faint and weightless, a sound for which there is no imitative word, the sound of a paperclip falling, but when you bend to pick it up, it isn't there

(op. cit. 89-90).

¹⁰ In Ad de Vries' *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* birds are defined to symbolize among other things "spiritualization, time: a passage in space = a passage in time ... substantiation of the soul ... immortality: transmigration of the soul" (Vries 1984, 47).

In the image of the paperclip on may hear the faint echo of Mr. Tuttle's visit, which, after processing its course, turns out to be presumably a figment of traumatic imagination. Nevertheless, the tone assigned to the passage unmistakably *tenses* it in its tentative deliverance. Another kind of metaphor, underscoring this tentative quality of the narrative occurs in the instance when the sudden sensation of the dissociated motion of flowing vehicles on the lanes seems to stand for the whole tensed atmosphere characterizing both the narration and Lauren's hovering frame of mind:

It's a hazy white day and the highway lifts to a drained sky. There are four northbound lanes and you are driving in the third lane and there are cars ahead and behind and to both sides, although not too many and not too close. When you reach the top of the incline, something happens and the cars begin to move unhurriedly now, seemingly self-propelled, coasting smoothly on the level surface. Everything is slow and hazy and drained and it all happens around the word *seem*. All the cars including yours seem to flow in dissociated motion, giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of, and the highway runs in a white hum. Then the mood passes. The noise and rush and blur are back and you slide into your life again, feeling the painful weight in your chest
(op. cit 31).

Given the detachment and muffled quality of the narration, which never concedes to a fixed and set formula, everything in it seems to be its own paraphrase so much so that certain of its elements, as the above quoted passages, in their miniature, maquette-like rendering of the novella automatically function as a metaphors about it. In sum, it can be said that these instances, as I claim, by depicting the themes that occasion them bespeak of an ineluctable tentativeness which is made feasible in the first place via the formal cues DeLillo uses to destabilize the narrative. Without their (in)definite formal background the themes would never emerge.

As I indicated above, in the texture of the novella there is skepticism (toward the ever congealing language) to be traced that is evident in the formal and thematic (and within that in the metaphorical) aspects of its structure, which curiously is compensated for in the latent promise that the, to put it this way, teleologically engineered and propelled expectation of the becoming text offers. There is, in brief, the ambivalent sentiment I propose DeLillo possesses, which is the knowledge of futility and the motivation to proffer provisional strategies to surpass the conclusiveness of that futility. The method DeLillo chooses is to substitute *becoming* for *being* and tone the language accordingly in an inconclusive, indefinite, ever ductile, yielding and open manner. The terms in which I am talking now indicates the final step to be taken in order to round eventually out the argument about the synergic effects of the formal and thematic syzygy.

The design meshing with the figure

You could hear a pin drop. This is an expression, rather reminiscent of the above mentioned paperclip affair which expresses the aura of a muted tension. Appealing to the minimalist credo an ambition to educe *much* from a basis of *less* is detectable to be at work here. Even if this *much* is merely implicated and never actually arrived at its promise and 'latency' is never denied, what is more, it is enhanced by the *less* definite manner in which it is suggested. DeLillo's text is never in repose even if it definitely seems so. The static tone of the novella, the aura into which it is formally keyed, bespeaks of an overflowing subtext of a tension that lends a poised quality to the texture which, in fact, qualifies the actual thematic concerns involved in it. The synergic operation of the thematic and formal duality of the text is without doubt rendered feasible primarily via the formal configurations DeLillo adopts (or invents). Flexing the muscles and doing extreme body stretches and contortions, Lauren represents DeLillo's way with language. In

deploying an inconclusive strategy and thus leaving sensually and semantically open the things depicted, by destabilizing a descriptive narratorial voice, DeLillo attempts and achieves to realize the maximum potential inherent in language to deliver his fleeting and delicate sense. The modestly tantalizing tone of this tentative voice results in a poised narrative that immerses the reader in the illusion of a presence which is to resemble the openness and caprice of the external world, and to that end it is grounded in an openness of voice never claiming authority to delimit its object, or, subject. Trite as it may sound but what has prospecting vitality and a true potential is always the unknown that is beyond the reductive, deforming and distorting mental murder of familiarity. That is why “somehow” becomes not the weakest, as the narrator claims, but, on the contrary, the strongest of words.

To draw a moral from the story at the intersection of the novella and my essay it seems to be not unwarranted to state that in meticulously flexing the tone what DeLillo communicates may be the understanding that the only proper way one is to adopt is to avoid the extremes of either losing *form* or that of solidifying into one. As we have seen Lauren in the end does not fade out of the social matrix and in a telling gesture she opens the window because she “wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was” (DeLillo 2001, 124), so she is absolved by regaining her harmonious self, which is first and foremost a body, but, as the corporeal and linguistic suggestions attest to it, she would have fallen to pieces were it not for her persistence in listening (through Tuttle) and holding to her body, her body in time and her body in linguistic reality. In the same way, as the formal realizations evidence it, language should be anchored in a material base but to avoid its deadening automatization it constantly has to be prevented from fading into solidifications of convenient patterns; it has to remain alive, that is, it has to maintain a tension between these two extremes because adopting either of these two attitudes would mean to lose contact with the nature of reality we inhabit. Perhaps the motor behind all creative action, and action at all, or even existence is the tension stretching between the knowledge of futility and its visceral denial that manifests itself in such configurations as artworks. Perhaps if there was a way, there would be no way at all. Perhaps the condition for the possibility of a way, of ever-changing provisional ways, is the absence of an ultimate way. Perhaps it is an absence that exerts a gravitational pull on every phenomena of the human mind; a pull that is inescapable and blind like in the halo of a cosmic black hole.

In *The Names* my interest was the way in which a mind centered on ritual can so easily slip off into violence. I thought that ritual stripped from the world becomes dangerous, becomes violent. It loses its connection. It's almost pure silence devolving into nuclear weaponry in a curious way, in the way a theory, a formula on a blackboard, like $E = mc^2$, progresses into a bomb explosion on the other side of the world. It's a little like that. These people had removed themselves from the world. And they were acting out of an impetus of pure mind

(op. cit. 90).

This obsession DeLillo talks about is a deathly dedication to a way of looking at the world the consequences of which in extreme cases, as DeLillo points out, can be devastating, therefore the only sane way of looking at the world seems to be a flexible one. To achieve our “end” then, it seems, is to be done by never losing sight of our various means and also by never committing the error of restricting ourselves totally to one of their set parameters.

In this sense what DeLillo seems to pay homage to in his literary work of art is the eternal human dilemma of how to conduct a meaningful life within the confines of linguistic and corporeal forms. Tersely, put, the idea is: accepting though never settling; for, again, what the narrative that avoids repose suggests is that you cannot and should not shed *form* but its configurations you must control, and no dissolution (of linguistic and corporeal form) is possible yet

solutions are to be avoided. Faintly echoing these concerns DeLillo in an interview asserts that "repetitions create a warped consumerism" (DeLillo in Moss 1999, 91), and in the same interview he defines the writer's character as an individual taking a stand against the aero wheel of consumption, he says:

the writer in opposition is an idea one has to take seriously. The writer opposed—in theory, in general principle—to the state, the corporation and to the endless cycle of consumption and instantaneous waste. In sort of an unconscious way, I think this is why writers, some of us, write long, complicated, challenging novels. As a way of stating our opposition to the requirements of the market

(op. cit. 94).

Collating these sentiments with the propositions I made in connection with the poiesis of *The Body Artist* one could say that, in the manner of Wallace Stevens, there is an exaltation of the creative imagination that is forceful and active and never settles into transparent and scrutable patterns, which is in stark contrast with the passivity of consumption. In other words, (creative) production is propagated against the idle and atrophic assumptions of consumption.

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Kaposvári Márk
Tension and Tense in DeLillo's Art of Prose

The connection between man and his world is possible via language. Language binds people and their reality together and enables orientation for the former in the latter. As to how close this language of the humankind is to the real things of the world, the answer has always been controversial. Today, in the light of postmodern and post-structuralist theories of language, it is accepted that language is merely a system, a structure, with insoluble limitations. Besides this, however, there has always been present the trend that searches for and tries to invent the perfect language, which like Adam's language in the Bible, is in direct and harmonious connection with the world. Most of the postmodern writers, naturally, emphasize the corruptness of language, but there are exceptions who fit within somewhere in between the two traditions. There are, in fact, postmodern writers who realize the limitations inherent in language still search for and perhaps believe in the existence of a redemptive language that connects directly to the world. Don DeLillo is one of these writers. In my paper, first I shall look at briefly two of his earlier novels (*White Noise*, *The Names*) in which there are instances when characters experience a kind of lingual transcendence, then I analyze in more detail one of his newest novel, *The Body Artist*. In this novel, there is a fantasy-like character (Mr. Tuttle) who, by being in every term exposed to the real world, is unable to lean on the soothing banisters of human language and a temporally determined perception. DeLillo problematizes human cognition in him but also attempts to absolve the presented disposition characteristic of humans. He tries also to provide a cure for that disposition of the 'language-disease' and in trying to achieve this he sets the tone of this novel consciously in an indefinite and elusive manner. He tries thus to transcend everyday language through an enigmatic representation that aims at a cathartic experience in the reader in order to arrive at another and perhaps more direct or sensual relationship with the world.