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Cet article commence par situer l'écriture tardive de Don DeLillo dans le contexte critique qui procède du Romantisme, et établit une analogie entre le poème tardif de Keats, "The Fall of Hyperion," et la dynamique narrative qui sous-tend plusieurs des textes les plus récents du romancier. Il entreprend ensuite une lecture plus détaillée de *The Body Artist*, où la notion d'apocalypse est interprétée comme un trope qui permet une réflexion sur la temporalité du langage littéraire. Le contexte du Romantisme facilite l'établissement d'un lien entre l'écriture de DeLillo et la "crise" kantienne qui a fait venir au jour, avec des conséquences littéraires importantes, la faculté d'Imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) en tant que mise-en-figure, et la *mimèsis* comme "présentation" (*Darstellung*), étudiées ici en tant qu'effets d'une expérience traumatique de perte subie par le *body artist*.

Mots clés : DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, Keats, Romantisme, postmodernité, imagination, *mimèsis*, apocalypse, temps, historicité, mutabilité.

This article begins by situating Don DeLillo's late writing in the critical context proceeding from Romanticism, and establishes an analogy between Keats's late poem, "The Fall of Hyperion," and the narrative dynamic that underwrites several of the novelist's most recent works. It then takes up a more detailed reading of *The Body Artist*, interpreting apocalypse as a trope enabling reflection on the temporality of literary language. Situating DeLillo's work in the context of Romanticism enables the establishment of a link between the author's late work and the Kantian "crisis" which brought to light, with profound literary consequences, the faculty of Imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as a putting-into-figure, and *mimèsis* as "presentation" (*Darstellung*), studied here as effects of the body artist's traumatic experience of loss.

Keys words: DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, Keats, Romanticism, postmodernity, imagination, *mimèsis*, apocalypse, time, historicity, mutability.

## Mutability as Counter-Plot

### Apocalypse, Time, and Schematic Imagination in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*

Richard Anker

[T]o name mutability as a principle of order is to come as close as possible to naming the authentic temporal consciousness of the self.

— Paul de Man, “Time and History in Wordsworth” (94)

While the figure of apocalypse comes up frequently in commentaries of Don DeLillo's fiction, rarely has it been contextualized from the perspective of the modern reception of romantic literature and the critical idiom that this reception has established. Easily recognizable as an important theme in DeLillo's work, apocalypse is generally discussed either as a historical (or post-historical) phenomenon that transcends the literary – as when Peter Boxall employs the term to describe the sense of “deep completion” achieved by post-cold war global capitalism and the apparent “founding of an unimpeachable, unboundaried America,” in his reading of *Underworld* (Boxall 177) – or else, more diffusely, as a religious concept whose secularization and internalization as a psychological reality remain essentially unproblematic, scarcely calling it would appear for literary historical elucidation. The same is true for the perhaps even more widely employed figure, in DeLillo criticism, of a fall, another major trope of romantic literature, inherited directly from Milton and more obliquely from biblical tradition, and associated in various ways in recent criticism with the postmodern vernacular of apocalypse, catastrophe, cataclysm and trauma. Although an abundance of intertextual associations has been enumerated in critical readings of DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007), including of course allusions to the biblical drama of the Fall, Keats's late poem “The Fall of Hyperion” (1819), in which Miltonic myth is subsumed within poetic insight, has not been one of them, as though the romantic moment of the internalization of such tropes could be taken for granted.

My objective here is not to explore the highly problematic, and much disputed, notion of internalization,<sup>1</sup> but more simply to propose a reading of DeLillo's late fiction, in particular *The Body Artist* (2001), which treats the romantic moment of literary history (and, to a very limited extent, the Kantian “crisis” which preceded it) as integral to our contemporary, postmodern understanding of literature, rather than, as remains frequently the case, in polemic opposition to it. Contextualizing DeLillo's writing within the larger literary-historical horizon emerging from Romanticism by no means proceeds from an attempt to “romanticize” the author, nor does it suppose a perfectly continuous, genealogical or diachronic, understanding of literary history. It merely assumes the rejection of an overly reductive view of radical discontinuity between what we call “romantic,” on one hand, and “postmodern,” on the other, the former generally connoting, in critical discussions of DeLillo's work, in which both tendencies are often observed, a quest for vision, for unmediated insight, and a nostalgic drive

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<sup>1</sup> See Harold Bloom's influential “The Internalization of Quest Romance” (1970), and Paul de Man's “Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*” (1996), in which the notion of internalization is considerably problematized. For a more recent discussion of this question see Joshua Wilner's *Feeding on Infinity. Readings in the Romantic Rhetoric of Internalization* (2000). Wilner himself discusses Keats's Hyperion poems as an internalization of Miltonic myth on pages 18-20.

to (re)discover a primal language capable of giving direct access to the presence of things – Rousseau and Wordsworth are the authors most frequently evoked to represent these tendencies in DeLillo’s fiction (Coward, Maltby) –, and the latter a more skeptical, or ironic, insistence on mediation, on difference, and on language as a conveyor of absence. Of course this dualist and historicized understanding of literary form is not unique to critical interpretations of DeLillo’s work, as it is also evident in the reception of other postmodern American authors like Pynchon, Gaddis and Gass, the latter reinforcing and even further radicalizing this perspective in his own essays.<sup>2</sup> As a body of work generally recognized for being particularly concerned, however, with the *saving* of history at a time when historical change and mutability have never been more threatened by global (Keats or Shelley might have said “titanic”) forces, DeLillo’s writing may stand to gain more by comparison with its romantic predecessors than that of many of its contemporaries. This is so not only because, as is widely asserted, Romanticism marks an awakening to history in literary consciousness, a more intense awareness of time and mutability as conditions of human order. What such a hypothesis also implies is that literary history, the temporal transmission and inheritance of literary form, may be more potent as an animating force in history itself, or at least may have more vigor as a temporal entity and condition of historical change, than certain contemporary conceptions of literary texts (those, for instance, that ignore or suppress their own origins in Romanticism) seem to suggest. That said, my intentions here are almost entirely of a practical order. By not denying the existence in DeLillo’s writing of the aforementioned opposing tendencies – a logocentric quest for presence on one hand, a properly poetic awareness of mediation on the other –, but by affirming that the tension between them is itself a fundamentally romantic phenomenon (which is certainly no news to scholars of Romanticism), or has been transmitted to us by romantic texts, my aim is simply to provide a viable reading of a contemporary text which, inscribed as I see it in the continuing afterlife of the romantic tradition, structures itself or is articulated as a response to our postmodern situation of historical impasse.

In my discussion of DeLillo’s fiction the romantic paradigm of historical transformation will come from Keats, although the Wordsworthian conception of an apocalyptic imagination, such as it was elucidated by Geoffrey Hartman in his groundbreaking *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1787-1814* (1964), and thereafter contested by Paul de Man in his lecture entitled “Time and History in Wordsworth” (delivered in 1967), has also provided aspects of the theoretical framework in which my reading will occur.<sup>3</sup> Although a concern with apocalypse might most immediately suggest an interest in *Underworld* or, more directly yet, *Falling Man*, DeLillo’s novel dealing with the traumatic effects of the collapse of the Twin Towers, *The Body Artist*, published in 2001, deals no less with post-traumatic or post-

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<sup>2</sup> See my “Mimesis travestie, ou le ‘modernisme épuré’ de William H. Gass” for a discussion of the speculative logic which underwrites Gass’s interpretation of literary and philosophical history. As this paper will attempt to show, DeLillo’s writing works towards a suspension of the speculative logic on which Gass’s work depends.

<sup>3</sup> “Apocalypse” is a term with a long history in different schools of criticism. From the perspective of Romanticism, which I insist on here simply as a key moment in the secularization of the concept, Hartman’s contribution to the term’s rhetorical elucidation is widely recognized as seminal, however contentious certain aspects of the debate regarding this term and its relation to literary form and history have been. See *Wordsworth’s Poetry 1964-2014: Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Publication of Geoffrey Hartman’s Wordsworth’s Poetry 1878-1814*, eds. A. Warminski and J. Wilner, for recent discussions of Hartman’s conception of apocalypse and its dialectical relation to *akedah* (binding). M.H. Abrams, in “English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age” (1963), offers what may be considered the classic account of apocalypse in romantic literature.

apocalyptic experience, even though the historical event at its source does not have the epic proportions of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Progressively, one of the central themes of DeLillo's writing has become time. A concern with historical events of quasi-epic proportion, like the Kennedy assassination (*Libra* 1988), with the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation (*Underworld*), or else with environmentally disastrous toxic-waste spills (*White Noise* 1985), menaces that might be said to inform history's apocalyptic texture, has given way, in DeLillo's writing, to a preoccupation with time itself as the element in which human consciousness and experience are structured. History, as the empirical manifestation of time, is not merely sloughed off of course, as a snake sheds layers of dead skin, but there is a greater preoccupation with historicity itself in the later works, especially in *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Point Omega* (2010), which suggests that the possibility for a renewed understanding of history lies in a reconsideration of time, and in the ways in which artistic form and literary language temporalize experience. Like Percy Shelley's Prometheus who says of himself that he "gave man speech, and speech created thought,/Which is the measure of the universe" (*Prometheus Unbound* II, iv, 72-73), for DeLillo history, as we shall see, is what happens when time is differentiated, schematized, framed or measured by language.

This is not to suggest that history is reducible to a human production, that the faculty of speech which schematizes or measures time – presents time as such – is reducible to human productivity. The romantic theme of the secularization or of the human appropriation of a faculty conceived as divine in origin, the faculty of speech, continues, in DeLillo's fiction, to be a central problematic, where language remains both mysterious in its function and intimately associated in its origin with the thematic of a fall. This mysterious, or better, uncanny (*unheimlich*) function of language, on the one hand, and its association with a postlapsarian state of being, on the other, is the effect of two opposing, yet inseparable, tendencies in DeLillo's work, echoing an opposition that runs through romantic writing between an essentially poetic self-awareness born of the experience of finitude and a heroic or titanic drive to permanence and unity of being, were the latter invariably to reveal itself productive of its own collapse.<sup>4</sup> This opposition between a titanic will to power and the painful awareness of time acquired by the poet is nowhere more explicitly dramatized perhaps than in Keats's "The Fall of Hyperion," where the epiphanic or traumatizing vision of the titans' fall proves to be the possibility of the poet of negative capability who has no personal identity. Like the protagonist of *Falling Man*, Keith Neudecker, whose convulsive, incomplete transformation occurs in the wake of an apocalyptic event brought about by excessive desire for self-immediacy and unmediated contact with the principle of things – as the sections in the novel dealing with Hammad's terrorist plotting make clear –, Keats's poet, in the second of the two uncompleted Hyperion poems, awakens in a postlapsarian landscape of titanic ruin and ascends painfully and inconclusively towards his identity as a poet traumatized by the awareness of time.

The analogy can easily be made between this Keatsian scenario of falling as the condition of a painful but more authentic awareness of time and numerous scenarios in DeLillo's more recent works. In each case, a titanic moment of excessive desire for unmediated action precedes an apocalyptic inversion that reestablishes a more authentic, if uncanny, mode of temporal awareness. The multi-billionaire Eric Packer, in *Cosmopolis*, who lives in a forty-eight room apartment on the top floor of an eighty-nine story building in lower Manhattan, "the tallest residential tower in the world" (C 8), and spends his day in an

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<sup>4</sup> See Paul de Man, "Wordsworth and Hölderlin," to which I am indebted for my treatment of the opposition between titanic and properly poetic tendencies in the romantic tradition.

immensely over-sized limousine, begins his career by “effectively making history,” as he puts it, “before history became monotonous and slobbering, yielding to his search for something purer” (C 75). Packer’s heroic *making* of history followed by his speculative quest for something purer – the more perfect affinity he seeks between technology and capital, between the financial markets he controls and the natural world –, is at bottom a violent reaction against the grasp of time which haunts him from the opening pages of the novel. If this titanic reaction against time dooms him, however, it also turns out to be productive, as it allows for a paradoxical insight into the mediated nature of human time, when the video-screens Packer uses to monitor his identity and his surroundings begin displaying images of himself in proleptic fashion: the very shock he receives from explosions occurring around him during a riot near Times Square displays itself on his screens *prior* to his experience of it, and he dies looking into a computer simulation of his death *before* it will have happened. When therefore we read, towards the end of the novel, that “pain interfered with his immortality” (C 207), it is not merely the pain of the self-inflicted gunshot wound that is being alluded to, but the pain of human finitude itself, a “dying into life” as Keats would have put it. The “interference” with his immortality amounts in other words to a suspension – although not an interruption, not a cessation – of titanic will and its apocalyptic telos by a “negative capability” which abides an uncanny awareness of time. Richard Elster, in *Point Omega*, formerly a secret war advisor to the Pentagon and currently residing in the desert where he seeks escape from “time passing, mortal time” (PO 44), and from what he calls “the slinking time of watches, calendars, minutes left to live” (59), created, he contends, by cities, nurtures an apocalyptic nostalgia for what he calls “deep time, epochal time” (72), where human time would recede behind a quasi-geological time, ultimately resembling nothing if not a death-like state of permanence.<sup>5</sup> This speculative nostalgia for a pre-civilizational, natural time corresponds with a quest for unity of mind and matter, a transcendence of consciousness which, if achieved, would amount, Elster hubristically conceives, either to “a sublime transformation of mind and soul or some worldly convulsion” (72). Just as the apocalyptic telos in *Cosmopolis* is suspended when Packer observes a man burn himself to death in the Times Square rioting, Elster’s drive to self-immediacy and the negation of temporal awareness is interrupted by the sudden disappearance and supposed death of his daughter in the very desert where he had meditated his encounter with deep time, and it is left to his artistic double, the young film-maker Jack Finley, who had sought to document the older man’s war confessions, to attain the negative capability necessary to sustain a potentially self-annihilating exposure to time. In each of these novels, as in the previously mentioned *Falling Man*, an awareness of time as something other than merely natural and beyond the power of mind is mediated by death,<sup>6</sup> that is by a catastrophic fall symbolizing a negativity beyond the reach of imagination.

DeLillo’s late fiction re-experiences and represents in a variety of forms the secularized version of the Fall and of the redemption of man as a *process* of consciousness, a time-bound and mediated consciousness, which, like that of his romantic predecessors, refuses to sacrifice its capacity for negative achievement to more or less grandiose designs of historical power or to still more illusory schemes of post-historical plenitude. And yet, like

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<sup>5</sup> In the desert, as Elster puts it: “Day turns to night eventually but it’s a matter of light and darkness, it’s not passing time, mortal time. There’s none of the usual terror. It’s different here, time is enormous, that’s what I feel here, palpably. Time that precedes us and survives us” (PO 44).

<sup>6</sup> Finley’s confrontation with death, mediated by the image of the titanic Elster’s collapse, is also experienced more directly and painfully during a brief encounter with silence and nothingness in the desert, where he has gone in pursuit of Elster’s daughter: “The silence was complete. I’d never felt a stillness such as this, never such enveloping nothing. But such nothing that *was*, that spun around me” (PO 94).

the poetic language of his romantic forebears, DeLillo's fictional language seems to originate in the desire to overcome mediation, in the drive for poetic language to bind itself to natural things, as is attested by the apocalyptic tendencies of the aforementioned characters which in appearance contradict, but are in reality preliminary to, an awareness of the mediated character of identity and the temporalized modes of insight that underlie the negative capability of the artist.<sup>7</sup> One would doubtless be mistaken not to take this apparent contradiction seriously and to view DeLillo's representations of the will to overcome mediation as the mere parody of metaphysical desire, of the sort frequently associated with postmodern writing. It seems wiser to consider that in the dramatic pattern of Fall and redemption, apocalypse and creation, inherited by DeLillo from the romantic tradition, an irresolvable tension inherent to language itself is being played out, a tension which appears intimately related to the historicity and temporality of human experience.

The narrative dynamic of *The Body Artist* also conforms to this pattern of apocalypse and redemption that conditions the romantic awareness of history. When Lauren Hartke's husband, the filmmaker Rey Robles, born as Alejandro Alquezar, departs one morning from the country house the couple has been living in and commits suicide later the same day in the apartment of his former wife, the shock Lauren receives, at first debilitating, turns out to be the condition of an intimate and painful exploration of the sources of identity and of the redemptive function of artistic imagination, notably as concerns this faculty's role in the structuring of time. The suicide of her husband Rey, meaning "king" in Spanish, bears all the traits of a fall from heroic self-identity that we observe frequently in DeLillo characters. "The thing [the suicide] was a plan in his mind," Rey's previous wife tells Lauren (BA 58), underlining the apocalyptic telos of a consciousness driven by the desire to triumph over mediation: "I want God to see my face," he says jokingly, yet revealingly, to Lauren on the morning of his suicide (BA 14). Although Rey is a not unsuccessful artist, a film-maker whose subjects are "people in landscapes of estrangement" and "the poetry of alien places" (BA 29), his suicide is clearly the result of a will to overcome the heightened sense of estrangement and alienation that the intensely mediated life of the artist entails. When a blue jay, recognized by Lauren as a "skilled mimic" (BA 22), appears outside the kitchen window where the couple is having breakfast their final morning together, Lauren maintains a long inquisitive gaze with the bird, a reflection of her own artistic identity, while Rey declares his boredom with the appearance of blue jays and sends the bird flying the instant he looks up at it. And while Lauren spends her morning dwelling assiduously on the difference between words and things, on the ceaselessly inadequate relation between language and everyday reality, Rey, who Lauren senses feels diminished in having to discuss trivial things, disparages the act of speech and bemoans what he regards as the Sisyphean effort it takes to adequately present his thoughts (BA 17).

Despite Lauren's already appreciable negative capabilities, demonstrated in the novel's opening chapter, Rey's suicide nonetheless precipitates a shattering of the symbolic order of language, or of its symbolizing function, which profoundly affects her identity as an artist and a person. What her collapse, dramatized in the opening pages of the book's second

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<sup>7</sup> The opposition in *The Names* (1983) between the murderous cult members who seek a perfect identity between words and their referents in what finally amounts to the negation of the latter, on one hand, and the novel's protagonist, Jim Axton, on the other, also conforms to the Keatsian logic discussed here involving the collapse of titanic will as the condition of a painful and difficult birth of negative capability and awakening to mutability and temporal difference. The narrative dynamic in which this opposition plays itself out, however, in *The Names* appears less rigorously dialectical than that which underwrites the later novels discussed here.

chapter,<sup>8</sup> demonstrates is that the authentic self, which titanic identity strives to suppress or to overcome, is a mediated entity dependent on identification with an other, the kind of affective identification that Lauren displays, for example, in the way she interiorizes the physical discomfort that Rey, her 64-year old husband, experiences in reaching into remoter parts of the refrigerator: “She was too trim and limber to feel the strain and was only echoing Rey, identifyingly, groaning his groan, but in a manner so seamless and deep it was her discomfort too” (BA 9). Identity therefore is staged, from the beginning of the novel, as mimetic, and Rey’s suicide amounts to a rupturing of the affective bond which is constitutive of identity, in other words, as her spouse’s name suggests, to the loss of the transcendental model or paternal figure that any system of representation, including that of the ego itself, requires for its stability. What occurs then is what could be called an *unbinding* of mimesis, a dangerously destabilizing mimetism and a haunting sense of the *semblance* of reality, an uncanny presentation, in short, of the faculty of presentation itself. This awareness of the semblance of reality and of the presentation of presentation is evident from the opening paragraph of the second chapter, in the immediate aftermath of Rey’s suicide:

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. (BA 31)

With the collapse of the paternal or transcendental model of identification, it is not into some “hole” of the Real (*trou du Réel*), of which Lacan speaks, that the subject falls, but into the *unheimliche* apprehension of *mimèsis* itself. Not an absence of being but the presentation of appearance, or the presentation of presentation itself. What is missing suddenly – what has been “drained” away, leaving in its wake the hazy “whiteness” of the background evoked here – is what Plato would have called an “idea,” the absolute referent, model or transcendental double, whose function is to stabilize presentation and without which no appearance of phenomena, in the strict sense of the term, no re-presentation or recognition of reality as such, can occur. Perception thereby becomes estranged from itself, as in lieu of the beneficial doubling of the idea, or of the transcendental model, there emerges a “white hum” which materially conveys, it would appear, the very dissolution of the eidetic mode of repetition. The estrangement of perception, the sense of things being “self-propelled” and in “dissociated motion,” would in other words be the effect of a generalized *un-differentiating* of repetition, of a sort of neutralized or monotonized repetition, its collapse into pure reverberation, acoustically presenting the very loss or lack of the beneficial doubling provided by the paternal fiction, or *imago*, of the beloved other.

In other terms, what comes into view is what Kant called the schematizing faculty of the imagination, that “art hidden in the depths of the human soul,” which structures or figures, *fictions*, one might say, experience, from the awareness of time passing to the taste of honey

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<sup>8</sup> “In the first days back she got out of the car once and nearly collapsed – not the major breakdown of every significant function but a small helpless sinking toward the ground, a kind of forgetting how to stand” (BA 33).



on a piece of toast, as Lauren observes in the course of her mourning. The work of performance art, entitled *Body Time*, that Lauren will produce by the end of the novel finds its possibility in this process of mourning, that is in this heightened and uncanny awareness of transcendental imagination – *Einbildungskraft*, the fictioning or figuring faculty – which is its effect. For imagination, as the German romantics discovered, presents itself precisely as the effect of the disunity of the subject uncovered in Kant’s Critiques, the effect of the loss of a constitutive *eidōs* or Idea.<sup>9</sup> Whatever might be the empirical determination of the subject’s “trauma” or fall, what the reader is essentially confronted with, in DeLillo’s late fiction as in the works of his romantic predecessors, is the perceived loss of the “original intuition” of the phenomenal world and, by the same token, with the *mise-en-scène* of the faculty of unity or synthesis provided by Imagination. Everything begins, in other terms, with the “revelation” of the mimetic – accompanied, as we’ve seen, with an acoustic sense of undifferentiated repetition which materially renders the lack of beneficial doubling, the loss of the eidetic basis of phenomenal perception. That the appearance of the mimetic corresponds with the loss of salutary, eidetic repetition, could be confirmed in a reading of any number of passages in the novel, in the following sentence, for example, where Lauren recognizes that the perception of a sparrow viewed outside her kitchen window is dependent upon the repeatability of the schematizing function:

She saw it [the sparrow] mostly in retrospect because she didn’t know what she was seeing at first and had to re-create the ghostly moment, write it like a line in a piece of fiction, and maybe it wasn’t a sparrow at all but a smaller bird, gray and not brown and spotted and not streaked but not as small as a hummingbird, and how would she ever know for sure unless it happened again, and even then, she thought, and even then again. (BA 91)

It is evident here that what the collapse of the transcendental model has provoked is a fall into a world of potentially infinite or abyssal repetition, a groundless experience where such basic ontological distinctions as those between fiction and reality, absence and presence, the strange and the familiar, art and life, break down. The familiar act of seeing, estranged from itself by the haunted awareness of its mediation, forfeits the assurance of empirical stability and reveals itself as intrinsically unstable. Time, one observes here, emerges as the very element of perception, as the “fictioning” imagination that mediates the act of seeing introduces a spacing, or a difference, between what is qualified as the “ghostly moment” of the event and its presentation, delaying or differing infinitely the intelligible apprehension of the bird’s sensible presence.

Of course to speak of an “event” here is potentially misleading, since its “ghostly” manifestation is clearly the retrospective phenomenalisation of a fictional and, at bottom, linguistic occurrence. In other words, the event of the bird’s appearance is apophantic, which, as Michel Deguy in an essay dealing with Heidegger’s disavowal of the mimetic has reminded us, means “to make something be seen in its *correlation with something else*”

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<sup>9</sup> See the “ouverture” of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (1978), doubtless the most influential and incisive account of Romanticism’s historical connection with the Kantian “crisis.” See also, specifically with respect to the aesthetic question of presentation (*Darstellung*) after Kant’s Critiques, Nancy’s “L’Offrande sublime” (1984), Martha B. Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation. The Concept of Darstellung in German Critical Discourse* (1996), and Alison Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy. Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy* (2007). On the links between the Kantian crisis, the Jena poets and English Romanticism, including a discussion of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s work mentioned above, see Cynthia Chase’s introduction to *Romanticism* (1993).

(Deguy 89). The bird appears as a sort of visual echo of the schematic image, or as the synthesis of a series of images, repeating themselves *ad infinitum*, given the lack of transcendent correlation. In the same way that, for instance, the mythical Prometheus brought fire, which, as an element, was, is, already there, to borrow another image from Deguy (119), the bird comes into being, is presented, as a *mimèsis* of “nature.” *Technè* – the operation of the schematic imagination – reveals *phusis* – nature, the bird –, which, already there, was not present as such, and which, given the suspension of the imagination, reveals itself here as a *withdrawal* from being, as a falling out of what might be called the “as if” of things (I shall return to this notion). Or as a hovering between being and non-being, presence and absence, reality and fiction, etc.

Chapters two, six and seven of *The Body Artist* each begin with a suspended act of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), where presentation is itself presented, and where the essential instability and unreliability of perception is brought to light. Yet nowhere is this suspension of the imagining faculty more dramatically apparent than in the quasi-spectral, ghostlike apparition of the aphasic, nameless person whom Lauren calls Mr. Tuttle, after the image of a high-school science teacher, at the end of the book’s second chapter. A sort of beneficial, if *unheimlich*, doubling does after all occur then, in the wake of Rey’s loss, since Mr. Tuttle, who makes his appearance in the house repeating Rey’s speech, miming his voice down to its intonations, its resonance, its timbre, is clearly a reflection, or visible echo – a prosopopeiac hypotyposis, in rhetorical terms<sup>10</sup> –, of the fallen spouse, such as the image of the latter has been interiorized by Lauren. Which is why Mr. Tuttle is precisely, with respect to Lauren herself, a specular image of an interior and otherwise inaccessible *voice*, or faculty of enunciation, as is suggested by the fact that although Lauren hears, or at least suspects she hears, Mr. Tuttle *before* Rey’s death, she visibly discovers him only *after* her husband’s suicide. As in Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw,” for example, the image, *Bild* or figure, is a speculation of the voice – of Rey’s voice, the interiorized voice of the other, but also, no less disturbingly, of her “own” voice –, presented as an *impaired* faculty of presentation.<sup>11</sup> This impairment is scarcely surprising, after all, given what we’ve already observed with respect to the suspension of the schematizing function in the wake of Rey’s death. What Mr. Tuttle’s uncanny apparition amounts to, in short, is a reflective presentation of Lauren’s “own” suspended faculty of presentation, a specular fiction of her “own” suspended fictioning capacity.<sup>12</sup>

Although beneficial, in a certain manner, the ghost-like nature of Mr. Tuttle’s appearance undoes at the same time the intersubjective character of Lauren’s relation to him. Framing, and thereby objectifying, to a degree the dangerously unbound and abyssal repetitiveness that Lauren is haunted by, the “unfinished look” (45) and generally ungraspable appearance of Mr. Tuttle – “he seemed to recede under observation, inwardly withdraw” (85)

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<sup>10</sup> Hypotyposis is the rhetorical figure designating a lively or life-like presentation, a throwing under the eyes of a vivid scene (from *hypo*: beneath, under, and *tupos*: imprint, mould, mark), which Kant appropriates and transforms in taking on the philosophical problem of presentation (*Darstellung*) in *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (section 59).

<sup>11</sup> On the speculation of voice in James, see my *Henry James. Le Principe spectral de la représentation* (2012).

<sup>12</sup> Most commentators have of course recognized Mr. Tuttle as a figure of Lauren’s artistic unconscious. David Cowart thematizes this projection in a way which also takes into account the suspension of the artistic capacity: “If one resists identifying the damaged Mr Tuttle with an artist fully in command of his faculties, one can say that in Mr Tuttle Lauren encounters, as a projection of her own unconscious, the artist in herself, temporarily obtunded or disoriented by late catastrophe” (Cowart 206).

–, undermines the very stability and equilibrium that normally would be provided by an intersubjective relation. The “spectral sort” (86) of proximity this figure offers never provides a stable basis for reflective consciousness, never enables the kind of dialectical opposition to establish itself which is vital to identity as a speculative entity. In short, there is no return, after the loss of the ideal or eidetic image, to a “prelapsarian” state of stability, no restoration of titanic identity as the self’s reflective other. Instead, a more authentic if more painful confrontation with the mutability of identity and its mediated character, of which there had been only virtual awareness prior to the fall, imposes itself as “inevitable” (BA 41), and, indeed, as the very possibility of artistic achievement, much as the Keatsian poet discovers in his face to face encounter with Moneta in “The Fall of Hyperion.” Such achievement, negative in its capacity to endure the *unheimlich* encounter with semblance that we’ve already seen manifest itself, goes well beyond the mere glimpses of mediated time that are attained by other DeLillo characters like Eric Packer and Richard Elster. While the dialectical attempts of the latter to achieve a totalizing synthesis of mind and matter, technology and nature – in other words of *technè* and *phusis*, the root polarity at the basis of the will to power represented in DeLillo’s fiction –, result in apocalyptic forms of insight that annihilate themselves in their very achievement, Lauren’s artistic endeavor begins, finds its condition of possibility, in the suspension of the drive towards synthesis between the two terms of the polarity. Read in the context of DeLillo’s work as a whole, particularly his late work where the speculative tendencies underwriting the totalizing drive of Western capitalist hegemony are most explicitly thematized, what we are confronted with in *The Body Artist* is what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, reading Hölderlin from the perspective of the poet’s early collaborative efforts with Hegel and the latter’s idealist philosophy, called the “caesura” of the speculative (Lacoue-Labarthe 1986). Art, in DeLillo’s perspective, far from participating in the historical achievement of the speculative, that is in the aesthetic sublimation of the metaphysical crisis of (re)presentation inherited from Kant – as the writing of Gass, for example, does –, constitutes a suspension or caesura of the speculative enterprise that underwrites the post-romantic will to power. Without destroying insight into the temporal determination and the mimetic, essentially mutable condition of human existence, as one might expect from the suspension of speculative consciousness, what the spectral relation to Mr. Tuttle enables is a deepened, and a more affective, awareness of human time as constituted by language, that is by the schematizing faculty of the imagination which, at bottom, it now becomes evident, is a faculty of enunciation. That *Einbildungskraft*, the faculty of putting-into-figure, is grounded in the faculty of speech, is precisely what Mr. Tuttle’s speech impairment, his aphasia, serves to make clear:

He hasn’t learned the language. There has to be an imaginary point, a nonplace where language intersects with our perceptions of time and space, and he is a stranger at this crossing, without words or bearings. (99)

Lacking an effective language, Mr. Tuttle is deprived of the medium, transcendental or epistemic in nature, which coordinates spatial and temporal perceptions. Interpreted by Richard Elster in speculative idealist (Tielhardian) terms as the “omega point” (PO 72) where consciousness would transcend itself while subsuming its material basis, this “nonplace” or “imaginary point,” as Lauren more soberly puts it, is posited in material linguistic terms and thematized as the very locus of schematization. The difference between Elster’s idealist interpretation of this point and Lauren’s analytical, or critical, interpretation, is essential, and marks the fundamental separation between the naïve consciousness of the titanic mind in quest of a dissimulating harmony of being and an authentically artistic or literary consciousness, aware of its linguistic mediation. The same awareness as that demonstrated here underwrites the romantic, post-Kantian experience of finitude, or mutability, and

conditions the modern understanding of the work of art, and of literature in particular, as an elementary form of mediation, that is, as a form of presentation rather than mere representation, understood in the sense of imitation. The relentless undoing of self-representation displayed by Lauren's performance art is itself a consequence of this unveiling of language as the source of the imaginative faculty of schematization, since the eccentricity of the "nonplace" from which perception proceeds denies selfhood its prerogative of agency, even as it establishes the basis for a non-metaphysical conception of "transcendence" and disengages artistic creation from the point of view of the subject. Transcendental in the sense of being the a priori, precognitive condition of experience – "outside her experience but desperately central, somehow, at the same time," as Lauren surmises (BA 63) –, imagination is ultimately revealed as tropological in origin, in that it consists of a "turning" of one thing into the likeness of another, of making things appear in their correlation with something else, to take up once again Deguy's suggestive remark on the function of *logos* as *apophansis*.<sup>13</sup> As the specular image, then, of Lauren's "own" faculty for producing tropes, or turns of speech, Mr. Tuttle not only reflectively mimes, or personifies, the tropological function, as is suggested by the frequent winding and turning gestures he makes in the course of the novel, but, in doing so, he exposes the reflective subject, the body artist, to the suspension of tropological identification: "*He came into the room then, edgingly, in his self-winding way, as if, as if*" (my italics 78). He exposes the artist to the suspension of *mimèsis*, that is, once again, to pure repetition, to a duplicating energy deprived of model or reference: "*It was always as if. He did this or that as if. She needed a reference elsewhere to get him placed*" (my italics 45).

Because of his impaired capacity for speech, the tropological faculty, Mr. Tuttle is deficient in productive imagination, which structures time. His twisting gestures, his *turning towards...*, figuratively enacting the very caesura of the apophantic gesture of correlating, suspends time itself as "sequential order" (83), as "reassuring sequence" (BA 77). What he lacks, most fundamentally of all perhaps, is rhythm, that most basic or primitive of schematizing functions, as is suggested by the arrhythmic despondency that accompanies Mr. Tuttle's aphasia. For rhythm, *rhuthmos* or *rhusmos*, originally means form or schema, according to Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, as Benveniste relates in his *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, and as Lacoue-Labarthe points out, in his turn, in his "The Echo of the Subject." That rhythm as it is presented in *The Body Artist* might best be understood in the original sense of *skhema*, essential, as Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes, to "the general differentiation of what is" (1979, 200), is suggested in numerous passages in the novel, most notably perhaps in this extract, where Lauren is reflecting on her exchanges with Mr. Tuttle:

There's a code in the simplest conversation that tells the speakers what's going on outside the bare acoustics. This was missing when they talked. There was a missing beat. It was hard for her to find the tempo. All they had were unadjusted words. She lost touch with him, lost interest sometimes, couldn't locate rhythmic intervals or time cues or even the mutters and hums, the audible pauses that pace a remark. [...] She began to understand that their talks had no time sense and that all the references at the unspoken level, the things a man speaking in Dutch might share with a man speaking Chinese – all this was missing here. (65-66)

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<sup>13</sup> See also Matthew J. Morris's stimulating remarks on what he sees as the necessity of a "conjunctive" reading of *The Names*, which tend to suggest that the correlative basis of figural perception I'm proposing here is already at least implicitly manifest in DeLillo's earlier writing (Morris 126).

The “code,” missing here, is once again what Plato called the “idea,” but which a certain “materialist” tradition, starting with Aristotle, understands as a basic rhythmicity, described by Benveniste as “form at the moment it is taken by what is in movement, mobile, fluid, the form that has no organic consistency” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1979, 201). Deprived even of rhythm, of that most basic of schematizing functions, or of what perhaps might be called the most primitive organizing principle of repetition, Mr. Tuttle is the very *personification* of apocalypse, of a falling out of being in its schematization.<sup>14</sup> He is an embodied image, tragic in its unshelteredness, of the separation of things from themselves, of being from itself, in the advent of language. What his appearance gives access to is the pure *difference* of being, which, in a unified subject, is always already temporalized, always already schematized and determined – “measured,” “framed,” “structured” as Lauren repeatedly observes – by imagination. Fallen into a time preceding measured time, structured time (“a kind of time that is simply and overwhelmingly there, laid out, unoccurring” BA 77), Mr. Tuttle’s apparition can be rhetorically conceptualized as a metaleptic foreshadowing of a past event, a projection into historical time of a moment which precedes history and is the pre-condition of human temporal experience. This “event” or this “moment,” corresponding with what Lauren calls “body time,” does not precede history in the sense of some empiricist myth of natural time, as in Richard Elster’s conception of a geological time asymptotically approaching permanence, negating mutability and mortal time, but in the sense of being, in Peter Boxall’s terms, the “groundless ground” or “substratum” of conscious temporal experience (Boxall 219). Opposed to time in its structured, “narrative” dimension, this unsheltered time is a pre-schematic mode of temporality which, as Lauren puts it, is identical to itself:

Time 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. But not for him. He is in another structure, another culture, where time is something like itself, sheer and bare, empty of shelter (92).

To observe that time “stretches events” is to recognize that measured, sequential time is the imaginative schematization of the original (and originary) difference of being, where time is “something like itself.” Haunting the “narrative” time of history, such unsheltered, apocalyptic time manifests itself as the ghostly counterpart of historical consciousness only after the speculative thrust of that consciousness transgresses its own limit, as occurs in *The Body Artist* in the event of Rey’s suicide. Only then does the inversion take place which reestablishes an uncanny, essentially tragic awareness of time as a mediated entity the essence of which lies beyond the grasp of imagination. Although this encounter with time exceeds the reflective capacity of the artist, it does not abolish the possibility of art, but redirects the idealizing tendencies of the artist into an intensely physical and affective confrontation with human finitude. It was precisely such a reversal that Keats foresaw but was unable to fully accomplish in his uncompleted *Hyperion* poems, where Moneta’s face has a purpose analogous to the figure of Mr. Tuttle in DeLillo’s novel. Both serve to suspend artistic reflection in a long affective encounter with mortality, transforming art, as Lauren discerns, into a response to unsheltered finitude: “He was scared. How simple and true. She tried to tend him, numb him to his fears. He was here in the howl of the world. This was the howling face, the stark, the not-as-if of things” (90).

The “not-as-if” of things is not their absence, but rather the difference between things and themselves, after the advent of language, but prior to the schematization of things as a

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<sup>14</sup> “Maybe he falls, he slides, if that is a useful word, from his experience of an objective world, the deepest description of time-space,” as Lauren puts it (83).

semblance of themselves, prior to their correlation with other things. It is the “world” of the suspended apophantic function, of the stuttering “as if, as if” that we observed previously. It is the inarticulate voice or the “howl” of difference itself, of the pure hiatus, not empirical but transcendental, between *technè* and *phusis*, between the schematizing faculty of imagination and nature, or between the presentation of what is and what, without such presentation would remain, not absent, but undisclosed or concealed.

The historical function, then, of the artist? In her sheltering of time the artist enables history, where time is *something different from itself*, and where the “as-if” of things, in their *unheimlich* estrangement from themselves, familiar in other words and strange at the same time, being their own semblance, maintains a precarious distance from the “howling” space of originary difference. *Mimèsis*, the Greek term for the analogical relation between *technè* and *phusis*, for the correlative “as-if” of things which we call reality, is therefore the condition of possibility of history, its transcendental condition, which is why its revelation, infinitely paradoxical, amounts precisely to the caesura of history, to the suspension of the measured and sequential structure of time. It is the retrogressive movement towards this condition of history and of narrative time that underwrites the performance art of the body artist and, in the final analysis, DeLillo’s literary enterprise, and enables one to argue, as I’ve done at the beginning of this essay, for a temporal interpretation of literary form. Such an interpretation depends upon the recognition of art – and of a certain imaginative production in general –, not merely as representation, but as *mimèsis*, the correlating function which shelters time and opens the world to itself as its own semblance.

Let me now finish by quoting a frequently cited passage of the novel that testifies to the essential mutability of that semblance. Imagination, as a precognitive faculty of putting-into-figure, is not constituted by man but constitutes him as such. Whence the need, in the novelist’s quest to identify that faculty, for speculation, for the mirroring of presentation, of *mimèsis*, as the only means of overcoming the inevitable delay of the “author” with respect to himself, that delay which is evident on nearly every page of *The Body Artist*. What comes impossibly then into *view*, in the guise, as we saw, of an impaired speech faculty, is a *voice* which speaks, not belatedly as we do of a Fall, but of a coming into being, not nostalgically of the loss of permanence, but of an emergence into time and the mutable state of existence. For Mr. Tuttle, who on occasion discovers in himself a certain capacity for *rhyming* – which is a way, of course, of differentiating by means of repetition –, has moments of “inspiration,” as Lauren observes, where his speech, defective in its ability to synthesize, attains a capability which can only be qualified, in this context, as radically negative:

“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.”

She [Lauren] didn’t know what to call this. She called it singing. He kept it going a while, ongoing, oncoming, and it was song, it was chant. She leaned into him. This was a level that demonstrated he was not closed to inspiration. She felt an easing in her body that drew her down out of laborious thought and into something nearly uncontrollable. She leaned into his voice, laughing. She wanted to chant with him, to fall in and out of time, or words, or things, whatever he was doing, but she only laughed instead.

“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.” (74)

Clearly such disarticulation – such “paratactic” efforts, one might say recalling Adorno’s comments on Hölderlin’s late poetry, his period of “madness” –, in short such condensation and juxtaposition, is irreducible to stylistic effects.<sup>15</sup> What this “chant” articulates no doubt, in its very disarticulation of a schematizing *logos*, is the infinite mutability of a time-space impossible to inhabit but which, at bottom, inhabits all subjects. In the novel’s final chapter, after Mr. Tuttle will have disappeared, unaccountably of course, and while she strives to rediscover his reflection in her mirrors (112-13), Lauren will repeat his chant: “Being here has come to me” (121). She, however, can only *fall* in doing so: “She went *twisting* down, slowly, almost thoughtfully, and opened her mouth, *oh*, in a moan that remained unsounded” (first italics mine, 123). This caesura of voice and of consciousness, this tropological lapse of being, itself testifies to the mutable condition of human existence, to the fact that, at bottom, something *turns* in the human, displaces it, estranges it from itself.

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<sup>15</sup> Despite what Philip Nel seems to suggest. Nor, on the other hand, does it appear reducible to a “heap of obscure, impenetrable, merely juxtaposed fragments” (Di Prete 495). For a discussion which elevates Mr. Tuttle’s chant to the level of “an instinctive, almost Heideggerian poetry that [...] sings Being itself,” see Mark Osteen (72). Noëlle Batt, at the farthest remove possible from such an ontological interpretation of voice, reads it as the “biologically determined” speech of an autistic “creatively exploited” by DeLillo (73); such a literal interpretation necessarily falls short, as Osteen’s does for apparently opposite reasons, of rendering an account of the specular and properly figurative or rhetorical character of Mr. Tuttle’s apparition.

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