POSTMODERN PARANOIA: CONSPIRACY THEORIES AS NETWORK ANXIETIES IN

DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE* AND *UNDERWORLD*

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Abstract

Conspiracy theories find their way into a majority of Don DeLillo's novels, ranging from rumors that reference pop culture to speculations with political consequences. While conspiracies can be found throughout a variety of time periods and cultures, I historicize the specific forms of paranoia that arise in DeLillo's fiction. In *White Noise*, disturbances in smalltown America in the form of industrial waste spill are accelerated by mass media culture and lead to a family man's conversion into an attempted murderer. *Underworld* sees the reliable concerns of the Cold War become untenable as the American empire expands and events like the Kennedy assassination and Vietnam War lead to more complicated forms of paranoia. The novel traces the full extent of nuclear weapons development, all the way to the destruction of nuclear waste products. It is in these depictions of post-1945 American paranoia that DeLillo engages with the feelings of fear and uncertainty that can result from postmodernity. Both novels show an awareness of global systems intruding into civilian life, forcing their characters to learn how to reorient themselves or fail and succumb to their paranoia. The re-emergence of previously hidden waste proves the conspiracy theorist's dictum that "everything is connected" to be true. Drawing on DeLillo's treatment of the topic, I will expand on the sorts of anxieties that these conspiracy theories expose and consider how a subject's positionality influences their relationship to paranoia. This project also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of conspiracy as a way of comprehending the world, as it can be both an exaggerated reaction to the uncertainties of postmodernity and a reasonable expression of cynicism toward obscured power structures.

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Introduction

Don DeLillo's novels are some of the most notable within the American canon of paranoid fiction, alongside writers like Thomas Pynchon, Norman Mailer, Ishmael Reed, Kathy Acker, William Gass, and Joseph McElroy (Apter 365, Flieger 90, O'Donnell 181). These works often follow their characters through a dense labyrinth of networks as they become increasingly paranoid that they are the target of an orchestrated conspiracy. As the plot of the novel unravels, its characters become paradoxically trapped within the book's internal logic, discovering that everything surrounding them is intricately connected to the incomprehensibly large structures that govern their worlds. This sensation of paranoia is aptly described by Patrick O'Donnell, who defines it as a "mode of perception that notes the connectedness between things in a hyperbolic metonymizing of reality" (182). Sympathizing with the desire to believe while simultaneously recognizing the complexities that make this faith possible, DeLillo's ability to engage with this astounding "connectedness" for all that it entails is what makes his fiction such a compelling account of conspiracy's metonymic qualities.

DeLillo's writing career had a unique historical position which helped to cement his place in this canon. As Henry Veggian explains in *Understanding Don DeLillo*, he produced a majority of his work while the United States transitioned from "the industrial age into the age of data and information, images and simulation" (Veggian 24). Throughout this period of infrastructural shifts and cultural changes, DeLillo makes coherent stories out of this seemingly unrepresentable tangle of conspiratorial plots and digital networks (24). Patrick Jagoda finds, in *Network Aesthetics,* that the role of the internet in *Underworld* is to exemplify the sense that a hyperawareness of networks is "endemic" to the timeframe that this all-encompassing novel recounts (46, 54).

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It is this informational explosion that results in an "epistemological problem"; The sheer amount of connections it brings to one's attention defies both "cognitive comprehension" and "experiential capacity" (49-55). Those who observe the instantaneous combination of previously disparate elements that the internet brings to one's awareness struggle to hold them all together simultaneously in their consciousness (55). For this reason, Jagoda refers to these networks as a "limit concept" (3). Rather than repeatedly failing to comprehend these structures with insufficient rationalizations, Jagoda believes that "aesthetics and cultural production" can give us the tools to understand them (3). He suggests instead turning to the "everyday affects (such as expectation or frustration) that they generate" (7).

N. Katherine Hayles observes a similar phenomenon in what she describes as a "postmodern parataxis" (398). Arising within the time frame 1945 to 1985, she writes that scientific discourses switched from the use of a "conduit metaphor," which sees information as passed from person to person through a medium, to an informatic paradigm, that views information as "distinct from the signals that carry it" (396-397). The view of information as a "transmitted" signal came to replace a more embodied understanding of it as encoded within a material form that is then passed along (397).

As different technologies are used, scientific discourses develop new metaphors to describe this state characterized by "divergent yet juxtaposed" terms (398). Resultantly, ideas regarding embodiment and materiality mix with a conceptualization of digital information as inherently ephemeral (398). The relationship between the two is unstable and Hayles finds the "psychic data" (DeLillo, 37) perfusing the environment of DeLillo's *White Noise* to be one example of this split (409). In this text "radiation . . . slices through materiality," and the body is no longer a stable material entity but a fetishization undermined by the information that

surrounds it (409). Yet, as Jerry Fliegger writes, there is still an "obdurate quality of the object and of matter," which "reminds us of the ineluctability of the real, its intrusion even into the ether of cyberspace" (88). While these two fields are opposites of one another, they are constantly intersecting, resulting in the sensation of parataxis that Hayles identifies.

Likewise, Peter Knight, a scholar of conspiracy theories and American studies, sees the "epistemological—and social—fragmentation" characteristic of the postmodern era as an inflection point of paranoia (813-814). This heightened sense of unease becomes a major part of the postwar American climate, providing a throughline between both the Cold War and the counterculture of the 1960s (811). With this in mind, he believes that DeLillo's works, such as *Underworld*, encourage their readers to uncover "a secret history of paranoia over the last half-century" (812). Svetlana Boym, in "Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics," argues that the tendency of conspiracy theories to attribute major events to a "transhistorical plot" seeks to resolve this fragmentation by bridging the gap between "premodern fantasies" and the contemporary issues brought about by "postmodern technology" (98). This periodization is essential as it reveals how shifts in state power, military technology, and global trade starting at the midpoint of the 20th have reformatted the narratives of conspiracy theorists.

While DeLillo's *Libra* is often portrayed as his paranoid masterpiece, Knight suggests that, despite the Kennedy assassination's aftermath, "that paranoid realization is ultimately experienced as a loss of connectedness" (813-814). The anxiety results from the "impossibly complex proliferation of data" the event produces and in its incomprehensibility inspires a constant reviewing of related footage and materials, including the Zapruder film and the Warren Commission Report (814).

Knight cites Jean-François Lyotard's description of postmodernism as an 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (xxiv) (814) and Habermas's concept of a 'legitimation crisis' as theories that explore similar epistemological tensions (818). He finds that these issues appear in forms such as "conspiratorial questioning of the word of government experts" (818). Facing the confusion that results from postmodern fragmentation, Knight argues that DeLillo portrays conspiracy theories as a "provisional but ever-present way of making sense of the world," and a societal issue as opposed to one resulting from "personal psychopathology" (819). He denies Jameson's portrayal of "conspiracy theory as 'the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age'" and views the phenomenon as a neutral approach to constructing narratives around the incomprehensible (827). In this reading, DeLillo reveals that conspiracy theorization is a narrative technique for navigating postmodern life.

While Knight's work is highly informative, his approach to understanding conspiracy theories seems to be at odds with DeLillo's. In particular, he points to the depiction of J. Edgar Hoover within *Underworld*, describing it as something that "amounts to a clumsy pathologizing of history, suggesting a reading of Cold War paranoia not as a sense-making strategy that takes its meaning from the culture at large, but as the emanation of a personal pathology writ large" (818). While it is undeniable that in texts like *Underworld* the feeling of paranoia spares no one, parts of DeLillo's oeuvre repeat this pathological portrayal of conspiracy. Rather than a necessary adaptation, they are often portrayed as a reactionary impulse and not always the most suitable response. To gloss over this differentiation seems to ignore the highly political nature of some of the most renowned conspiracies.

This political quality has also been at the forefront of previous discourse surrounding conspiracy theories, particularly Richard Hofstadter's popular account of the paranoid style.

Gesturing toward the rhetoric of politicians such as Barry Goldwater and Joseph McCarthy (1-7), Hofstadter identifies this paranoid as one who believes their entire culture or nation is under an attack by outside forces and their way of life is at risk of being completely eliminated (4). Resultantly, this style appears in highly polarized political situations, at times when opposing interests meet in a way that feels "totally irreconcilable," meaning that compromise, bargaining, and policy-making are no longer viable options (39). Hofstadter sees this proliferate during times of catastrophe or the fear of such an apocalyptic event (39). However, his characterization of this rhetorical style has been critiqued for its own internal paranoia. In a critique of Hofstadter, Nicolas Guilhot exposes the internal contradictions inherent to this attempt to capture a psychological profile through the concept of style. He finds, in losing sight of historical processes, that this sort of analysis leads to the creation of its own "eternal enemy" and instead skews toward propaganda (390). Rather than resort to this previous attempt at addressing the politics of conspiracy, Don DeLillo's literature gives us the ability to construct a new framework.

This means that even as Peter Knight tries to minimize the political content of conspiracy theories to avoid the risk of pathologizing them, he finds himself addressing the issues of power that flow throughout novels like *Underworld*. As Knight writes, it is "less a matter of pure epistemological skepticism than it is a question of power" when information is limited from the public (819). This is echoed throughout Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, as he analyzes the mutual role that science, the state, and the media play in the language games that construct metanarratives (28). Lyotard even concludes his book by advocating for the public's "free access to . . . memory and data banks" that may otherwise be reserved for those in the upper levels of government (67). This stratification of accessibility is no

accident, but a historical precedent set by the formation of entities such as the CIA at the end of the Second World War.

Lyotard finds it necessary to make this data transparent as he is aware that technological advancements come with inherent consequences, specifically the formation and substantiation of all types of knowledge undergoing what he calls a "disorienting upsurge" (38). An influence on Hayles's analysis, he discusses how technology rearranges the rules of the language games we utilize to construct knowledge. In a system arranged around technology, Lyotard explains that the rules of these games change to favor "efficiency" over "the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc." (41). The best move is one which "expends less energy than another" (44). Overall, this leads to "the massive subordination of cognitive . . . statements to the finality of the best performance (77).

As Hayles makes clear in *How We Became Posthuman*, this had larger implications as cyberneticians created a perception of human beings as "information-processing entities who are *essentially* similar to intelligent machines" (7). Through its formation out of "scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy," postmodern thought obeys the rule that "there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments" (Lyotard 77). As the process of constructing knowledge is reformulated, conspiracy theories take on a new virility. They question matters of consensus, and at times, they are the most efficient way to explain the goals behind dense and incomprehensible systems. Don DeLillo's novels showcase these developments, as with the miracle drug Dylar in *White Noise* or the nuclear bomb in *Underworld*, illustrating how people—successfully and unsuccessfully— interface with the advent of knowledge that is in the process of being created. They also question the notion of efficiency and tend toward entropy.

While DeLillo's work has been heavily explored by those invoking postmodern theorists, namely Jameson, Baudrillard, and Lyotard, the application of more recent scholarship can be equally generative. These theorists are necessary to comprehend the functioning of postmodern aesthetics in DeLillo's work, but the materialist approaches of scholars such as Jagoda, Hayles, and Jessica Hurley allow us to trace the emergence of this cultural phenomenon and the social tensions it provokes.

A common trend in studies centered on paranoia is to see a strong relationship between the sense of self-defense that the emotion calls for and a subject's ego. Patrick Jagoda argues that paranoia serves as a way to organize one's understanding of these networks, although it is a method that places the paranoid subject entirely in the center of these forces (57). Others, such as Emily Apter, have found a similarly egocentric appeal in paranoia. Reading DeLillo's work through the lens of Immanuel Wallersten's work in world systems theory (365), she sees examples of the concept of "oneworldedness," or a belief that everything is connected (365). Due to this, she finds critiques that authors such as DeLillo and Pynchon launch at "American consumer capitalism" to be undermined by the oneworlded "American paradigm" through which they view the world, a conceptualization shaped "in the 1960s at the zenith of Cold War paranoia" (386). Rather than speaking to the narcissism of a single character, or writer, this trend sees a "paranoid subjectivity symptomatic of the englobing logic of post-war American geopolitics" (Baxter 172).

Likewise, Tom LeClair calls DeLillo a "systems novelist" for his investment in "new epistemological and scientific paradigm[s]" (2). These systems novelists see their characters as "producers and consumers of messages" within "frequently over-loaded communication loops" (17). In these works, "contemporary man . . . lives in and interprets an environment he has made,

a world he has projected" (LeClair 17). While less critical of this writing, LeClair still portrays these fictions as those in which man is at the very center of his world.

Summarizing Julia Kristeva's explanation of paranoia, Patrick O'Donnell writes that it is "a 'paranoid-type mechanism' that is the 'inevitable product of . . . a denial of the sociosymbolic contract and its counterinvestment as the only means of self-defense in the struggle to safeguard an identity" (200). Another psychoanalytic theorist, Teresa Brennan, associates paranoia with "the objectification of knowledge," or a "knowledge based on a need for control" (28-29).

While Robert A. Rushing echoes Peter Knight's claim that conspiratorial thinking is an 'equal opportunity fantasy' (392), he makes a distinction between its politically left and politically right forms. In his estimation, "the right-wing fantasy" takes a position of believing "that someone has taken away the jouissance that rightfully belongs to me and demands a sadistic retribution for this wrongful appropriation" (392). This is not to inherently demonize anyone who becomes paranoid, either. As Rushing writes, "what we admire in DeLillo and Pynchon is not just that they capture a particular form of subjectivity but that they reveal the form of subjectivity that we are required to adopt" (393). Patrick O'Donnell, too, argues that the postmodern paranoid novel deconstructs how "traditional ways of knowing and perceiving . . . are shown to accommodate a political process" (198). Rather than generalizing conspiracy, in this project I will examine the ways that DeLillo's novels explore this outward pressure to turn towards paranoia, specifically the rightward type.

It is worth noting that conspiracy theories have been a topic for study in various fields. Literary critic Sebastian Schuller has criticized a totalizing focus on functionalist approaches through sociology or psychology, which neglects to analyze the narrative characteristics of conspiracy theories (195). These conspiracies have been described as methods that everyday

people use to make sense of "opaque power," or the obscured structures which govern their lives (Grusauskaite, Harambam, & Aupers 2). In Jesse Walker's thorough catalog of American conspiracies, *United States of Paranoia*, he reveals that these ideas move across social groups, as "people adopt and adapt these myths for their own needs" (Walker 17). He concludes by arguing that one method of counteracting the sensationalization that surrounds conspiracies is to "be aware of the cultural myths that shape our fears" (Walker 338). However, as previous analysis of DeLillo's novels has shown, literary studies can serve as an equally generative place to undertake an examination of conspiracy theories, especially how they serve a narrative function, and why they come to fulfill that role in the first place. As Eve Sedgwick claims, ". . . paranoid knowledge is so inescapably narrative" (138).

Studies such as Jerry Flieger's "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye" propose that the postmodern aesthetic is paranoid in itself. He critiques the postmodern for containing "the celebration of the unreliability of discourse or metanarrative" and argues that it ". . . results from a fundamentally projective act where narrative is read as a function of idiosyncratic and contingent perspective rather than as a transcription of any verifiable reality" (89). The postmodern text "often seems to bear witness to a global catastrophe . . . including the splintering of the Cartesian rational subject" and "reflects a profound crisis of legitimation" (89).

In my reading of the two novels, I will reiterate Mark Osteen's assertion that *Underworld* brings together ideas found in his earlier novels, especially *White Noise*. My analysis will make it clear that conspiracy is a popular thread in both novels. With *White Noise*, paranoia can be seen in its atomized form as Jack Gladney constructs his masculinity in reaction to fear. *Underworld*, with its large scale, places paranoia in relation to the history of the United States.

If the postmodern crisis of epistemology that leads to paranoia is to be found in challenges to the ego, embodiment, and the Cartesian subject, as some have claimed, then it is worth examining the site of the crisis by closely looking at this subject. In my chapter on *White Noise,* I will elaborate on how both the posthuman and the postmodern have threatened humanist conceptions of identity, how that inspires conspiratorial thinking, and explore the consequences and alternative responses to such a crisis. When discussing *Underworld,* I will examine how the text uses concepts like sublimity and abjection to represent the threat that postmodernism poses to the body and the irrepresentability of this condition in tandem with an explosion of paranoia. Through his vast cataloging of conspiracy, DeLillo's work explores both the role of the state and the individual in the perpetuation of paranoia. His work, often inspired by postmodern theories, proves Lyotard's dictum that "a postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher" (81). In taking up this role, Eric Cofer and Katrina Harack have described DeLillo's later works as showing a "progression to a more embodied, networked ethics of living" (465), a concept that this project will work towards while considering how conspiracy theories function in their surrounding knowledge ecologies (Sedgwick 145).

Chapter 1: Failed Reconstructions of Self in *White Noise*

Published in 1985, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* follows college professor Jack Gladney and his family as they are exposed to a chemical spill given the tentative name of the Airborne Toxic Event. The catalyst of this leak is a railroad car breaking free and releasing a mass of chemicals that take the form of a black cloud traveling towards their otherwise peaceful town. In a 1985 *New York Times* review, Jayne Anne Phillips pointed out coincidences between the novel's general plot and a major industrial accident in Bhopal, India. This is also highlighted by Jesse Kavadlo, who cites the fact that the publication of *White Noise* took place only one month after this major industrial accident, in which a pesticide plant leaked deadly amounts of gas that killed approximately 3,800 people at the time of the event (15). It is estimated that in the following 20 years another 15,000 to 20,000 people died as a result of medical complications caused by exposure and the continuing presence of contaminants in the local environment, which remain present today in Bhopal's water (Broughton). The American company that owned the plant, Union Carbide Corporation, has been accused of obfuscating their culpability and manipulating the narrative surrounding their involvement in the tragedy (Broughton). The failure to maintain proper safety protocols in the plant and clean the site following its closure are a testament to the cost that poorly regulated international trade has on laborers and their surrounding environment. Additionally, those who suffered the worst consequences were living in the city's slums which surrounded the plant. While *White Noise* never explicitly references this incident, its narrative treatment of a similar event exposes the asymmetrical distribution of disaster and explores the psychic impact that such dangers have, even on those who are far from the epicenter. In the case of Jack Gladney, his encounter with the toxic cloud forces him to

confront his place within this system, destabilizing his identity. Throughout the novel, he attempts to reconstitute the borders surrounding his sense of self through paranoia and violence.

At times, *White Noise* employs a satirical tone to make light of Jack's overreaction, as his exposure to the fictional chemical Nyodene D. is not immediately life-threatening. With the Bhopal incident in mind, Jayne Anne Phillips finds in *White Noise* a "rendering of a particularly American numbness" as the Gladney family, members of the consumer society in the center of this globalized economy, face a crisis similar yet remain fixated on "totally American concerns." It is this self-centered orientation in a time of "ever-increasing interdependence between the self and the national and world community" which makes the novel "all the more timely and frightening," rather than the threat of the Airborne Toxic Event. Phillips references scenes in the novel in which Jack believes his class position precludes his ability to experience disaster. When his family asks if they should evacuate, he reminds them "that's for people who live in mobile homes" (Phillips 1985). As Jack explains to his family, "society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters," not college professors in a "pleasant town . . . with a quaint name" (DeLillo 122). For a family with the class status of the Gladney's disaster is always experienced through the comfortable mediation of television screens.

Once again, surprising coincidences made headlines when the movie adaptation of *White Noise* appeared on Netflix in 2022 and its similarity to a train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio led to another outbreak of paranoid thinking among Americans. A variety of popular sources reported on the event in East Palestine, Ohio, the same state where the movie was filmed. As reported on the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) "Center on Extremism" blog, this event was folded into popular antisemitic narratives. It was interpreted by the National Justice Party (NJP)

as an "attack on white Americans." However, the ADL clarifies that "questioning the government response in East Palestine does not equate to conspiratorial thinking" as "the EPA's handling of previous environmental disasters, from the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, to the Colorado Gold King Mine spill, has not inspired confidence or trust" (2023). According to the ADL's report, the NJP believed that the East Palestine derailment could not receive the same amount of coverage as the Flint, Michigan, water crisis due to Flint's primarily Black demographic composition. The criticisms presented against this clean-up process highlight the tension between reasonable criticism and the leap of logic that conspiracies require. Rather than viewing both events as linked by the U.S. government's elevation of profit over environmental protections, conspiracy theorists adamantly refuse to decenter whiteness and narrativize the incidents as calculated attacks on their way of life. While the train derailment and other catastrophic industrial accidents produce justifiable resentment and distrust, misdirected paranoia eclipses any potential for critique. Likewise, when reading *White Noise*, it is essential to consider how Jack Gladney's race, class, and social positioning are responsible for the shape his paranoia takes.

The persistence of paranoia, generated by repeated failures at properly tracking the exploitative nature of multinational capitalism, confirms that *White Noise* is not only "timely," as Jayne Anne Phillips surmises, but a longstanding work capable of representing postmodern crises (Kavadlo, 15-16). It is important to note that I place such emphasis on the affects surrounding the Airborne Toxic Event because none of the characters die or fall ill from their exposure. In both of the real-world cases that seem to spill out from the pages of the novel, we are forced by the devastation brought upon people and the planet to recognize the minor roles that many of us play in comparison to the larger interests of global trade. For the Gladney family,

this information is enough to spark an identity crisis. As Tom LeClair argues in his book *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, the book's real disaster takes the form of "the new knowledge that seeps into the future from the imploded toxic event" (209). Rather than "the scattered corpses or destroyed buildings of conventional disaster fiction" the family's "response is to information" (209). This is especially true in the case of Jack, and his failure to internalize this information into his frame of reference will be the primary focus of this chapter.

As panic spreads across the town and throughout the family, Jack and his wife Babette's latent anxiety surrounding their own mortality reaches a new height. Jack finds out that Babette has been testing a drug named Dylar that is meant to assuage a user's fear of death. By engaging with the panic and paranoia that stems from events such as these, Kavaldo finds that DeLillo's work is able to engage with "the problem of what it means to be human when being human seems fraught with peril" (15-16), especially when "scientific explanation intensifies rather than alleviates" these anxieties (16). This can be seen in *White Noise* when Jack's exposure level is tested by specialists and he believes he sees "death rendered graphically" (DeLillo 137). He is made to "feel like a stranger in [his] own dying" (137). He is also forced to consider what other personal data of his is circulating, spread throughout "some state or federal agency, some insurance company or credit firm or medical clearinghouse" (134). From the generic to the particular, all of the intimacies of life and death are transformed into anonymous numerical data points that can be analyzed and traded.

This focus on the threat of new and unpleasant information, rather than the material consequences of disaster, is also present in Moritz Ingwersen and T.U. Dresden's article "Media Exposure: Communicable Disease and Communication Networks in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*." Reading *White Noise* alongside Neal Stephenson's

science fiction novel *Snow Crash*, they argue that DeLillo's novel blurs the line between "informational and biological systems" (425). In this way, the Airborne Toxic Event functions similarly to a pandemic, likening it to the language virus of *Snow Crash* (420). As Ingwersen and Dresden assert, it is the event of a pandemic that forces us to trace infection through points in a network and leads to a deeper awareness of the various infrastructures in which our bodies are embedded (417-418). In the case of the train derailment in *White Noise*, the Nyodene D. chemical is "a whole bunch of things . . . that are byproducts of the manufacture of insecticide" (DeLillo 127). This industrial waste is one part of a larger chain of infrastructure, assisting in the growth of crops that are then transformed into processed foods and eventually reach the supermarket that the Gladneys are familiar with. If this event never took place, it is likely that this family would never even consider the complex chemicals that are essential to their daily life. However, recognizing the existence of waste products like Nydoene D. raises questions about the environmental impact of agriculture, the quality of what we consume, and the risks present for those who do the work of manufacturing.

For Jack and his family, the Airborne Toxic Event forces them to reckon with their connection to these large-scale systems, unleashing their paranoid imagination. The cloud is "death made in a laboratory," such a sophisticated mix of "chlorides, benzines, phenols," and other chemicals that, in their fear, the family can only regard in a way that is "simple and primitive" (DeLillo, 124). Sometime after the event, Jack's son, Heinrich, warns him that "the real issue is the kind of radiation that surrounds us every day" (166). In our lives we find ourselves in the crossroads of invisible "electrical and magnetic fields" that function in inscrutable ways, carrying their own unidentifiable hazards (167). This reveals that Nyodene D. is only one example of the vast array of threats presented by a postmodern world. The

overwhelming challenge to categorize and contain this knowledge makes paranoia tempting, but such a stance only further obscures their functioning.

The threats that Heinrich catalogs are similar to the chemtrails, fluoridated water, 5G radiation, and carcinogens that populate the imagination of today's conspiracy theorists. Jack wants to reason against his son's fascination with "catastrophic findings" and induce "a spirit of informed and skeptical inquiry" within him (167). However, as the novel shows, he can not even stop himself from reflexively internalizing these paranoid concerns. His paternal authority is challenged just as his own faith in the government's ability to protect him has been shattered. The inability of the family to make sense of these systems echoes their anxiety during their evacuation, during which Jack thinks that, "in a crisis the true facts are whatever other people say they are. No one's knowledge is less secure than your own" (118). With all of their positions infused with doubt, a person in this situation struggles to present their own arguments even against what they know to be false. Even when Jack has statistics at his disposal, he wonders if it is "prissy" to quote them "in the face of powerful beliefs" (132). With no way to ascertain the truth, Jack abandons his usual predilection for academic reasoning in favor of his instincts which are swayed by fear.

These anxieties are well contextualized by Frida Beckman who, in her article "Paranoid Masculinity, or, Toward a New Identity Politics," outlines the way that a predilection towards conspiracy theories is related to a specific form of victimized subjectification. She identifies this way of seeing the world within the white males that populate the alt-right (235). Echoing the critiques of Hayles, Beckman argues that the fact that even the most minute details in our lives are "connected with multinational companies, with cybernetic networks, and global geopolitical

logics" lends itself to the difficulty of conceptualizing oneself as a free and autonomous subject in any capacity within the 20th century (237-238).

When we have no way of placing our own minuscule lives within these grand schemes and networks of influence, it leads to a crisis of identity (238). Despite this, Beckman finds that these white men, as a demographic, have always considered themselves to be "free" and "autonomous" in a way that rejects entanglement with forces that they can not control directly (236). This is unique from the lived experience of those in other groups who have been historically oppressed (236). When those who have not previously had to struggle to assert their autonomy find it challenged later in life by external circumstances, reckoning with any lack of total freedom becomes an existential crisis (236). The conception of self-driven by what Beckman identifies as "American liberal individualism" is no longer tenable without a sense that outside forces are closing in (237). Beckman identifies DeLillo's work as an expression of this anxiety, alongside the novels of other American writers like Pynchon, William Gibson, and Philip K. Dick (238). The paranoid subjectification that we are dealing with in this case is often not a justified one, felt by the marginalized, but a slipping sensation that elicits a reaction from those who are used to the treatment that their social privileges afford them.

It is in his response to this crisis of a situation that Jack decides violence is the only reliable way to regain his sense of certainty and control. Those surrounding him portray this decision as natural through an essentialist view of gender, such as when his wife Babette refers to it as a matter of "plain dumb blind male biology" (256). Jack is told repeatedly that he is biologically predetermined to act in such a way, allowing violence to play a fatalistic role in the world of men. Babette knows that, having slept with another man, she has "injured" Jack's "male pride" (256). When he asks for more information regarding Mr. Gray, she warns that Jack will

only end up killing him. She says that "a male follows the path of homicidal rage" (256). His colleague, Murray, also speaks to him about "a fund, a pool, a reservoir of potential violence in the male psyche," "a great dark lake of male rage" (279). If Jack is acting the way a man should, then it is implied that he has an immutable prerogative to harm others for the sake of his self-image. The standard for masculine behavior in this cultural context is outlined as animalistic domination achieved through violence.

The construction of this white male identity has been analyzed along similar lines by Michael James Rizza. He explains that Jack occupies a humanist construction of identity, which is characterized by being "autonomous, rational, and knowable" (85). However, Rizza notes that this can only be upheld through an "exclusion of the Other" (85). These are the "violent grounds" on which Jack's identity must rest (85). As his sense of self is decentered, Rizza theorizes that Jack understands the process as one of "feminization" (82). His fears include "the dangers[s] of being penetrated, dominated," and "colonized" (82). To repel the forces that he believes are acting upon him, Jack feels he must fight back with similar aggression (82). Similarly, Jesse Kavaldo finds that ". . . death has a phallic power over Jack" (27). The terms which he uses to describe its presence sees it "become[] menacingly sexual, entering and remaining inside, and then reproductive, simultaneously a pregnancy, parasite, and virus" (27). The consequence of this positioning is that "Jack Gladney, who, first displaced from his house by the cloud, now becomes displaced from his body" by the presence of death (27).

In response to the sensation of being pushed out of his body, Jack overcompensates by allowing his sense of self to grow. On an internal level, Tom LeClair explains that both Jack and Babette both attempt "'mastering' death by expanding the physical self as an entity" (214). In the text, this tactic of expansion finds new ground as DeLillo's narration is able to draw the reader

into Jack's hysteria. He wakes up "in the grip of a death sweat. Defenseless against [his] own racking fears" (46). In this moment of paranoid fear he notices that "the digital reading on the clock-radio was 3:51," thinking it is "always odd numbers at times like this" (46). His emotions are channeled into an episode of referential mania as he asks himself "what does it mean? Is death odd-numbered" (46)? This leads him to consider the meaning of all numbers, if they are all uniquely "life-enhancing" or "charged with menace" in some way (46). Much later in the novel, after going to sleep considering his wife's affair, he wakes up with the feeling that "someone or something" is "nearby" (230). His first thought is to consider if it is "an odd-numbered hour" (231) and when he cannot recognize Vernon sitting in the backyard, he considers him "Death, or Death's errand-runner," or "an aphorist of last things" (232). On a first pass, an attentive reader may internalize this dread, considering it a valid hint that the book is foreshadowing a planned plot point. For those who do not yet know who Vernon is, this tense moment in the book seems like it truly will precipitate Jack's demise. By layering the narration with Jack's disjointed thoughts, DeLillo destabilizes the structure of his novel and his character's psyche expands to include the reader in the grasp of paranoia. Jack's existence as a postmodern character becomes as perfuse as the toxic cloud and other hazards that radiate throughout the environment.

Solidifying the cultural acceptance of such behavior, we can see plenty of justification given to Jack's violent impulses, besides the biological arguments that have already been employed. When he is visited by his father-in-law Vernon, he is quick to point out the things that need fixing around the Gladney home (234). Vernon, a handyman and womanizer, is a paradigm of masculinity. Jack thinks about how his own inability to do repair work is "a betrayal of gender" (234). Later, Vernon questions him for not owning a firearm. He is proven right in his suspicion that Jack would be "the last man in America who doesn't own the means to defend

himself" (241). This may be another source for Jack's self-consciousness, as when his family was evacuating, he took notice of a bumper sticker that read "GUN CONTROL IS MIND CONTROL" (151). It caused him to reflect that in emergency situations, it is best "to stick close to people in right-wing fringe groups" (151). Regardless of his own politics, he concedes to these groups as representations of men who can get things done in a crisis. Finally, through Vernon, Jack is able to acquire a firearm, what he considers "the ultimate device for determining one's competence in the world" (242). To have a gun is to be prepared, familiar with the omnifarious dangers of life and ready to handle them. Having this ability to enact violence is more than a matter of male disposition, it is portrayed as a societal duty required of men in order to protect and provide for their loved ones.

In Don DeLillo's essay "Silhouette City: Hitler, Manson, and the Millennium," he directly engages with the proliferation of white supremacy and fascism within America. This essay was recently released in The Library of America collection *Don DeLillo: Three Novels of the 1980s*, which Mark Osteen, the collection's editor, has called "directly related" to the included novels. In an interview with the Library of America, Mark Osteen summarizes the essay as "a penetrating analysis of extremist right-wing groups and the troubling presence of neo-Nazism in the United States." DeLillo explicitly references these groups throughout the piece, specifically The Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) and the Silent Brotherhood (5). He explains that they have "established retreats, compounds, brotherhoods, networks, all linked to homegrown churches that mix apocalyptic reverie with violent anti-Semitism" (4).

Much like the global systems that induce anxiety in *White Noise*, DeLillo points out that these groups see "complex systems, centralization, the whole scheming technocracy of welfare

and banking" as threats to their way of life(5). The fears that these neo-Nazis have regarding globalism are the same anxieties that result from the disorientation of posthumanism. In response to their identity being challenged, they seek to "blame," inventing an enemy that they refer to as "ZOG, or the Zionist Occupational Government" (5). This framework calls back to the other citations of antisemitic thought that DeLillo provides in his essay, which include Hitler's mention of "the world empire of Jewish satrapies'" and the depiction of Jewish people as "demon-conspirator(s)" at the time of the crusades (3-4). Historically, this specific conspiracy theory has its basis in books like *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The ideas associated with this text found ground in America when the *Dearborn Independent* newspaper, owned by Henry Ford, published a series of articles on the topic that were later compiled into a book titled *The International Jew*. Likewise, this is the same rhetoric to be found in the white supremacist conspiracy theories that circulate online today (Lev Topor 120).

DeLillo's argument in the essay can be read as an extension of the claims that Susan Sontag makes in her piece "Fascinating Fascism" (Veggian 16). In this text, Sontag attempts to characterize fascist ideology, especially its aesthetic content, which she sees as being "based on the containment of vital forces" (8). Rather than their violence simply being that of "brutishness and terror," Sontag finds that this ideology of repression lives on in common principles (10). Among these, she lists "the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of the intellect; the family of man" (10). Likewise, DeLillo finds the "shadow" of these beliefs not only in our "collective perception" but in the mundane scenes of everyday life (1). DeLillo's mention of specific extremist groups, as well as his awareness of their conspiratorial beliefs, makes it clear where he thinks this shadow lies. Above all, DeLillo

and Sontag both see the Nazis as offering a particular fantasy to those who chose to inhabit their worldview.

Conspiracy theories are enriched by the details that fantasy can provide. DeLillo and Sontag find this element present in the phenomenon of those who collect Nazi memorabilia. Taking a book of SS uniform photographs as her object, Sontag finds a testament to "the power of the image," as the details to be extracted from regalia, weaponry, and artifacts lend themselves to the enrichment of fantasy (14). As Sontag writes, "for fantasy to have depth, it must have detail" (14). DeLillo also positions these items as objects for "collecting pleasure" (2), and claims that "Nazi lore and notation represent a rich source of material to be consulted in the service of fantasy and self-fulfillment" (2). This same mania toward collection of details and a search for historical factuality makes itself known through conspiracy theories that are intensely elaborate. The cataloging of detail allows one to have a fuller, richer mental image of an event.

According to DeLillo, these conspiratorial fantasies are ornamented with an apocalyptic motif (3). He describes "the fuhrerbunker," where Hitler ended his life, as a representation of the "myth of self-fulfillment" (3). These white supremacists chase the fame and glory of "slain warriors," believing their death can cement their status as heroes in the crusade against what they deem evil (3). The apocalyptic quality of their perceived vindication services an identity that is no longer in the dynamic realm of becoming, but one that is fixed after being forged through acts of extremist violence.

Sontag and DeLillo also see the idolization of a strong, totalitarian figure as a shortcut to the process of constructing an identity. Sontag sees the adoption of Nazi ideology in part a "response to an oppressive freedom of choice" and a reaction against "an unbearable degree of individuality" (13). DeLillo believes that Charles Manson's followers found a similar appeal in

the words of their leader, who told them exactly "what to do" and "what to believe" (6). While the mandate's of a totalitarian leader may seem oppressive, DeLillo's interest in the allure of such figures leads him to find that, to some individuals, it is the weight of the decision making process thrust upon them by their freedom that feels despotic. For these willing subjects, the "secret yearning" that Hitler answers is "the yearning to be spellbound, unburdened by free will and self-command" (2).

Where DeLillo's essay departs from Sontag's is in his ability to contextualize these ideas within the landscape of American culture, including their relation to mass media. He notes the spectacular quality that all of this violence holds, especially "the spectacle of an empire" that has proven itself as a "master[] of extremity" (2). With this highly aestheticized, richly documented regime in mind, DeLillo warns that it is possible to be "seduced by the imagery of force and domination" (2). This is especially dangerous in a postmodern culture where "information shades into rumor and mass fantasy" all of which are liable to transform into "topical entertainment" (2). In such a setting, even Nazis have an "adaptability to consumer format," due to the codification of their imagery and the shocking appeal of their (6). Any media coverage of these groups risks spreading their message.

This is the case because of the nature of American discourse. DeLillo writes that "in the American air, with every thought permitted, the distance between thought and action becomes ever slighter" (6). The allowance of free speech does not protect anyone choosing to spread hate speech, but the invocation of the First Amendment is a common rhetorical move made by white supremacists. Again, turning to frequency with which these groups carry out DeLillo highlights the anxiety that "only fanatics win unconditional victories" as their willingness to commit violent acts yields more direct action than the "network of compromise and distortion" that so often

hinders democratic processes (2). This dilemma is a major theme in DeLillo's writing, especially as seen in his 1991 book *Mao II*, in which an author must weigh the effectiveness of his words against the spectacular transmission of ideas that terrorism affords. With regard to *White Noise*, the speed at which misinformation about the Airborne Toxic Event travels and how quickly the event is interpreted as an apocalyptic call to arms means that these questions should remain at the forefront of the novel's reading.

Throughout *White Noise*, Don DeLillo provides a compelling characterization of an otherwise comfortable and privileged man's descent into paranoia. Avoiding the pitfall of a pathologizing critique, DeLillo instead uses humor to deflate the anxieties of a postmodern era. He expresses sympathy for the feeling of confusion that may arise while lampooning the narcissism present in narrative frameworks that catastrophize the lives of middle class Americans. The recurrence of conspiracy theories and their popularity speaks to an inability to reconcile with the massive transformations brought about by late stage capitalism. The intertwining of interconnection and mediation has destabilized concepts such as the self and the nation, as well as the ability to communicate through channels previously acknowledged as legitimate. In this time of crisis, there is a tendency to seek out certainty that can be catastrophic. The adoption of this form of conspiratorial thinking can make it difficult to confront the root of social issues, and at worst, it can result in fanaticism and bigotry. The challenge that *White Noise* presents to readers is how this paranoia should be managed and redirected toward productive ends.

Chapter 2: Paranoia and *Underworld*'s Postmodern Sublime

Released in 1997, *Underworld* builds on *White Noise'*s interest in the waste that exudes from global systems and far surpasses it in scope. Within the sprawling narrative of *Underworld*, conspiracy theories litter the text as frequently as mentions of waste do. Following Nick Shay and a cast of other characters throughout the second half of the 20th century, information is another form of excess in the novel that needs to be managed, and conspiracy theories seem to offer up one way of doing so. The characters all find themselves drawn to these theories in some form or another, from the idea that the moon landing was faked (227), to the belief that AIDs was spread by the government (243). With its detailed multitude of plot lines and recurring motifs, scholars like Jesse Kavadol have commented on the novel's ability to draw the reader in to the "paranoid experience" (108). The form of *Underworld* encourages readers to make attempts at piecing together the many narrative fragments within the lengthy text and decide which elements hold the most weight in the historical account that DeLillo provides. Like a conspiracy theorist, the reader is tasked with seeking out patterns and making connections.

In this chapter, I will discuss how DeLillo's work portrays the proliferation, function, and spread of conspiracy theories, as well as what information is excluded from these dramatized re-narrativations of history. Primarily, I argue they result about from an inability to properly represent the changes brought about by late stage capitalism, as Jameson claims in *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism* with his aside that conspiracy is a failure to understand these systems (34-38). These changes include the advancements in military technology and the expansion of U.S. political power that DeLillo depicts in *Underworld*. Most importantly, DeLillo uses the nuclear bomb as a metonym for what Lyotard and Jameson have called the postmodern sublime, an effect of these immeasurable networks of connections and the

impossibility of representing their totality. In this context, conspiracy theories are the byproduct of increasingly mediated cultural production and a symptom of the larger incomprehensibility of postmodern life. Jessica Hurley's theory of the nuclear mundane is useful in understanding DeLillo's employment of waste, which reveals what material knowledge is lost when the sublime eclipses our understanding of our world.

One character who experiences an arc that clearly articulates the paranoia of postmodernity is Matt Shay, Nick's brother and a nuclear weapons researcher. Matt experiences an internal conflict over his role doing "weapons work" (402). He takes notice of the protestors who stand outside his workplace as he heads in each day (404, 409). Even if his work is done at a level of distance, through the abstraction of numbers crunched at his cubicle, he feels a sense of unease. His work results in "arrays of numbers and symbols" which may enter the world in ways that he can not conceive of at the time they are created (408).

His coworker Eric Deming, who has Q-level clearance, "spread[s] astounding rumors" that often unsettle Matt further (403). In one instance, Eric tells Matt how the Nevada Test site impacted the health of nearby communities, detailing realistic symptoms like vomiting and rashes, while also making outlandish claims, such as suggesting that you may wake up three inches shorter than you were the day before (405). He intentionally mixes truth with rumor, claiming it adds an "edge" and an "existential burn" to the situation (406).

Matt's sense of disturbance becomes acute after a "paranoid episode" that makes him painfully aware of the systems which surround him (DeLillo 446). This is catalyzed by Matt smoking weed that was possibly "laced with some psychotomimetic agent" at a party thrown by others who are working on the bomb project (421). At first, we are told he is "surrounded by enemies," the most stereotypical refrain of paranoia (421). However, he realizes that what really

disturbs him is "not enemies but connections, a network of things and people," or "things and figures and levels of knowledge that he was completely helpless to enter" (421). Again, he feels the weight of what his work may result in compounded through its alienated production. Besides the potential loss of human life it can bring about, it reveals to him a new way of seeing large global systems of production. He asks himself, ". . . how can you tell the difference between orange juice and Agent Orange if the same massive system connects them at levels outside your comprehension" (DeLillo, 465)? These chosen terms are reflective of the global economic hegemony and military power needed to sustain a prosperous consumer society. However, Matt, who is at a distance even from the work he does for the military, struggles with the knowledge that the insignificant details of his life are interrelated with the larger functions of power.

While he fails to come up with a way to properly differentiate these objects, he reacts with what he believes to be "the only intelligent response" (DeLillo 465, 466). Not satisfied by this answer, Matt wonders if all he can do is be "ready to half believe everything and to fix conviction in nothing" (466). He is prepared to believe even "the most implausible things" (467). This line of thought shows paranoia and conspiracy theories as one response to an awareness of the postmodern situation, even if it is not a fully satisfactory one.

Scholars Peter Knight and Brian J. McDonald have both interpreted the postmodern paranoia that emerges at this moment as a mutation of earlier 1950s anxieties. Specifically, in the article "'Nothing You Can Believe is Not Coming True': Don DeLillo's *Underworld* and the End of the Cold War Gothic," McDonald attempts to historically place *Underworld* as a text by examining the reception of conspiracy-based texts at the time of the novel's release in the late 90s. Citing the critic Michael Wood, McDonald recounts the perception that *Underworld* "marks an initiation into the age of the post-paranoid novel" (94). By post-

paranoid, Wood believes that these specific formations of anxiety "have lost much of their political and cultural currency in America" (McDonald, 94). The fears that once circled around the events of the Cold War, such as "nuclear holocaust and communist spies," are no longer as threatening as they once were and instead seem "rather quaint and suitably nostalgic" (94). While Wood sees a downturn in conspiracy theories, McDonald argues that they have simply undergone a change in form. Now, they are "organized by the accelerating forces of globalization rather than the ideologies of Cold War politics" (95). The manner in which sensations of paranoia manifest themselves relies not only on a single subject's positionality, but on the larger historical forces that organize these observers.

McDonald acknowledges that Peter Knight has similarly described *Underworld*'s representation of Cold War anxiety as nostalgic (95). Knight presents this notion in his article "Everything's Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia." There, he delineates the paranoia of the fifties as secure, and the form that comes after as insecure (815). Like McDonald, he argues that the novel portrays Cold War paranoia as "oddly comforting" (Knight 815). The hostility between world powers in the past is a lesser evil in comparison to the "age when power has become unstable, unfocused, and intangible" (Knight 816).

Reflecting on what was at stake in the Cold War reveals the depth of political connotations linked to establishing a sense of secure paranoia. As McDonald mentions, "commonality and nationhood" are the benefits provided to a community forged through paranoia (95). In the fifties, one manifestation of this was McCarthyism. While the threat of nuclear weapons is an obvious danger, halting the spread of communism was also at the forefront of the U.S. political agenda. Today, with slogans like "Make America Great Again," nostalgia for this period becomes even more politicized.

Within the text, DeLillo introduces various historical events that destabilized this secure paranoia and national self-perception. One such event, the focus of his book *Libra*, is the Kennedy assassination. As Knight writes, for DeLillo, this serves as "an inaugural event in the society of the spectacle, the limit case of modernist solidity before politics finally gave way to the postmodern simulation" (814).

Another major blemish to the reputation of the United States as a just, democratic nation, as referenced in *Underworld*, is the Vietnam War. Matt Shay's inability to completely deny Eric's conspiracy theories stems from his experience as a veteran in this war. It gives him a streak of skepticism and fuels his belief in the rumors that Eric posits (DeLillo 418). When Eric tells him that the atomic bomb tests "weren't safe but they went ahead anyway" (417), the narration explains that states that Matt had "served in Vietnam, after all, where everything he'd ever disbelieved or failed to imagine turned out, in the end, to be true" (418) This thought reflects general disillusion with the Vietnam War, driven by revelations about U.S. actions overseas. One such instance can be found in Seymour Hersh's Pulitzer Prize-winning report on the injustices committed by U.S. soldiers during the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. Likewise, in 1971 Daniel Ellsberg provided the *New York Times* with the Pentagon Papers that exposed the details of the United States's actions in Vietnam (Weiskopf and Willmott 1). For Patrick Jagoda, these "resistances" against U.S. cultural and financial hegemony are just as tied to a network aesthetic as their object of critique (13). Specifically, he takes note of "the New Left's broader adoption of news media, especially televisual networks, as a key aspect of its strategic planning in anti-Vietnam protests (13) These events, shared through the spectacle of media, have disrupted what Eric refers to as a "placid" time (DeLillo 410). Jagoda sees another expression of "the network imaginary" in this reporting, as it "was central to countercultural movements such

as New Communalism as well as to the New Left's broader adoption of news media, especially televisual networks, as a key aspect of its strategic planning in anti-Vietnam protests. (13).

Peter Boxall has also identified this time period as a watershed moment for the America that DeLillo seeks to represent. Calling back to *White Noise*, he reminds us that Jack Gladney claims "he 'invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968'" (Boxall 120). Boxall sees this as a "pivotal moment," particularly for the movement of power in the world from "European colonialism to the cold war" (120). With Vietnam and the My Lai massacre in mind, he finds that the photographs taken of the tragedy by Ronald Haeberle "distill a historical continuity between the Second World War and Vietnam" (120). They display ". . . a way of narrating the movement from nineteenth-century colonialism to the postwar US and Soviet occupation of strategic European and Asian states" (120). Despite these changes, the one thing which connects both eras is "mass civilian death" (120). He believes that "by 1984, perhaps, it is precisely the capacity for a particular form of historical articulation has been lost" (121). By tracing this mass death from 1968 to 1984, Boxall meets Daniel Cordle's notion that the common framing that primarily characterizes the Cold War as one in which no major powers clashed ignores "the casualties in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and other places" (9).

This undoing of secure paranoia has even larger implications. If, as McDonald writes, the Cold War produced "a state of tension that seemed to impose ultimate borders, real and metaphoric, on the reach and exercise of power and its instruments" (96), then this new paranoia is archetypically postmodern. Matt's episode of mental fragmentation becomes a consequence of his failure to reconcile with the postmodern sublime. Fredric Jameson provides a useful theorization of this concept in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In this book, Jameson explains the historical state that proceeds from the "privileged lost object of

desire" that is the 1950s (19). In his chapter regarding *Underworld*, Patrick Jagoda draws

attention to the fact that DeLillo's novel begins in "the early 1950s," rather than "the end of

World War II—the 'post-1945' that serves as a common marker of the beginning of American

'global' power in texts such as *Gravity's Rainbow*" (49). Likewise, Jesse Kavaldo sees "the

bomb and the ball" as transporting "Nick from childhood innocence into adulthood" alongside

the century he lives in (115).

Part of this development involved an expansion of capitalism on a global scale. Utilizing

Ernest Mandel's periodization from the book *Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson places this at the

center of his concept for a postmodern sublime. This periodization defines this 3rd stage as one

of "machine production of electronic and nuclear apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century

(qtd. in Jameson 35). As a result of advanced technology, humankind is granted the sense that a

new force, perhaps one created by the hands of humanity, has overthrown Nature as the great

"*other*" (34). This is a "moment of a radical eclipse of Nature itself" (34). It is this sense that

creates the postmodern sublime, as in many aspects, human invention is capable of establishing a

mastery over nature.

Rather than reaching a resolution between the conception of a self and a great other,

Jameson sees this issue as an advancement of classical problems regarding "aesthetic

representation," especially as outlined by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke (36). Jean-

François Lyotard injects this same dilemma into his characterization of the postmodern. As he

writes, "the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in

presentation itself" and "searches for new presentations . . . in order to impart a strong sense of

the unrepresentable" (81). In this historical situation, Jameson argues that the sublime is found in

"the machine," particularly how people attempt to represent their inner workings and how they

see their humanity defined in "relationship to" the concept of a machine (36). It is critical to note that the machine is only a symbol for something greater and even more indescribable. Jameson writes that it "may well serve as adequate shorthand to designate that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery" (35). The sheer dread of this uncanny and "alienated power" leads to "the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis" (35). In stopping up our capacity of figuration, the postmodern sublime also poses a challenge to the imagination.

The idea that the limitations of capitalism have put similar constraints on creativity has resonances with Jameson's often-quoted line that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." This bold statement is even the basis for Mark Fisher's concept of Capitalist Realism. However, in the quote's entirety, Jameson states that we ought to "revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" (2003). Rather than eclipsing creativity, this reconsideration gives an artist new material with which to address the postmodern sublime. It is this apocalyptic vision with which I argue DeLillo attempts to represent the social, economic, and political structures that have shaped the latter half of the American century.

However, above the limits of representing technology, Jameson finds the postmodern sublime stemming from "a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism" (37). The role that technology performs in this formulation is to "offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentered global network of the third stage of capital itself" (37-38).

One result of this situation is the rise of science fiction literature that Jameson describes as an expression of "high-tech paranoia" (38). These popular works are "narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies" (38). While DeLillo's writing contains elements that push the limits of our own reality, such as the drug Dylar in *White Noise* and worldwide technological blackouts in *The Silence*, he and other "paranoid" writers weave these anxieties into similar employments.

Here, it becomes necessary to return to Brian J. McDonald's analysis, specifically in relation to the horror associated with the paranoia postmodernity brings about. While McDonald focuses on the presence of medieval characteristics and metaphors throughout the text, this horror can also be observed in the terror wrought by the sublime. If Jameson's analysis focuses on the Kantian question of representation, McDonald and DeLillo both make use of the terror that has been emphasized by Burke. As McDonald writes, the paranoia of *Underworld* reveals "an emerging nightmare vision of forces and systems of power that seem to function beyond containment" (97) and "a world haunted by massive systems of power whose ubiquity, diffusiveness and almost invisible menace seem to acquire a virtually preternatural and spectral potency" (McDonald 97). He argues that this culminates in a gothic aesthetic.

While the political background of the 1960s is essential to the paranoia in the novel, the ultimate signifier of dread in *Underworld* is to be found within the technology of the bomb. To communicate its destructive power, it is often described for its unparalleled ability to dissolve the human body. While the systems that Matt envisions are described as "horrific" (DeLillo 446), the bomb that he is working on has the capability to "redefine the limits of human perception and dread" (DeLillo 422). DeLillo's depictions of the bomb's destructive power do not linger at the

edge of the mushroom cloud it produces. They focus on the deconstruction of the subject caught within its blast.

Eric stokes Matt's fear by letting him know that when the bomb goes off, "your arm becomes an x ray of your arm" and "you don't have to open your eyes" because "you can see right through the lids" (410). When pilots are made to fly over the detonation of a nuclear bomb for the sake of a test at the Nevada site, "a glow enters the[ir] body that's like the touch of God" (613). One pilot says that he was able to see his bones through his skin and, years after the test, his "left eye sees things that belong to [his] right" (614).

The divine power present in the bomb dissolves the subject that comes into contact with it, rewiring their sense of being. Even afterward, this pilot struggles to write his name, symbolizing the blow taken to his identity (614). While the physical impact is clear, this exposure also entails a new awareness of the information that is inherent to such a weapon's existence. The scientific acumen needed to create this bomb, alongside the new definition it provides to any exercise of power, makes it that one has to reassemble themselves in their position to it. Moreover, DeLillo presents his readers with the terror of biological warfare. This, he writes, is "worse, in a way, because the sense of infiltration was itself a form of death" (557). New warfare technologies, from these biological agents to the current development of autonomous weapons systems, are an epistemological battleground over which ethical concerns are staked.

Jameson claims that these technologies only stand in for larger, more nebulous threats. The true source of conflict is "the impossible totality of the contemporary world system." (Jameson 38) Like Jameson's analysis, the ability of advanced military technology to dismember the human body is a reflection of the larger threat that the enlarged networks circulating in this

new era of multinational capitalism pose to the traditional Cartesian subject. Jameson describes this as "that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions" (38).

With Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* being published in 1991, it is critical to examine the shifts that occur between its publication and Patrick Jagoda's articulation of similar ideas in *Network Aesthetics*. Rather than succumb to pessimism, Jagoda seeks to assert that it is possible to "grapp[le] with crucial experiences of (if not the totality of) finance capital, control societies, and network form" (27). While "provisional and in process," this type of language exists and Jagoda finds it in works across mediums, including within *Underworld* (27). One such way Jagoda engages with this theme is to recognize "a parallel movement from 'machine' metaphors to 'network' metaphors" occurring during this time period (14). This was one of Jameson's limits, as he identifies the difficulty of creating a metaphor to illustrate the inner workings of a personal computer, especially compared to "the turbine," "pipes," "and conveyor belts" (Jameson 36).

In *Underworld*'s focus on waste, its attempt to trace a single baseball's path through history, and its movement through the lives of loosely connected characters, DeLillo attempts this same exact challenge of putting the unrepresentable into words. While conspiracies can be viewed as a type of waste, they are also a form of waste management as they attempt to tie extraneous facts into narratives. This is the task of all narratives, and DeLillo's decision to actively engage with these stories that challenge our ability to recount the facts of American history in a satisfying way eventually results in a more fully encompassing, nuanced recreation of the nation's developments from the 1950s and onward.

In *Infrastructures of Apocalypse*, Jessica Hurley similarly addresses the textual qualities of nuclear technology. As she writes, "literature registers the nuclear age as a crisis of narrative" (5). The threat of nuclear destruction, although possible, is more abstract than threats of terrorism, bombings, or invasion. Instead, it functions primarily by inciting a state of anxiety, where "apocalyptic violence exists only in the imagined future while the present is marked only by a damaging anticipation of disaster, the psychic wound of a bombing that might take place any second but that hasn't, so far, not yet, not here" (5).

Hurley, as well, finds conspiracy linking itself to this concept. The management, maintenance, and deployment of any such technology is "rendered invisible through overlapping regimes of secrecy, misinformation, and bureaucratic boringness designed to deflect attention" and leads to the proliferation of narratives that can be described as "dramas of perception in which characters come to realize that indirect violence is being done to them" (7). In DeLillo's fiction, some characters must uncover the waste that has been hidden from them, while others are well aware of the devastating consequences that this waste can have. This framework of the spectacular and the mundane can be considered in broad terms through the ways that exploitative processes are often hidden from public view, but the negative health outcomes brought upon those living near nuclear test sites and waste facilities are a real instantiation of this.

Hurley builds her concept on the foundation of Frances Ferguson's "nuclear sublime," as well as David Nye's "technological sublime" (8). In the case of Ferguson's nuclear sublime, unrepresentability is tied to the sheer devastation of "nuclear holocaust," as to imagine this scenario requires one "to exist in one's own nonexistence" (qtd. in Hurley 17). Hurley also traces "the phrase 'thinking the unthinkable'" to its origin point in ". . . Herman Kahn's famous book of the same name that stemmed from the RAND Corporation's nuclear war games" (8).

As Daniel Cordle writes, "the issues of representation raised by nuclear contexts can be seen as, if not identical, certainly continuous with those associated with postmodernism." (7) Much like the postmodern artist must task themselves with reimagining their situation, it is essential for critics to provide a proper analysis of these underlying networks. Otherwise, the "mushroom cloud serves as both metonym and disguise" for other encroachments on the freedom, safety, and livelihood of people across the globe (Hurley, 8-9). Much like the way conspiracy theories can help a subject center themselves, they can also absorb attention around a single object, be it a virus, a vaccine, or an assassination.

Rather than remain mesmerized by the nuclear sublime, Hurley urges us to turn our attention to what she terms the nuclear mundane. This means to look toward "material realities, focusing on the environmental, infrastructural, bodily, and social impact of nuclear technologies and the politics that prioritize them," especially "after 1945," rather than the destructive power of the bomb (9). She describes these infrastructures as "envirotechno-social systems" (11). Instead of mystifying the nuclear situation through conspiracy, the mundane allows us to pinpoint "moments where nuclear infrastructures intersect with structures of power" in order to generate a more measured, critical response (9). She seeks to "redefin[e] the nuclear object as continuous with a set of militarized infrastructures rather than as their exceptional end point" (9). Leveling this against nuclear criticism and its general preoccupation with the detonation of the bomb, Hurley believes that this framing is more suitable for the production of criticism which is capable of pointing to "something that can be named and challenged" by making "the nuclear visible" (9).

This necessity of examining the nuclear mundane is due to the fact that, unlike any other type of warfare or weapons technology, Hurley discusses how the nuclear variety "changed

infrastructures around human knowledge," through the creation and funding of various fields of study, including engineering, climatology, and computing (10-11). In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich connects "human-computer interfaces" to their origin in the creation of the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment Defense System, or SAGE (101). By looking beyond the sublime, Hurley, and others like Manovich, are able to find critical details that explain the relations of power between the military industrial complex and its civilian applications. Conspiracy theories fail to do this by basing their narratives solely around the most sensational aspects of an event.

Through her methodology, Hurley is able to trace two important shifts in state power that also have relevance with regard to common conspiracy theories. The first of which is the introduction of limits to "atomic research to government-chosen private companies" through the 1946 Atomic Energy act (48). Under this act, any research results were "automatically classified as . . . top secret" (48). This involved "all AEC employees" to "pass a full FBI background check" (48). The result was "a new market" which functioned in secrecy (48). Hurley clarifies that this was "widely read at the time and in the following decades as inimical to the spirit of democracy" (48).

Another one of the most important transformations that occurred was the formation of the Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA (48). It was "established in 1947 by the National Security Act to act within the jurisdiction of the executive branch without congressional involvement" (48). A major step in its growth and development occurred only one year after its formation, as it was granted the right to "undertake cover operations anywhere in the world" (48-49). As a result, the CIA was able to serve as "a fully operational tool for covert warfare" and act "without democratic oversight" or "accountability" (48-49). With its historical roots in the Manhattan

project, "wartime's suspension of democratic norms would now be the standard procedure of the nuclear state" (49). The source of many conspiracy theories, the CIA is the center of changes which altered the status quo of "informed consent of the ruled" in western democracies. (49).

This new era of state power contributed to a paranoid mode of thinking, especially as seen in Hurley's reading of Ayn Rand's novels *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. In her recounting, these changes lead to "America's apocalyptic transformation into its totalitarian other," as "the state finally reveals its death-driven lust for power and destroys its citizens' physical and mental freedom" (44). With real implications for the lives of U.S. citizens, "under the veil of wartime secrecy, the legal and bureaucratic infrastructures of the United States had been transformed" (47). While these objections grow out of a reasonable suspicion towards this massive amplification of state power, Hurley clarifies that this dread eventually manifests as "not only an ideological anxiety but also a racial one" (42). Building off of Sarah Ahmed's idea that "race has an infrastructural dimension" (43), she explains that "the nuclear state . . . shifts the position of whiteness within the network of objects in relation to which it defines itself, threatening the nature of whiteness itself" (43). When these relations are altered, "whiteness is stripped of its access to 'its' objects of rationality and futurity" (55). In this way, the result of "globalization is a vulnerable whiteness that can imagine economic and affective integration with the globe only as the end of its own privilege, the end of the world" (64). Again, with the example of Ayn Rand, Hurley claims she "redefined the government as the enemy of the white self," specifically "white American subjectivity after 1945" (72).

These anxieties regarding whiteness explicitly appear in *Underworld*. One such scene occurs when Nick Shay is talking to his coworker Big Sims about the U.S. census. Sims, who is black, remembers a time when his mother hid him from census surveyors. Considering the

implications of this act, he wonders if there has been a tendency to underreport the African

American population in general and what conspiracy may be behind it. He asks Nick if

"somebody's afraid that if the real number is reported, white people gonna go weak in the knees .

. .?" or (335), if they will be "menaced by the true number" (336). Surrounding all this, he says,

"there's genuine paranoia" (336). Here, government population surveys are jeopardized by

secrecy and deceit. The fear that the population of white U.S. citizens is dwindling is a direct

expression of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. However, DeLillo adds an ironic twist

to this portrayal of white anxiety. Sims is so invested in the idea of this number being falsified

because an accurate report of population could become a source of empowerment for people of

color, especially if it turns out they are not in the minority after all. This scene directly engages

with the paranoia that results from U.S. racial tensions.

Peter Boxall, while examining *Underworld* for what Hurley would refer to as the nuclear

mundane, finds a similar racial precarity. He turns to a moment when Nick and Matt reminisce

about buying shoes with their father. In order to find the right size, an X-ray machine is used to

measure Nick's feet. Boxall argues that the potential contamination that Nick received from this

device likens him to the children of Kazakhstan, who suffer from even greater amounts of

radiation exposure (198). Due to this he is, in Boxall's words, "another one of the blind victims

of the military industrial complex" (198). The impact of globalization connects Nick, his

scientist brother, and the children of Kazakhstan within the same system of nuclear

infrastructure. Likewise, those in Kazakhstan who have suffered severe health complications

from radiation are seen sporting novelty T-shirts that they have acquired due to "the result of an

importing ploy gone awry" (800). Nick is asked to join a man named Viktor Maltsev in business,

where Viktor can purchase waste from Nick in order to destroy it with nuclear explosions (788).

Their customers will range between "corporation[s]," "government[s]," or "municpalit[ies]," and Viktor is "connected to the commonwealth arms complex, to bomb-design laboratories and the shipping industry" (DeLillo 788). As DeLillo writes, "capital burns off the nuance in a culture" (785), and characters become identical nodes in a network of markets regardless of their race, culture, or class. This process sees "a planing away of particulars" as "the force of converging markets produces an instantaneous capital that shoots across horizons at the speed of light" (786).

In this sense, the previously discussed fears of Ayn Rand come true as multinational capitalism irrevocably alters the relationships between nations, their borders, and their inhabitants. However, Rand, and those who invest in a majority of conspiracy theories, respond by prioritizing the integrity of white identity above all else. In this way, their mismanaged paranoia completely fails to acknowledge the exploitative practices that deserve our suspicion. A piece of narration in *Underworld* describes such a state, where ". . . the intersecting systems help pull us apart, leaving us vague, drained, docile, soft in our inner discourse, willing to be shaped, to be overwhelmed—easy retreats, half beliefs" (DeLillo, 826).

DeLillo, however, is able to undertake a more thorough examination of these infrastructures through what Salah el Moncef bin Khalifa calls his production of a "counterhistory" that is an "archeology of the commonplace" (149). It is through the waste that these connections are revealed, and in the novel, "waste is the underhistory" (DeLillo, 791). In this task, Moncef sees DeLillo analyze the two previously discussed systems with interacting "signifying regimes:" "the accumulating leftovers of the marketplace" and "the sedimented waste of the military-industrial complex" (151). Again, while this waste has an aspect of "banality," Moncef argues it is "the most significant symptom and archival trace of our times,"

especially for its potential to expose "the repressed failures, blind spots, injustices, betrayals, and unreason of historical process" (152).

He believes that due to the postmodern delegitimization of "political action," this sort of archeology becomes more necessary than "ideological affiliation with grand political narratives" (156). It functions as an "excavation of social and cultural significance from the plural sediments of daily experience" (157). Joe Rollins identifies this as "the post-Marxist call for an art that attempts to expand the political imagination, to generate counternarratives and universalize individual experience" (1265). Rather than retreat into fantasies about nation, race, or conspiracy, the postmodern artist creates his narrative by sifting through the materials of a desacralized world in order to make sense of the mundane.

Underworld addresses the entirety of the nuclear industrial complex, from the weapons developers who work at a remove from what they create, to the bomb itself and the waste it leaves behind. When considering DeLillo's interest in vast narratives that move toward the limits of language, Jagoda's network model can be useful in solving the crisis of representation that follows from Jameson's postmodern sublime. Evolving beyond the machine metaphor of the past, the ability to trace the connections within networks is essential to understanding the functioning of power and capital in the time of postmodernism. Metaphors can be mobilized to generative ends in order to conceptualize these challenging ideas. Likewise, a materialist approach such as Jessica Hurley's can be critical in historically placing the paranoia that resulted from wartime adjustments to democratic political standards. DeLillo's choice to thoroughly engage with both the incomprehensibly sublime qualities and the abject mundanities of the U.S. military industrial complex allows him to provide a new framework with which to imagine the postmodern situation.

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Conclusion

The narrativity of conspiracy serves a functional purpose, albeit one that is easily misguided. They can create transhistorical narratives out of the messiness of history or help one find their place within the systems that transect their existence. Their cynical stance can especially be useful in identifying violations of power. However, their totalizing nature can erase the nuance that is essential for a true understanding of the world and its injustices.

In *White Noise*, information in the form of unclassified, decentering knowledge poses the largest threat to Jack Gladney and his way of life. While he fears death in a literal sense, the greatest source of anxiety is to be found in the "waves and radiation" that flow from the minutiae of his everyday life and remind him of his place in larger global systems (310). Attempting to reconstruct his sense of self, he fails at incorporating the contradictions of postmodernity into the rationality of humanist subjectivity and instead develops boundaries that sustain him at the expense of those around him. Finding a similar response to the task of self-determination in the real world, DeLillo's essay "Silhouette City: Hitler, Manson, and the Millennium" makes direct references to the subcultures of conspiracy that continue to circulate in the United States. Specifically, he finds that they are often interrelated with an apocalyptic brand of white suprematism.

With its larger breadth and scale, *Underworld* similarly addresses the importance of making knowledge manageable, even in its most wasteful form of junk information. While nuclear weapons serve as the ultimate symbol of technology's destructive power, it is also necessary to study their more mundane qualities. The process of creating such advanced forms of technology required massive rearrangements of intellectual work and the production of knowledge within the United States. These very arrangements, such as the covert essence of the

CIA, often work to hide networks of exploitation. Although DeLillo's novels feature conspiracy theories prominently, his deeper meditation on this theme through the form of literature proves more successful for making sense of postmodernity than conspiracy on its own.

As the conspiratorial notion that "everything is connected" becomes continually vindicated through the workings of networked technology and multinational capitalism, the question is no longer about if we should be paranoid, but to what extent. As DeLillo's intellectual engagement with the white nationalist terrorist groups of his day shows, a misplaced sense of paranoia has severe implications for the wellbeing of the diverse groups of people living within the United States. An apocalyptic level of terror can also mask the mundanity of state violence or the impacts of climate change, redirecting narratives around the most sensationalized aspects of a story while letting true mismanagements of power go unchallenged. If a conspiratorial stance is to be taken, it needs to be adopted with an emphasis on critical thought. Perhaps paranoid affects can be adopted as an antidote to the cruel optimism theorized by Lauren Berlant or serve as a basis for orienting oneself against an oppressive system rather than in opposition to marginalized others.

Above all, what these paranoid narratives reveal is the inextricable connections that characterize a postmodern and posthuman world. Catastrophes across the globe are no longer fodder for the Gladney family television in *White Noise*, but material events with consequences that soon reverberate to the unassuming center of consumer capitalism. The waste that travels through *Underworld* reveals the extent to which repression and secrecy aggravate the need for grand narratives, while challenging readers to form their own interpretations. Moreover, the growing body of scholarship in the fields of media studies and terrorist studies on the politicization of conspiracy theories toward the aims of the alt-right and white supremacist

groups can be placed historically as developments of the continually relevant issues that DeLillo

addressed early on. Don DeLillo's continued engagement with the philosophical questions

surrounding art and representation, especially as they are complicated by continuously shifting

technologies and epistemological frameworks, solidifies him as a writer worth reading even as

these perspectives evolve.

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> *Writing Center Digital Marketing & Social Media Management*   **2022 - Present**
> *Writing Center Consultant*   **2022 - 2023**
> *Undergraduate Teaching Assistant*   **2015**
> **TED**
> TEDxUNLV Public Relations Team Member   **2024**

Teaching Experience

> English 101   **August 2023 - December 2023**
> English 102   **January 2024 - May 2024**

Certifications

> **Consulting with Multilingual Writers**, *UNLV Writing Center*   **February 2023**

Publications

> "Integral Reality and Virtuality in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*." In *New Perspectives on the Metal Gear Solid Series.* Edited by Steven Kielich and Chris Hall. Bloomsbury. Forthcoming

Conferences & Presentations

> "The Price of The Pink Pill: Incel Ideology and Antisocial Women in   **March 2023**
> Neoliberal Society," American Comparative Literature Association,
> Chicago, IL, 16-19 March 2023. Conference Presentation.

> UNLV GPSA Research Forum. University of Nevada, Las Vegas   **April 2023**
> Graduate & Professional Student Association, Las Vegas, NV, 15 April
> 2023. Podium Presentation.

> *"Serial Experiments Lain* and Posthuman Feminism," Mechademia,   **May 2023**
> Kyoto, Japan, 27-29 May 2023. Conference Presentation.

> "The Digital and the Abject in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*," Rocky   **October 2023**
> Mountain Modern Language Association, Denver, CO, 11-14 October
> 2023. Conference Presentation.

> "Aidoru Alterity: AI Personification and Alienation in William Gibson's   **October 2023**
> Bridge Trilogy," Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, Tempe,

AZ, 26-29 October 2023. Conference Presentation.

"Postmodernity, Fascism, and Conspiracy: Reconstructing the Self in an Era of Uncertainty," American Comparative Literature Association, Montréal, Canada, 14-17 March 2024. Conference Presentation.	**March 2024**
UNLV GPSA Research Forum. University of Nevada, Las Vegas Graduate & Professional Student Association, Las Vegas, NV, 6 April 2024. Podium Presentation.	**April 2024**

Professional Service

Moderator. Logan Johnson, "Care Ethics and Emotional Labor in the Modern Writing Center," Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association Tutorcon, Online, 7 April 2023. Conference Presentation.	**April 2023**
Speaker. Student-Led Orientation Session, English Department of University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 22 August 2023.	**August 2023**
Speaker. "Being Successful in Graduate School," English Department of University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 6 October 2023.	**October 2023**
Speaker. "CV/Resume Enhancing," Psych Careers Start Here. Psi Chi International Honor Society in Psychology, 29 November 2023. Presentation.	**November 2023**
Speaker & Facilitator. "Telling Your Story in Application Essays," Economic Summit & Student Leadership Conference. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 3 February, 2024. Workshop.	**February 2024**
Speaker & Facilitator. "Reaching Your Career Potential: CVs and Resumes for Administrative Assistants," Professional Development for Administrative Assistant Academy. University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1 May, 2024. Workshop.	**Forthcoming**

Awards

Nominated for Horst Frenz Prize	**2024**
Awarded to best graduate student paper presented at American Comparative Literature Association conference	
Research Resources Committee Travel Funding	**2024**
$500 Granted for travel	
GPSA Travel Grant	**2022-2024**
$2,500 Granted for travel	
First Place in Poster Design for the 14th Annual Japanese Speech Contest in Southern Nevada	**2018**
Awarded for exceptional illustration and graphic design	
Millennium Scholarship Recipient	**2015-2020**
$10,000 Award granted to Nevada high school students with a GPA exceeding 3.25 who attend a Nevada university	

UNLV Dean's Honor List   **2015-2020**

Granted to students each semester who complete 12
credits with a GPA exceeding 3.5

Leadership & Involvement

UNLV ExplorNation Club Secretary   **2016-2017**

Social club for international students

Languages

English: Native language

Japanese: Intermediate fluency

Professional Memberships

American Comparative Literature Association

Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association

Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts