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TECHNOLOGIZED SUBJECTS IN THE NOVELS OF  
THOMAS PYNCHON AND DON DELILLO

by

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary subjectivity, as portrayed in the novels of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, is characterized by a struggle between internal drives for autonomy and self-expression and powerful external technological forces. Using Louis Althusser's notion of "interpellation" as a structuring premise, this dissertation argues that a conglomeration of databases, dossiers, image technologies, and modes of technological indoctrination comprises a "system" which both substitutes for the mysterious Other and "hails" the individual as a subject of technology. The technologized subject is constantly surveilled and influenced by the system; he or she becomes the physical representation of a totalizing discourse, another manifestation of Jean Baudrillard's "simulacrum."

While such a conception can easily be situated in the current academic discourse on late twentieth-century subjectivity, and is easily borne out through close readings of examples from the texts, there are other factors which rupture such a clearly-defined picture. The last two chapters, therefore, provide several examples of the multiple "human," "physical," and polydiscursive possibilities which serve to empower the subject. These possibilities are illustrations of Michel Foucault's "technologies of the self," strategies employed by the individual to exercise control over identity, to gain autonomy, and to work toward personal perfection. Complete autonomy is increasingly difficult in an increasingly technologized society, but innovative acts, deeply communicative interactions with others, and the exuberant linguistic play demonstrated by the characters of DeLillo and Pynchon ensure that the technological domination of the subject is kept at bay.

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I dedicate this thesis to Catherine.

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson states that “reality” is subject to a kind of editing according to “epistemological premises” (vii). In the computer age, the dominant epistemological premise is founded on an efficient but closed system of databases and dossiers. The dossier on the subject, which is a record of the subject’s behaviour patterns, transgressions, and “preferences,” is permanently inscribed in digital codes. The “reality” of the individual self is thus “edited”; an image of the subject is established as that subject’s official identity. Rational, efficient organization of otherwise untidy reality is necessary to the operation of a governing body increasingly involved with computer technology. A culture is created when one belief system becomes dominant and people comply with it: the monumental rise of the digital database as an organizing structure, then, has created a technological culture which has ontological consequences.

This thesis equates the concept of “self” with Bateson’s sense of reality: it is something which is open to multiplicitous possibilities. “Identity” is the structure we give to self, and a “subject” is created when the self loses a measure of control over the possibilities of identity by adhering to a dominant code. The “postmodern” subject is generally conceived of as a decentred, somewhat confused entity, existing within a whirlwind of different discursive influences, yet still “subject” to and “naturalized” by a dominant discourse (generally characterized by functionalism, rationalism, and control). In Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland*, and in several novels by Don DeLillo, including *The*

*Names*, *White Noise*, and *Mao II*, this privileged discourse is clearly governed by a system of computers which is established as a legitimate space in which the subject is encoded as a computer file. The digital file represents the ultimate reification or inscription of the self by the dominant order.

The nature of this thesis is also, unfortunately, part of the dominant discourse. This study of how the self is subjectified by the prevailing ideological system in America, a system characterized by its dependence on computer technology and the media to sustain a set of self-aggrandizing assumptions, is undertaken with the best of intentions; it represents, however, an attempt to discuss that which is characterized by openness in terms of closure. To subject the postmodern to the academic is, according to Jeffrey Nealon, to commit a disservice, because the indeterminacy of postmodernism is antithetical to the determinacy or "closure of limits" of institution (2-3).

With this problem always in mind, this thesis will illuminate not only the means by which the characters of Pynchon and DeLillo are subjectified by the technocratic State, but also the means by which those same characters put forth their own, self-fashioned "epistemological premises." The self need not be limited by existence within the system. Any individual has recourse to the establishment of what Foucault calls "technologies of the self," which are creative, personal, if often fleeting, means to announce one's self-created identity and to maintain control over his or her location within the established subject positions of the dominant culture. Part of my purpose, then, is to add to the work of scholars like Jay Clayton and Paul Maltby, who want to look at the *possibilities* available to the postmodern individual, rather than the constraints. These characters are

not as flat, impoverished, and powerless as some critics make them out to be. Much evidence points to the late capitalist subject as a mediated, hyperreal figure; authors like Pynchon and DeLillo, however, present strikingly vital characters, full of possibility and uniqueness. Although much of this study is dedicated to pointing out how we are technologically subjectified, it ends with a positive affirmation of the creative potential of the late twentieth-century Western subject.

These positive qualities reside in the postmodern multiplicity that eludes appropriation by the dominant culture. Postmodernity is to a large extent an outlaw condition; any discourse which is subsumed by the sovereign ideology ceases to be postmodern and becomes characterized by unity. Conversely, totalized discourses, viewpoints, or ways of being can be turned, subverted by “counter-practices” which re-code these “media representations that affirm the official culture”—what theorists refer to as *bricolage* (Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 29). Free-play is the primary means of empowerment for the individual interested in his or her own self-control and self-preservation, but multiplicity is easily co-opted. One must not be fooled by the plurality of signs generated by the media, the technological-communications apparatus. This is a plurality with an insidious purpose: it is designed to distract the populace, to amuse them out of critical awareness, to substitute for and thus quell the emergence of their own limitless possibilities. It is *White Noise* working to subdue the natural, teeming life of a place like *Vineland*. Behind it all is a code of legitimacy which conceals a dominant ideology and works to operationalize people, technologically to trait them, to make them into subjects. As Scott Bukatman argues, “the discourses of . . . writers like Pynchon and

DeLillo . . . perform [the] function of representing the human and technological as always-already coextensive” (194).

The self, however, cannot be *entirely* appropriated. There is evidence to show that the prime mover of the self comes not from without, but from within. This self-fashioning impulse is a form of resistance to the official coding of one’s identity. In this act of resistance, the subject seeks out alternatives, the “excluded middles” (*The Crying of Lot 49* 181), by insisting on human values which the technological state can neither furnish nor tarnish, by lighting out for new discursive territories, new codes, new plenitudes. They seek to define themselves through their *meditations*, not their mediations through computer databases. What, for lack of a better term, may be called “natural language” includes anything which keeps the self in flux. Its opposite, binary language, reifies the self.

Because we live in a computer age, digital language is ubiquitous. I have chosen to focus on texts which are set during a period characterized by the extensive operationalizing of society, a period during which the computers were networked to form a system designed to regulate our lives. Novels like *Vineland* and *White Noise* are set during a profoundly important period in the history of the technologically dominated subject: that span of years in the early 1980s when the microprocessor began to infiltrate the areas of life in which people had once been more “connected.” Automated teller machines began to usurp the human tellers in banks; video games in arcades now sequestered and isolated players who might once have gathered for more communal amusements; personal computers offered a companionship unlike any other; tangible paper

records were replaced by invisible, abstract accumulations of code; television cast a glow which, more than ever before, continued to net viewers into private, media-regulated spheres.

Any individual is always already subjectified—born into and defined by a pre-existing structure of power relations. I will investigate how the growing ubiquity of computer technology *further* challenged the individual's claim to autonomy and made him or her more a subject, dominated by a Power which now had a better means of controlling its subjects, through a process of projecting an *image* of the subject based on electronically stored data—making the person the “sum total of his data,” in the words of one of Don DeLillo's characters. Outright resistance to this new episteme is essentially futile, because the digital machine inscribes it as monumental, unalterable; the efficiency, the mathematical simplicity of the computer at its most basic level guarantees its legitimation by the rationalist order in its quest for total systematization at a rapid pace.

Pynchon, in his article “Is it Okay to be a Luddite,” questions the efficacy of technophobic resistance in the “Computer Age”:

What is the outlook for Luddite sensibility? Will mainframes attract the same hostile attention as knitting frames once did? I really doubt it.

Writers of all descriptions are stampeding to buy word processors.

Machines have already become so user-friendly that even the most unreconstituted of Luddites can be charmed into laying down the old sledgehammer and stroking a few keys instead. Beyond this seems to be a growing consensus that knowledge really is power, that there is a pretty

straightforward conversion between money and information, and that somehow, if the logistics can be worked out, miracles may yet be possible. . . . It may be only a new form of the perennial Luddite ambivalence about machines, or it may be that the deepest Luddite hope of miracle has now come to reside in the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good. (41)

This belief assumes, perhaps, an uncritical luddite—but this is a contradiction in terms. The contemporary luddite must surely be characterized by his or her personal resistance to the growing influence of computer technology, as he or she witnesses machines which trade currency for simulated conflict, perceives the emergence of a new social stratum based on the possession of a growing quantity of technological hardware which continually obsolesces, watches interactions with others made fewer with the advent of devices designed to simulate and stimulate, and feels the pressures exerted by the demands of computer literacy and laser-printed professionalism.

The computer makes demands on us, as if it were a power unto itself, and we must willingly submit. These are the reasons I have chosen to study the novels of Pynchon and DeLillo. They deal with contemporary existence under the glow of the computer screen and the mysterious movement of electrical impulses which carry information about us, which carry commands relating to us, which carry . . . *us*. The computer system has been established as a realm, a space, a net, a web, a highway: these are the metaphors we have given to coded information. One enters and is consumed by it, imprisoned by it. Self-

reliance, the refusal to conform, is exceedingly difficult: one is simply cut off. One has little choice but to submit.

Submission is never complete, however. I will examine strategies of self-fashioning, which is resistance in the sense that it subverts the digital image which is an effect of the massive computerization of everything associated with the individual. There are means for individuals to assert their autonomy, through physical movement in “real” space, through self-affirming uses of the body, through genuine human interactions, and through language strategies which go against the grain of the dominant discourse and which help to establish private spheres of community. The more the individual engages in free-play, the more that individual creates his or her own identity and freedom. Careful readings of novels like *Vineland* and *White Noise* turn up such strategies. One must read these novels slowly, thoughtfully, in order to experience the finely-scripted sentiments and gratifyingly-wrought scenarios; one must not hurry through such texts, or risk revealing complicity with a world of fast-paced images and sound bites.

“Close readings,” on the other hand, themselves require careful scrutiny. Because of the legitimacy granted to academic discourse, it is easy, often, to take the scholar at his or her word. If critics argue that language is diminished by its appropriation by media and the technological society, and that we lose our freedoms because we are bombarded with images generated by a communications apparatus which is associated with the prevailing ideological system—it is not necessarily so. There is a great potential for freedom in linguistic acts. The first several chapters of the dissertation employ the language of the pessimists and discuss digital appropriation, technological interpellation, surveillance,

media excess, and so on. Later, the tone becomes more optimistic as I employ the language of those critics—some of the very same who bewailed the loss of human autonomy—who argue for human potential and self-determination. This change in tone is intentional: I use language to change from the pessimist into the optimist, but through it all I strive to be aware that I am using a discursive mechanism to throw the undefinable self into different kinds of focus.

I am aware of the limitations of my approach. This dissertation is full of bias: I enjoy the humour and fun of these novels; I perceive abstract threats with skepticism, and for the most part presuppose irony on the part of the creators of these textual worlds. Another bias is nurtured by my own dislike of the widespread infiltration of computer technology, and my awareness of myself as subject to technology in various ways, even in the writing of this thesis. I become, daily, increasingly aware of the absolute necessity of familiarizing myself with computer technology. How are these things affecting my assessment of the subject of technology? Am I a resisting self in this writing, or a complicitous subject?

Whatever the case may be, this thesis attempts to provide a reasonable analysis of the “personhoods” of these characters, despite the inevitable hyperbole which comes from investigating such impalpable subject matter. In chapter one, I establish the scope of my study and provide a theoretical framework for discussing the “technologized subject.” The overall framework, ironically, is a binary: the individual is a hybrid, both self and subject, establishing an identity through multiple discursive, human, and physical possibilities—Foucault’s “technologies of the self”—but also controlled by a totalizing,

legitimate discourse. This latter is the technology of domination, constituted by what I call “digital information (or identity) storage” (D.I.S.), and the maintaining of a mythology of the network or system. Does the subject too willingly submit to domination by the technological Other? Using Foucault, Althusser, and others, I initiate a discussion working toward a theoretical framework. Subjectivity, power, language, and technology are my keywords.

In chapter two, I provide a brief discussion of the problems of investigating subjectivity, the attempt to characterize the living (or fictional) individuals of any specific place at any specific time, the factors involved, the prevailing attitudes. I then investigate several theorists on the subject of “postmodern subjectivity,” and bring in the critics of Pynchon and DeLillo to emphasize key points. Chapter three investigates various image technologies in greater detail and undertakes some close readings of important passages of the novels under study to illustrate my arguments. I argue that image technologies condition the subject to accept the coded image of the self as his or her official identity. The simplest image technology is the photograph, to which the subject is often expected to conform. One must comport oneself according to the image. The digital file takes the notion of the image to a higher level, because it is a vastly complex and multi-faceted computer replica of the subject. Chapter four delves more deeply into the texts to investigate the consequences of this replica, which effects the technologized subject. The digital matrix creates the illusion of a new reality, a simulacrum; the illusion generates a digital shadow which is granted hegemony over the physical body which casts it.

In chapter five, after having explored how the subject is shaped or constructed, or has always-already complicity in that construction, I now explore technologies of the self, arguing for a progressive movement toward self-definition or autonomy apart from the influence of external technologies of domination—anything free of technological mediation. The subject has the power to engage in a dance of expression, stealth, invisibility, and integrity, a generation of personal heat through movement, change, and free-play, adhering to values and seeking alternate spaces which digitalization cannot touch.

Finally, chapter six explores linguistic free-play, the use of language in its subversive and self-fashioning potential, the establishment of a dynamic resistance to a monologic appropriation of identity. Examples include the creation of personal lexicons, code-switching, subverted linguistic stereotypes, conversation leading to misinformation, and other unusual linguistic occurrences. Being in control of language means being in control of one's own story, the narrative of self which constitutes identity. The digitally reified self is a template, an official story, not a living story. It is the difference between a contrived, formulaic narrative and an improvised one.

At their best, these authors present a polyphonic narrative space, a rich diversity of language. Their most vivid characters speak a language that is distinctly their own. An astonishing illusion has been achieved, leaving one feeling that despite all attempts to subdue it, there is no totalizing of the self, there is no defining, no tidy summing up. In this, as in all attempts, all one can do is make tracings: one is a tracing of the monument that is the digitally represented self, easily discernible but lacking artistic merit, lacking life.

The other is an attempted tracing of a self which will not hold still, the end result of which is an unruly but lively scribble, grotesque and in motion, and all the more human because of it. It is a humble drawing of the human spirit in continual passage through moments, lacking definition.

## CHAPTER ONE: TECHNOLOGIZING THE SUBJECT AS A TECHNOLOGY OF DOMINATION

The identity of the postmodern subject is caught up in the tension between a concept of the “self”—an essential and unique aggregate of personal history and traits which defines the individual—and what is written or encoded about the self. The modern technological state dispossesses the subject of his or her “identity” through a particular form of technological power. Central to this argument is the concept of the digital dossier, the database of facts, statistics and all relevant filed material about the individual citizen, which in a sense “writes” the subject. The individual’s life and identity is often *equated* with that individual’s file or dossier: one need only think of the amnesiac who is found with no means of identification, or the individual who, having had his file deleted from a computer bank, suddenly, in various ways, ceases to exist. Membership necessitates documentation, and too often the physical presence of the subject is not *enough* presence to make up for the absence of some important document.

This transubstantiation of concrete subject into document is a practical necessity in any society regulated and overseen by a centralized bureaucracy, for reasons I shall develop. In order to provide a theoretical framework for my analysis of technologized subjects in Pynchon’s *Vineland* and DeLillo’s *White Noise* and other novels, I wish to synthesize various poststructuralist views, as well as some of the scholarship on

technology and control in order that I may situate my notion of the dossier-identity within it. I will discuss how the subject's relation to technology helps to construct a simulated system of control, which changes the nature of identity. Finally, drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of "technologies of the self," I will suggest how the subject may work to resist the technological—or technocratic—appropriation of identity.

The subject has been re-presented as a bureaucratic entity since long before the existence of computer systems in government. The dossier made up of documents, licenses, records, and other written artefacts replaces the individual from the point of view of the State, whose interconnected agencies all have access to the dossier-subject. Mark Poster, discussing Foucault's notion of the "panopticon," a structure which helps authorities keep track of deviant behaviour, explains that a "meticulously kept dossier" was necessary for "total surveillance of the subject" (91; see also Lyon 3). The dossier, a static representation of "who the subject is," an artefact naturalized as the subject's identity, has a permanence<sup>1</sup> which the physical subject lacks: for this reason present actions or future plans of the subject may be rendered illegitimate by the dossier. A resourceful individual goes to the bank for a loan to back a sure-fire scheme. The banker agrees with the client—it is a sound plan of investment which is very likely to bring in a significant return—yet the bank is currently unable to loan her the thousand she needs; the computer shows a deficit in her credit. Despite the good sense of the plan, the human relation of trust and the recognition of a perfectly sound proposition in this scenario are overshadowed by the credit rating.<sup>2</sup>

The written record does not lie; it would appear that the customer owing money, if we were to put it into words, “lacks solvency.” This is what is essentially written in the credit file of our imaginary customer, and, until the file is changed, it remains as a permanent truth. Writing itself, as Jacques Derrida has suggested, has more permanence than the subject who writes. Every word is a sign that is “born at the same time as imagination and memory, at the moment when it is demanded by the absence of the object for present perception” (314). The written thoughts of the individual, his or her represented ideas, will “remain” beyond his or her death; not only do they remain, but they are also “iterable”—subject to re-use out of context. Derrida insists that “to write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting” (316)—just as I am doing here with Derrida’s own words. It is in the nature of the written sign to detach itself from its context or source, to exist without the consciousness or intention of the writer (317). Extending these ideas, we can see how the records and files—the “traces” of our lives (Lyon 4)—in a dossier are also iterable, also able to be used, for whatever purpose, in the absence (especially in the ultimate absence, death) of the person to whom they refer. The dossier, like the written mark in general, “can do without the referent” (318).

The “absence” I investigate in my chosen texts is not death (although some of Pynchon’s characters are characterized as “deathless” or as living dead); the functional iterability of the dossier-sign, however, renders the source of the written record, the

physical subject, redundant, as the example of the credit rating was intended to show. The record is the “remainder” (322), which, cut off from its original source or context, is prone to what Derrida calls “citation” (324), a “parasitical” function. The State, in order to maintain what is in effect a kind of totalitarian control,<sup>3</sup> “cites” both law, the codified rules of society, and dossier, the inscribed dispositions of the subject. This citation effects changes in the physical subject.

The dossier “supplements” the life of the individual, in much the same way that a camera can produce “fictions of the real”: the viewer of a photograph sees the “real” through a process of “virtual witnessing” (Ezrahi 164-6). Apprehension of an event or an object does not require close proximity. Neither does manipulation of the citizen require the physical presence of that citizen. It is enough that within the databanks of the State there exist electronic “images” (Lyon 18) of each citizen. Drawing on the work of Poster, Lyon elaborates on this electronic realm of

complementary selves . . . [each one] the sum, as it were, of [the subject’s] transactions. New individuals are created who bear the same names but who are digitally shorn of their human ambiguities and whose personalities are built artificially from matched data. Artificial they may be, but these computer “selves” have a part to play in determining the life-chances of their human namesakes. (71)

Thus the physical subject can be manipulated from afar. Through what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call an “incorporeal transformation,” words uttered by an authority can

*change* the subject, as when a judge condemns a criminal (80). Immaterial words effect an ostensibly immaterial though highly significant change: in the time it takes to utter the word “condemned,” a living man becomes a man marked for death. Any word is in fact an “order word” (76), both in the sense of compelling obedience and creating “order.” Thus are we, through being part of a “collective assemblage” (80), subject to the order words, or speech acts, of those who have the symbolic authority (“symbolic capital,” in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms<sup>4</sup>) to wield them. As members of society, we depend on our dossiers for existence in the State, and the destruction or loss of documents through which we lay claim to possessions, abilities, and thoughts can effectively separate the physical body from those possessions, abilities, and thoughts. The same goes for the concept of “identity.”

An extreme—or perhaps not so extreme—example of the dossier’s ontological significance is the bureaucratic paper-death of Doc Daneeka in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*:

The first person in the squadron to find out that Doc Daneeka was dead was Sergeant Towser, who had been informed earlier by the man in the control tower that Doc Daneeka’s name was down as a passenger on the pilot’s manifest McWatt had filed before taking off. Sergeant Towser brushed away a tear and struck Doc Daneeka’s name from the roster of squadron personnel. With lips still quivering, he rose and trudged outside reluctantly to break the bad news to Gus and Wes, discreetly avoiding any conversation with Doc Daneeka himself as he moved by the flight

surgeon's slight sepulchral figure roosting despondently on his stool in the late-afternoon sunlight between the orderly-room and the medical tent.

(350)

The official word on Doc Daneeka's status renders him a ghost. Despite efforts to assert himself with his physical presence, he is not recognized. His wife puts more implicit faith in the administrative form letter which comes (along with notification of her newly-obtainable insurance claim) in the mail than she does in her husband's letter assuring her that he is, in fact, alive. He no longer exists within the military-bureaucratic network, perhaps because acknowledgement of his presence would cause undo disruption to an organization which depends on utter fidelity to the system of files used to keep track of its members.

With computer technology it is possible to expand the dossier on the subject to any degree. Compared to paper files, computers can store much more, and more detailed, information on the subject, at a lower cost and with greater efficiency; telecommunications also allows for the interlinking of different file systems (Lyon 45, 46). Consider the extent of the American government's computerized file system by the year 1983, the approximate time of the novels I am investigating: "[t]he federal government uses 9,260 computers and has 6,723 records systems containing 3.8 billion records on individual citizens" (Margiotta 306).<sup>5</sup> I assume that by now these figures are far more dramatic and represent something detrimental to one's privacy and self-control; indeed, the spread of information relating to identity in the "Information Age" is what prompted this study in the first place.

In some sense it is also a reaction to the optimism of writers like William Martin, who sees information technology as “a truly enabling and liberating presence in our midst” (11), or Derrick de Kerckhove, who believes that the current trends in electronic media “expand” the limits of one’s body and allow for self-control (202).

I do not mean to suggest that there is no room for optimism in investigating the technological appropriation of identity. My goal is to look for ways in which subjects in the novels of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo try to rescue their selves from the abstract, electronic zone and reclaim their ability to self-fashion. The digital dossier lays claim to official identity, but small victories are claimed by the postmodern character, particularly in his or her use of language within new, shifting, and non-sanctioned discourses, as well as in other dynamic practices which are difficult for the ruling body to surveille.

Because I am focussing on a fairly specific kind of technological appropriation, I need to establish some parameters for my study. I will be focusing on a span of years (roughly, the eighties) which might be considered the foundation of the technological dystopia of utter human isolation envisioned by many critics. Jean Baudrillard, for example, sees humanity heading for a day when each individual will exist in a space of “private telematics” (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 15), so interfaced with the television and the computer that interaction with others takes place only through screens and via remote control. The body itself becomes a “monitoring screen” (12), and the physical world becomes practically superfluous:

We know that the simple presence of television transforms our habitat into a kind of archaic, closed-off cell, into a vestige of human relations whose survival is highly questionable. From the moment that the actors and their phantasies have ceased to haunt this stage, as soon as behaviour is focused on certain operational screens or terminals, the rest appears only as some vast, useless body, which has been both abandoned and condemned. The real itself appears as a large, futile, body. (17-18)

The drive for miniaturization will extend even into private space (20), in the ultimate degradation of human existence, which Baudrillard refers to as an “obscenity”: just as object has degraded into commodity, sex into pornography, and message into medium, so are “[a]ll events, all spaces, all memories . . . abolished in the sole dimension of information” (24).

I believe that this obscenity, the effacement of the self within data streams, has its roots in the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this time we witnessed the accelerated infiltration of computer technology into everyday activities formerly characterized by human interaction. Home computers and video game arcades were on the rise, and so the leisure time of people began to be apportioned in different ways. Transaction between customer and bank teller frequently became a brief interface between customer and automated teller machine. In some cases the need for “company” could be satisfied by the computer terminal. Experience could now be expressed through the bountiful metaphor of technology, which has what Northrop Frye calls “resonance.” Neil Postman in

*Amusing Ourselves to Death* defines this principle as “metaphor writ large,” and his comment about communications media also applies to the computer: “Because of the way it directs us to organize our minds and integrate our experience of the world, it imposes itself on our consciousness and social institutions in myriad forms” (18). Computer technology was well on its way to becoming ubiquitous, heading for a time when no area of life would be left untouched by the realm of the digital computer—including language (Turkle 17). The broad range of the computer’s influence is examined in the novels under study, which for the most part are set in the 1980s (the present of *Vineland* is 1984, and *White Noise*, published in 1984, has a clearly contemporary flavour). One might argue that the World Wide Web is irrevocably changing the nature of identity, privacy, and leisure, but I would like to suggest that such change has already long been made manifest.

I further narrow my study by focusing mainly on the effects of the computerized dossier, which I also call digital information storage (D.I.S.). The “i” of information is also the “I” of identity; information about the self effectively *is* the self. “Information” in this context refers to digital data, information which is “stored”; it is not the information which is “characteristic of living and open systems” (Wilden 71), but rather “coded variety.”<sup>6</sup> D.I.S. is used by the State to effect a digital conversion<sup>7</sup> of identity. It is a technology of domination. It constructs a mythology of the information network or “system” which operates in society. I will elaborate on this technology of domination, and suggest how such theorists as Jean Baudrillard, Louis Althusser and others can be adapted productively for this study.

I will also touch briefly upon the effects of television and other electronic media, for clearly television helps to shape the subject in many ways, and in fact can overload the individual with media images, resulting in what Scott Bukatman calls “image addiction” (26). I will provide examples of such shaping power and addiction from Pynchon, whose “Tubefreaks” and “Thanatoids” are individuals misguided by television, and from DeLillo, whose text is cluttered with media which infuse the waking and dreaming of his characters; both authors, as well, reveal television to be treated by Americans as if it were a member of the family. Still, focus will be placed mainly on how the digital dossier makes of the postmodern subject an always already hybrid, part “human” and part “digital being.” The nature of this hybrid is oppositional. As humans we recognize the necessity of record keeping, but we often find ourselves in opposition to it, especially when it denies change in our lives. This opposition to technological domination will be demonstrated later in this dissertation.

Computer technology constitutes in general a massive and palpable force of influence and control in society. The subject acquiesces, with humility and a kind of religious awe, to his or her official identity which is mediated through corporate and State computer systems, and thus submits to this ultimate domination. The subject is prone to this submission because of three interrelated factors. The first has to do with the nature of the individual’s relation to technology: that is, the individual is not fully cognizant of the nature of his or her relation to technology. The second has to do with the effects of the ubiquity of technology, miniaturization, and the widespread bombardment of information

and images in society—the simulated society described by Baudrillard, and the mythology of the “system,” in whose simulated, electronic “space” we all must “live” as simulated selves. The State computer network also becomes a social force which usurps previous social forces, including God and democracy. Our imperfect understanding of computer systems and other technological devices shares responsibility with the proliferation of images, described by Baudrillard, in creating this mythology of the system. Third, and most importantly, the subject is prone to submission due to a process of technological “interpellation.” I will first discuss the coming-into-being of the system before investigating how it ultimately changes the nature of the subject’s identity.

Robert Cooper discusses how the meaning of technology has changed in the modern world. The root *technē*, he points out, originally signified “the art of making present, of bringing something to realization,” which stresses the agency of the individual engaged in technological undertakings. The modern use, however, places the emphasis on “immediacy” (279): now we are concerned with how quickly our devices can perform their functions for us. Attention is diverted from the “bringing forth” and toward functional efficiency and convenience. Albert Borgmann in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* discusses the operational nature of technological objects in his development of what he calls the “device paradigm” (4). Devices replace various kinds of “focal practices,” practices which “centre and illuminate our lives”; Borgmann provides the example of stereophonic music (4).<sup>8</sup> The reproduction of music through mechanical means, which has permanence, supplants the focal practice of experiencing “real” music,

direct from the instruments and voices, which is fleeting. Borgmann argues that despite the permanence of recorded music the character of the original is always “inaccessible”—we are deprived of its clarity of focus. Neither is the subject’s real self or identity accessible in the digital dossier, the *re-presentation* of identity in permanent form. This kind of permanence is discussed by Cooper: drawing on the ideas of Elaine Scarry, he shows how “technologies of representation” translate what is essentially vulnerable and unstable into “more durable and external structures” (280)—as, for example, “embodying” memory in books.

Permanence is greatly valued in a society that has lost faith in notions of transcendent continuance. This valuing, perhaps, leads to taking technology for granted. The process of how, for example, a stereo system produces “music” is invisible to us because the inner complexity of the machine is hidden from sight, and we thus have no competence with it. Borgmann’s point is that we do not consider the technical nature of our devices; the fact that they are machines remains inconspicuous and we forget the real nature of our involvement with them (43-4).<sup>9</sup> Computers are a relevant case in point: most of us lack a clear understanding of their complex inner workings; they are common enough that they have become familiar (28), and their role as commodity has begun to outweigh their essence as machinery. Furthermore, they have become “friendly,” in other words, as Borgmann says, “easy to operate and understand. But such ‘friendliness’ is just the mark of how wide the gap has become between the function accessible to everyone and the machinery known by nearly no one” (47). That ignorance, Borgmann recognizes, extends even

to professional computer programmers, who are content simply to carry out their tasks with the relative ease allowed by their “friendly” counterparts.

The “invisibility” of computers has to do with much more than their concealment of memory chips and circuit boards within unassuming, non-threatening consoles and their chameleon-like blending into the environment. In a passage which reads very much like Baudrillard, Borgmann suggests that once the device paradigm is “deeply entrenched,” reality itself begins to pattern itself on the paradigm. Now essentially beyond the range of perception, the paradigm becomes invisible:

There are fewer and fewer contrasts against which it is set off, and meeting us in objective correlatives, it attains an objective and impersonal force. To move within the realm of devices and commodities is then entirely normal, and to exchange the engagement with things for the consumption of commodities is to extend the range of normalcy. This relation to technology is neither one of domination by technology nor one of conscious direction of technology. It is perhaps best called one of implication in technology. Living in an advanced industrial country, one is always and already implicated in technology and so profoundly and extensively that one’s involvement normally remains implicit. . . . technology is the rule today in constituting the inconspicuous pattern by which we normally orient ourselves. (104-5)

Oversaturation in technology through commodification, it seems, results in an inability to differentiate, and thus the technology becomes *en masse* invisible. Bukatman suggests that

these technologies exist unseen, “circulating outside of the human experiences of space and time” (2). This lack of perception results in a “crisis” for modern subjectivity.

Link these devices together, network them, and they develop into a powerful closed system of information, itself “invisible,” which can match physical reality in all of its manifestations, though it is but a model. Anthony Wilden recognizes that “our society seeks to manipulate the real” (117); it would seem that it does so by making the real world conform to the model-world. This “functional *reality*” (Rowe 37) can have the same characteristics as physical reality. One can and does exist, for example, in a particular form, “in” the system, within its “space.” The difference is that it is more easily subject to organization, editing, and curtailment. Through establishing static images, it attempts to deny individuality and motion. Baudrillard writes that “microprocessing, digitality, [and] cybernetic language” move “in the direction of the absolute simplification of processes” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 89).<sup>10</sup> They are part of what he calls the “simulacrum.”

Baudrillard begins *Simulacra and Simulation* with the bold statement that simulation is now “the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”; he calls this an effect of the “*precession of simulacra*” (1).<sup>11</sup> In the hyperreal, all referentials become “liquidated” and replaced by powerful signs and images as we watch more and more television and forgo the exploration of the real world in order to visit consumer-targeted attractions which are “artificial resurrection[s]” (2) of the world, and which save us the trouble of having to experience reality first-hand. Baudrillard writes: “It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real . . . deterring every real process via its operational double . . . Never again

will the real have the chance to produce itself” (2). I hope to show in my chosen texts that while real processes *are* often deterred by the preceding of the dossier-system, there is evidence that the real does nevertheless remain viable—that individuals do have opportunities to “produce themselves.”

The real is smothered by the increasing proliferation of images and signs and also, as Baudrillard suggests, by the complete cataloguing and analysis of physical reality (8), necessary so that it can “circulate not, any longer, in our memories, but in the luminous, electronic memory of the computers” (*The Illusion of the End* 2). Measurement of the human is often viewed as dehumanizing (R. Brown 55), perhaps because analysis puts the human on display for cold scientific appraisal. The specular nature of this relation should be emphasized: we are obsessed with images; looking takes precedence over touching, feeling, and experiencing. As Baudrillard writes in *The Ecstasy of Communication*, “images have become our true sex object, the object of our desire” (35).

We forfeit other modes of experience. We take the world of images to be the world of the real in this unexamined existence, guided<sup>12</sup> by those in authority, who recognize that a populace hungry for more images and commodities is a complacent populace—what Stafford Beer would call a “variety attenuated” populace (94). Variety attenuation refers to a process whereby the natural complexity of a system is curbed by “organizational restrictions” (12) in order to produce a desired outcome. Variety is required by the individual to maintain a degree of self-determination, so that is what the State works to reduce. Beer explains that “[v]ariety absorbs variety” (21); the media overload experienced in contemporary society,

then, operates as a variety attenuator—it absorbs the variety of citizens (it keeps them occupied) and weakens them so that they are “subject” to control.

The simulated world is also a “model of perfection”—albeit a “useless” perfection (Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* 6). This perfection is static, timeless,<sup>13</sup> and deathless. In the simulacra there is no death because the self-as-simulation becomes a permanent sign. This is a kind of eternity, but not one which Baudrillard finds very satisfactory:

Are we not going back, as a result of all our technologies, to a (clonal, metastatic) *de facto* eternity which was, formerly, the destiny of the inhuman? But this functional immortality, instead of occurring in a “world beyond”, which at least had the advantage of being *another world*, is happening in . . . our world, which has, consequently, become our “world beyond.” (99-100)

This perfect existence provides the kind of addictive timelessness and deathlessness which, in extreme cases of complicity and complacency, is hungrily sought by several of Pynchon’s characters. The “perfect” world which is available to anyone’s perusal is precisely the mythology that is concurrently established with and consequently overseen by the computerized system of power.

In the construction of a simulated universe we discover oppositional forces, individual desires for autonomy. Allied with these forces, opposing the simulacra, are the concepts of the “original,” of “singularity”<sup>14</sup> (*The Illusion of the End* 75), and of nature. For the most part,

however, Baudrillard insists that we all have complicity in creating a system that works against nature:

By producing highly centralized structures, highly developed urban, industrial and technical systems, by remorselessly condensing down programmes, functions and models, we are transforming the planet itself into a waste-product, a marginal territory, a peripheral space. Building a motorway, a hypermarket or a metropolis automatically means transforming all that surrounds it into desert. Creating ultra-rapid communication networks immediately means transforming human exchange into a residue. (78)

This residue is also what is left over after the simulacra/system has extracted a condensed version of each citizen's identity and digitally compiled it into the dossier.<sup>15</sup> The residue is the physical body, which must act according to law and according to the precedent established by the dossier.

Borgmann writes that “in one sense technology is nothing but the systematic effort to get everything under control” (14). Martin Heidegger in “The Question Concerning Technology” searches for the “essence” of technology (3), which he sees as *ge-stell* or “enframing,” or that which “challenges forth” humankind to take its place in the “standing reserve,” the condition of being available for “further ordering” (15-17)—a kind of energy storage. Heidegger's motivation is to find in technology a way of “revealing” some kind of truth (12). In the end he decides that the truth to be found is within technology as art, *technē* in the sense of *poiēsis* (34). Humankind's “ordering attitude” (21), however, can

be a danger if ordering is undertaken for its own sake, which counteracts the “destining” of humankind toward truth (26). Enframing is inherently dangerous in that it “threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing reserve. Human activity can never directly counter this danger” (33). Such danger is implicit in the spectre of a technological ordering which seeks to put the individual under erasure, an indistinct palimpsest within the database.

The technologized state exercises firm control over citizens.<sup>16</sup> Even before the widespread use of computer technology, Jacques Ellul in 1954 suggested that we allow the State to have this control because as individuals we are not “rational enough” to maintain our machines; the State must take on the job of “constraining” us in order for machines “to attain maximum development” (115). Ultimately we must yield our entire being into this process. State tactics to achieve this yielding of the self included increasing education and propaganda. Now, however, the appropriation of the self is effected by the machines themselves. Baudrillard would call the digitally stored dossier a “model of control” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 2) which “produces” the real. I argue that the static self represented by D.I.S. becomes operational as a set of anticipating functions based on the precedents set by former actions (traces) and the inevitabilities programmed into the subject by various social factors (sex, citizenship, class, and so on).

The dossier anticipates one’s behaviour in society, which is in line with what Baudrillard calls the new “truth” of the simulacrum: this is the “manipulative truth of the

test that sounds out and interrogates, of the laser that touches and pierces, of computer cards that contain your preferred sequences” (29). Robert Cooper’s phrasing is appropriate: “knowing in advance is a defining feature of technologies of re-presentation” (284); Wilden’s notion of “cybernetic causality” is also relevant: also called “goalseeking within constraints,” it is “an informational relationship defined by the future: the goal exists before the effects that result from seeking to achieve it” (78). The State knows how it wants the subject to behave; it installs constraints (the official identity of the subject) to ensure this behaviour. This is how the “real” is produced from a model. Such “reality,” though, is, according to Beer, no more than a “delusion”: once the model is in place, it becomes easy to ignore “inputs that do not seem to fit very well the models we have developed. . . . what we all refer to as ‘reality’ is a version of the universe that is very much cut off at the knees” (Beer 57).

A delusion it may be, but authorities have the power to impose this skewed vision of reality over others. Langdon Winner shows how human behaviour is curbed, for example, in the workplace, where any spontaneity is seen as a potential “risk for business” (73); he adds that “[e]ach day we see a widening of the kinds of human activities and consciousness that are technically embedded and technically mediated” (78). Any other behaviours on the part of the residual body are also residual, messy, subject to tidying by the State—particularly if they contradict the precedents set in the dossier.

Such behaviour would constitute the kind of randomness that the system seeks to prevent. The system itself is cool and controlled; it enforces predictability in society, where

*nothing will be left to chance*, moreover this is the essence of socialization, which began centuries ago, but which has now entered its accelerated phase, toward a limit that one believed would be explosive (revolution), but which for the moment is translated by an inverse, *implosive*, irreversible process: the generalized deterrence of chance, of accident, of transversality, of finality, or contradiction, rupture, of complexity in a sociality illuminated by the norm, doomed to the descriptive transparency of mechanisms of information. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 34-5)

For most people, these mechanisms are always already in place as laws for the purpose of homogenization. In *Vineland*, Pynchon gives us a glimpse of a bureaucracy which seeks to “pacify” all remaining subversive territories, to bring them in line with a

timeless, defectively imagined future of zero-tolerance drug-free Americans all pulling their weight and all locked in to the official economy, inoffensive music, endless family specials on the Tube, church all week long, and, on special days, for extra good behavior, maybe a cookie. (221-2)

One imagines an oatmeal cookie, or perhaps a digestive.

Baudrillard also uses the idea of “satellization” as an analogy or model of control and of removing the possibility of chance (*Simulacra and Simulation* 35ff). The satellite is programmed to orbit in a precise path, and the satellization of the subject, through D.I.S., is what the system is after. It must be easy to oversee; the system must be able to keep track of an entire population. Robert Cooper discusses this basic control situation in terms of Foucault’s panopticon:

These institutional and organizational sites were, for Foucault, the “theaters of representation” where codes and models, time tables, documents and registers structured action and thought in specific directions. In effect, these “theaters of representation” were sets of injunctions or commands which instructed people how to act and think or to act and think in one way rather than another. (296)

Poster sees the government database on its citizenship as a “Superpanopticon,” a mode of surveillance in which we have been “disciplined . . . to participating” (93). Regardless of the metaphor used, it is clear that the system is designed to keep the individual always in view, and always following a predetermined path.

Like a satellite, the postmodern subject has been programmed through a compiling, processing, and storing of information about the subject. This programming goes beyond the so-called “conditioning” of advertising (*Simulacra and Simulation* 89-90).

Advertising is only the “prefiguration” of a mode of existence characterized by “*inertia*,” each microuniverse saturated, autoregulated, computerized, isolated in automatic pilot”

(91). Why do we allow our lives to be directed in this way? The idea that we are programmed suggests a mechanistic conception of the self. We are not unthinking automata, but there is within us a disposition, in a sense, to behave as though we are. I will use the ideas of Louis Althusser in his essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” to address this issue, as well as continue to explore the changing nature of identity in the Information Age.

By using the word “disposition,” I am referring to a fundamental condition that exists in society, a relation between self and authoritative *other* that Althusser calls “interpellation” (160ff), whereby an individual subjectifies him- or herself and affirms the social hierarchy by responding to the hail of the other. Althusser provides the example of a policeman calling out “hey you” to a person on the street, who responds by turning around (163). This hail causes a rupture in the individual’s (up until that point self-guided) life. The individual is transformed into a subject through this “incorporeal” use of words. It is important that our response to the hail is one of consent or complicity in the subjecting structures—although it is true that we are inevitably “subjected” merely by being born: “*individuals are always already subjects*” (164). Education serves to ensure that the dominant ideology will remain secure and that this transformational process will not be questioned.

In the technological age, this hailing is of a slightly different character—it comes from D.I.S.—but it has the same effect. While Althusser argues that education is the dominant Ideological State Apparatus of “mature capitalist social formations” (144-5), I

suggest that in the modern age the digital file is dominant. The ubiquity of computers and their function as a major regulatory part of American life creates within the citizen a disposition to respond to their hail, a response taking the form of acquiescence to the ruling structure's appropriation of who we are. Althusser writes: "it is the *imaginary nature of this relation* [of ourselves to our conditions of existence] which underlies all the imaginary distortion that we can observe (if we do not live in its truth) in all ideology" (154-5). Digital Information Storage distorts because it is a static representation passed off as the subject's identity, when any individual consciousness is in fact characterized by diversity and movement. The digital dossier attempts to reproduce the self, rather like how music is reproduced. "Excessive high fidelity," Baudrillard writes, "casts radical doubt on music" (*The Illusion of the End* 6); in like manner is radical doubt cast on the self in this process of technological interpellation. The virtual space of the government's system of dossiers is like a frozen, digital limbo which reifies the souls of its tenants, or a mechanical diorama in which figures move along slotted courses, subject to the winding key of the State.

Whatever else "identity" may be, it seems clear that it is not a fixed notion for any individual. Philippe Daudi suggests that virtual reality will liberate us by giving movement to one's so-called "fixed identity" by recontextualizing it (64). Identity, however, is only "fixed" when it is appropriated in the manner I am suggesting, and the freedom to recontextualize it is exercised only by movement in the physical world or in the world of the imagination. Even if identity is perceived as "an aggregate of index memories,

appropriated personas and revisionist histories,” as Christopher Dewdney believes (51), one should still have the prerogative to shape it in whatever way one likes. The contents of the dossier, however, function as a constraining force, and, as Wilden points out, an increase in constraint is proportional to the degree of inanimation (73). In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson writes: “Perhaps what each of us means by the ‘self’ is in fact an aggregate of habits of perception and adaptive action *plus*, from moment to moment, our ‘immanent states of action’” (242)—states in which we have “a brief commitment to an adaptation.” If this constantly shifting adaptability and possibility is undermined, if complexity is denied, then the person is negated. We are not just the sum total of our past experience—but authority systems in both Pynchon and DeLillo treat individuals as if that were precisely the case. The structure of D.I.S. is destructive to one’s control of oneself, an extreme case of how, as Bateson puts it, “the communications of others may damage my identity, even to the point of breaking up the organization of my experience” (251).

The subject must believe that the computer file which represents him or her is in essence his or her identity—or at least behave as if this were so. In this way the electronic dossier may be said to be a technology “embodied” (Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld* 72); because one’s behaviour is constrained through it, it in a sense becomes part of one’s body, an existential relation. If such behaviour becomes natural, in that we forget how we are constrained, then the technology has “withdrawn” or become absorbed, just as the technologies such as the telephone and eyeglasses withdraw in a process of embodiment

(73, 78). Behaviour based on the dossier is also an example of how, as Althusser explains, “ideology has a material existence” (155)—because the “conscious” subject must always “inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice” (157), without recognizing (i.e. “misrecognizing”) how that practice is “defined in the last instance by an ideological apparatus” (159).<sup>17</sup> This is the same unexamined existence in which one takes images of the real to be the real—the simulacrum.

In one sense this is a confusion of “logical types” (Wilden 167: see Bateson 180, 202). Treating a representation (in this sense a simulation) as the real thing, treating a metaphor “with the full intensity of literal truth,” is the very practice that Bateson insists characterizes the schizophrenic (192). The simulacrum may very well entail a schizoid existence. The basis of Bateson’s theory of schizophrenia is the “double bind” (201), and what better way to characterize an existence which is both real and simulated? How better to characterize a population’s need for and resentment of central authority structures? The individual must have government but has a drive for *self*-government. The schizophrenic “*must live in a universe where the sequences of events are such that his unconventional communicational habits will be in some sense appropriate*” (206). The State fashions a world which operates in accordance with its own needs, equating dossier and individual identity (Beer’s call, in *Designing Freedom*, for a radical revisioning of social bureaucratic systems thus takes on new significance). But how do we characterize the existence of the split subject? What strategies are left to him or her to exercise selfhood in a closed system?

Baudrillard insists that the Information Age subject is not one to act out in defiance of the simulacra: “the universal promiscuity of images reinforces our exile and immures us in our indifference” (*The Illusion of the End* 58). He also, however, discusses this existence in terms of the “simplification of processes” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 89), which suggests the entropic tendency of a closed system. Wilden wonders how an essentially “closed system logic . . . has continued to dominate our ways of thinking, to the point of ruling contextual and relational views out of court” (62). The answer has to do with power: the State has the physical force and control over how and what information gets disseminated. Because society is not perceived by Wilden to be a simple, closed system, however, he does not see how this level of organization can likely remain stable. Bateson, as well, argues that “[w]e do not live in the sort of universe in which simple lineal control is possible. Life is not like that” (438).

Simulacra or no simulacra, there is an unstable, human factor which must be considered, which accounts for my drive, in the latter half of this thesis, to explore the counter-technologies that work to resist the appropriation of identity and the smothering of this essential human element. Responding to the logic of Wilden and Bateson, I will later devote myself to exploring the rich areas of human selfhood and individualism—what Foucault would call “technologies of the self.” Foucault stated in an interview his belief that “the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning” (R. Martin 9). Given that individuals are, as we have seen, always already “interpellated” as particular kinds of subjects, self-interested individuals will thus strive towards a transformation, to prove that they are something more than their hailed subjectivity, more than a mere *gestalt* of compiled data.

A large part of the condition of being trapped is one's *belief* that he or she is trapped, and Foucault, as an "histor[ian] of thought" (10), would like to show how subjectifying forces can be demystified and potentially abolished: "All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made" (11). Rather than being subject to "universals," human life is characterized by possibility, by diversity, or what Beer calls variety. Foucault's seminar entitled "Technologies of the Self" begins to explore the nature of this conception of human beings.

In this text, Foucault sketches an historical outline of the various modes of "self" construction. He is not, however, suggesting a simple binary opposition. Technologies of the self are not simple forces to resist the technology of power or domination, which attempts to "objectivize" the subject (18); often they are implicated in systems of power. Life in society is about interdictions—particularly in terms of the individual having "certain kinds of knowledge" about him- or herself. The example Foucault provides is the link between sexual prohibition and confession, which results in the subject being "compelled to decipher himself in regard to what [is] forbidden" (17). It is what the individual can "know" that constitutes a self. Foucault recognizes the sciences as specific kinds of "truth games" or technologies that operate to constitute a particular kind of subject (17-18). The individual self can, however, participate in the truth game by developing personal technologies, personal modes of questioning. This participation can effect a transformation of the self, as a particular kind of technology of the self it can potentially

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (18)

Rather than being “acted upon,” “governed,” “managed,” and so on, the individual engages in research into the self that breaks through the barriers of conventional science and dominant ideology.

It is important to understand precisely what is meant by “technologies of the self.” The concept is historical. Foucault takes us back to an ancient Greek axiom which has been replaced in the modern Western world: “to be concerned with oneself” (ultimately for a greater good, salvation) becomes “know yourself” (19)—in other words, know your limitations, know your place, follow the rules. “Self-concern” is clearly too close to “selfishness” for Christian morality, which preaches, rather, “self-renunciation.” When one knows one’s place, one is in line with conventional morality (22), which is the same morality appropriated by the State: to accept one’s D.I.S. identity is also a mode of self-renunciation. Buying into the ideology of the governing system, we reject ourselves.

What, then, are we left with? We live in the physical world, we have bodies that move and voices—the accoutrements of self, as Foucault implies: “When you take care of the body, you don’t take care of the self. The self is not clothing, tools, or possessions. It is to be found in the principle which uses these tools, a principle . . . of the soul” (25). The principle of the soul, the essence of self, is what I will attempt to play against the principle of the ideologically

constructed self, the bureaucratic self, the dossier self.<sup>18</sup> How does the subject engage the soul? Is there a mode of “soul-searching” that will lead to the path of “self-discovery”? Foucault reminds us that such soul-searching or “spiritual retreat” is often merely an “administrative” function, a “taking stock” of social “rules of conduct” (33-34) and an assessment of the extent to which they have been obediently followed. Rather than an unpredictable foray into the unknown of self, the retreat is but a “mnemotechnical formula” (34), a technique by which we bear out our subjectivity.

The “technology of self” in which I am interested is the demythologizing one, the one which challenges accepted visions of self. It is not about taking stock, “public exposure” (42), sacrifice, obedience, or classification. It is concerned primarily with new kinds of “techniques of verbalization” which “have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break” (49). The new context is one which, I believe, lacks the prescriptiveness and “permanence” of the dominant ideological force, and which operates according to an aesthetic of challenge, free-play, and unpredictability. The “decisive break” is a movement into strange, dynamic, and often shocking new discourses. I submit that this takes place in part through the individual’s playful and disruptive use of language.

It is not enough to seek “liberation only by constantly and consciously testing the ways in which our personal variety has been and is being constrained by the very things we tend to hold most dear,” as Beer suggests (87). This amounts merely to discovering that,

for example, one is being manipulated by television or advertising, or that one is being diverted away from healthful activities by the lure of other popular distractions. There must be more, and it must be more than the griping that ensues following discovery of these crimes against oneself. There must be a kind of action, a putting into practice of these new technologies of self within the new discursive realm, a rupture of the social system. The particular technology of the self I am interested in exploring has affinities with what Ralph Waldo Emerson called “self-reliance.”

Self-reliance for Emerson meant complete mastery over the self. Its enemy was conformity, part of a grand social conspiracy to dispossess the citizen of his or her self:

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. . . . The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. (41)

Conformity is about “names and customs”—just as the digital dossier is about names and predispositions. To conform is to be limited. Nonconformity often means acting in direct violation of the law. In the modern world, however, digital appropriation of identity has made the self into a much more complex concept, and the “Superpanopticon” makes such violation easy to detect. As Althusser warns, misbehaving subjects will “on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus” (169).

“Resistance,” in the form of rejecting one’s digitally encoded identity, would be an act of rebellion meriting either dismissal (repudiating your poor credit rating will result in dismissal by

the bank manager) or retaliation from that apparatus which, according to Althusser, is the *public* apparatus of law enforcement which functions by violence (73). This kind of resistance is clearly futile. Better means of taking back control of the self involve exercising diversity, movement and free-play that can neither be tracked, nor controlled, nor disciplined by the State, which can only attempt to block such strategies from our perception (see Wilden 61).

Such strategies are what Wilden might call “legitimate” rules, those which “enable people to express their creativity” (18). This term might cause confusion: Wilden is not talking about the “legitimacy” created by the ruling body, but is referring to the “rightness” of a person having self-government—legitimacy from the point of view of the individual. Who better to have control over the self? These legitimate rules include such things as linguistic free-play, antilanguages, code-/dialect-switching, conversational strategies leading to disinformation, artistic expression, adventure, or any dynamic response to a monological appropriation of identity. We might characterize these responses as “noise,” which Bateson calls “the only possible source of *new* patterns” (Wilden 189).<sup>19</sup> I will explore some of the discourses in the texts of Pynchon and DeLillo to assess the extent to which these noisy strategies constitute valid “technologies of self”—the extent to which they allow subjects to reclaim at least a part of their identities.

## **CHAPTER TWO: SITUATING SUBJECTIVITY IN THE POSTMODERN TECHNOLOGICAL ERA**

Any attempt to clarify something as tricky and doubtful as the “subject” or “self” leaves one positioned between competing tensions, as evinced by the struggle one perceives in the many critical articles on Pynchon and DeLillo. On the one hand, there is a sense that one can define and classify an individual; this confident appraisal of subjectivity seems aligned with forms of domination. To “write” the subject is a means of establishing an episteme about personhood, a way of knowing that fosters control over the subject. On the other hand, there is a sense that such a thing as personhood is inherently uncertain and open to multiplicity—that no amount of critical interpretation will exhaust the possibilities of the postmodern text and its person-like creations.

I would like to acknowledge this tension, to admit that in my attempts to define my “subject” I must also be aware of its slippery nature, its possibilities, its resistance to definition. There is, of course, an inherent problem in defining something as complex as the so-called “postmodern subject,” and there are further problems which arise when we discuss literary characters as if they are accurate representations of “real” people, even when we acknowledge such fictional beings as constructed. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that there are two camps regarding this issue: the “purists” who argue that characters are simply verbal constructs which should be treated semiotically, and the

“realists” who insist that characters are mimetic, “person-like” enough to be treated as real people. That characters can be said to possess “traits” (31-33) of the (generalized) subject of a particular culture is problematic, but a useful starting point. My own tendency is to assume that the prevailing social attitudes and cultural forces of a given era directly affect art, which in turn generates a generalized vision of the contemporaneous subject.

One might claim, for example, if somewhat simplistically, that an observable diminishing of religious faith and a concurrent social disenchantment during the first half of the twentieth century (the result of such things as the growth of rational-scientific theories of human behaviour and the terrible human losses of World War I) influenced a new aesthetic and artistic production, resulting in the experimentation, rejection of conventional forms, and focus on the psyche which characterize the modernist period. Such an artistic reappraisal was due to the belief that existing artistic modes were insufficient for what needed to be expressed (hence Ezra Pound’s dictum always to “make it new,” and T.S. Eliot’s injunction to the poet “to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning” (Eliot 65)). Along with the upsetting of traditional forms, the traditional hero was also subverted: the modernist hero is often bitter, shabby and socially impotent, only occasionally and briefly awakened to the “truths” and joys of life in “epiphanies” and “moments of being,” and someone who turns to expressing profound feelings in “images” or “objective correlatives.” Having written the foregoing, I would like to add that such an explanation is far too tidy. It would also be erroneous to suggest that “postmodernity” effects a similar type of process,<sup>20</sup> because postmodernism by nature resists all attempts to “master” it, as Frederic Jameson insists:

If what is historically unique about the postmodern is . . . acknowledged as sheer heteronomy and the emergence of random and unrelated subsystems of all kinds, then . . . there has to be something perverse about the effort to grasp it as a unified system in the first place. The effort at conceptual identification is, to say the least, strikingly inconsistent with the spirit of postmodernism itself; perhaps, indeed, ought it not to be unmasked as an attempt to ‘master’ or ‘dominate’ the postmodern, to reduce and exclude its play of differences, and even to enforce some new conceptual conformity over its pluralistic subjects.

(342)

I am to some extent claiming to conceptualize the “postmodern subject,” but I am ultimately more interested in letting the subject speak for itself, with an instinctive belief that what is dominated in contemporary society is only an official *version* of the self. There is another, unofficial self, characterized by the “sheer heteronomy”—the lively, random, and playful potential—of the individual, who may stake claims within the multiple discourses of postmodern life, and who may discover ways to resist the asphyxiating excess of media images and the shackles of a totalizing grand narrative. This picture of the self is not a picture at all: it is decentred and dispersed, eluding frames and boundaries. Hanjo Berressem refers to these two versions of the subject as “the two rhetorical extremes of *naturality* and *simulation*” (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 243) between which the Pynchonian subject is located.

The extent to which any individual defines him- or herself according to the “official” version, whereby one becomes a controllable constant, determines the reach of the State’s totalitarian potential. I have suggested the digital dossier-making of government as a primary

means toward total control. We should, however, also consider the body which gives “materiality” to the self: the notion of subjectivity is a kind of essence applied to a concrete individual, in Louis Althusser’s conception. I have already referred to Althusser’s definition of ideology in terms of the subject: “*all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects*” (93). The flesh-and-blood person is always-already constructed—interpellated—as a subject by current forces of domination. I suggested in the previous chapter that the individual is thus “hailed” by the computerized dossier-system within which he or she exists as a D.I.S. profile, becoming what Kaja Silverman calls a “spoken subject” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 169). The physical body may have ambulatory capabilities, but the self is reified by the system, and thereby directed. One danger DeLillo recognizes, according to Thomas LeClair, is “that essential instincts for self-preservation and play have, once the complex body is denied, been replaced by self-destructive and rigid routines affecting the body’s relation with itself, with intimates, with society” (*In The Loop* 168). Later I shall return to the body as a site of potential resistance, but for the next several pages I undertake the sobering task of outlining the extent of our subjection to ruling structures—and our consequent loss of humanity. I ask the reader to keep in mind that there is always a danger of becoming too prescriptive, of letting the well-reasoned arguments of the theorists and critics—many of which are totalizing schemas—influence our own judgements of the novels and their characters. In the end, it is our “listening” to the characters themselves, through our reading, that bestows upon them a voice, granting them life-likeness.

The computer system referred to above is the most recent manifestation of the "panopticon," a mode of surveillance whereby "a multitude of people are inspected at a distance by a small number of secret eyes" (R. Cooper 295). Those eyes rove between the digital information at the State's disposal and the citizen outside, making sure the original matches the copy. Jean-François Lyotard suggests that technological superiority, a "generalized computerization of society," is linked to power in "real" contexts:

The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information. (47)

Lyotard refers to performative utterances (such as those used in, for example, a marriage or Christening)<sup>21</sup> as, potentially, "the use of terror" by the State (67), especially when considered in the context of computerization. Such use of technology also "provides the great rationalization of the unfreedom of man and demonstrates the 'technical' impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one's own life" (Marcuse in Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 158).

Many critics see this unfreedom as the basic situation in the novels of Pynchon and DeLillo. DeLillo's characters, according to Daniel Aaron, discover that they are mere "players in a game manipulated by unknowable forces. . . . At bottom they are only integers in a vast information network" (70), a network created by government and corporate agencies.<sup>22</sup> Berressem, as well, finds the control of individuals by powerful,

invisible forces to be the basic scenario in Pynchon's novels; *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, is informed by Foucault's view of the subject as "inscribed" in a "global network of infinitely complex and ramose power relations" (*Pynchon's Poetics* 206). The scientific-bureaucratic conglomerate controlling this network—the "evil and anonymous force [which] presides over a helpless subject" (207)<sup>23</sup>—is active in *Vineland* in a fine-tuned and farther-reaching form.<sup>24</sup> It operates clearly through technological surveillance, which has replaced "God's omnipresent eye" (Callens 124). It is present most insidiously in "computer connectivity," which William Grim calls "the quintessential form of Pynchonian paranoia" (159).<sup>25</sup>

The computer is the means to allow "the evil power-death-tech-government-official-reality politics of our age" to "poiso[n] our personal lives, our psychic health, and our family life, no matter how we try to insulate ourselves from it" (Porush, "Purring" 38).<sup>26</sup> It is everywhere; it is automatic (Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime* 8). It even encourages the practice of informing on one's neighbour. The computer is a key aspect of what N. Katherine Hayles calls the "snitch system" in *Vineland* ("Who Was Saved?" 15). Government agencies hatch schemes in which domestic spies are paid to provide information that is subsequently converted into digital code, making the database a primary locus of control. This state of affairs, according to Hayles, raises the "possibility that human action, perhaps even the human soul, can be reduced to . . . ones and zeroes" (20). The binary language of the computer is appropriate to the either-or logic of an administration which seeks to control subjects by delegitimizing private, random acts.

Pynchon had addressed this state of affairs in *The Crying of Lot 49*, which “mourns the contraction of America from a land of diversity to one of binary choice” (Stimpson 31).

Individuals faithful to such a program—unquestioning victims and agents alike—live a “life” completely delineated by the system. Raymond Olderman refers to these pathetic individuals as “straights”:

The straight’s devotion to a single set of metaphoric explanations puts him or her in terrible bondage to external control. . . . the straight’s system must provide *escapes* from the ordinary patterns of life without risking involvement in any new set of patterns—the escapes must be sanctioned by the very system the straight wishes to escape; the illusion of courage and danger must be maintained within a context of hidden safety from change—titillation replaces revelation, pornography replaces passion.

(217-18)

This devotion to a pre-existing set of formulae for experience—any experience—reminds one of Jean Baudrillard’s conception of this kind of self-effacement as an “obscenity” (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 24). Such is the consequence of the State and the Corporation using surveillance to maintain control and high profits. In the modern, digital age, this type of control is ubiquitous: Deborah Madsen suggests that in *Vineland* “the concepts and techniques of social control have not only become explicit but are regarded as normal aspects of everyday life” (126).

This domination by malevolent forces has always been the main target of Pynchon's work. He reveals these forces "grinding individuals into anonymity and conformity" (P. Cooper 45), causing an "impotent despair" as "people resign themselves to being controlled and directed by the incomprehensible, impersonal forces of corporate and bureaucratic necessity" (60; see also 179). Cooper, while he grants the possibility of an efficacious "counterforce" (105), finds that Pynchon is not engaged in presenting "real" characters or heroic individuals who "search for authenticity or quest for existential self-creation" (182), but is rather only concerned with exposing the reality of "larger-than-life, impersonal forces" (179) in the technological and bureaucratic culture.<sup>27</sup> This, then, is the reason why some critics find Pynchon's characters flat, controlled by forces beyond them and lacking in substance (179, 182).<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in the world of *White Noise*, argues Frank Lentricchia, it is not the characters who "act," but rather "the novel's setting that drives the novel's human agents, and by so acting upon them deprives them of their free agency" ("Tales" 103).<sup>29</sup> The setting to which he refers is the electronic landscape of images, an "environment-as-electronic-medium" (89). One might argue that DeLillo's entire *oeuvre* is concerned with demonstrating this void of "personhood" in contemporary life: "Some of my characters," he said in an interview, "have a made-up nature. They are pieces of jargon. They engage in wars of jargon with each other. There is a mechanical element" (DeLillo in LeClair and McCaffrey 81). "Jargon" is the lexicon of the rational-scientific discourse, the robe of a mechanistic order<sup>30</sup> which reduces individuals to a combination of technical keywords—

the kinds of terms which might connect the dossier of any individual to criminal, financial, and marketing databases.

Like *Vineland*, DeLillo's novels *White Noise*, *Mao II* and others continue this trend of envisioning the contemporary subject as nothing more than the sum of its database profile. They deal with what Donna Haraway calls the "informatics of domination" (Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime* 27). As an example of how one can lose one's identity through the manipulations of an external force, Daniel Aaron, Paul Civello, Hal Crowther, Frank Lentricchia, and Joseph Tabbi all point to DeLillo's portrayal of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*—a man forced by a secret and insidious political group to conform to an image which they have created.<sup>31</sup> Oswald served a specific purpose; in general, though, the only purpose the average citizen is meant to serve is conformity to the present state of things—as well as the State of Things. The life of the subject is plotted. For the protagonist of *White Noise*, this kind of plotting "represents . . . an absorption of individual distinctions into a fixed frame, which threatens one's freedom to develop independently" (Reeve and Kerridge 303). People are inscribed by technological forces, an extension of how they are "subject to the authority of naming," which Tony Tanner sees as one of Pynchon's concerns (60). One does not—cannot, so long as our preferences and our predilections are tallied in digital files—exist for oneself.

One lives, rather, "for" the state, as Foucault suggests in "The Political Technology of Individuals." Our identity, he suggests, is to a large extent tied to our recognition of ourselves "as a part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state" (146). The rationality of government is that it rules for its own maintenance; individuals

are not a concern except “insofar as they are somehow relevant for the reinforcement of the state’s strength . . . . From the state’s point of view, the individual exists insofar as what he does is able to introduce even a minimal change in the strength of the state” (152). This minimal change is brought about by various actions expected of the citizen: “to live, to work, to produce, to consume; and sometimes . . . to die” (152). Foucault is interested in examining what he calls “technique” or practice, a “new technology of power, the new techniques by which the individual could be integrated into the social entity” (153). He calls this technique “the police,” by which he means the exercise of government for the “well-being” of society. I am suggesting that D.I.S. is the most potent current policing power. While Foucault admits that in contemporary society human happiness has become “a requirement for the survival and development of the state” (158), I wonder if that concern for “happiness” does not simply take the form of providing the populace with what it thinks it needs to be happy: the convenience of data storage, whereby the state “remembers” our own histories and preferences; a ceaseless supply of consumer goods, so that we may never want for amusement and a material sense of well-being; and the twenty-four-hour availability of television.

The unidirectional nature of television, present in most homes, is responsible for a drug-like addiction to information,<sup>32</sup> providing “daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism” (Althusser 81), or what Maltby calls “ideological discharge” (*Dissident Postmodernists* 32); meanwhile it also disrupts meaningful communication by isolating individuals, effecting an “erosion of the public sphere” (30). The masses, according to Baudrillard, are “neutralized, mithridated by information”; they “in turn

neutralize history” and become subjects with “no history, meaning, consciousness or desire” (*The Illusion of the End* 3). David Thoreen suggests something along these lines in his discussion of *Vineland*. Television “compresses” history, giving the present “the privileged status of the historical”; viewers thus become “fixated” on the present, either through the live coverage of events offered by the news or through “reruns” of the past (53). At the same time, television “condition[s] its viewers to accept some set of supposedly normative values, so that viewers end up dissatisfied if their lives do not match the lives of TV characters” (54). The citizen becomes simply a part of a “mass” as his or her individuality is “liquidated” by the capitalist machine (Adorno in Hutcheon, *Politics* 13). Television is particularly notable for the “unprecedented simultaneity and constancy” with which it keeps citizens locked into predetermined roles (Bukatman 39).

Almost all of the critics of *Vineland* and *White Noise* cite television and its deluge of images and simulations as responsible for the attenuation of the subject’s will. The general arguments of David Seed and Tony Tanner, although pre-existing the publication of *Vineland*, are relevant. Seed argues that in all of Pynchon’s fiction people exist in a world of “clichéd images” which promote “passive imitation” (*Fictional Labyrinths* 6). Oedipa Maas, Benny Profane, Tyrone Slothrop, and those like them all negotiate a world of “signals,” looking for clues which will help them to make sense of their experience. Unfortunately, as Tanner argues, “Pynchon’s characters move in a world of both too many and too few signs, too much data and too little information, too many texts but no reliable editions, an extreme ‘over-abundance of signifier’, to borrow a phrase from Lévi-Strauss” (76). To Tanner’s list we might add “too many channels but no worthwhile programs,”

and it is certainly no difficulty to consider television as part of Seed's notion of an "environment" of "clichéd images." With fewer and fewer areas of life left unmediated, it is no wonder that the subject is left with fewer and fewer resources from which to draw—despite the shopping malls which offer abundance but which can "dehumanize" the "space" of *Vineland's* America (Karpinski 38)—for the creation of a "self" which is characterized by the potential for creativity and change.<sup>33</sup>

M. Keith Booker argues that the constant stream of video images in the world of *Vineland* creates "individual subjects in a mold advantageous to the prevailing ideology" (9); more importantly, he suggests that "the mind-numbing effects of this constant exposure to television, by rendering the populace incapable of critical thought, make any genuine resistance to official authority virtually impossible" (15). Television negates the possibility of critical thought because, as Neil Postman argues in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, it is quick-paced, leaving no time for reflection; it is fragmented and discontinuous, resulting in a general sense of incoherence; and it is entertaining, which distracts our attention away from any serious content. Maltby, drawing on Henri Lefebvre and Herbert Marcuse, explains that a constant bombardment of signals "has the effect of eliding mediating thought processes" (*Dissident Postmodernists* 35), attenuating the critical faculty (36) and the ability to choose our own interpretations: "The ruling discourses . . . are believed to delimit the mental horizons of the subject, framing his/her reading of the social totality, of history, and rendering alternative readings inconceivable or nonsensical" (185). E. Shaskan Bumaz concurs: "No complex view of self, interpersonal relations, or society can

readily survive the glow of the easy resolutions and formulaic plots of most television. What challenge to its authority could withstand the simplification of the media?" (165).

DeLillo also demonstrates how image technologies work to transform individuals into operational subjects who sustain the established order, itself a regime based on a "modelled" reality. Whether through the trivialization of history in "the alliance of the media and the academy" (Cantor 47), the attenuation of a sense of community, family, and self due to the omnipresence of television (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 135, 140), or the sensationalizing of experience in "the processed tabloid babble in which the American vulgate is drowning" (Crowther 92), the human will to creativity is distracted by the glut of simulation. Douglas Keesey informs us that the title of *White Noise* was originally meant to be "Panasonic," "to emphasize the all-encompassing nature of TV's verbal onslaught" (*Don DeLillo* 8).<sup>34</sup> Here, as in the world of *Vineland*, the televisual apparatus works to impair critical ability. Information is suspect and the formation of knowledgeable opinions is hampered by what Noel King refers to as "the persistent trope of 'floating remarks'" (72) in the novel. Sound bites, a "panoply of floating utterances derived from television and radio," none of which can be traced, pollute the social world. Lacking a discernible thread, these bits and pieces of information occasion a "general cultural condition of distorted communication" (73).

In *White Noise*, asserts LeClair, television "infiltrates" the lives and consciousnesses of the characters "without their awareness" (*In the Loop* 217). In so doing, television works to create "an illusion that it constitutes the only possible manner by which human beings apprehend themselves and their relationship to the world" (Moses

71). Here, as in *Vineland*, “Television, the intertextual grid of electronic images, creates the Real” (Duvall 131)<sup>35</sup>—always assuming, of course, a fully complacent, non-critical subject. Contrary to LeClair and others, I will argue later that many of DeLillo’s characters are in fact critically aware of the extent of television’s influence.

John Frow believes that in *White Noise* it is “no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully” between life and its media representations (178). DeLillo’s characters, like Pynchon’s, are induced to model themselves on the images provided by television, the constant repetition of which make them into “types” born from the “amalgam of television and experience, the two now theoretically impossible” (179). Lentricchia argues that DeLillo is not really writing about the contemporary subject at all, but rather “the electronic medium of the image as the active context of contemporary existence in America” (“Tales” 88) a kind of electronic “environment” which constructs both the individual self “and therefore (such as it is) contemporary community—it guarantees that we are a people of, by, and for the image” (89). Cantor recognizes that in such an environment, there is no true “community”: “The problem is clearest in the Gladney family, which can find little in common except watching television” (50). In the end, all aspects of “existence”—personal, interpersonal, and transcendent (see Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 141)—are re-presentable as media simulations, and are thus replaceable. When DeLillo’s character Winnie Richards explains why she is “proud to be an American,” the satire is clear: “The infant’s brain develops in response to stimuli. We still lead the world in stimuli” (*White Noise* 189).

These ideas regarding ideologically-tinged replacements for human needs in the end point toward or describe a functionalist subjectivity. Technological surveillance works jointly with the conditioning and indoctrination which result from being immersed in constant data streams from the communications apparatus, another means to dominate a complacent populace. This functionalist view of subjectivity is described by Lyotard when he writes that the “transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions” (48). The subject is considered raw material to “supply” the dominant power and becomes, in effect, objectified (LeClair, *In the Loop* 174).<sup>36</sup> So far, then, the portrait of the subject I have been sketching is a fairly drab affair; it is a picture of mindlessness, image-as-drug addiction, motivelessness and complacency which is bound to raise objections, one-sided as it is.

Yet this is the kind of subjectivity required by the State characterized as a “total system”; all subjects must be assimilated (Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 34). To this end, the dominant power works to excise all traces of resistance to such adaptation from the subject. Its job is made easier by the fact that subjects are willingly complicit in their own subjectification. Again, the critics of Pynchon and DeLillo concur that this complicity is a fundamental issue. Berressem, in particular, insists in both his article and his book that “*Vineland*’s main theme is the *complicity* of the subject and power” (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 237).<sup>37</sup> David Cowart sees *Vineland* as representing an ideological shift: the “liberal” bias of the sixties, characterized by “hordes of student demonstrators,”

has given way to the Reagan-inflected eighties, with “whole undergraduate populations majoring in business” (12). Expressions of resistance have been replaced by expressions of the dominant culture: a mass complicity which is the technological society’s legacy. Hayles argues that the computer’s entrance into public life establishes it as a “coercive power” which leads to “government ‘cooperation’” (“Who Was Saved?” 24). Karpinski speaks of this compulsion as a “seduction by and cooperation with the system”; the resulting complicity is a “postmodern dilemma” (37). Perhaps she sees it as a dilemma because the plurality which is generally considered to be a major feature of postmodern existence is here undercut by allegiance to a monologic, closed system, which has co-opted that plurality for its own perpetuation (Madsen 116).

As argued above, because the State endlessly supplies an enticing image commodity we ourselves become part of that commodity. It makes us forget ourselves, as Barbara Pitmann argues: “Pynchon understands the power of popular culture to distract us from our stated political goals” (45); this power is thus able, she explains, to co-opt the political left in the novel. Tabbi, as well, sees the diminishing of the people’s political efficacy as a serious concern in Pynchon’s novel:

the most effective and potentially dangerous ideological force *at this moment* is to be found in those things we do everyday to sustain the technological culture, whether what we do is explicitly technological or not, unconscious and internalized or, if conscious, sweetened with a suitably hip postmodern irony. . . . [A new] sophistication and a new self-censorship may explain why the same self-conscious irony that helped

make for such all-embracing social and political criticisms in *Gravity's Rainbow* has by now frustrated any direct political opposition, as Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland* all too clearly shows. (*Postmodern Sublime* 7)

The sophistication of which he writes is *technological* sophistication, and “self-censorship” is its product. In DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, as in Pynchon, this self-censorship is effected by a number of means. First, one can subject him- or herself to the offerings of the mediated culture: Lentricchia argues that although the novel's main character, Jack Gladney, is critically aware of the horrors of contemporary culture, he yet participates in them (“Tales” 93). Second, one can factor in technological appropriations of the self even though it results in a paradoxical formulation, as Hayles suggests occurs in *White Noise*, which is “concerned with how human beings are implicated in the incongruities that emerge from a parataxic mode of being. [The novel] intimate[s] that we *are* these incongruities, for we embody our conservative evolutionary heritage even as we wield technologies that can redesign it at will” (“Postmodern Parataxis” 418). Third, one can replace a healthy respect for the “mystery of existence” with a helpless mystification of the “complex systematizing of the social, political, and economic world”—for which Thomas Schaub criticizes both DeLillo and LeClair (131). Although these are actions that the subject may be said to undertake willingly, in the end it is important to remember that people are in a sense programmed by the cultural apparatus to adopt these self-censoring activities.

If we grant that this programming exists, it requires no great leap in logic to consider that all “experience” in the technological society can become dehumanized. According to Bukatman, “[t]he prevailing attitude [within postmodern fiction] is that technology imposes itself upon human experience to such a degree that the very concept becomes irredeemable” (15). Rather than being some constitutive element of self or identity, experience in the technological society serves the functionalist drive of the system, which attempts to impose

a redefinition of the norms of ‘life.’ In this sense, the system seems to be a vanguard machine dragging humanity after it, dehumanizing it in order to rehumanize it at a different level of normative capacity. The technocrats declare that they cannot trust what society designates as its needs; they ‘know’ that society cannot know its own needs since they are not variables independent of the new technologies. Such is the arrogance of the decision makers . . . . (Lyotard 63)

These ideas would suggest that the drive which animates one is always “allogenic,” or determined from outside—from the technological other. The technologized subject is always linked to the operational efficiency of the State.

That the subject is motivated from something “outside” is suggested by Althusser, who links the immaterial essence of self (if we can call it that) to material practice by suggesting that the relation between the concrete individual and his or her conception of self-as-subject (the effect of ideology) is an *imaginary* relation (89). Material practice is both the foundation and the by-product of ideology, in a self-sustaining loop:

the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every “subject” endowed with a “consciousness” and believing in the “ideas” that his “consciousness” inspires in him and freely accepts, must “act according to his ideas”, must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. . . . the “ideas” of a human subject exist in his actions . . . . (91)

Action becomes habitualized as “practice,” and is further “governed by the *rituals* in which these practices are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*” (91). Given that we are “subjectified” by ideology, according to Althusser, then the major constitutive element of the self is essentially an elaborate delusion in which we are all complicit. Althusser’s often-quoted reference to Pascal again provides a useful example: “kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe” (91-2). More generally, *behave* as a “self” with a belief system, and you become that self. The process is circular, but it ultimately stems from an outside source—we are told what to believe; we are hailed. It is thus easy to see why the ideology which Maltby calls “technological rationality” (*Dissident Postmodernists* 156ff) effectively constitutes individuals as controllable, technologized subjects.

This external source of subjectification through language recalls the Lacanian formulation, whereby recognition of symbolic difference initiates the individual into the symbolic order. In *Écrits* he writes that “language restores to [the *I*], in the universal, its function as subject” (2). The subject is constructed in language, in the act of enunciation, as Emile Benveniste has suggested (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 82). The textual basis of

subjectivity is, then, an integral component of any discussion of the self. Given this fact, the postmodern subject is seen by many theorists to be diminished or limited in various ways due to constraints imposed by the conventions of language, and the official regulation of language by the dominant power. Louise K. Barnett, for example, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "linguistic capital," looks at how the "intentions" of the subject are always "constrain[ed] or manipulate[d]" (1). She argues that many postmodern texts "image . . . a condition of verbal exhaustion in a society in which automatic responses, endlessly recycled, have supplanted individual expression to the extent that almost all utterances are predictable and clichéd" (196-7). Hutcheon remarks: "If the speaking subject is constituted in and by language, s/he cannot be totally autonomous and in control of her or his own subjectivity, for discourse is constrained by the rules of the language and open to multiple connotations of anonymous cultural codes" (168).<sup>38</sup>

Even the popular idea that one "narrates" oneself is problematic; many theorists recognize that the narrative stream from which we draw to construct ourselves is not ideologically pure—just as the domain of media images which presents the norms of social life is not ideologically pure. Clayton argues that while narrative can constitute the subject, it is mediated by and otherwise caught up in social and cultural values—so identity is not one's own, ultimately (33-4). According to many critics, he writes, "Narrative is the villain that blocks the full plurality of the text" because it is "aligned with a conservative, inegalitarian, or authoritarian politics" (40). Narrative conventions are tied to the dominant ideology because they are the same conventions and structures which

helped to establish that ideology in the first place. Richard Harvey Brown discusses the narrative installation of identity (43), social control through discourse (51), and the “repression of alternative realities” (52) through an imposed metanarrative structure—namely technological discourse, which snuffs out other, more “participatory” discourses. Even one’s training in particular kinds of reading strategies may indicate co-optation by the dominant discourse, so that even one’s reading is not one’s own: David Leverenz, for example, describes how his reading of *Gravity’s Rainbow* revealed his “membership in the Firm. . . . Anything organized, including narrative or interpretation, signified co-optation by waste-making forces” (230-1). Clayton goes on to analyze Leo Bersani’s criticism of narrative as sustaining hierarchy, passivity, the “violent” imposition of order, and the restriction of “the mobility of desire” (72-74).

The structure of a personal narrative, then, will not only be similar to that of a dominant order (official) narrative, or metanarrative, but it will also actually constrain one’s freedom. DeLillo’s character George Haddad in *Mao II* discusses a situation in which a national narrative literally becomes the personal narrative:

“We memorize works that serve as guides to conducting a struggle. In committing a work to memory we make it safe from decay. It stands untouched. Children memorize parts of stories their parents tell them. They want the same story again and again. Don’t change a word or they get terribly upset. This is the unchanged narrative every culture needs in order to survive. In China the narrative belonged to Mao. People memorized it and recited it to assert the destiny of their revolution. So the

experience of Mao became uncorruptible by outside forces. It became the living memory of hundreds of millions of people. . . . Don't you see the beauty in this? Isn't there beauty and power in the repetition of certain words and phrases? . . ." (162)

If there is beauty here, it is a terrifying one. Haddad is right to see the power in the national narrative, but it is the power of social control, what Bill Gray later refers to as "One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself" (200).

The individual cannot escape the official word: Stephen Heath points out that narratives in contemporary culture are "mass produced," and we are forced to "consume 'the constant narration of the social relations of individuals, the ordering of meanings for the individual in society'" (Heath in Hutcheon, *Politics* 57). At every turn we are faced with narratives which reinforce how we are supposed to behave and which influence our own narrative-making. Of course, as several postmodern theorists (notably Lyotard) insist, postmodernism is inherently sceptical of any totalizing narratives. This insistence, however, does not change the fact that a dominant order controls a populace by demanding allegiance to an imposed metanarrative. I argue that digital information storage, the digital dossier on the self, is the most powerful "official narrative" which constructs the self; it is part of the current metanarrative imposed by the technological order. A healthy postmodern resistance, then, would entail what Lyotard calls "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv)—a challenge to the computerized dossier system as constitutive of social identity. It would necessitate a questioning of the presumed "direct and natural link between sign and referent" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 34)—in this case between

the dossier and the self. The biggest obstacle to this challenge, as I argued in the last chapter, is the fact that our acceptance of computers in our lives makes it easier for us to have faith in them and forget about how they affect our lives. Lyotard argues that “along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as ‘knowledge’ statements” (4).<sup>39</sup> When the system is legitimated as the source of knowledge, subjects begin to comply with the delegitimation of their own private modes of knowledge-generation, their “*pétits récits*”—and thus it is harder for them to mount a significant challenge. Furthermore, given that “facts” are generated out of the “interpretation of archival evidence,” or “the traces of the past,” as Hutcheon suggests (*Politics* 57), the indelible nature of digitally coded information on the self ensures that the subsequent “facts” about the self are that much more ineluctable.

While metanarratives are regarded with scepticism by the postmodernist, the recognition that metanarratives and personal narratives share common ground is unsettling. According to Maltby, this recognition takes the form of an “anxiety that communication is necessarily on terms established by the social order, such that to speak at all may be to surrender one’s autonomy” (*Dissident Postmodernists* 40). Language is highly suspect in postmodern thought and fiction, to the extent that it is seen as a means of “entrapment” (41); further, he writes that the “centripetal tendencies in language are seen to have intensified, the greatest part of our communications now inflected toward the politico-cultural center” (185).<sup>40</sup> Gianni Vattimo refers to this situation as “the shattering of the poetic word,” whereby language becomes “monumental” because of the insistence

upon certain formal rules and other constraints (such as the aligning of narrative conventions with the dominant ideology, discussed above). The monument freezes the creative impulse in the same way I have suggested the digital file reifies the individual:

The monument . . . is not the artistic casting of a full life, but rather a *formula* which is already constituted in such a way as to transmit itself, and is therefore already marked by its destiny of radical alienation: it is marked definitively, in so many words, by mortality. The monument-formula is not constructed so as to ‘defeat’ time, imposing itself on and regardless of time, but so as to endure in time instead. (73)

This petrification of language makes of the word a tombstone marking the burial plot of creativity. In much the same way is the technologized subject engraved in stone (or, rather, in silicon) as an immortal but dehumanized entity.

Both authors I am investigating deal with the diminishment of language or its appropriation by the dominant order, along with its potential rejuvenation in individual creative linguistic acts, examples of which I will explore later in the thesis. Slade recognizes that a major concern in Pynchon’s work is linguistic colonization, and several critics concur. Robert D. Newman, referring to Slade, provides the example of Tchitcherine, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, promoting the New Turkic Alphabet:

By depicting the imposition of a standardized alphabet to replace unwritten speech and gesture, Pynchon demonstrates the undermining of cultural heritage. The inimical power of colonialism lies in its capacity and desire to invade the viscera of a civilization, to bring “the State to live in the

muscles of your tongue" ([*Gravity's Rainbow*] 384). In snatching the lifeblood of language from its colonies, the State (the They system) facilitates its control by destroying their aberrant variety. (116)

Slade himself acknowledges that "all ways of knowing . . . are inherently vulnerable to distortion" (72)—because language is too easily appropriated by dominant ideologies. Nothing can be absolute; everything, rather, is rhetoric designed to sustain established power (LeClair, *In the Loop* 67).

We learn society's language norms through that cultural apparatus most available to administer it. The image culture of television and cinema in fact so penetrates these characters' lives that it "constitutes a kind of secondary language, a code supplementary to the linguistic codes of American English" (McHale 120). David Thoreen argues that "every character in *Vineland* . . . can be seen playing a role, borrowing from Hollywood images that are not limited to costumes but extend to scripted speeches and appropriate dramatic actions" (55). Even history does not escape the influence of the media: "significant events . . . are submitted to media 'rewriting'" in *Vineland* and forced into the mould of "prescribed scenarios" (Cornis-Pope 86). The very same could be said of DeLillo's fictional world: one need only think of the Gladney family's reactions to news of the toxic cloud in the middle section of *White Noise*. In DeLillo, as well, the language of the "epistemology of consumption" (that is, brand names) is everywhere in the spoken language of the characters (Lentricchia, "Tales" 105).

The State colonizes, then, not only by colouring how experience is expressed through a clichéd and ideologically-inflected language but also by providing—*broadcasting*—inexorable images of experience deemed by the dominant ideology to be normative. In this way, the State has “colonized all but the margins of our linguistic space” (Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 185). There remains, however, yet another means for the diminishment of language’s creative potential. The technological State, in reducing experience and human lives to digital codes, also reduces this potential to “formulae” (Porush, *The Soft Machine* 6). In Pynchon’s world, language does “little more than convey information” (Chambers 208). Because information is the means to control, the State would prefer to keep language restricted to its transmission; any spontaneous or non-prescribed linguistic act (that is, any spoken act which does not echo the sanctioned discourses of the technological culture) is potentially dangerous to the State—until, of course, it is appropriated, recycled, sanitized, and peddled back into the social body.

When this happens, the originally intended meaning can be subverted because the “signifying potential of all signs is limited by hegemonic interpretive systems that prescribe specific kinds of meaning as the objects of knowledge” (Madsen 114). The result is a system of “Totalitarian discourses” in Pynchon’s world, which “attempt to circumscribe the domain of all cultural articulations” (123); “the word,” as Chambers argues, effectively “belongs to ‘them’” (13).<sup>41</sup> In the work of DeLillo, as well, communication between people is seen to be determined by outside strictures. LeClair argues that “oral discourse” takes the form only of either “redundancy” or “performance,” both of which negate the possibility of real communication (*In the Loop* 64). Again, the system which seeks to

prevent this communication between people is itself hidden in language, in euphemism—what Lentricchia ironically calls “the state’s poetry of concealment” (“Tales” 107)<sup>42</sup>—pattern (Morris 114), and cliché (Oriard 18-19). N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge argue that communication is “unreliable” in *White Noise*, as it increasingly becomes a matter of accessing the various legitimate “compartmentalized modules” (308, 309); what results is a kind of role-playing, not communicating.

Real communication is washed out by “white noise.” Arthur M. Saltzman asserts that cliché is the essence of white noise, “the uniform influx in which particularity dissolves into static, and the metamorphic potential of words may not be heard above the universal monotone toward which all utterances tend” (812). This “monotone” is a process of leeching language of its “metaphoric” and “defamiliarizing” potential by processing it through “such vulgarized forms as advertisements, tabloid headlines, and bureaucratic euphemisms” (808). The end result, according to Saltzman, is a discursive dumping ground, which might look innocuous enough on the surface, but which conceals a “menace,” “insidiously compressed . . . in the language we absorb and employ” (820). It is clear, then, that both authors reveal how language can be made to conceal and sustain the “evils” of the established ideological system, and to homogenize or totalize the populace that system controls.

While these stagnating forces of totalization do exist, this very anxiety about language may very well engender the postmodern subject’s so-called decentred or constantly shifting positionality. While Maltby speaks of “colonization,” he also refers to the “margins of linguistic space” (*Dissident Postmodernists* 185), margins which have

breached the walls of any totalizing impulse and expanded the discursive universe. What results is a multitude of options available to the self. Not all critics, however, positively regard this decentring of the self. Barnett agrees with Hutcheon that the postmodern novel decentres the self because it disrupts all of the foundations of humanism upon which the self as a centred, stable concept rests. However, where Hutcheon sees the goal of postmodernism as exposing the “coherent” self as a “historically conditioned and historically determined construct” (*Politics* 38), totalized by a dominant system, Barnett goes further: the contemporary novel “abandons belief in the individual as capable of ordering life and creating value.” It effects this demystifying with a “mocking lack of seriousness” (8). As discussed above, one of the social institutions undermined by increasing rationalist logic and technologization is the efficacy of language as a public medium; Barnett sees it corrupted (116) and abused to the point where the individual cannot depend on it as a potential means to create or resist (220). The individual’s only recourse is silence (10-11, 23). When the individual is not silent, his or her speech lacks critical force, which “facilitates the integration of the subject into the social order” (Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 36).

I challenge these claims as overly prescriptive. To call language in general “corrupt” is to do an injustice to it. We may look instead to alternative discourses: those of Bakhtin’s rogues, clowns and fools; those of Pynchon’s “counterforce”; and those which may be hashed together from what DeLillo refers to as babbling, glossolalia, intimate speech, and madness, all of which is part of the “language of the self, the pain of self” (DeLillo in LeClair and McCaffrey 88). I also wonder if we should as critics

abandon the value of the individual's instinctive *drive* to resist the totalizing impulses of the dominant order using language strategies—even if attempts at subversion are for the most part foiled. It is certainly true that many counter-measures, modes of resistance, and methods of subversion have become appropriated and anticipated by contemporary culture.<sup>43</sup> Language itself has become, as Vattimo suggests, “monumental”—inflexibly bound to dominant meaning systems. But has the poetic potentiality of language been irredeemably forged to this extent? I believe, and will argue at greater length later that, on the contrary, the subject in his or her use of language can in fact be a site of resistance and flux in the midst of stagnating forces.

Perception of self in the postmodern era is informed by challenges to “humanist certainties” and increasing perceptions of the “limits of language, of subjectivity, of sexual identity” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 8). I am uncertain as to why the vanishing of a totalizing “certainty” leads one necessarily to a sense of “limits.” Nonetheless, many critics focus on the “decentred” self as necessarily helplessly awash, unable even to “express” him- or herself. Jameson argues that the very concept of “expression,” whereby something ineffable “inside” the subject is “projected out and externalized, as . . . the outward dramatization of inward feeling,” is no longer viable in the era of postmodernism (11-12). There can no longer, he insists, be any differentiation between inside and outside; the self does not exist as a monad or unit which can be “alienated” from others, but is rather characterized by fragmentation (14). In discussing this scattered or dispersed subjectivity, many scholars are quite negative: Marc C. Connor suggests that critics in general see the postmodern “sublime” as “an experience of destruction, alienation, and apocalypse in

which any notion of a coherent subject and a harmonious social realm is eliminated” (67); Tabbi in *Postmodern Sublime* writes of technology becoming an “outward embodiment of thought” which obviates “romantic and modernist preoccupations with order, autonomy, and organic models of wholeness” (21); Leonard Wilcox argues that the deluge of electronic images in contemporary life “obliterates coherent meaning” and suppresses any “ability to imagine an alternative reality,” which leads to “the hollowing out of the self—or better to say, the dispersal of the self, the generalized destabilization of the subject in the era of networks and electronic transmission of symbols” (347).

Jameson discusses the fragmentation of the subject’s “cultural productions,” pointing out that “fragmentation,” along with “randomness” and “heterogeneity” are what theorists of the postmodern privilege and advocate (25). Further, he asserts that because there is no longer a centred “self” to feel emotion in any unified way, we are all saved from the closed-off “mindless solitude of the monad” (15), and society as a whole benefits because such concepts as “charisma” and “genius” are no longer in place to create a foundation for dominating others. Society is more informed, more democratic, and presumably open to greater variety and choice. Although I am inclined to agree that multiplicity should be privileged for its creative potential, I also see the trope of fragmentation as somewhat over-stressed, itself liable to break apart into meaninglessness. What is further troubling about Jameson’s assessment is the underlying assumption that what is good for “society”—often Jameson’s privileged term—is good for the individual.

As well, it is naive to assume that “society” is at any time free from the potential tyranny of an overarching technocratic system. That we as individuals are exposed to a greater variety of information or “stimuli” does not imply that this variety is not constrained and manipulated by the State, that it is not simply what makes up the official—the “meta”—narrative, or that it is not simply wielded as variety attenuation, to match our own potentializing variety part for part, in order to absorb it. In other words, the so-called information explosion which gives individuals the liberty to explore at will and make “knowledgeable decisions” (Lyotard 67) and informed choices may very well be a controlled explosion. Lyotard notes that the growth of power is the State’s main goal, and to this end it works to undermine “idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation” (46). It must control the legitimation of knowledge in order to perpetuate itself. It must therefore control people. As long as there is a technocratic State which has the resources to channel and combine information in specific ways, it has the wheel and the rest of us are just along for the ride.

The State, however, cannot prevent the whispering which may go on in the back seat, and often lacks the capability to regulate the power which may come, paradoxically, from the subject’s dispersal into various identity groups or subject positions. Hutcheon writes of the postmodern subject as resisting fixity; instead, it is “conceived of as a flux of contextualized identities: contextualized by gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, education, social role, and so on. . . . this assertion of identity through difference and specificity is a constant in postmodern thought” (*Poetics* 59; see also *Politics* 39). Some critics have expressed concern that the practical consequence of identity politics will be the loss of “a

shared identity” (Clayton 25), which might entail a more positively valued individuality. The social fragmentation resulting from identity politics, Clayton suggests, “may succeed in changing social attitudes—and hence altering everyday practices—in patterns that are out of sync with legislative or judicial decisions from on high” (25). It seems unlikely, however, that this politics will reach the point of revolutionary fervour, neutralized as the greater population is by the propaganda mechanisms of the technological and communications apparatuses. Further, these multiple “subject-positions” are themselves essentially the “interpellated roles offered by this or that already existing group” (Jameson 345).

The existence of different identity positions in society, however, is useful in that they provide a means for the subject to practice variety and thereby resist official definition, partly by exercising control over both the intensity and the duration of his or her affiliation to a particular position. Daudi affixes the label “virtual” to this subject who has “a forever moving identity constantly reactualized in new contexts” (64). Being a member of various kinds of groups and discourses, whether they are legitimate or subversive, gives the subject the chance to create for him- or herself a sense of identity that is open to variation as the subject wills it. Maltby, promoting his idea of “dissident” postmodernism, uses such terms as “radical democratic politics” and “multiple sites of antagonism” to suggest a kind of free, healthy, and autonomous system (*Dissident Postmodernists* 7). A member of such a system would be the “discontinuous or ‘shattered’ self,” the self characterized by “mobile desire,” advocated by Bersani (Clayton 73). Further, the subject can attempt to make his or her own history *plural*, in keeping

with the postmodern conception of history (Hutcheon, *Politics* 66); this plurality can aid the subject's attempt to escape an allogenic, totalizing narrative.

On the other hand, such terms as "shattered" and "discontinuous" seem negative in tone. Jencks, attempting to formulate a response to the question *What is Postmodernism?*, suggests that the multiplicity which characterizes postmodernism—that is, "[p]luralism, the 'ism' of our time"—"is both the great problem and the great opportunity: where Everyman becomes a Cosmopolite and Everywoman a Liberated Individual, confusion and anxiety become ruling states of mind and ersatz a common form of mass-culture" (7). He suggests that the contemporary subject must learn to "eclect," or select from the teeming available variety the best elements in order to achieve some kind of "totality" (54-5). It is not clear how this selection is to be managed, however, and the very idea begs the question of whether the subject who has successfully "eclected" can still be called postmodern.

A picture of the postmodern subject is always a little out of focus, never still for long enough to capture. The "multiple and even contradictory sites" occupied by the contemporary subject (Silverman in Hutcheon, *Poetics* 170) are strictly conceptual, but it is imperative to the liberation of the self to insist upon them in spatial terms, and in terms of movement. That other postmodern "space" of which I wrote in the preceding chapter—the "space" of the digital realm—is far more dangerous to autonomy. Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping," which is the subject's attempt "to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world" (44) is an example of this kind of unifying or totalizing strategy, which

Jameson deems “impossible” in the contemporary era (40). Although he argues that we are currently incapable of cognitively mapping “the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects” (44), I think our complicity in the linking of D.I.S. profiles and official “identities” means that we have in a sense mapped our selves onto a conceptual field of digital codes. On the other hand, there is no way cognitively to recreate this digital identity in space; digital representation of the subject alienates the self from its own identity.

Leaving aside for the moment the existence of the physical body, which seems to have no place in discussions of the “self” except as the material evidence of guiding forces—the body “moves” according to the will of some controller, whether it be the consciousness of the individual or the hail of the State—my discussion of self has always come around to “who controls it.” But given this language of dissolution, dispersion, decentring, fragmentation, and flux—given, in other words, some evidence of resisting the “enforced complicity” which is the technologized subject’s legacy—how can “it” be controlled?

The postmodern “self” is a pluralistic entity, it is a collective of “subjectivities.” Foucault suggests in “What is an Author?” that the subject is “a complex and variable function of discourse.” When Foucault asks “what matter who’s speaking?” (138), he implies that it is the “spoken” itself which truly matters. Again we arrive at language, or discourse, as the prime mover of subjectivity. If we insist that all discourse is operational, linked to the dominant ideology, then the notion of the self is indeed beyond any individual’s control.

By suggesting that the postmodern subject can develop radically new discursive “technologies of the self” in order to work toward personal autonomy, however, I am arguing for the creative potential of language, that in the act of creating new discourses the subject can effect an identity guided by the self. I assume, along with Jannis Kallinokos, that despite the fact that the “subject” is for the most part “socially constructed,” and despite the fact that it “can no longer be viewed as sovereign, consistent and rational,” there still exists a “minimal core of individuation” (256)—some internal, self-motivating drive which cannot ultimately be taken from the subject.

The foregoing discussion admittedly is only a small taste of the sumptuous if slightly ponderous banquet that is the discussion of postmodern subjectivity. Where some see the inevitable fragmentation of the subject as spelling a loss of power for the individual, I choose to side with those who see the dissolution of the subject as potentially liberating, provided we grant that minimal autogenic core of identity. Inevitably, though, the individual subject must always be very small when placed against the backdrop of society and culture—and the system of government which endeavours to ensure that he or she toes the line. The struggle for autonomy in the shadow of this system is always difficult and interminable given the constant bombardment of ideology from the propaganda apparatus and the ubiquity of technological devices which attenuate the free play and diversity of the subject. Thus, it is easy to see the subject in various oppositional stances: the subject is persecuted by the system, is at war with the system, is in flight from the system in order to maintain control of self.

Pynchon provides us with a glimpse of precisely this kind of subject, according to several critics. Tanner sees the Pynchonian subject as essentially persecuted, and argues that Pynchon's sympathies are with the "disinherited" (16), the "losers" (17), and so on.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, he argues, Pynchon is attempting to challenge "our often unexamined assumptions about the valuable and the valueless" (21). For one thing, to view society in this binary fashion is problematic. Robert Newman, for example, suggests that many of Pynchon's characters attempt to exist in a so-called "middle ground" (7), a space of "vitality" and openness which is antithetical to any of the dominating systems we encounter in the texts, all of which attempt to polarize life in some way.<sup>45</sup> Newman discusses Calvinism as an example of this kind of control system, one which categorizes human life as "elect" or "damned." We recall also the Firm in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which attempts to control Slothrop through Pavlovian conditioning, so that they may turn him on or off like a light switch. This "Newtonian" (Madsen 78) or mechanistic mode of control is what the novel is attempting to expose, according to Hutcheon (*Poetics* 59, 188). Slothrop, though, is an example of the resistant self—a subject who denies this mechanistic domination by searching for his "immanent self that he believes preceded 'Their' determination of his subjectivity" (Madsen 98). The Pynchonian hero is the subject who attempts to elude "Them," by breaking out of patterns of cause-and-effect, by acting in an unpredictable fashion, by practicing variety—by existing, to return to Newman, in the middle ground. The question of who controls one's identity is also a main concern of DeLillo's novels.

As I will show in the next two chapters, the novels of Pynchon and DeLillo present a vision of a system which dominates by denying this middle ground of fluctuation. In utilizing the binary language of the computer to code the dossier of the subject, the system digitally captures his or her identity. That something as complex as identity can be so reduced reminds us of one of the most important of poststructuralist observations: once something is *named*, it is subject to a certain degree of control and limitation. Stephen Cohen and Linda M. Shires suggest that in fictional characterization, the proper name “substitutes” for a set of traits (75); Althusser asserts that hailing, the calling out of the subject’s name, reinforces ideological subjectification; Derrida contends that the signature on a letter stands in for, and outlasts, the writer. Naming is a primary concern in the works of Pynchon, which are largely about attempts to “order the flux of life, to make sense of a shifting array of signs to derive meaning” (Newman 5). Newman recognizes that although naming can be a creative act, the “results are often sterile” (5). As “J.A.K.” Gladney says in *White Noise*, “I am the false character that follows the name around” (17). The “pretentious pseudonym” he has invented to create a sense of myth and power “has merely put him at a greater distance from . . . his true self” (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 134). He has become a slave to an image, a name.

For the establishment, naming is clearly a means of control. The dominant system wants to give its subjects “a fixed identity. Those who succumb are rendered essentially inanimate, and some take perverse pleasure in adapting their bodies to match their mechanical mentalities” (Newman 7). Andahl, a member of a cult which murders people based on the correspondence of proper and place name initials, has escaped this kind of

official identity: officially, “we barely exist,” he tells James Axton. “There is not even a threat of the police to give us a criminal identity. No one knows we exist” (*The Names* 208). The cult thus has power, and is not subject to the de-animating forces which create zombie-like television addicts, the target audiences of consumerism. Having avoided the official naming, neither are they affected by the grand, elusive and powerful force which shapes everyone else: the dossier. In the next two chapters, I investigate the texts to illustrate the technologizing of the subject and all that it entails: innundation, appropriation, objectification, complicity, control.

### CHAPTER THREE: IMAGE REALITIES, TUBAL NARCOTICS, AND THE FRAMING OF THE SUBJECT

Both DeLillo and Pynchon satirize American life, even when they appear to implicate themselves in the alleged shallowness of contemporary existence—the pop culture allusions, references to television, and the use of brand names. Satire in Pynchon and DeLillo has been amply investigated, and critics find in both that the dominant American ideology of the eighties is no better than a fascist, totalitarian regime.<sup>46</sup> Nostalgic ideals like the “family” have been undercut by the very campaigns which try to position them as the saving grace of contemporary life; the family in *Vineland* has become “part of the officially packaged American dream” (Booker 31)—“packaged” in the same way that everything else has become commodified, produced as naturalized ideological or homogenized images (Bumas 170). Values are produced, and are thus shallow (Hawthorne 79). An overabundance of signifiers is a primary target in both authors’ works. DeLillo in *White Noise* critiques a society in which “brightly colored” items (7, 326) abound, television and radio voices ceaselessly haunt domestic space, and where photographs of a barn become more interesting than the barn itself. This abundance is only superficially indicative of freedom and choice; in reality it underscores a totalizing, self-perpetuating system (Duvall 128; see LeClair, *In the Loop* 14).

Part of these authors' satire of the culture includes a probing look at what I call technologized subjects. These are individuals whose lives are guided by a technological system which serves the dominant ideology, and they are interpellated through the establishment of a digital space. In this and in the next chapter I will demonstrate the completeness of this computerized hailing by providing examples from the novels of Pynchon and DeLillo of how experience is informed or affected by technology and media culture, how technological surveillance delimits the lived horizons of the subject, and how one's very identity—one's *official* self, or soul—is created by the system.

In a society which has become computerized, no area of life remains unaffected, and one eventually learns to reformulate perceptions of lived experience in terms of the digital. In this chapter I discuss the role of image technologies—photographs, film, and television—in preparing for this translation into the realm of the one and the zero.

Although the role of television in communicating the myths of society in these two authors' works has been amply discussed by critics, I find it useful to explore some of these ideas because through television individuals are conditioned to accept their technological subjectification. TV is a technology which "broadcasts" an ideologically-motivated image-world as a mythologized normative reality. The screen world is seen as a more enticing place, the screen people as more interesting people; consequently, viewers begin to behave like television characters (and, in some cases, like the television itself). The screen, too, becomes a permeable barrier, a gateway to an "other" side (see McHale 118). Such a conception helps to condition the contemporary subject to think in a certain

way—to consider the artificial space “beyond” the television screen, “within” the computer banks, as a viable space within which to exist.

All image representation has ontological consequences. Closely studying the image is believed to be a means to unlocking its secrets—and the secrets of the object itself. In the end, though, the object will not matter; when it is gone, all that will remain is the photograph, the “picture limbo,” “the frame of official memory” (*Libra* 183, 279). DeLillo makes the link between self and image clear in *Mao II*: the Moon cult members as individuals are divided from their selves through photographic representation: “They’re here but also there, already in the albums and slide projectors, filling picture frames with their microcosmic bodies” (10). As they willingly seek to deny their selves in their complete obedience to Moon, who “lives in them like chains of matter that determine who they are” (6), becoming homogenized constituents of “an undifferentiated mass” (3), their selves are also being “captured” on film (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 184).

Even when the photograph is meant as a harmless record of an event, it can have the effect of stirring doubt and discontent in the present, as when a person wonders why she cannot be happy like she is in the photograph. Brita Nilsson claims that her photography project is a kind of “memory” (25), but it is a form of memory which has ramifications for the present. The photograph, like the digital dossier, can represent an “official” memory which denies the variability of the self. Brita and her subject, the novelist Bill Gray, engage in a conversation about photography which supports this claim. When he states that he is “losing a morning’s work” to pose for her, she responds: “That’s not the only thing you’re losing. Don’t forget, from the moment your picture

appears you'll be expected to look just like it. And if you meet people somewhere, they will absolutely question your right to look different from your picture" (43). The image usurps nature, as Phillip Gochenour argues (171). What Gray is "losing," then, is his human right to change according to his own whims.

No one seems to worry about the photograph being an accurate representation of the subject; rather, the reverse is true. This is the "corruption" of the "image world" Gray refers to (36). Till now, he has been a reclusive author, shunning the public, and thereby maintaining, as Brita suggests, "a grace and a wholeness the rest of us envy" (36). Having been photographed, he risks irreversibly changing who he is, and puts into motion a kind of destiny. He has become "material" for the camera, making his life secondary:

"There's the life and there's the consumer event. Everything around us tends to channel our lives toward some final reality in print or on film. . . . Everything seeks its own heightened version. Or put it this way. Nothing happens until it's consumed. . . . All the material in every life is channeled into the glow. Here I am in your lens. Already I see myself differently. Twice over or once removed." (43-44)

When the lens "consumes" him—makes him a product to be consumed by others—a part of him is killed, the part which determines the direction of his selfhood. For this reason, Bill finds the whole process a "morbid business" (42). His picture will substitute for his life, live on after he is dead: "when I'm really dead, they'll think of me as living in your picture" (44). The image is indeed a powerful technology.<sup>47</sup>

This sense of the immortality of the image is present also in *Vineland*, when Prairie discovers a photograph of her mother in a database:

They were walking along on what might have been a college campus. In the distance was a pedestrian overpass, where tiny figures could be seen heading both ways, suggesting, at least for the moment, social tranquillity [. . . ] Frenesi's face was turned or turning toward her partner, perhaps her friend, a suspicious or withheld smile seeming to begin. . . . DL was talking. Her lower teeth flashed. It wasn't politics—Prairie could feel in the bright California colors, sharpened up pixel by pixel into deathlessness, the lilt of bodies, the unlined relaxation of faces that didn't have to be put on for each other, liberated from their authorized versions for a free, everyday breath of air. Yeah, Prairie thought at them, go ahead, you guys. Go ahead. . . .

“Who was that boy,” DL was asking, or “that ‘dude,’ at the protest rally? With the long hair and love beads, and the joint in his mouth?” (114–15)

Not only Prairie's “feeling” inspired by the picture, but also the temporal markers of the passage, suggest that the events of the picture are in a sense forever occurring; they are “deathless.” Prairie imaginatively projects a conversation, the details of which presumably come from her limited knowledge of the period, gleaned from television reruns and other left-over relics, the love beads, bell-bottoms, paisley shirts, gestures, and catch-phrases. She quickly substitutes “dude” for “boy” to lend authenticity, and therefore reality, to what she sees.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, the narrator refers to the “authorized versions” of these individuals, which is precisely what the dossier photograph represents. Prairie senses that

by extending them through the screen and into her own imagination she is “liberating” them: her intentions are good, but she is in fact limiting them to a narrow field of discourse. Far from being “living” images, photo-Frenesi and photo-DL are rendered two-dimensional, static, and subject to cliché.

When Prairie becomes transfixed by the image, falling into “a hypnagogic gaze” (115), she is under the influence of what DeLillo’s characters refer to as the “aura” of photography. Bill Gray suggests that “Nature has given way to aura” (*Mao II* 44); Murray Siskind in *White Noise* asserts that “Every photograph reinforces the aura” (12). This utterance represents a harmful viewpoint which DeLillo’s pop culture guru Murray often espouses, the idea that image technologies create atmospheres of influence which have religious mystery or significance. When Jack and Murray become blind to reality, caught up in the mechanics of its reproduction—as when they visit “the most photographed barn in America”—they substitute an ideology-sustaining mythology for the mysteries present in the natural world. Not one detail does Gladney give us about the barn itself. Instead he tells us about the signs, the parking lot, the cars and buses, the “cameras . . . tripods, telephoto lenses, filter kits” (12) and post-cards. They watch not the barn but the people taking pictures of the barn. They hear not the sounds of nature but rather “the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling clank of levers that advanced the film” (13). It seems, as Murray suggests, “impossible to see the barn” (12), because the barn has become “a packaged perception, a ‘sight’ . . . not a ‘thing’” (Lentricchia, “Tales” 90).

John Duvall, drawing on John Frow, refers to Murray's notion of "aura" as "the myth of authenticity" that "comes into being through mediation, the intertextual web of prior representations" (140); Douglas Keeseey, as well, suggests that the aura is "based on falsehood, a reduction of the true uniqueness of nature to a standardized sign" (*Don DeLillo* 137). Somewhere a real object, the barn, exists, but to image worshippers the most important thing is to contribute to the influx of representations. This is Baudrillard's simulacrum. In this order of existence, representations exist at the highest level of validation, especially when they are given the illusion of motion. In *Vineland*, however, film is revealed to be not a purveyor of truth but only a technology of *framed* representations; as such it can be co-opted by the establishment to frame or imprison the souls of individuals. Frenesi Gates' betrayal of Weed Atman and the other actors in the revolutionary People's Republic of Rock and Roll (212-47) partly involves turning the film collective 24fps's main weapon—the movie camera—against itself (Hayles, "Who Was Saved?" 21).

Frenesi, on Brock Vond's order, initiates a rumour that Weed is in fact an FBI "plant" (234). The plan is to let the rumour, combined with Weed's own increasing self-doubts—the result of the visits to Dr. Larry Elasmio, a dentist used by the FBI to brainwash subjects (226-28)<sup>49</sup>—percolate, to let the paranoia build (239), and then to catch Weed on film. Frenesi believes that filming Weed being accused will be enough to destroy his credibility and thus begin the inevitable destruction of the People's Republic, which is Brock's plan. Frenesi explains: "We're going to be filming it. Once we have

him on film, whether he lies or whether he confesses, he's done for, it doesn't matter" (240).

Her statement represents a betrayal of the film collective's creed, that the close-up of the human face can "reveal and devastate. When power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory device, the human face. Who could withstand the light?" (195). Although Weed is innocent, the camera will "frame" him as one of these corrupt individuals; he will unwittingly play out "a role Vond and Frenesi have written him into" (Gochenour 174). The establishment has appropriated a technology meant to expose its own corruption and deceptions. Now, They use it to Their own purpose—to capture the "spirit" (213) or the "soul" (236) of the populace, to possess them. When this is not enough, they will kill. Significantly, the shooting of Weed Atman is designed as a media event (Slade 76).

In DeLillo's *The Names*, Frank Volterra is a filmmaker who has come to make a film about the cult of the names, which murders people based on a coincidence of initials.<sup>50</sup> In a way, he too has as his object the appropriation of something. Volterra plans to make his motion picture a self-reflexive piece, "an essay on film, on what film is, what it means" (199). With a filmmaker's vision, he sees everything in the landscape, including voices, the wind, and so on, as elements of film, and he has essentially scripted the project before it has begun—as if these mysterious people he seeks to film will be actors hired to complete his vision. He wants his film to make a statement about the illusions of film and how it affects life, but in making it he is asking the cult members to forsake the very action that defines them: they will have to agree not to murder.

Murder is their purpose, even if it does not make sense. Owen Brademas comes to the realization that the cult members have “intended nothing, they meant nothing. They only matched the letters” (308). In his search to find meaning for the murders, Owen has come to realize that they “mock our need to structure and classify, to build a system against the terror in our souls” (308). This need for structure also informs Volterra’s pursuit, and to gain it he would strip the cult of its mystery, its “meaninglessness.” In his single-mindedness about the importance of film in contemporary life, he cannot imagine that the cult would deny the chance to exist on film, even if it means denying their very essence:

“I have a sense of these people. . . . The life they lead out here, what they do, seems so close to something on film, so natural to film, that I believe once I talk to them they’ll see it’s an idea they might have thought of themselves, an idea involving languages, patterns, extreme forms, extreme ways of seeing. Film is more than the twentieth-century art. It’s another part of the twentieth-century mind. It’s the world seen from inside. We’ve come to a certain point in the history of film. If a thing can be filmed, film is implied in the thing itself. This is where we are. The twentieth century is *on film*. It’s the filmed century. You have to ask yourself if there’s anything about us more important than the fact that we’re constantly on film, constantly watching ourselves. . . . I can’t believe these people won’t instantly see they belong on film.” (200)

Volterra's describes a simulated reality: film is inherent in things; things "belong" on film; he encounters something in life and is reminded of the movies. The medium, however, is clearly subject to the framing of the maker; it is subject to the forces of the culture it reflects. Volterra is caught within an obsessive, delusional circle. He seems unable to see life outside of the camera frame—he can only see it "from inside." He has made the motion picture into a schema through which to see patterns and forms, in repeatable and analyzable sequences.

In the end, it is unlikely that he will capture the cult on film, because what they do is antithetical to the idea of film, with its linear unwinding from spool to spool. "No sense, no content, no historic bond, no ritual significance" is how Axton, the narrator, describes them: "Owen and I had spent several hours building theories, surrounding the bare act with desperate speculations, mainly to comfort ourselves. We knew in the end we'd be left with nothing. Nothing signified, nothing meant" (216). Perhaps the cult of the names represents the unrepresentable. The human need to master knowledge—"to master the data" (*Libra* 442)—to control nature through the process of applying patterns to what occurs in nature, has one of its greatest successes in the image, and in the sequencing of images. In the unfolding of one filmed event after another, the viewer is free to make connections and look for patterns of repetition.

All of this takes on a new dimension when we consider television. Those patterns appear everywhere; there is no need to search. They become part of the State's program of creating norms for society. Many critics<sup>51</sup> have pointed out that both Pynchon and DeLillo portray the average American as suffering from media overload, what Scott

Bukatman calls “image addiction” (26). Whether this addiction stems from the marvellous spectacle always available or the “beauty” of television’s “extended capacity for convolution,” as Metzger calls it (*The Crying of Lot 49* 33), television has co-opted most aspects of life, including spirituality and human community. DeLillo’s character Murray Siskind considers television “a primal force in the American home,” something with the status of a sacred myth, ancient and collective:

“You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. . . . Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. ‘*Coke is it, Coke is it, Coke is it.*’ The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness and disgust.” (*White Noise* 51)

Murray is demonstrating how thoroughly he has been indoctrinated, and the implications of his diatribe are disturbing. What about the propaganda that emerges out of the consumer glut? What justifies the discovery of myth in marketing ploys? What about the effects of the lack of coherence resulting from disconnected flashing images? Where is the human connection in an individual’s one-way interface with the television set? I have to agree with Frow’s assessment of this speech: “Murray has the quixotic ability to disregard the banal surface of television and,

with all the innocence of a formalist semiotician, to discover a cornucopia of aesthetic information in its organization" (186).

Frow's suggestion that Murray has blinkered himself to the ideological force of the screen's images in his fascination with what he conceives to be pure signs seems correct, although in his interpretation of the information, Murray is more a searcher for archetypes. The problem is, the system of mythology he builds out of what he sees has not sprung from any collective unconscious or transcendent realm, unless one considers the materialistic impulse to qualify. Murray's students argue, in response to his ludicrous suggestions, that "Television is another name for junk mail" (50).

Certainly this issue is a point of contention: LeClair, for one, believes that Murray's viewpoint is essentially DeLillo's (*In the Loop* 229); Maltby finds that DeLillo is pointing out the "paradox" that "brand names not only flourish but convey a magic and mystical significance" ("Romantic Metaphysics" 265); Eugene Goodheart suggests that Murray is simply responding to a "high cult prejudice" against television (125). If Murray were referring to any kind of intellectual programming, I might be inclined to consider this possibility. He seems, however, singularly fascinated with the glut of commercial images, "jingles" and marketing catch-phrases. There is nothing of value there in terms of human community. As Thomas J. Ferraro argues, this overflowing medium of television, this wealth of data, can only provide a "substitute . . . for the ties that no longer bind" (24).

It provides substitutes for other things as well: when Gladney's daughter mutters the words "*Toyota Celica*" in her sleep, he attributes to them a "ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant" (155), revealing how he shares Murray's point of view. DeLillo's

narrator accosts us with distressing hyperbole, generating phrases—“beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder,” “splendid transcendence”—even while he realizes that his daughter has only uttered a brand name. Does he understand the extent to which the brand names and slogans of the media have overwhelmed the consciousness and unconsciousness of his daughter? Cornel Bonca argues that the phrase is the means for Steffie to express her “death-fear” (36), and recognizes the “ambivalence” of the incident: it is “pathetic that Steffie has had to express her fears this way, but amazing that she does; awe-inspiring what strange psychic trails she had to follow to make her deepest fears heard, equally wondrous that on some level, they are heard” (37). If one accepts Bonca’s interpretation, his argument for the import of Steffie’s utterance makes sense; on the other hand, it seems a bit *too* pathetic that something so profound is expressed in commercial terms: the utterance is the mark of her indoctrination in the consumer, televised culture.

Maltby concurs with Bonca that Jack’s response to his daughter’s utterance is not to be read as parody: “Clearly, the principle point of the passage is not that ‘Toyota Celica’ is the signifier of a commodity . . . but that *as a name* it has a mystical resonance and potency” (“Romantic Metaphysics” 261). Words do have a power, as Maltby suggests, but that power has been co-opted by powers that sell; ironically, Jack, with his exaggerated language, seems to be trying to sell us the sense of import the uttered words have for him, the narrated experience itself a commercial (as Goodheart suggests, 127) for a notion of the mediated life as deep and satisfying, especially if one enjoys the means to consume, as he does: Gladney feels tremendously satisfied by his spending, whereby he “grow[s] in value and self-regard” (84), becoming just as happy as the people on television, perhaps. In the Toyota Celica passage,

Gladney becomes a smooth-tongued salesman, preying on our desire for the transcendent, perhaps even the desperate pusher of a narcotic believed to open doors to something mystical. Critics like Bonca and Maltby would have us believe that this is DeLillo's purpose as well.

Television has become like a drug which affects the speech centre of the brain. One of Pynchon's characters, DEA agent Hector Zuñiga, is a television addict on the run from a drying-out facility for "Tubefreaks" (*Vineland* 33) called "Tubaldetox" (45). Our first indication that Hector has allowed popular television programming to enter his discourse is his casual reference to Zoyd Wheeler as his "li'l buddy" (26, 27, 31), "which as they both knew was what the Skipper always liked to call Gilligan, raising possibilities Zoyd didn't want to think about" (33). Perhaps the most extreme example of this kind of addiction is the figure of Willie Mink in *White Noise*, who by the time Gladney finds him is alone in a motel room facing a television, and has essentially *become* a television set, uttering the same kinds of things we often hear coming from the Gladney's television (306ff); he "voices the drone of the mediascapes" (Wilcox 356), his "subjectivity [having] been voided almost entirely and replaced by the signifying chain of television's language" (Duvall 144-45); he has become just one "channel" (Moses 76) out of many.

While Mink's affliction is extreme, at times we all become channels for the media, or channel our lives through it; it happens all throughout *Vineland* and *White Noise*. "Prime time" itself becomes valorized as a ritual part of one's day (*Vineland* 194; 370). Television programming suggests a new way to measure the passage of time, as when Prairie Wheeler's boyfriend assures her that her troubles will soon be over: "Only a couple more commercials, just hold on, Prair" (105). Similarly, Gladney, thinking about

the people in his neighbourhood, wonders: “What happens to them when the commercial ends?” (*White Noise* 272). In Hector’s case, watching television has become an addiction which affects not only his perceptions of experience but also his applications and pursuits. Frenesi Gates recognizes that Hector depends on “Tubal fantasies about his profession, relentlessly pushing their propaganda message . . . turning agents of government repression into sympathetic heroes” (*Vineland* 345). His behaviour as a federal agent, then, is based on “bits and pieces carefully culled from his favourite programs” (Callens 123)—crime dramas. The assumption is that people will respond to his behaviour favourably, because the public has expressed its approval for such programs.

As Prairie’s boyfriend Isaiah suggests, television was the instrument through which any revolutionary aspirations in the sixties smothered under the heavy hand of official reality: “you sure didn’t understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th’ Indians, sold it all to your real enemies” (373). The Media is aligned with selling out; in its name you will sell yourself and those you once respected, be they friend or enemy. Hector’s current ambition is to produce a Hollywood movie capitalizing on sixties culture, the message of which will be “that the real threat to America, then and now, is from th’ illegal abuse of narcotics” (51). The night manager of the Bodhi Dharma Pizza Temple,<sup>52</sup> referring to this project, suggests that Hector is “risking a lifelong career in law enforcement . . . in the service of the ever-dwindling attention span of an ever more infantilized population. A sorry spectacle” (52).<sup>53</sup>

Maltby calls television an “addictive and mind-altering intoxicant” (*Dissident Postmodernists* 177). Hector, despite the fact that he is DEA agent, is a television junkie, prompting the intervention of the “National Endowment for Video Education and Rehabilitation” (33)—Tubal Detoxification. The group is not federal—why would the Man fund something which works against that which helps to sustain the dominant ideological program?—but is rather a research group privately and publicly financed. The viability of the NEVER program is ironically exposed: its taxonomy is derived straight from television (Hector is classified as a “Brady Buncher”); the music Zoyd hears while on hold over the phone is a collection of “themes from famous TV shows” (43). In the end, the program buckles under a misguided approach to therapy, whereby attempts to wean Hector off television through brief sessions of “low-toxicity programming” only enflames his desire “to bathe in rays, lap and suck at the flow of image” (335). Patients now wander around “like zombies in the movies, humming theme songs from favorite shows, doing imitations of TV greats, some of them quite obscure indeed, getting into violent disputes over television trivia” (336). The term “zombie” is appropriate, given that such characters are guided by an external force which makes them “mindless.” They become, according to George Haddad in *Mao II*, “absorbed”: “The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial” (157).

Zoyd Wheeler is thus absorbed. Once a year, in an act of contrived madness, Zoyd must do “something publicly crazy,” in return for which he receives “mental-disability” checks (*Vineland* 3). That Zoyd is not in control of his own “madness” is made clear by

the scheduling, pre-planning, and even pre-production of the event by the local media: he calls “the local TV station to recite to them this year’s press release” only to find that he has been “rescheduled” (3); he buys a dress for the event that will “look good on television” (4); he reminds people “to watch the evening news” (8); he arrives to find a “production staff” (11); he “obligingly” rushes at the cameras, “making insane faces” (12); later, he watches himself on the news, performer of an act now “annual” and “familiar” as a “kissoff story” (14), the general effect of the spectacle now enhanced by “dubbed-in sounds” and slow motion (15).<sup>54</sup> Zoyd’s “transfenestration,” his public demonstration of madness designed for television, amounts to a use of technology by the representative of the State, Brock Vond, to keep Zoyd under surveillance (304).

It has, as well, the added benefit of pacifying Zoyd, satisfying his desire for televised fame, and thereby reducing the possibility of his breaking out into new territories of “madness.” No wiretaps or hidden cameras are needed to keep track of Vond’s prey. Zoyd sits at home that evening with his daughter Prairie, watching himself. To see himself on the Tube, that purveyor of truth and spectacle, is immensely gratifying. Witness the sense of frustration and disappointment experienced when the media are not where he wants them to be (5). We discover the same thing in *White Noise*, when the failure of the media to report on the experiences of individuals means that those experiences are not validated: a murderer is disappointed because the city in which he committed his crime has no media, which means “he won’t go down in history” (45); passengers of a plane which has narrowly avoided crashing feel that the absence of the media to record their trauma means that they “went through all that for nothing” (92); a man wanders through

the crowd during the “airborne toxic event” scare, holding aloft a small television set, displaying its blank screen, uttering a tirade about the lack of media response—“No film footage, no live report”: “Don’t those people know what we’ve been through?” (161, 162).<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in *The Names*, the narrator refers to

an Irishman who complained that he kept walking into scenes of destruction and bloodshed that never got reported. . . . His fear was going undocumented in city after city. He was disturbed by the prospect that the riot or terrorist act which caused his death would not be covered by the media. The death itself seemed not so much to matter. (194)

Experience, then, is meaningless unless it is documented and thereby legitimated by the technological apparatus. It is no wonder, then, that subjects are so easily co-opted by the State through the use of technology. They desire to be “centred,” as it were, within the borders of the screen.

The consumer culture attempts to homogenize life and place a stopper on the creative impulse by suggesting that the images and experiences seen on television have been authorized. The tube is everywhere, as the “house hymn” at Tubaldetox emphasizes (336-37). Its ubiquity means that it has the power to shape life and culture in its own image. Printed on the bottom of Gladney’s cable bill is the legend “CABLE HEALTH, CABLE WEATHER, CABLE NEWS, CABLE NATURE” (*White Noise* 231)—a reference to the simulacrum established by the media (Moses 64-65). In *Vineland*, cable is in the process of infiltrating nature itself, as different companies begin to establish “Cable Zones” in the wilderness around Vineland (319). The text itself, as several have pointed

out, is saturated with media allusions; Pynchon, according to Johan Callens “stands under suspicion for knowing just too many television programs” (133).<sup>56</sup>

Television is so pervasive that it can cause, like movies, “a real change of consciousness” (*Vineland* 7).<sup>57</sup> Generally it serves the establishment’s purposes: in DeLillo’s *The Names*, Andreas Eliades asserts that American television becomes an educational apparatus only when it serves American interests:

“I think it’s only in a crisis that Americans see other people. It has to be an American crisis, of course. If two countries fight that do not supply the Americans with some precious commodity, then the education of the public does not take place. But when the dictator falls, when the oil is threatened, then you turn on the television and they tell you where the country is, what the language is, how to pronounce the names of the leaders, what the religion is all about . . . . The whole world takes an interest in this curious way Americans educate themselves. TV. Look, this is Iran, this is Iraq. Let us pronounce the word correctly. E-ron. E-ronians. This is a Sunni, this is a Shi’ite. Very good. Next year we do the Philippine Islands, okay?” (58)

Eliades’ underlying message is that America uses television to reinforce its position at the top of the international hierarchy. The importance placed on correct pronunciations—as if to suggest a sense of respect for other cultures—is undercut by the general disregard of those cultures when they do not in some way serve American interests. Eliades reinforces his claim by suggesting that other cultures are served up as television specials in network

programming, turning current political tendencies into entertainment trends—or, true to the logic of the simulacrum, turning current entertainment trends into political inevitabilities. It is true that Eliades is politically charged during this conversation, which creates hyperbole; the claim he has made, however, has great validity: other cultures are useful to sustain America's consumer culture, and superficially to "broaden" America's understanding of other cultures. In *Vineland*, for example, Billy Barf, lead singer of the Vomitones, performs at a Mafia wedding, his "acquaintance with anything Italian . . . limited to the deuteragonist of Donkey Kong and a few canned-pasta commercials" (95).

When television serves these ideological interests, it also serves personal ones. It influences how people interact with others, as if they have forgotten how to do so on their own. *Vineland* demonstrates how television shows are always a source from which to draw when something needs to be expressed, although the result is usually a trivialization of human signals and situations. Consider the influence of "Star Trek": in his attempt to explain a significant spiritual experience to his daughter Prairie, the best Zoyd can do is to state, "It's like Mr. Sulu laying in coordinates, only different" (40). Zoyd refers to difficult situations as "those times when the Klingons are closing, and the helm won't answer, and the warp engine's out of control" (285). Clearly uncertain as to how to buffer the awkward reunion between her daughter and her granddaughter, Sasha Gates relies on the only memory they are likely to share—Prairie, as an infant, singing the lyrics to "Gilligan's Island":

"First time she ever noticed the Tube, remember, Frenesi? A tiny thing, less than four months old—'Gilligan's Island' was on, Prairie, and

your eyes may've been a little unfocused yet, but you sat there, so serious, and watched the whole thing—”

“*Stop*, I-don't-want-to-hear-this—”

“—after that, whenever the show came on, you'd smile and gurgle and rock back and forth, so cute, like you wanted to climb inside the television set, and right onto that *Island*—”

“Please—” She looked to Frenesi for help, but her mother looked as bewildered as she felt. (368)

Sasha wants Prairie to sing the theme song for her mother, in the belief that this will take them back to a happier time, which will always be connected to the TV show. She knows of no other way to ameliorate the awkwardness of the reunion (Slade 76), and seems oblivious to greater implications: given the fact that “Gilligan’s Island” is about how “an ensemble of castaways maintains the cultural *status quo* of a class society” (Pitmann 46), Prairie’s early immersion in it—when her eyes are yet “unfocused”—is an example of “political indoctrination” into the dominant culture. Sasha’s interpretation of the infant Prairie’s movements as a need to “climb inside the television set” suggests another kind of indoctrination—the conditioning of the subject to accept and to crave an abstract existence within the data streams.

Frenesi recognizes that Sasha is only “trying to help,” even if her point of connection is rooted in the television screen; what they really need is simply to *be*—to “sit and hang out for hours, spinning and catching strands of memory, perilously reconnecting” (368).<sup>58</sup> Under an oak tree is where Pynchon leaves them for a time, surrounded by a

mass of family, a “profusion of aunts, uncles, cousins, and cousins’ kids and so on”; we never do get to hear what they say to each other. The point is, the attempt is made, and there are no television sets nearby.

Perhaps, though, the influence of television is always felt. Interactions with others can be dealt with as if they were subject to the banishment and recall of the channel selector, as when Frenesi’s son Justin comes “wandering in, cartoons having ended and his parents now become the least objectionable programming around here, for half an hour, anyway” (87). To treat his parents as “characters in a television sitcom” (351) is a strategy he learned from a friend in kindergarten, a means to deal with difficult situations by distancing oneself through the illusion of control; its result is alienation (Slade 76). Unable to deal with people in real contexts, these characters often deal with them through mediation. DeLillo provides several examples in *Mao II*, all of which involve his character Karen Janney, who has been a victim of programming and counterprogramming all of her life (DeLillo’s prologue deals with her programming by the Moon cult; chapter 6 deals with her reprogramming by her family). At times she seems to become a part of the programmed realm of TV, as when she watches disaster footage, becoming “lost in the dusty light . . . able to study the face [of the survivor] and shade into it at the same time, even sneak a half second ahead, inferring the strange dazed grin or gesturing hand, which made her seem involved not just in the coverage but in the terror that came blowing through the fog” (117). Part of her seems to cross through the television screen, as if her experience has given her membership in some kind of televisual logic. Perhaps because like the survivor on the screen, whose experience has been instantly commodified for a

viewing audience, Karen knows what it is like to give over her life to a controller, an overseer, she experiences this strange, medial empathy, able to sense the victim's gestures, feel residual tension, occupy him.

Later, watching the riots ensuing over the funeral procession of Ayatollah Khomeini, Karen feels herself to be "among" the crowds of frenzied mourners (189); she "went backwards into their lives, into the hovels and unpaved streets, and she watched the pictures on the screen" (190). Again the viewing of televisual images prompts a sense of connection on a deeply personal level. She believes herself to be the only one watching, that "everyone else tuned to this channel was watching sober-sided news analysis delivered by three men in a studio with makeup and hidden mikes" (190). She is aware of the detachment, the formal façades of such programming, but what she feels herself to be a solitary witness of is real. "It could not be real if others watched," for if everyone were watching then everyone should feel as she does; everyone should share her sense of "anguish, feel something pass between us, hear the sigh of some historic grief" (191). The calmness of her viewing companion Brita Nilsson confirms her belief. It is unthinkable that life could callously go on when such events transpire as those she witnesses on the screen.

Karen is an interesting character because of her strange relation to these mediated events. She seems to be a figure of great compassion because of her ability to empathize with the suffering and grief of the people on TV. Bill Gray, the novel's protagonist, expresses his admiration for Karen, who is "smart about people," who "watches TV and knows what people are going to say next. Not only gets it right but does their voices"

(65). Karen's response to people is inextricably connected to television; arguably her most powerful responses are for the faces on the screen. Mediated, they become larger than life, more durable—which seems to be the lesson of the novel's meditations on the photograph, on the image.<sup>59</sup> Durability is the essence of the database, as well.

The other side of this coin is the treatment of the television set as a person. In *White Noise* the TV is a constant companion, an apparatus which does not just transmit audio signals but “says” things (see, for example, 18, 29, 61, 95, 96, 178, 226, 257); the television is always on, but only occasionally does the narrator tell us what it “says”—almost as if it has interrupted him (see Duvall 145). DeLillo's play *The Day Room* has a television as a character, played by “an actor in a straightjacket” (58)—who could easily be Willie Mink from *White Noise*. Pynchon also provides examples of this kind of delusion: Hector Zuñiga's wife in divorce court named the television “as correspondent, arguing that the Tube was a member of the household . . . addressed and indeed chatted with at length by other family members” (348); because she destroyed the television set in question, Hector continued the thread by charging her with “Tubal homicide, since she'd already admitted it was human.” He further speculates about how it would be developed in “the movie of his own life story”:

it would be one of those epic courtroom battles over deep philosophical issues. Is the Tube human? Semihuman? Well, uh, how human's that, so forth. Are TV sets brought alive by broadcast signals, like the clay bodies of men and women animated by the spirit of God's love? (348)

This ludicrous debate underscores the influence of television in our midst, and de-emphasizes its function, which is to broadcast the dominant ideology in the form of spectacular images of “normative” behaviour, to persuade the populace to be good consumers, to entertain them, to diminish their creative and critical potential—not to mention their attention spans, which are already short enough (*Vineland* 52, 111-12, 154, 155). To impart consciousness to it—to suggest even remotely that it is analogous to the human—is to lend it a dangerous authority and credibility. It is a small victory for humanity when, in “non-Tubal ‘reality,’ both actions were thrown out as frivolous” (348). Note the quotation marks around “reality”: one can hear the sarcasm in Hector’s voice as he recalls the verdict of the more grounded-in-reality judge (Callens 133).

Such brief groundings in reality do not diminish the power of television. Different characters in *Vineland*, at different times, describe their problems and experiences in terms of game shows (12-13, 40), weekly serial programs (42, 60, 345), televised movies (271), and so on, which supply the entire basis of the television-world mythology. What are we to understand when DeLillo’s narrator, checking on his kids at night, states that it feels as if he has “wandered into a TV moment” (*White Noise* 244)? The implication is that anyone who watches television will know exactly what he means. When she is on the run with DL Chastain and Takeshi Fumimota, Prairie Wheeler finds herself “wishing they could wake into something more benevolent and be three different people, only some family in a family car, with no problems that couldn’t be solved in half an hour of wisecracks and commercials” (*Vineland* 191). Having grown up without her mother, Prairie has learned from the television what the cultural family norm is, can recognize it

when she sees it, and feels therefore the frustration of the orphan mocked by images of the perfect family:

On the Tube she saw them all the time, these junior-high gymnasts in leotards, teenagers in sitcoms, girls in commercials learning from their moms about how to cook and dress and deal with their dads, all these remote and well-off little cookies going “Mm! This rilly *is* good!” or the ever-reliable “Thanks, Mom,” Prairie feeling each time this mixture of annoyance and familiarity, knowing like exiled royalty that that’s who she was supposed to be, could even turn herself into through some piece of negligible magic she must’ve known once but in the difficult years marooned down on this out-of-the-way planet had come to have trouble remembering anymore. (327)

The only magic being worked here is the shallow but extremely effective sleight-of-hand practised by the media apparatus, providing too-perfect images of harmonious family relationships which harbour ideologically motivated ideas of obedience and consumerism. DeLillo provides a similar example of media-created perfection in his image of the politician who, during the airborne toxic event, might perhaps make a brief appearance “in a bean field outside a deserted town,” stepping out of his helicopter, “square-jawed and confident, in a bush jacket, within camera range, for ten or fifteen seconds, as a demonstration of his imperishability” (*White Noise* 130). The brief duration hardly matters; his confidence and his apparel will convey to viewers the message of his

worthiness and power. He will embody the stereotype that people are used to in such situations, and that people will aspire to. He will assure them that they are in good hands.

That Prairie to a large degree believes she should be like the stereotyped images of adolescent girls on the television screen highlights the power of these stereotypes as “perfect semiotic simulation[s]” (Berressem, *Pynchon’s Poetics* 236; Booker 16).

Berressem points out that the “tragedy” of *Vineland* stems from the fact that the American family is clearly not at all like the one portrayed in shows like “The Brady Bunch,” but is rather a kind of miniature replica of the fascist state (“Forward Retreat” 369). Despite his heavy-handed language, the point he makes is valid: the State sponsors a cultural apparatus to sustain myths of the “healthy” family which will encourage citizens’ obedience to their governmental “fathers”—making us all “infants” to be reared as productive, obedient, useful citizens. Thus, when Brock Vond herds the dissidents from the College of the Surf off to his PREP camp for “reconditioning,” he sees them as “Children longing for discipline”—children in an “extended national Family” (269). While it is important to note that Prairie is “annoyed” by these images she sees on television, she still has complicity, modelling her behaviour with her friend Ché on the “star-and-sidekick routine” of television shows (*Vineland* 327), as McHale points out (117).

There are other instances of this kind of wish-fulfilment, the transformation of experience based on the stereotyped images of television. Whereas Prairie actively models her relationship with her friend on TV shows, her mother Frenesi at one point experiences the “primal Tubefreak miracle” (84) of having the image on the screen actually appear. This is not, of course, what “really” happens, but the coincidence is close enough for

Frenesi. All set to enjoy a casual onanistic interface with “the perennial motorcycle-cop favorite ‘CHiPs’” (83)—to indulge a uniform fetish she partly believes was inherited from her mother—she is interrupted by reality in the form of a knock on the door. The experience is immediately translated into terms which transform it back into the screen medium:

there outside on the landing, through the screen, broken up into little dots like pixels of a video image, only squarer, was this large, handsome U.S. Marshall, in full uniform, hat, service .38, and leather beltwork, with an envelope to deliver. And his partner, waiting down beside the car in the latening sunlight, was *twice* as cute. (84)

The details of the Marshall’s description in this passage are undercut by a much more interesting perception. The Marshall stands “outside”—on the other side of the screen door—and yet we are given an additional descriptive phrase which would be superfluous if it did not serve to emphasize Frenesi’s mediated perception: the man exists “through the screen,” referring to a commonplace illusion that the television screen represents a barrier between different worlds. Frenesi sees the officer as “broken up” into pixels through the mesh of the screen—but here the narrator is inspired to add another detail which functions to keep us tethered to reality: it is like a video image “only squarer.” Here there appears to be a kind of uneasy tension between reality perceived as a television image and reality as it should be perceived.

Berressem discusses this scene as an instance of the “interpenetration” or permeability of real space and media space: “In this permeable universe, every memory is

always already a screen memory, a memory in and of the screen” (“Forward Retreat” 362).<sup>60</sup> Frenesi has thus used the screen door to frame her experience, to help transform it as the “miracle” whereby one can enter the fantasy world of television. It has the residual effect of concealing from her consciousness the connection between the “television’s sexualization of authority” and “her own submission to an authority she knows is corrupt” (Madsen 131). It is easier to perceive the appearance of the attractive, uniformed man as a materialization of the television image rather than as a bureaucratic messenger. The melting together of the physical reality and the televised spectacle results in a confusion of originals and copies, of reality and mediation. I argue that this confusion also arises when the digital dossier is perceived in spatial terms.

*White Noise* provides an interesting reversal of Pynchon’s “Tubefreak miracle.” Walking into his daughter Denise’s room, where the children are watching television, Gladney is shocked to see his wife’s face on the screen. “Confusion, fear, astonishment” are felt as they see how their flesh-and-blood Babette has become “framed in formal borders” (104). In his initial shock at seeing the unexpected,<sup>61</sup> Jack considers the image to be his wife’s ghost, “set free to glide through wavebands”; when an explanation occurs to him, the conceit remains: “It was but wasn’t her. . . . Something leaked through the mesh. She was shining a light on us, she was coming into being, endlessly being formed and reformed as the muscles in her face worked at smiling and speaking, as the electronic dots swarmed” (104). She is now “Babette of electrons and photons”; and although Jack tries, he cannot rid himself of a sense of “disquiet,” a sense that he has been forever separated from his wife (105). If, as Ferraro suggests, the result of this experience is “to destroy the

distinction between flesh and image . . . then television can be said to seduce us with a major reconstruction of the nature of reality itself" (26). The human consequence is that, having become an image, one's "inner self" is devalued (27). Ferraro also suggests that Wilder, who begins to cry when the set is turned off and the image of his mother disappears, exemplifies the danger of this mediation: eventually we may find ourselves unable to function without it, "helpless without our image-fix" (28). As well, the imaging of the self leaves us vulnerable, as Hayles indicates: "The parataxic juxtaposition of muscles and electronic dots indicates that the configuration has become unstable, ready for appropriation and transcription" ("Postmodern Parataxis" 410).

The spectacle is a means of mediating and thereby trivializing life—but it is also very capable of mediating death as well. Television has "trivialized the Big D itself" by "picking away at the topic with doctor shows, war shows, cop shows, murder shows" (*Vineland* 218). In *White Noise*, death is mediated in the disaster footage that the Gladneys watch with such fascination and greed (64). Part of the attraction is spectacle, but the spectacle also establishes a distancing (Messmer 404) and effectively replaces logic: Gladney becomes certain that such horror could never happen to his family (114).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, consider the disturbing explanation by a colleague for why disaster footage is so "entertaining": "We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information" (66; see Saltzman 821). The suggestion that violence is necessary to counteract media saturation has chilling connotations, not the least of which is that violent death becomes imbued with a new meaning, one that erases the sense of pity

and horror: violence entertains. Being on television, death has an aura of unreality—it is distant, it is happening to someone else, or not really happening at all.

The “fake death” (Berressem, *Pynchon’s Poetics* 205) provided by television becomes the new haunted realm of contemporary life. Individuals fed up with life, disgraced, discouraged, or abused by the system, can opt out of life to reside in the glow from the television set. Pynchon calls this community of undead television addicts “Thanatoids.”<sup>63</sup> As Ortho Bob Dulang explains, “‘Thanatoid’ means ‘like death, only different’” (170). Because they watch so much TV, these people are closed off from the living, in a sense. They are not “ghosts,” as Takeshi is quick to inform DL, but rather “victims . . . of karmic imbalances” (173). Many of them have been done some kind of injustice—some are Vietnam veterans, for example—and are obsessed with the desire for revenge. They are destined forever to remain in this limbo, obsessed with retribution but limited in its pursuit by their television addiction. Wilde sees in the Thanatoids a vision of the “larger American population, traumatized by television and possibly by memories of the sixties” (171). In that case, “Thanatoid” is just another word for “normative subject.”

As already discussed, the appropriation of the individual’s life is effected largely through the conditioning of subjects to accept their State-mediated identities. Television is the most pervasive technology used to accomplish this conditioning, although the related technologies of photography and film are also significant in the effects they can have on identity and power relations. What is true for DeLillo’s barn is true for the human subject. The image has the power to lock the individual into a fixed identity which takes precedence over the randomness of the self. If we move closer to the picture, and closer

still, we discover the pixels which compose it. We can imagine these dots as bits of information, part of a vast grid of information about the subject. This is the digital realm, the subject of the next chapter, which again draws from Pynchon and DeLillo to explore what is in effect a digital image of the subject which delegitimizes, and transforms, the changing self.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: HAILING SUBJECTS OF TECHNOLOGY**

The concept of hailing, introduced into the discourse regarding power by Louis Althusser, refers to an individual responding to the hail of an authority figure. By responding, the individual tacitly recognizes the authority of the hailer and willingly submits to his or her power. Partly, we respond because we have been taught to see the hierarchy as legitimate; partly, we respond out of knowledge of the tools of oppression the hailer has at his or her command. I have argued in this paper that the entity doing the hailing in the technological society is the computer system, which not only hails us as subjects but imprisons us in its abstract, digital space. We are not only subjectified as obedient citizens of the State, we are “technologized”: we become physical bodies which move according to electronic versions of our selves stored in networked databases; files coalesce into a framed image of the person. I have shown how image technologies have ontological consequences for the subjects of a technocratic domain. In this chapter I will use the texts of Pynchon and DeLillo to investigate how every aspect of social life has become “digitized,” either in the sense that events and persons can be stored as digital codes, or in the sense that database technology has become an extended metaphor for life.

Our complicity in our own subjectification hinges on our willing acceptance of technological figurations of reality. Neil Postman suggests that technology makes blinkered fools of us all: “technology is a one-eyed king ruling unopposed amidst idiot

cheering" (*Conscientious Objections* xiii). This harsh assessment, however, puts too much blame on the "masses" and does not acknowledge the pervasiveness of microcomputer technology which makes complicity a requirement for social order. Pynchon concludes one chapter of *Vineland* with a rather menacing passage. Frenesi Gates, demanding to know how the payment on her cheque could have been stopped after hours, learns something she must already know very well, existing as she does "within" the system. The night manager of the supermarket "spent his work life here explaining reality to the herds of computer-illiterate who crowded in and out of the store. 'The computer,' he began gently, once again, 'never has to sleep, or even go take a break. It's like it's open 24 hours a day. . . .'" (91). The computer is not human, but because the manager refers to it in human terms, it seems superhuman. Rosita Becke and Dirk Vanderbeke argue that the computer system in Pynchon's world is "an impenetrable sphere," comparable to the mysteries of Nature and the gods in "mythic times" (66). "Reality" for Pynchon's characters is a constantly-operating computer system, described as a super-powerful conscious being, always available to validate existence, solve problems, or occasionally stop payment on a cheque.

This deification is also suggested in DeLillo's *White Noise*. Jack Gladney ponders the nature of the establishment's system, which like a god is mysterious, and even insidious in the invisibility it is granted by computer technology.<sup>64</sup> He believes that he must live "in accord" with "the system," a deified mainframe which has the power to bless or curse his life, depending on the extent to which he conducts himself in proper—that is, complacent—fashion. A trip to the automated teller machine, another 24-hour

computer—confirms this belief. After following proper procedure, pushing the right buttons, he is gratified to learn that

The figure on the screen roughly corresponded to my independent estimate, feebly arrived at after long searches through documents, tormented arithmetic. Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. . . . What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. . . . The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies. (46)

Despite the jubilant language, it is not hard to sense the darker aspects of this passage. Gladney is connecting with a machine, not a person, and the machine has the power to “approve”; for us this kind of interaction is part of a “slowly accumulating strangeness” which “threaten[s] our security as readers” (Bryant 158). There is a slight suggestion of menace in the possibility that numbers might not match: what effect would such disagreement have on that “something of deep personal value” Gladney refers to? There can be little comfort in a passing sense of harmony and authentication when an underlying sense of disquietude always lurks in the background; nor, as Arthur M. Saltzman argues, can there be “much consolation . . . if such congruities reduce their consumers” (809).

LeClair argues that one's relation to the system is inherently "vulnerable": "the data bank both gives and takes away security" (*In The Loop* 215). In DeLillo as in Pynchon, this so-called harmonious network depends on the proper functioning of the technologized subject. Jack Gladney, in order to pay his cable bill, must follow a 12-step procedure which serves both to facilitate the processing of payment by the company's accounts department and to demean the customer: step 3 is "sign your check"; step 10 is "secure the envelope flap"; step 11 is "place a stamp on the envelope, as the post office will not deliver without postage" (*White Noise* 231). The customer conforms to the mechanics of a system, thereby becoming one element in the system. As such an element, he is redefined as a number, a code: "REMEMBER. You cannot access your account unless your code is entered properly. Know your code. Reveal your code to no one. Only your code allows you to enter the system" (295). The secret code is confidential information shared by the subject and, presumably, the distant, invisible administrators of the system of electronic funds; in reality, the code is the means to make of the subject an abstraction, a number. Daniel Aaron asserts that DeLillo's protagonists are, in the end, "only integers in a vast information network created and controlled" by the bureaucratic divisions of society (70). In the paragraphs which follow, I will examine how in these texts technology informs the ways in which we express our experience; co-opts the sacred, mysterious, and creative domains of life; changes how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships with others; establishes a system of surveillance to monitor all human action; and ultimately reduces lives and deaths to data.

The decade of the eighties is characterized by a tremendous influx of computer technology: digital synthesizers predominated in music, home computers started to become a necessity, and video games became an undeniable part of youth culture. Early video games were two-dimensional, but they soon incorporated a sense of perspective and other elements of realism. They became simulations of reality: the “joystick” resembled the throttle of an aircraft or the steering wheel of a car, and so on. Baudrillard suggests, however, that the sequence in which an object is followed by an image of the object, or an event is followed by a simulation of the event, becomes reversed in the age of simulation—what he calls the “precession of simulacra” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 1). One might expect, then, that events will be described as—will in fact be *seen* as—simulations in contemporary society.

Pynchon provides several instances in which experiences take on the aspect of video games. An argument between Frenesi Gates and her husband is described as “a kind of alien-invasion game in which Flash launched complaints of different sizes at different speeds and Frenesi tried to deflect or neutralize them before her own defences gave way” (87). Another character’s journey up to the Ninjette Retreat is also described as “an all-day hard-edged video game, one level of difficulty to the next, as the land rose and the night advanced” (161). Finally, there is sex-as-video-game: for Frenesi, her FBI lover Brock Vond’s “erect penis had become the joystick with which, hurtling into the future, she would keep trying to steer among the hazards and obstacles, the swooping monsters and alien projectiles of each game she would come, year by year, to stand before” (292-3). Frenesi’s life as an FBI informant, subject to the whims of the bureaucracy and its

computer system, is described as one long video arcade game. In the arcade, the narrator tells us, “calls home [are] forgotten” and “rows of other players” are “unnoticed.” This detachment from human contact characterizes the simulated life, which is lived “no longer in the time the world observed but [in] game time,” a phrase which signifies Frenesi’s exemption from the responsibilities of life. Life in the Stock Exchange in DeLillo’s *Players* strikes a similar chord, with Lyle Wynant, only half in jest, stating that as far as the “outside world” is concerned, “I thought we’d effectively negated it” (23).

Another extreme is the reduction of human will to a mechanistic conception based on how computer technology works. Baudrillard writes that “the meticulous operation of technology serves as a model for the meticulous operation of the social” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 34); at an individual level, our interest in the sequences and codes of the computer translates into a reconceiving of the body as “a stockpile of information and of messages, as fodder for data processing” (100). Human reality, then, is described in the language of technology. For instance, to be given shelter in the Ninjette retreat, an applicant must “take responsibility for both her input and her output” (*Vineland* 109). These computer terms serve to emphasize how the “Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives” has been modernized by digital technology, more Western co-optation of the Orient: rather than enlightenment, the focus here seems to be on business (107, 128, 153-54),<sup>65</sup> and the jargon of computerization and processing is a necessary addition to the Sisterhood’s discourse.

Indeed, all things spiritual seem to have been co-opted by technology and database systems.<sup>66</sup> Ancient mystical, magical or sacred practices are described in terms of, or transformed into, data storage technologies. Consider how DL Chastain describes her Ninja abilities: to make an individual forget that he saw her, she does “a little rewind and erase” on him (254), reducing his mind effectively to a machine which records and replays experience; to gain control of a guard, she “punch[es] into a sequence of his trigger points the subroutine *Yukai na*” (255), as if his body has become a keyboard and his anima a microprocessor; later she “reactivates” him (256) and discovers that she had not “set [the subroutine] on low” (257). The magic that the Ninja, using only her body, can perform on the body of another, has been reinscribed as an interface between human and machine.

Not only has the victim been so reduced, however, the skills of the human actor also become redundant. The dedication, self-sacrifice, and concentration once required to perform the “Ninja Death Touch,” for example, are in the modern age no longer required: “Today, of course, you can pick up a dedicated hand-held Ninja Death Touch calculator in any drugstore, which will track, compute, and project for you quick as a wink” (141-42). The flippant “of course” serves to underscore the playfulness here, but it also emphasizes the ubiquity of convenient and in some cases disturbingly entertaining “hand-held” devices, such as the computer game played by Takeshi’s seat-mate on the flight to America, which combines “sex and detonation” (160).

Takeshi’s salvation from the Death Touch mistakenly placed upon him will be provided through technology, the Kunoichi Retreat’s “Puncutron Machine” (149, 163); connected to the patient with electrodes, the machine creates a circuit designed “to get

that chi back flowing the right way” (163). The “karmic adjustment” venture Takeshi and DL set up in Shade Creek is a corruption of Zen principles (Safer 57), fully immersed as it is in computerization, with Takeshi “running traces” on names supplied by clients and complaining about how fast the “amount of memory on a chip” increases, making those traces harder to narrow down: “The state of the art will only allow this to move so fast!” (174). Seeing the office for the first time, with its assortment of “computer terminals, facsimile machines, all-band transmitter/ receivers” and the like, Prairie’s response is to marvel, “Hi-tech Heaven” (192)—her abbreviation of “technology” and the truncated spelling of “high” emphasizing further the infiltration of computer discourse in everyday language; moreover, the reference to “Heaven” merges the sacred and the technological.

This digital co-optation of the sacred realms occurs also in DeLillo’s fictional world. Babette, reading the tabloids to a blind man who “demands his weekly dose of cult mysteries” (*White Noise* 5), reads the text introducing a coupon for “Life After Death”:

“The no-risk bonus coupon below gives you guaranteed access to dozens of documented cases of life after death, everlasting life, previous-life experiences, posthumous life in outer space, transmigration of souls, and personalized resurrection through stream-of-consciousness computer techniques.” (144)

One wonders how they can document everlasting life—although “documentation” does offer a kind of immortality. What does the “stream-of-consciousness” technique involve? Does the client feed thoughts and feelings into the machine, reducing them to data in the hope that they will be “stored,” ready for the afterlife? The purveyors of this promise of

afterlife prey on people's fear of death and their faith in technology, as do the chemists who are experimenting with Dylar, with its ingenious "drug delivery system" (187), by using "computer molecules and computer brains" (300). When Murray Siskind calls technology "lust removed from nature" (285), he makes of technology a god in whom we should put our "faith": technology, he maintains, "creates an appetite for immortality on the one hand. It threatens universal extinction on the other. . . . It prolongs life, it provides new organs . . . . Give yourself up to it, Jack. Believe in it. They'll insert you in a gleaming tube, irradiate your body with the basic stuff of the universe. Light, energy, dreams. God's own goodness" (285). Murray is an evangelist of technology, that omnipotent force which tames and enslaves nature, its righteous mandate being "subdue and codify" (*The Names* 80).

Frenesi Gates makes a similar connection. Fearing that she is to be cut off from the witness protection program, she philosophizes about the implications of "the patterns of ones and zeros," the "weightless, invisible chains of electronic presence or absence" (*Vineland* 90) which represent her status, her personhood: "everything about an individual could be represented in a computer record by a long string of ones and zeros" (90); her fate will be decided by the touch of a keyboard. Extending the metaphor, she muses that the lives and deaths of human beings might themselves be the digital impulses in a kind of meta-mainframe, "digits in God's computer" (91), a notion M. Keith Booker finds dehumanizing (12).<sup>67</sup> This cosmic metaphor has God as the ultimate computer "hacker." The language of the digital informs the concepts of creation and cosmos; Deity

and Digital system have merged.<sup>68</sup> Computerization also permeates the domain of astrology, (262-63), making it another “tool of control,” according to Johan Callens (137).

If technology is a metaphor for the deity, then the technocrats have built its place of worship in such collectives as the Central Intelligence Agency: the phrase itself suggests a name for God (Foster 157). In *Libra*, Larry and Beryl Palmenter discuss this spiritualizing of the centralized surveillance system:

The Agency was the one subject in his life that could never be exhausted.

Central Intelligence. Beryl saw it as the best organized church in the

Christian world, a mission to collect and store everything that everyone has ever said and then reduce it to a microdot and call it God. (260)

If God is “all knowing,” the implied logic goes, then to be all-knowing is to be God.

Several years in the future, Nicholas Branch will have much the same idea as he sits in a small room surrounded by documents lit by the glow of a computer. He speculates that his purpose in writing a history of the Kennedy assassination for the CIA is to protect what he sees as “a vast theology, a formal coded body of knowledge . . . its own truth, its theology of secrets” (442). The computers of the CIA have taken over the domain of the spiritual, and all that it includes: fear and awe of the unknown, apprehension of the Almighty’s mysterious ways, and a sense of Its power and omniscience.<sup>69</sup>

Everywhere in Pynchon’s world we find the influence of the computer dulling the sheen and softening the edges of anything in human life that is creative, beautiful, or mysterious. Pynchon finds the genesis of this corruption of life in the sixties, at institutions like the College of the Surf, where the “brand-new field of Computer Science”

(*Vineland* 204) is taking root, and where “only students likely to be docile” are admitted. The college is transformed from an institution of creative exploration to a training ground for bureaucracy, “law enforcement, business administration” and “dress code[s]” (204). It represents “official reality” (205).<sup>70</sup> The college is where much of the novel’s central action occurs, where we see human thought supplanted by the digital machine.

Music is one form of creativity so affected. As a harkening back to the “predigital” sixties (38), Van Meter removes the frets from his bass guitar, seeing “in the act further dimensions, the abolition of given scales, the restoration of a premodal innocence in which all the notes of the universe would be available to him” (224).<sup>71</sup> Removing the frets, which are used to subdivide and allow for organization in music, is a means to open up new possibilities. Conversely, there is already a sense in the late sixties, “as revolution went blending into commerce,” that the so-called “analog arts [would] all too soon . . . be eclipsed by digital technology” (308). Rock and roll is fast becoming, not a means to express anything counter-cultural, not, as the revolutionaries of the “People’s Republic of Rock and Roll” believe, “the one constant they knew they could count on never to die” (209), but an entertaining diversion, a way to keep people “distracted” (314).<sup>72</sup> At its worst, it is turned into “muzak” for shopping malls, “perky and up-tempo, originally rock and roll but here reformatted into unthreatening wimped-out effluent” (328).

Technology has also infiltrated the literary arts, in the form of word processors, championed by George Haddad in *Mao II*: “I find I couldn’t conceivably operate without one,” he says. “When I prepare material for lectures, I find the machine helps me organize

my thoughts, gives me a text susceptible to revision. I would think for a man who clearly reworks and refines as much as you do, a word processor would be a major blessing” (137-38). Bill Gray, his auditor, prefers to write without this “blessing,” without the aid of a machine which would make his words insubstantial, mere impulses (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 179). Haddad by his own admission is dependent on the computer; he is unable to organize his ideas on his own. The computer is not, as George insists, something Bill “dearly need[s]” (170). Part of Bill’s existence as a person, and as a writer, is his struggle with words, and using the typewriter enables him to give his words, and by extension himself, substance (*Mao II* 48; Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 179).

The pervasive computer, however, is radically changing the nature of the individual’s existence in society, and is changing the way individuals perceive themselves. We have become part of a system. The hostage in *Mao II* refers to it as “the system of world terror,” through which he has become irreversibly changed. As time passes, the people—the officials who try to have him released and the public, who initially treated him with sympathy—begin to think of him less as a person and more as a case, a file:

In the beginning there were people in many cities who had his name on their breath. He knew they were out there, the intelligence network, the diplomatic back-channel, technicians, military men. He had tumbled into the new culture, the system of world terror, and they’d given him a second self, an immortality, the spirit of Jean-Claude Julien. He was a digital mosaic in the processing grid, lines of ghostly type on microfilm. They were putting him together, storing his data in starfish satellites, bouncing

his image off the moon. . . . But he sensed they'd forgotten his body by now. He was lost in the wavebands, one more code for the computer mesh, for the memory of crimes too pointless to be solved. (112)

In this passage, and in the examples to follow, we find several commonalities. One is the sense of “existence” within the data, as a spirit or soul, leading to a diminishing of the importance of the body: he “is” a “digital mosaic,” and so on. Another is the sense of “immortality” granted to the individual who exists as a dossier in the system. Then there is the idea of digital space, an abstract realm which usurps real space; it is the domain of control by the technicians who will manipulate, dismantle and reassemble the data which make up this new self. Finally, the whole process is akin to terrorism, as Joseph Tabbi suggests: “The terrorist power of DeLillo’s narrative comes from those moments when human bodies erupt into the placeless, selfless sphere of electronic transcendence” (*Postmodern Sublime* 206).

In *Vineland*, shortly after Weed’s shooting (246),<sup>73</sup> which Frenesi has helped to orchestrate, the FBI moves in to put an end to the People’s Republic (247–48), rounding up the dissidents and taking them to Vond’s “Political Re-Education Camp” (268) to be turned into government informants—what Hawthorne suggests “represents full fascist control” (85). Although Frenesi is rescued from the PREP camp, she realizes that she cannot return to being “the person she’d been—beyond any way to clear it she had set up Weed’s murder and was in the federal law-enforcement files now and forever” (280).<sup>74</sup> She has been entered into the database of the establishment, like countless others: examples of characters in authority referring to or tapping into official databases of other

subjects abound in the text (26, 103, 112, 131, 147, 201, 262, 308). What this “digitizing” of her experience essentially means for Frenesi is that she has become automatically redefined as a person.

Her actions have been inscribed into a file system, which makes her a prime candidate for the government’s usurpation of her life. She has become a monument. Far from being in control of her own life, far from being free to pursue whatever revolutionary aims she might once have had, she is now “listed as a species her parents had taught her to despise—a Cooperative Person” (280). The dossier system works by encoding action, arresting it like a photographed image, labelling it, and then reapplying it to the individual. The data are based on real events (details of the individual’s life), but they are assembled into a version of the self which does not really exist (the digital identity). This computer self is dehistoricized (see Hinds 92; 96-7), caged in an abstract digital landscape. When this happens one is not a person but a “resource” (12), as Zoyd Wheeler recognizes.<sup>75</sup> The self, as perceived by the individual, undergoes a transformation into a new existence which owes its formulation to the language of the digital. Frenesi, for example, regards

her particular servitude as the freedom, granted to few, to act outside warrants and charters, to ignore history and the dead, to imagine no future, no yet-to-be-born, to be able simply to go on defining moments only, purely, by the action that filled them. Here was a world of simplicity and certainty . . . a world based on the one and zero of life and death. Minimal, beautiful. (71-72)

For “minimal,” read limited, closed, redundant. Frenesi as a snitch, as a dossier-self, is disconnected, living in the video-game world described earlier. She is not really “free”; her life is always restricted by the dossier. She cannot live in “real time” (71), for to do so is to be haunted by the past, forever “on her case”; as Strehle points out, by existing in her “time-free zone” (*Vineland* 90), Frenesi can ignore “the world of the spirit” (111). She can assuage her guilt, but the consequences are serious: she becomes mechanical, a tool of the State, existing according to “scripts” sent by the government (*Vineland* 72).

The simplicity of this kind of existence is appealing to people who have become “players” in a world devoid of human feeling. In DeLillo’s *Players*, Lyle Wynant finds the stock exchange to be a place of refuge despite the seeming chaos: “In the electronic clatter it was possible to feel you were part of a breathtakingly intricate quest for order and elucidation, for identity among the constituents of a system” (28). LeClair suggests that because Lyle feels this way, he is resisting the fundamental “systems fact” that he “belongs to the larger ecology of living and dying” (*In the Loop* 162). The closed system to which Lyle is attracted is characterized by disconnection from all things, even from the money which has become transformed into electronic signals (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 87). Lyle likes to carry computer printouts with him, seeing “in the numbers and stock symbols an artful reduction of the external world to printed output, the machine’s coded model of exactitude. One second of study, a glance was all it took to return to him an impression of reality disconnected from the resonance of its own senses” (70). The world is reduced, disconnected, and yet Lyle is comforted: it is the safest reality he knows in a world of

terror and chaos. DeLillo has almost from the beginning of his career linked the horrors of human existence with the means of coping with them.

Such coping strategies as used by Lyle, however, deny the complexity of the self. Significantly, Pynchon refers to the “ones and zeros” of the computer in describing this mechanistic way of existing. These binary digits are more than a means to store information: they suggest the fundamental law of the system, that human lives can be switched on or off by State technicians. Foucault’s argument—that ultimately individuals are irrelevant except insofar as they exist “for” the State (“The Political Technology of Individuals” 146)—is echoed by Pynchon in describing this “government-defined history without consequences” and its informants, “the destined losers whose only redemption would have to come through their usefulness to the State law-enforcement apparatus, which was calling itself ‘America’” (354). Frenesi Gates is one of these losers, having lost an important part of her self.

One consequence of this loss is the poor sense of connection she has with others. Frenesi is only able, after the betrayal which initiates her into the domain of surveillance and databases, to form limited relationships with other people. Perhaps the completion of her indoctrination occurs when, after sex with Brock, she considers the possibility of saving him, “the ‘real’ Brock, the endearing adolescent who would allow her to lead him stumbling out into light . . . returning him to the man he should have grown into”—the real self she imagines to be buried under the surface, which presents “the worst kind of self-obsessed collegiate dickhead, projected on into adult format” (216). She considers the possibility of using love—clearly at this point an irredeemable ideal, having become

trivialized—to redeem fascism. As she leans close to his sleeping form, in all its unconscious innocence, to “whisper to him her heart’s overflow” (217), she suddenly discovers that he is awake and has been *watching* her the whole time. Her scream and Brock’s sadistic laughter abruptly end a fragile promise of hope, love, and human connection for Frenesi, and usher in her new life of surveillance, the constantly watching eyes of Brock Vond and the State he represents.<sup>76</sup>

The machine has replaced reciprocal communion with a one-sided interaction with others *through* such devices as the answering machine, which allows us to “screen” calls, as Brita does in *Mao II*. Her caller, Bill Gray, discourses on the “strangeness” of speaking not to a person but to a machine:

“This is a new kind of loneliness you’re getting me into, Brita. How nice to say your name. The loneliness of knowing I won’t be heard for hours or days. I imagine you’re always catching up with messages. Accessing your machine from distant sites. There’s a lot of violence in that phrase.

‘Accessing your machine.’ You need a secret code if I’m not mistaken.

You enter your code in Brussels and blow up a building in Madrid. This is the dark wish that the accessing industry caters to. . . .” (91)

Bill recognizes the distancing and dehumanizing of the situation. The brief connection he feels in the simple utterance of her name is washed out by the loneliness and violence of the “accessing.” We do not connect with others; we access them. He realizes that for her, separated from him by time and distance, he is not a person but a message (92).

Is the answering machine very distantly related, then, to such technologies as a rifle's telescopic sight and the polygraph machine found in *Libra*? Both make of an individual something reduced. Using the former, one shoots not at a person but "a series of images conveyed to you through a metal tube" (297), which "obscures the meaning of the act" (298). Using the latter, an individual becomes "pliant," cooperative: "It allows you to give yourself away" (362) as an inscription, a graph. As Earl Mudger says in *Running Dog*, "There's a neat correlation between the complexity of the hardware and the lack of genuine attachments" (91). Technology creates a series of removes between individuals. Bill Gray becomes a voice on Brita's answering machine, then not even a voice: he realizes that her answering machine "makes everything a message, which narrows the range of discourse and destroys the poetry of nobody home" (*Mao II* 92). Despite this recognition, the voice's owner attempts to connect with Brita through his lengthy message; he expands "the range of discourse" somewhat by moving beyond the expectations of the answering machine (name, number, time of call, a brief message). He speaks long and eloquently, describing the world outside his window, physical sensations, the sunrise—until, decisively, "the machine cut[s] him off" (93). This technology, then, contributes to the fading of human passion, communion, and love.

Pynchon suggests that love is an impossible ideal for the individual who has been assimilated into the system, in which most elements of freedom and creativity are stripped away. In the system, individuals are resources, and make of others resources. It is quite clear that Frenesi married Zoyd because it was convenient for her. Prairie has grown up believing that their meeting was "love at first sight" (261, 281), but Zoyd is probably more

correct when he tells Frenesi, "It could've been anybody, Scott, the two junkie saxophone players, all's you was lookin' for was some quick cover" (282). She seems to make no effort to deny this or defend herself, because she knows that it is true. She is past personal redemption, having been integrated into a system which leaves her bereft of self-love, self-control, and human connection. After giving birth to her daughter, Frenesi falls into a serious depression, imagining herself "visited" by Brock Vond, who frightens her with an "ideology of the mortal and uncontinued self" (286-7) whereby all human connection is undermined by a focus on mortality: being a mother means that she is only an animal after all, and that therefore "Time [has] claimed her" (287). What she realizes, unfortunately, is that Brock can offer her salvation from this sense of her life: he offers the "timeless" existence within the FBI's system, an existence which reminds her of the filmed world of "silver and light," in which she "had been privileged to live outside of Time, to enter and leave at will, looting and manipulating, weightless, invisible" (287).<sup>77</sup> This is, as Berressem recognizes, a good description of the computerized life (*Pynchon's Poetics* 231). All Frenesi has known is the use of technology to frame the subject, to fix the subject, and to make the subject immortal. For that last gift, she will even "turn against" her mother, "her once-connected self" (292).

She enters the system of informers, marrying a man she has met in Brock's PREP camp, again for cover. They have no real love for each other. Each has extramarital affairs known to the other, and Frenesi feels that they are "locked into this," knowing that she does not want to be alone only because she is "not resourceful enough" (70). She imagines a conversation with Flash in which the reality of their situation is exposed:

“ . . . Once they find out you’re willing to betray somebody you’ve been to bed with, once you get that specialist’s code attached to you . . . they can use you the same way for anything, on any scale, all the way down to simple mopery, anytime they want to get some local judge tends to think with his dick, it’s your phone that rings around dinnertime, and there goes the frozen lasagna.” (70-71)

Here again we see her realization that her act of betrayal has “coded” her. She has become a file that can be pulled anytime a new scheme is put into action by corrupt officials. Even the “frozen lasagna” is a nice touch in this passage: the simple, human act of preparing food becomes one of the “impossibilities” Frenesi considers in her imagined conversation (71). Her wish that they might just leave, disconnect from the system to make their own home is washed out in the ellipses of Flash’s imagined response: “not ‘Let’s do that’ but ‘Sure . . . we could do that. . . .’” (71).

They are too caught up in the system to remove themselves. Their involvement with the system is the result of deals made with the FBI, Frenesi having betrayed her revolution and Flash, a former outlaw, having been caught and “left with no choice but to work his way up on their side of the law” (73). Flash, however, believes every subject to be, in effect, “a squealer. We’re in th’ Info Revolution here. Anytime you use a credit card you’re tellin’ the Man more than you meant to. Don’t matter if it’s big or small, he can use it all” (74). Karpinski suggests that this statement of the inevitable co-optation of the subject is a “facile excuse” that much of the novel’s action seeks to repudiate (38). Flash is attempting to justify what he does by suggesting that everyone does it: the

difference, however, is that most people are *unwitting* agents. As Hite notes, despite the fact of technological surveillance making individuals automatic informers, “complicity is not by definition total and does not by definition rule out resistance” (147).

Their lives are so caught up in the idea of the database that when funding for their protection program is cut off and they are erased from the system, they feel their existence threatened. Clearly it means that their means of survival is endangered, but there are ontological ramifications as well. The idea of “self” is abused by this existence. Consider the violence implicit in Zoyd’s phrasing of the situation to Hector: “you still have her file, you can punch her up when you need her—” (27). This is the second time that Zoyd has related this clerical action (typing on a keyboard to activate a file in a database) to violence: only moments earlier he mused that the “Man could crush him with just a short tap dance over the computer keys” (27). Pierre Bourdieu might call this a kind of symbolic violence—the freedom of the individual is constrained by the manipulation of symbols by an authority figure (167)—and it translates forcefully here into the manipulation of physical action and location (Frenesi must relocate—allow her body to be “posted” (*Vineland* 72)—when ordered to do so), into control of one’s livelihood (the databanks control the issuing of stipends necessary for the recipient’s survival), and into control of one’s self-perception (the more one corroborates the database-model, the more one becomes the physical representation of the model). The individual whose identity is appropriated by the database cannot even claim possession of the digital codes that make up his or her file, as Roy Ibble suggests to Flash: “most of you old-timers, I hate to say it, you’ve been bumped off the computer to make way for the next generation, all ’em deeply

personal li'l ones and zeros got changed to somebody else's, less electricity than you think" (352).

That Frenesi's "file is destroyed" is serious indeed, when in this system the absence of a file means the absence of the person. To the authorities, the loss of the file means that they have lost control of Frenesi's movements (28), but to Frenesi and Flash, erasure from the file system has more serious consequences. Their "budget line" has been "terminated" (31); Flash has been to "the terminal room" (the word "terminal" here moving beyond its computer meaning) to discover that many of their fellow informants "ain't on the computer anymore. Just—gone" (85). He returns home with a "quickly compiled list" of informers, all of whom had hoped for the "shelter" offered by existence in the federal protection program. Because their sense of being is tied to the database, they have come to depend on it: "But now, no longer on the computer, how safe could any of them be feeling?" (87). Erasure from the system is devastating. Having lived in a false, abstract, deathless, and "rigorously controlled" (Strehle 111) video game-like existence, what Berressem calls a kind of "limbo" ("Forward Retreat" 360), Frenesi fears the consequences of being

abandoned already to the upper world and any unfinished business in it that might now resume . . . as if they'd been kept safe in some time-free zone all these years but now, at the unreadable whim of something in power, must reenter the clockwork of cause and effect. Someplace there would be a real ax, or something just as painful, Jasonic, blade-to-meat final—but at

the distance she, Flash, and Justin had by now been brought to, it would all be done with keys on alphanumeric keyboards [. . .] (*Vineland* 90)

Here is a clear sense of exile into the world where physical laws must be reckoned with, outside of the abstract immortality granted by having one's name entered into a database or listed on a computer print-out. Frenesi's fanciful musing on the subject has the weapon of her undoing (more violence) materializing out of digital transmissions. Bureaucratic action—erasure, or the slating of an individual for “termination”—seems clearly to effect disappearance or death (88). Even if the subject survives in the real world, the erasure makes his or her loss of identity complete (Tabbi, “Pynchon's Groundward Art” 92). Because souls are so easy to store in the database, the defunding of a program can in fact seem like a “massacre” (88).

Hayles makes a distinction between two systems in *Vineland*, a “snitch system” and a “kinship system” (“Who Was Saved?” 15). Frenesi has disappeared from both. She is a technologically interpellated subject sought by her daughter, Prairie, whose search methods include accessing the data banks of the “Ninjette Terminal Center.” “The file on Frenesi Gates” (113) is extremely dense, containing everything from Frenesi's “legal history with the DMV [and] letterhead memoranda from the FBI enhanced by Magic Marker” to “clippings from ‘underground’ newspapers that had closed down long ago, transcripts of Frenesi's radio interviews . . . and a lot of cross-references to . . . 24fps” (113-14). Obviously Prairie can get no sense of who her mother “really” is from this file, which only contains her mediated, digitally encoded identity. It is, however, all she has, the past being essentially unknowable except through mediation (Berressem, “Forward

Retreat” 363–4; McHale 139). Hinds, writing exclusively on Prairie’s “historical method,” points out that language plays little part in Prairie’s attempt to “know” her mother (95); as I mentioned above, when they do meet at the reunion, Pynchon’s narrator leaves them alone, and the reader is not privy to their attempts “perilously” to reconnect with nothing but their voices, looks, and gestures.

Two more important ideas regarding Prairie’s mediated attempt to connect with her mother need to be examined. First, as Hinds suggests, Prairie’s computer search helps her to achieve a “de-chronologized understanding of events” (97). For her, the database is as “timeless” as it is for Frenesi, Flash, and the others who exist “within” it. The “events” in the dossier—the computer narrative of her mother’s life—are taking place in the “now” of the search; this enables Prairie to extrapolate from the images she finds, like the one of Frenesi and DL, and imagine a conversation (114–15).

Along with the temporal, there is also the spatial to be considered.<sup>78</sup> I have argued that the concept of digital space is important to the technological interpellation of subjects, and in this section of the novel there are references to this abstract space. Prairie briefly considers her mother’s file to be her mother’s ghost, existing in a haunted realm: “into it and then on Prairie followed, a girl in a haunted mansion, led room to room, sheet to sheet” (114).<sup>79</sup> Ironically, even the “sheet to sheet” qualification—perhaps meant to remind readers that this is a file, like a sheaf of paper documents in a folder—is an abstraction, a means to keep one’s interaction with computer technology on a familiar basis. Later, after Prairie logs off and says “good night to the machine” (115), the narrator uses this metaphor of space as a link to a flashback: “Back down in the computer

library, in storage, quiescent ones and zeros scattered among millions of others, the two women, yet in some definable space, continued on their way across the low-lit campus” (115). The narrator’s phrasing places “the two women” in apposition to digital impulses. Their “quiescence” is doubly suggestive: Prairie has shut the computer off, so the digital codes are not being accessed; they are inactive. Also, in the photograph, the two friends seem to be, for the moment, at peace. The passage creates an effective transition to the flashback,<sup>80</sup> but it still sustains the notion of abstract, digital space, part of what constitutes the politics of digital identity. A similar technique is used by DeLillo in *Libra*: when Branch types a date into the computer, the “names appear at once, with backgrounds, connections, locations. The bright hot skies. The shady street of handsome old homes framed in native oak” (15-16). Somehow, the codes in the “memory” of the computer system, extensive and interconnected as they are, still suggest an impossible extension beyond themselves. Again, the narrative transition into the past, into the life of Win Everett, one of the agents of the assassination plot, is effortless. Although the suggestion that summer skies and oak-framed houses also exist within the database is troubling, it is an easy—even a natural—conceit to sustain. I too have been referring to Frenesi Gates, for example, as a kind of digital spirit, taken from life and entrapped in the system.

Digital hailing of the subject essentially invalidates any self-fashioned identity. Why, then, should it have so much regulating force in our lives? Like the relation between a referent and its signifier, the relation between digitized file and “real self” is an unnatural convention based on *social agreement* (we pay our taxes, we renew our driver’s licenses,

and so forth, in return for safe passage beneath the strong arm of government). Resistance would mean rejecting one's digitally encoded identity, an act of rebellion meriting retaliation from the Repressive State Apparatus which, according to Althusser, is the *public* apparatus of law enforcement, which functions by violence (73). Pynchon's character Brock Vond, who at one point has Zoyd beaten to "do something about [his] tone of voice" (*Vineland* 301), is the representative of this "state law-enforcement apparatus" (354). It is a pure display of power; Zoyd has already agreed to the deal which will bring him into the digital fold.<sup>81</sup>

In the present of the novel, Zoyd is informed that, in the matter of his public display of madness, he must conform to the pattern of behaviour which has been entered into the government's file on him; if he does not, he will be cut off from his means of survival. The appropriation of his madness is made even more clear when he tries to alter the routine. A friend provides this warning:

"it's become your MO, diving through windows, you start in with other stuff at this late date, forcing the state to replace what's in your computer file with something else, this is not gunno endear you to them, 'Aha, rebellious ain't he?' they'll say, and soon you'll find those checks are gettin' slower, even lost, in the mail . . . ." (8)

His digitally stored identity prevents any individual expression of self. "The message is clear," according to Hayles: "The only craziness happening now is that approved, or rather *demanded*, by the authorized codes in the computer and the 'inexhaustible taxpayer millions' of the snitch system, with the media and private enterprise as collaborators" ("Who Was Saved?"

24). Zoyd gives up his original plan of dressing in drag and carving up a lumberjack bar with a chain saw, and jumps through the window *as usual*. He thus has complicity in his own subjectification to the state technological apparatus. His livelihood depends on the recognition that his file *is* his identity, which, however distorted, is a function of the digital ideology of the simulacrum.

Zoyd in his acceptance becomes “pliant,” a word used by DeLillo’s characters in *Libra* and *Running Dog* to describe the same kind of process. Technology, according to Win Everett, “means the end of loyalty. The more complex the systems, the less conviction in people. . . . Devices will drain us, make us vague and pliant” (*Libra* 77). Because of our acceptance of the legitimizing power of documentation, we will be whatever “They” want us to be. Earl Mudger, a character in *Running Dog*, insists that

“ . . . If *they* issue a print-out saying we’re guilty, then we’re guilty. But it goes even deeper, doesn’t it? It’s the presence alone, the very fact, the superabundance of technology, that makes us feel we’re committing crimes. Just the fact that these things exist at this widespread level. The processing machines, the scanners, the sorters. That’s enough to make us feel like criminals. What enormous weight. What complex programs. And there’s no one to explain it to us.” (93)

The reason no one bothers to explain it to “us” is that, from the point of view of the State, “we” exist only as files in the system, subject to whatever categorization is deemed appropriate. Mudger makes two basic assertions here: the first is an “if-then” statement, similar to a logic gate in computer science terms. The computer, based on either-or,

knows no in-between state; there are no gradations. As part of the system, if one is defined a certain way by those who control the system—as a criminal, for example—then he or she effectively becomes a criminal. In Mudger’s second assertion, however, he refers to “feeling” like a criminal. Inside the system, there is no “feeling”—one is, or one is not, depending on how *they* have determined it. It is, however, a measure of the system’s effect on the physical self in the outside world that one can feel like a criminal when he has committed no crime. It means that the data has extended the range of its power beyond itself, making the individual an aspect of the dossier.

Undeniably, the images and digital data streams become an inextricable aspect of existence. Bureaucracy claims the soul. Brock Vond suggests that he has claimed Frenesi’s soul, although he calls it by its official name: “I have her power of attorney, she gave me that even before she gave me her body” (*Vineland* 301). Vond is the Satan of this bureaucracy, desiring also to possess the “spirit” of Weed Atman, the Christ-figure<sup>82</sup> of the People’s Republic of Rock and Roll. Referring to a report on Atman prepared by Frenesi, Brock says, “I never saw anything about his spirit. That’s what I’d like to hear about sometime. I want his spirit, hm? I’m happy to leave his body to you” (213). The capture of Weed’s soul, as discussed in the last chapter, is effected through an image technology, the camera (236, 246).

One method of dominating the soul of the individual is keeping it alienated from others. In the modern age, those who were once creative and communal, the “former artists or spiritual pilgrims,” the “former tripping partners and old flames,” now find themselves not only “in the service of others” in a labour hierarchy, but also “sorted into

opposing teams” by some hidden bureaucratic entity, so that the only connection they have is “across desktops or through computer terminals” (321). The State tightens its control of the self by constraining anything which might contribute to self-definition. The ultimate State control of everything is prophesied by a character who made his first appearance in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Mucho Maas warns Zoyd, in paranoid fashion, that

“ . . . they’re gonna be coming after everything, not just drugs, but beer, cigarettes, sugar, salt, fat, you name it, anything that could remotely please any of your senses, because they need to control all that. And they will.”

“Fat Police?”

“Perfume Police. Tube Police. Music Police. Good Healthy Shit Police. Best to renounce everything now, get a head start.” (313)

Here is a vision of the ultimate denial of the body. The more variety an individual is allowed access to, the more senses he or she is allowed to exercise, the further he or she may come to reclaiming the self. Remove these potential revolutionary ingredients, however—turn the arts and the pastimes of human life into “just another way to claim our attention, so that . . . after a while they have us convinced all over again that we really are going to die” (314)—and the individual remains the docile, obedient subject desired by the State. Television, corporate-based rock and roll: these are the means to create a simulated existence to replace life (Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics* 206) and turn the Land of the Free into a “scabland garrison state” (*Vineland* 314). The “beautiful certainty” of immortality that Zoyd and Mucho had in the sixties, inspired by LSD, is now the promise of the digital system, the “falsely deathless” realm occupied by Frenesi (293).

In the domain of digital information storage, identity is reduced to simulation. Life, as I have tried to show, is reduced to data. Even one's death, however, is not one's own in the age of simulacra: *White Noise* provides a perfect example of this simulacrum, this usurpation of death. A group referred to as SIMUVAC, for "simulated evacuation," uses an actual environmental accident, the release of a deadly airborne toxin called Nyodene D, as the model for their simulation. A technician tells Jack Gladney,

" . . . we don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. In other words we're forced to take our victims as we find them. We didn't get a jump on computer traffic. Suddenly it just spilled out, three dimensionally, all over the landscape. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There's a lot of polishing we still have to do. But that's what this exercise is all about."

(139)

This technician is so caught up in the simulacrum (Wilcox 351) that he seems somewhat disgruntled by life's three-dimensionality and randomness. He would "polish" the real in order to improve the simulation—a simulation generated by the computer, by programs and data streams, and by stereotypes.<sup>83</sup> The technician, then, clearly implicates himself as a subject of technology. Later, some of the people of Blacksmith do the same when they perceive a "chemical odour" and decide not to worry because there are no "technical personnel" in the vicinity to legitimate what they are perceiving (271).

Gladney, as well, has complicity with his own technologizing. Because there is some concern that he might have been exposed to the toxic cloud, he goes to speak with one of the SIMUVAC technicians, whose computer terminal links to Gladney's "data profile," subsequently called his "history" (140). It encodes his past, and, because he willingly responds to it as a dominant force, it contains his very identity. "I wanted this man on my side," Gladney tells us, because the technician has "access to data"; "I was prepared to be servile and fawning if it would keep him from dropping casually shattering remarks about my degree of exposure and chances for survival" (139). Gladney becomes willingly submissive before this representative of technology, who holds the key to Gladney's electronically mediated fate, the "computerized dots that registered my life and death" (140).

That the computer has the power to compute an individual's fate is believed by those who reduce life to a database, who treat life as a closed system. After initiating a "massive data-base tally" on behalf of Jack Gladney, the SIMUVAC technician deciphers the essential meaning of the results, the "bracketed numbers with pulsing stars" (140; see also 260, 279) which fill the screen: he tells Gladney, "It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that" (141). John Frow recognizes that this is essentially meaningless (186), but Gladney accepts unconditionally that it "is now official, according to the computer. I've got death inside me" (*White Noise* 150). The computer is like a judge rendering a "verdict" (172); his death is "in the works" (202). In a sense, this last statement is true, but not in the way he thinks. While death may be "inside" him, as it is in all of us, the "works" refers to the computer which has predicted his fate.

The irony is that the prediction is extremely vague (140). As Frow argues, “data” is only “a set of constructs, figures whose significance lies not in their inherent structure but in the decision that has been taken to frame them in a certain way” (187). Despite the fact that Gladney may outlive the death which the computer has predicted—despite the fact that this death is a computer death, affecting a computer self—he gives it credence. Telling his wife about it, he speaks “matter-of-factly, tonelessly, in short, declarative sentences” (202), suggesting a discourse more “digital”—more aligned with what Anthony Wilden calls “the dominant logic of our society, the left-brain logic of analytic and digital communication” (61)—than the variety and inflection of human speech. Gladney repeats the doctrine of the SIMUVAC technician: “We are the sum total of our data, I told her” (202).

The subject hailed by digital technology experiences a reduced sense of control; no individual has power in this overwhelming flood of data and information (Bukatman 5). Gladney is distanced from his own death in the database tally. When his mortality is “rendered graphically,” he “feel[s] like a stranger in [his] own dying” (142). He is witnessing the “self-alienated character of postmodern death” (Moses 74); his death is no longer “personal.” Wilcox sums up the mediation of death as “death by printout” (353). When Gladney goes for a check-up, he finds that there are “[n]o startling numbers on the printout. This death was still too deep to be glimpsed” (204), as if death can be “seen” in the numbers (compare the counterpart to this in *Vineland*—the printout which signifies absence from the system). When Gladney asks what the numbers and stars mean, he is told that “[t]here’s no point to [his] knowing at this stage” (260; see also 140). As a mere

“patient,” he is not privy to the specialized knowledge of his doctor, who “knows the symbols” (281).

Later, Gladney checks into Autumn Harvest Farms, a facility with “sophisticated computers to analyze the data” (277), whose name, as Gladney recognizes, belies the technology inside its doors. Here, Gladney is prompted to narrate his life through a computer, typing “the story of my life and death” (276). He is giving away more of himself, so that later, when a technician at a console “transmit[s] a message that would make [Gladney’s] body transparent”—his “screen” body, not his real body—Gladney feels himself enter the realm of the digital: “I heard magnetic winds, saw flashes of northern light. People crossed the hall like wandering souls, holding their urine aloft in pale beakers” (276). He imagines a computerized realm “where charged particles collide, high winds blow” (325), traversed through the “imaging block,” which fills Gladney with dread. Having given up the secrets of his body, Gladney knows the paranoid fear of all individuals who have entered the system: “I am afraid of the imaging block. . . . Afraid of what it knows about me” (325).

As one indication of his loss of self, Gladney finds himself engaging not in a conversation with the technician, but rather a kind of simulated or meta-conversation:

“. . . We usually start by asking how do you feel.”

“Based on the printout?”

“Just how do you feel,” he said in a mild voice.

“In my own mind, in real terms, I feel relatively sound, pending confirmation.”

“We usually go on to tired. Have you recently been feeling tired?”

“What do people usually say?”

“Mild fatigue is a popular answer.”

“I could say exactly that and be convinced in my own mind it’s a fair and accurate description.” (277)

Because of the emphasis on what “usually” is said, what a “popular answer” is, and what Gladney “could say,” the exchange is based on a series of hedges. Even when Gladney appears to emphasize his “own mind,” he still needs “confirmation” from the machines to legitimate his feeling. Gladney finds it difficult to express how he feels because of his knowledge that there is a “printout”: there are data that will make his answer subject to scrutiny. Can he—should he—feel fine when the printout says he should feel otherwise?

Another indication of his loss of self occurs when Gladney finds himself using the jargon associated with the technological, a style of speech he knows is “stilted”: he asks if “the printout shows the first ambiguous signs of a barely perceptible condition deriving from minimal acceptable spillage exposure” (279); soon after, the speech styles of doctor and patient are reversed. Gladney uses a disconnected euphemism, referring to his fate as a “worst-case scenario contingenc[y]”; the doctor states the blunt, simple fact that Gladney is afraid to hear: what he has been exposed to can “[c]ause a person to die” (280).

Gladney's encounter with a technological death, Nyodene D, and his encounters with technology at the SIMUVAC console and at Autumn Harvest Farms, have highlighted his mortality, have bracketed his death with computer stars. His fear, however, is based only on a computerized version of himself, a computer death. He can find no comfort in the fact that he may outlive this death; he has always known that the technological system which oversees human life comes first. When he states that the "holographic scanners" at the supermarket convey the "language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living" (326), he is pointing to the only mystery left in contemporary life. Your doctor knows the symbols; the computer knows your code, your "binary secrets." We are the sum of our files: to the extent that we respond to this hail of technology, we have complicity in sustaining the simulacrum, and in subjectifying ourselves as simulated beings. With these extended figurations of technology, DeLillo and Pynchon reveal the extent to which computer technology motivates, guides, and subjectifies us.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

A subject is “technologized” to the extent that he or she conforms to his or her digital shadow in the database, allowing the physical self to be guided by digital information. The technologized subject is characterized as static, limited, abstract and “monumental.” Subjects, however, may utilize various strategies to make their bodies into sites upon which to inscribe their own histories, to elude the dominating forces which attempt to make them into the predictable characters of a technocratic grand narrative. This chapter begins to examine such disruptions of official identity as means for individuals to become, in Michel de Certeau’s words, “poets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (xviii).

Despite their presentation of a highly mediated society which constrains individuality, both Pynchon and DeLillo believe in the power of the body, individual expression, and human community to rise above such things as technological subjectification and attenuated variety. Robert D. Newman recognizes the importance of a “middle ground,” a zone between the one and the zero of the techno-rationalist scheme, a domain of “vitality” in Pynchon’s fictional world which exists despite attempts to eradicate it by dominant orders like Calvinism, which divides human experience into “abstract distinctions” or polarities. Attempts to inhabit the middle ground are “associated with humanistic responses to life’s entrapments” (7). These “humanistic responses,”

which I take to mean concerns with human relations and fundamental human values, are present in *Vineland*.

Some critics are hesitant to acclaim the power of human values when Pynchon provides so many examples of the invasive force of the technological. One discovers a measure of circumlocution and vacillation in these critics, many of whom sense both a measure of parody and a tone of optimism in the novel. The instances of creativity and human connection which do exist, however, are subtle yet potentially powerful forms of self-fashioning, and exemplify what E. Shaskan Bumaz refers to as the “utopian impulses” of *Vineland*’s inhabitants, “which might be provisionally explained as various types of desires to live more happily, in a more just social system than the one that exists in their nation at large” (150). The real “spirit and magic” present in *Vineland* are engendered from human or “earthly” values, which include, among other things I will examine, “[p]aying attention, accepting the Other, working hard for understanding, persisting in one’s commitments” (Strehle 115). Even Judith Chambers, in spite of her complaints about *Vineland*’s “diminished” language (186) and “dimensionless characters” (x), recognizes an “affirmation” in “Pynchon’s willingness to face what is and his courage to champion humane action as the consistently positive alternative to both oppression and apathy” (xi).

Similarly, many critics sense an affirmation of human values in DeLillo’s writing. Arthur M. Saltzman suggests that his characters are engaged in an attempt to “locate some reliable avenue of free agency, some outpost of personal dimension” (807). Douglas Keesey sees *White Noise* as DeLillo’s attempt “to bring us back into intimate contact with nature and ourselves, to renew the immediacy of life—and death—experience” (*Don*

*DeLillo* 149). DeLillo's other major champion, Thomas LeClair, finds the concept of open systems to be a major concern in the novels, suggesting an alternative to the "punishing 'certitudes'" (*In the Loop* 27) of closed, dominating structures. In order to help his readership "risk being 'open to human possibility, to understanding the great range of plausibility in human actions,'" DeLillo's characters are exaggerated, according to LeClair, to reflect "substance, integrity, concern, human reciprocity" (26).

I will begin with an examination of physical "substance"—the body as a potential site of resistance which cannot be entirely co-opted by the technocracy. The State has formulated dossier-identities for its citizens, but there is power in the presence of the physical self, as Brita Nilsson discovers upon meeting Bill Gray for the first time: "She felt the uneasy force, the strangeness of seeing a man who had lived in her mind for years as words alone—the force of a body in a room" (*Mao II* 35). The body can be a source of power for the individual in various ways; the better one knows one's body, the easier it is to use as a force of obscurity, to effect a retreat from danger, and to affirm the self through unhindered movement. Pynchon's heroine, DL Chastain, has learned to use ancient practices in order to have control over her own movements: "By training her body and senses according to Ninja precepts, Darryl Louise Chastain achieves the kind of individual control that can counter the state control of minds appropriate to a state in the year 1984" (Slade 73). She learns secret Ninja techniques, "moves" that require "rigorous practice every day for her even to begin to understand—and until she did understand, she was forbidden to use any of them out in the world" (*Vineland* 127). This intense connection of "understanding" and skill provides DL with a knowledge of how to use her body to her own ends, and as she becomes more intimate with her body's abilities, she

takes on what Stacey Olster calls “reality” and “wholeness”(130). The reclamation of her own body is the most important thing ever to happen to DL:

As days and weeks passed, DL found herself entering into a system of heresies about the human body. In an interview with *Aggro World* years later, she spoke of her time with Inoshiro Sensei as returning to herself, reclaiming her body, “Which they always like to brainwash you about, like they know it better, trying to keep you as spaced away from it as they can. Maybe they think people are easier to control that way.” The schoolroom line was, You’ll never know enough about your body to take responsibility for it, so better just hand it over to those who are qualified, doctors and lab technicians and by extension coaches, employers, boys with hardons, so forth—alarmed, not to mention pissed off, DL reached the radical conclusion that her body belonged to herself. (*Vineland* 128)

“They,” of course, are the privileged members of the dominant order, professionals who remove the individual from her own body, disconnecting her from reality, in order to manipulate her. In *White Noise*, Jack Gladney discusses with his wife the consequences of talking to such professionals. Babette says, “I’m never in control of what I say to doctors, much less what they say to me. There’s some kind of disturbance in the air” (77). The disturbance of which she speaks is precisely this sense of lost control over the self, when Babette admits that she “lie[s] to doctors all the time”—though she cannot say why—she is illuminating the last weapon of the individual against the system and its professionals, who practice a secretive discourse. Brita Nilsson in *Mao II* is “superstitious about talking to doctors in detail. She thought they would take her body over, name all the damaged

parts, speak all the awful words” (90). To speak the privileged discourse is to claim ownership. The doctor knows not only the “symbols” (*White Noise* 281), but also the secrets and mysteries of the body. Heinrich and Denise discuss these mysteries:

“If the eye is a mystery, totally forget the ear. Just say ‘cochlea’ to somebody, they look at you like, ‘Who’s this guy?’ There’s this whole world right inside our own body.”

“Nobody even cares,” she said.

“How can people live their whole lives without knowing the names of their own parts of the body?” (158)

Heinrich has located the reason our bodies are so easily appropriated by the professional: what could be more intimate to the individual, what could be more “one’s own” than one’s body—and yet what could be more alien, because of ignorance? As a corollary to how the subject avoids thinking of the internal mechanism of a computer and thereby can regard it as “friendly,” the subject also avoids thinking of the finer details of his or her own physical form, which can thus become foreign.

Perhaps it is because Jack, early in the novel, lacks a real sense of awareness of and comfort with his own body that when he is labelled as “harmless” and “indistinct” he becomes uncomfortable. His colleague, Eric Massingale, insists that he is “a different person altogether” when he is not wearing his academic robes; Eric has difficulty reconciling the version of Gladney he sees at the college with the man he presently sees before him. As if to emphasize that Jack’s clothes have made him who he is, Massingale says, “I think I know those shoes” (83). Gladney is so disquieted by the encounter that he

is put “in the mood to shop,” as if the accumulation of more material goods will shore up his fragile sense of self:

I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it. I sent clerks into their fabric books and pattern books to search for elusive designs. I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed.

Brightness settled around me. (84)

The purchase of things makes Gladney feel “valuable”: falling into “his role as a consumer” (Duvall 136), he has become just like the parents he witnessed on “the day of the station wagons” (*White Noise* 5), someone who, in his own mocking words, “suggest[s] massive insurance coverage” (3). This is the person he has “forgotten.” He has taken a step backward, becoming the object of his own scorn. Inflated by consumerism, he becomes surrounded by the false aura celebrated by Murray Siskind. He experiences the glittery, false transcendence of the shopping mall, becoming “expansive,” “generous,” a “benefactor.” He transforms himself into the perfect, happy, prosperous image of the television commercial model.<sup>84</sup> DeLillo provides a quick summation of what has just occurred when the family arrives home and Steffie watches television, “attempting to match the words as they were spoken” (84). She, like her father, aspires to the image on the screen.

This is, however, but a momentary setback for Gladney. Later, when he searches through the family's garbage looking for the Dylar bottle, he feels like an "archaeologist" (258), and meditates on the meaning of this garbage as personal residue:

Is garbage so private? Does it glow at the core with personal heat, with signs of one's deepest nature, clues to secret yearnings, humiliating flaws? What habits, fetishes, addictions, inclinations? What solitary acts, behavioral ruts? . . . Was this the dark underside of consumer consciousness? (259)

Perhaps not liking the answer to his questions, perhaps intuiting the connection between the modern self and the trappings of consumerism, Gladney shortly after this incident begins to rid himself of those trappings. We are provided with lists of the things he throws out (262, 294); he has discovered an aversion to the objects in his home, "an immensity of things, an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality" (262). Having just returned from a physical examination which has made him feel like "a child facing the school principal over a series of unexcused absences" (261), feeling that sense of alienation and mortality, he now wants to rid himself of the things which amplify those feelings (LeClair, *In the Loop* 215). Saltzman, referring to this incident, writes: "If death is capitulation to rutted beliefs and behaviors, life is refutation of predictability. . . . Blessed excess reveals its lethal propensities" (813-14). In ridding himself of his excess consumer baggage, Gladney is making a life-affirming statement. Later, after a discussion about death with Murray Siskind, Gladney again goes home to confront his things "in a vengeful and near savage state. I bore a personal grudge against these things. Somehow they'd put me in this fix. They'd dragged me down, made escape impossible" (294).

Rather than extending one's capacities or one's life, things can become mere ballast, weights which "drag one down" and cause abilities to atrophy. The visit by Babette's father Vernon Dickey provides a refreshing glimpse of an individual who believes in self-sufficiency. Vernon has presence: as Jack approaches him, Vernon begins "to assume effective form, develop in the crisp light as a set of movements, lines and features, a contour, a living person whose distinctive physical traits seemed more and more familiar" (244). Vernon believes that a man should be able to fix things. Occasionally, says Gladney,

he seemed to attack me with terms like ratchet drill and whipsaw. He saw my shakiness in such matters as a sign of some deeper incompetence or stupidity. These were the things that built the world. Not to know or care about them was a betrayal of fundamental principles, a betrayal of gender, of species. What could be more useless than a man who couldn't fix a dripping faucet—fundamentally useless, dead to history, to the messages in his genes? I wasn't sure I disagreed. (245)

Gladney phrases his father-in-law's ability to take control of the things in his life in terms of "fundamentals." Without these basic human principles, an individual is in danger of becoming a slave to things to the extent that he or she can no longer have any effect on history itself. If a man does not live, as Gladney's reading of Vernon suggests, according to the blueprint in his genes, he has "betrayed" his very self. That Gladney finds himself agreeing with Vernon—albeit in a hedging fashion—suggests that he is indeed moving towards a reassessment of his own life and sense of self.

Vernon has the ability to bring out a different self in others, as he does with Babette: "Gleanings from another life poured out of her. The cadences of her speech changed, took on a rural tang. The words changed, the references. This was a girl who'd helped her father sand and finish old oak, heave radiators up from the floorboards" (248). In a differentiated, variety-attenuated society, people (particularly women) are not expected to be able to repair their own devices, to fix their own bodies, even to know their own bodies. To step beyond one's sphere of knowledge or specialization is to take a degree of control over oneself: it constitutes a technology of the self.

DL's reclamation of her own body through study defies the system; it is "radical" (*Vineland* 128); it is, as Hanjo Berressem recognizes, "a revolutionary act against a simulatory system" (*Pynchon's Poetics* 206). Knowledge of her own body allows her to make herself invisible (*Vineland* 253): even though she has "blazing" red hair, it is something which "the Man [is] never quite able to see" (251). The ability to exist for yourself, unseen by the watchful eyes of the establishment, is a significant means to personal power. Winnie Richards in *White Noise* has also developed the ability to move "from place to place without being seen" (184-85), although no one quite knows why she does this. Gladney suggests a few reasons, but in the end it is not *why* she does it but simply *that* she does it. Jack's first attempt to catch her provides a "new" sensation for him: "It felt strange to be running. I hadn't run in many years and didn't recognize my body in this new format, didn't recognize the world beneath my feet, hard-surfaced and abrupt" (186). Perhaps this unfamiliar exercise feels so stimulating because he has been experiencing life too much in the digital matrix, separated from reality by television, computers, and automation. Winnie's evasiveness gives her power; for Jack, in pursuit, it

calls up “a strange elation, the kind of bracing thrill that marks the recovery of a lost pleasure. . . . I wanted to run, I was willing to run” (226). Jack experiences a potent awareness of his own body and the pleasures which physical action can give him. He sees Winnie execute moves that are “deft and lovely”; he has found something new and human to appreciate.

Drug use is another means to achieve, if not bodily control, a sense of freedom. The use of drugs by characters in Pynchon’s texts has been amply discussed by critics. David Cowart is disturbed by the fact that in Pynchon’s novel, “taking drugs . . . remains a powerful metaphor for the idea of an alternative to the rapacious capitalism and consumerism that afflict American society” (11). Drug use is seen as mainly a sixties phenomenon, as “radicals” attempt “to explore alternative states of consciousness through the use of drugs” (Booker 32), but old “dopers” like Zoyd still indulge. In the sixties, drug users constituted a community of “identical-looking beach pads beginning to blend together” (*Vineland* 24)<sup>85</sup> which eluded authorities trying to keep track. Hector, for example, experiences frustration in the dope world’s “Casbah topography that was easy to get lost in quickly . . . an architectural version of the uncertainty, the illusion, that must have overtaken his career for him ever to’ve been assigned there in the first place” (25). A challenge to “certainty” is the counterculture’s greatest threat to the systematizing dominant culture. Drug use functioned, for one thing, to stave off the *certainty* of death, replacing it with a sense of immortality and thus opening up possibilities of self-control (313-14; see Strehle 111). While some argue that drug use is valorized as a means to resist totalitarian control, others, like Joseph Slade, suggest that drug use in *Vineland*

functions merely as “symbolic baggage of the outlaw,” that human potential has nothing to do with narcotics but rather with one’s “capacity to love” (78).

In *White Noise*, the only illicit drug use is the unauthorized experimentation with a drug called Dylar, which is designed to eliminate the fear of death. Although the drug apparently fails, it is significant that the symptoms of the addict Willie Mink, one of its designers, manifest themselves in Mink’s channelling of television sound-bites. As John Duvall points out, “Americans already have a more successful version of the drug Mink failed to produce. . . . television itself, that means of forgetting death through aesthetization, is Dylar, an imagistic space of consumption that one accesses by playing dial-a-rama” (146; see also Zinman 77). Duvall here has suggested the meaning of the third section of the novel, “Dylarama.”<sup>86</sup> Michael Valdez Moses explores the meaning of DeLillo’s fabricated drug at some length, pointing out that this technological-scientific attempt to “annihilate” human angst (75) would have, were it successful, the concomitant effect of destroying something that is fundamentally human, an “existential understanding of human finitude”: the drug might “return human beings to a blissful but subhuman state” (76). The radicals in Pynchon’s world do not want the *fear* of death quelled, but rather death itself. To deny death would have the effect of standing up to those who deal in it the most: the establishment.

Clearly, one cannot quell death. One can, however, enhance one’s life with a healthy respect for death. I have discussed in an earlier chapter how the society depicted in novels like *Vineland* and *White Noise* “trivializes” death by mediating it through television. DeLillo’s mysterious character Winnie, however, suggests that a healthy fear of death can give “a precious texture to life, a sense of definition” (228). A real sense of

mortality, experienced most intensely in life-threatening situations, may be the essence of life and of self, as Winnie explains:

“Picture yourself, Jack, a confirmed homebody, a sedentary fellow who finds himself walking in a deep wood. You spot something out of the corner of your eye. . . . It is a grizzly bear, enormous, shiny brown, swaggering, dripping slime from its bared fangs. . . . The sight of this grizzer is so electrifyingly strange that it gives you a renewed sense of yourself, a fresh awareness of the self—the self in terms of a unique and horrific situation. You see yourself in a new and intense way. You rediscover yourself. . . . The beast on hind legs has enabled you to see who you are as if for the first time, outside familiar surroundings, alone, distinct, whole. The name we give to this complicated process is fear.”

“Fear is self-awareness raised to a higher level.”

“That’s right, Jack.”

“And death?” I said.

“Self, self, self. . . .” (229)

As Keesey notes, the proof of this is borne out by Jack himself when he is wounded in his attempt to murder Willie Mink; it gives him “a renewed sense of life” (*Don DeLillo* 149). In planning to kill Mink he is following the world view of Murray Siskind, whose view of death contradicts that of Winnie. Murray represents the simulacrum, in which there are only “killers and diers” (290). He believes that fear and death are “unnatural” (289) and that murder “adds to a person’s store of credit, like a bank transaction”—Jack’s paraphrase (291). Murray is backwards, seeing murder as perfectly normative and

transactional, and seeing fear, perhaps the most human and natural of emotions, as unnatural. James Axton in *The Names* calls human awareness of death a “saving grace,” “our special sadness . . . a richness, a sanctification” (175). An attempt to eradicate one’s fear of death is an attempt to deaden one’s humanity, a leth(e)al action leading to complacency and stillness.

Ideally, the ultimate act of subversion would be constantly to vary one’s personal concept and public display of self, in order to resist the reifying consequences of digital information storage. Unpredictability, changing performances in various settings, might be called madness by the establishment, but it would bestow upon the individual total control over his or her agency. We know that Zoyd’s performance at the Cucumber Lounge in *Vineland* is not real mental instability, not what in *The Names* is called “a final distillation of the self” (118), because the act is always prearranged and directed; the element of chance, for example, is removed with the installation of “stunt windows made of clear sheet candy” (*Vineland* 12). Through random movement and change, however, Zoyd might become a mystery never fully understood by the system’s custodians. Zoyd strikes the reader as the kind of individual who would prefer to be left alone to live his life according to his own fashion; he might wish, along with Jack Gladney, that “the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to a plan” (*White Noise* 98). The powers that be, however, do not allow this kind of freedom. One must seek it on the run.

*Vineland* is full of individuals “on the run” from, unable to be located by, or generally avoiding the authorities (see, for example, 52-55, 190-91, 265, 328). Frenesi Gates, once a representative of the counterculture, is pursued by Brock Vond,

representing the dominant order. In the present of the narrative her daughter Prairie is searching for clues to her whereabouts, even in her own face (98-99). DL realizes, however, that “with Brock Vond out tearing up the pea patch too, [Frenesi’s] movements might be less certain” (100)—especially since she has been wiped off the computer because of budget cuts. This situation allows Zoyd to have a laugh at the State’s expense: “Yah, hah, hah, hah, you lost her’s what happened, some idiot back there wiped out the computer file, right? Now you don’t even know where she is, and you think I do” (28). In Zoyd’s laughter is the realization that the same technology which can grant so much power can also render the State impotent, and give power back to the individual. Although Frenesi initially feels dread when she discovers she is no longer on the computer file, there is hope, in the rediscovery of family and life “above ground,” that she can regain a sense of self and confidence through personal connection and personal movement.

De Certeau suggests that people tend to make these kinds of movements in ways that go unperceived. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he writes:

In the technocratically constructed, written, and functionalized space in which the consumers move about, their trajectories form unforeseeable sentences, partly unreadable paths across a space. Although they are composed with the vocabularies of established languages . . . and although they remain subordinated to the prescribed syntactical forms . . . the trajectories trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop. (xviii)

De Certeau is writing about “tactics of consumption” (xvii), ways in which subjects use established, legitimized practices in opportunistic ways (xix), in unintended ways (Clayton

23). Jack Gladney, for example, suggests that “eating is the only form of professionalism most people ever attain” (*White Noise* 175); because “professionals” are those who are given the power to control lives, an individual seeks out the means to control wherever he or she can find it.<sup>87</sup> Everyday things and mundane activities, then, can be used “tactically” in order to assert a small, personal force upon one’s own world; “popular procedures” can be retooled to the extent that they “manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them” (xiv). Such popular procedures are

clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline.’ Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline . . . . (xiv-xv)

In the next chapter I will suggest that language can be used by individuals as one form of antidisciplinary technology of the self practised by some characters in these novels. Here, however, I refer to other practices, such as the “practices related to urban spaces, utilizations of everyday rituals,” “familial practices,” “poetic ways of ‘making do’ (*bricolage*), and a re-use of marketing structures” (xv). Clayton finds de Certeau “too optimistic,” because he “appears to gloss over the way popular tactics can be coopted by the dominant economy” (23). This assessment, however, begs the question: if a tactic has been “coopted,” is it still by definition a tactic? “Tactics” are not practices which become codified or categorized; they are by definition new, unexpected, and unusual uses of everyday life. Clayton does grant that people do have a kind of power in “the ability to change tactics at the very moment when a practice has become commercialized” (23).

De Certeau believes that such practices are “pervasive”: we are not dealing with a marginal group of subversives who challenge authority, but rather a “silent majority” of the “non-producers of culture,” who pursue an “activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized . . . the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself” (xvii). Brian McHale suggests that Pynchon, for example, “represents [Americans] doing some of the things they do *while* ostensibly watching TV, that is, he represents some of the ‘illicit’ or ‘unauthorized’ uses we routinely make of TV (‘illicit’ and ‘unauthorized’ only from the point of view of TV advertisers, who presumably would prefer to have our undivided attention)” (117). Although McHale’s point is that TV and real life have “interpenetrated” each other to a large degree, his suggestion that characters are making a use of television other than what is “intended” suggests this kind of tactical activity. Booker is more direct in his assertion that *Vineland* is made up of

bits and pieces of popular culture, seeking to turn that culture against its makers and suggesting the creative possibilities in an active reclamation of popular culture for the populace it supposedly serves. . . . Popular culture for Pynchon may be produced and disseminated by an immense network of forces whose main goal is to stimulate conformity and mindlessness, but that does not mean we must necessarily consume it in conformist and mindless ways. In the end, popular culture is what we make it. (20-21)

Booker’s claim is valid: there are ostensible “makers” of culture—“an immense network of forces”—but popular culture is really “what we make it.” It is made, but can be unmade, or remade, in the way we use it. “Culture,” then, is subject to the kind of popular

manipulation suggested by de Certeau; as a dominant force it is illusory, a myth sustained by dominant powers, and by the willing submission of subjects. The State may call its mythology “popular culture,” but the very name insists that it is created by *people*—not subjects, but individuals. We must think not in terms of a static “popular,” but rather a moving populace, who engage in momentary but liberating acts which help to ensure that in the end the disparate academic formulations of self as either “unified” or “decentred” are too extreme to have any real relation to the autonomous self, the liberated self who is undefinable, always at play, yet always *in control*.

“Movement” may seem limited in a society which is arranged as an informational panopticon. The motion I have in mind, however, is a metaphorical dodging of official constructions of identity. It may take the form of a refusal to “write oneself,” as Foucault suggests: “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be” (“The Subject and Power” 216).<sup>88</sup> What Foucault would have us deny or refuse are the structures which subjectify us; as McConnell explains, “Foucault constitutes resistance as the refusal to continue to write one’s subject-ivity [*sic*]. Resistance is a holding-back of the appearance of the free subject in textual form. . . . By the logic of Foucault’s theory of epistemology, to write one’s life is to imprison one’s actions within the system one struggles to escape” (165). In *Mao II*, DeLillo’s protagonist Bill Gray clearly finds in writing a means to construct himself (48), but the fact that he has avoided the publication of his current manuscript suggests he is aware of how easily he can be appropriated by mass culture; Keesey argues that Gray’s hesitation to publish and otherwise put forth a public self is his attempt “to minimize the media appropriation and standardization of his message and to retain the

power of his individual voice” (*Don DeLillo* 178). It is not the *writing* that threatens the self, but rather the publication of that writing—the making public of the self reminiscent of the covenant theology of the New England Puritans, in which the public declaration of sin reinforced the political-religious appropriation of the individual. Not to publish, however, means that in a sense one remains hidden from the public: one’s own life becomes “a space of invisibility that potentially harbors the project of a new self and a new subject” (McConnell 166). Certainly Pynchon’s shunning of the public medium of photography is his means to protect his self. When DeLillo’s character Bill Gray makes himself “inaccessible,” he has “grace and wholeness” (*Mao II* 36); when he does become publicly visible through photography, he feels dead (42).

In Foucault’s scheme, the tendency towards invisibility, towards resisting any official inscription within the system, would constitute a “technology of the self”—the employment of which Booker sees as “the central human activity” (6). Although Booker sees the “process of self-constitution” as problematic, given that “any choice we make in constituting ourselves must be made at the expense of excluding possible alternatives, and any structure we impose on our lives tends to limit our freedom to investigate other structures” (6), making a choice does not necessitate the kind of monumentalizing entailed in digital information storage. No alternative is irrevocably “excluded” in such choices, and the “structure we impose” hardly threatens our freedom to explore other possibilities. One may choose, then choose something different. The important thing is the *power* to choose.

Membership in society does, however, constrain choice. The two competing subjectifying structures examined here and in Booker’s article are the Althusserian model

of interpellation and the Foucauldian model of self-constitution. Booker seems to see this as a simple opposition of forces (10), but I think it is more realistic to suggest that the individual needs to achieve balance. Mark Richard Siegel argues that

one must be able to structure reality and at the same time be aware of the relatively uncertain value of that structure as an interpretive system.

‘Official’ systems of structuring reality may be convenient means for justifying as necessary and expedient the personal interests of those in power, especially if the average person is unaware of the relativity of such systems. (18)

A sense of balance may be achieved in challenges to official systems, as Siegel further notes. I will discuss the idea of the “counterforce” in further detail, but the most enduring means to self control will be found in brief but potent moments. An individual needs to accept the hailing of authority in society in order to avoid the repercussions of law, but this acceptance can be tempered by technologies of the self. In the electronic age of digital surveillance and information storage, the need for developing such technologies is extremely important.

Booker believes, however, that the society depicted in *Vineland* precludes the possibilities for self perfection envisioned by Foucault: “The models this culture offers seem designed specifically to undermine creative explorations of selfhood, encouraging the populace, not to explore new possibilities, but to conform to stereotypes” (16). An ideology of consumption and a “lack of high culture” in society<sup>89</sup> influences everything to the extent that “Foucault’s creative self-constitution thus may become just another variant of Althusser’s interpellation” (16). Booker’s argument grossly overstates the case. To

refer to Foucault's notion of human liberation and self-perfecting as a "variant" of ideological hailing is mistaken: if an activity turns out to be ideologically influenced, it simply fails to satisfy the requirements of a technology of the self.

We may, perhaps, come close to establishing the criteria for a potent self technology by examining Pecheux's notions of identification, counter-identification, and disidentification (Macdonell 39-40). Identification is "the mode of 'good subjects,'" or those who consent to official reality and identity. Counter-identification is the "mode of the trouble-maker" who refuses to consent—although, as Macdonell points out, counter-identification does not preclude complicity. Macdonell calls disidentification, on the other hand, not a mode but an *effect*: it is an effect of antagonism whereby cultural beliefs, the "prevailing practices of ideological subjection," are consistently questioned—in Pêcheux's words, they are worked "on and against" (Macdonell 40).

*Vineland* continues Pynchon's disidentificatory program of examining prevailing cultural beliefs; it "tests familiar assumptions about mainline American society and those about realistic fiction and suggests alternative universes, codes of behavior, and modes of fantastic fiction—in short, new ontological perspectives" (Slethaug 57). These new perspectives have the effect of countering dominant structures which reify the self as an official entity. Phillip Gochenour points out that film is one such structure, designed to "take the place of the substance of the actual events. What it takes to destabilize this structure, especially if that structure is something called history, is another set of images, in this case memory," which can be a strong enough force "to counter the attempt to construct an official story" (176). A rejection of the framed, legitimated story and an emphasis on memory, then, is an example of disidentification: memory's function is to

present “another kind of testimony” in order to “[disrupt] the smooth continuity of history” (177). The feminist myths Sister Rochelle tells Takeshi—the creation story in which the feminine paradise where women are “content to just be” is suddenly invaded by men, “subdivided and labelled,” and polarized (166); and her vision of Heaven and Hell as empires which make the paradise of earth into a “second-rate” tourist location (382)—represent this kind of alternative testimony or memory. Albert Piela notes that Pynchon, with the use of these different versions, “subverts the idea that one myth may be privileged as ‘true,’ and demonstrates the multiplicity of versions of a story” (126).

Disidentification is also a mark of DeLillo’s protagonists, like Bill Gray, who, presumably aware of how the media has the power to appropriate his thoughts and his art, “limit[s] the number of books by him and images of him in public circulation” and thereby attempts “to retain the power of his individual voice” (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 178). Gray’s awareness of the threat of technological appropriation is reached because he exercises the power of his mind: he thinks, questions, challenges. Thinking, according to Frank Lentricchia, is the defining quality of DeLillo’s characters: “what they think about tends to be concerned not with what goes on domestically in the private kitchens of their private lives . . . but with what large and nearly invisible things press upon the private life, the various coercive contemporary environments within which the so-called private life is led” (*Libra as Postmodern Critique* 193). A disidentificatory practice of challenging society’s assumptions can result in the putting into practice of strategies for self-control, turning towards technologies of the self.

In *Vineland*, Zoyd may be considered more than just a “bad subject”; a “creature of attitude” (26), he is someone who, naive as he is in some respects, adheres to his values

and sees through the rhetoric of those in power. David Thoreen sees Zoyd as the “only true revolutionary, the only really dangerous insurgent” in the novel: he is a “non-participant. . . . Zoyd is the hero in *Vineland*. It is Zoyd whose life provides an alternative to the official economy, Zoyd who is the real enemy of the state” (60). Other than his “non-participation,” Zoyd’s heroic qualities include his longing for human connection, his integrity, and his creativity.

With the refusal to write oneself—or the attempt to outmaneuver the written self—is a sense of free reign given to the imagination. Zoyd demonstrates at least a resistance to writing himself when he plans to alter his annual routine of public lunacy: “window jumping’s in my past, this year I’m gonna just take this little chain saw into the Log Jam and see what develops from there” (*Vineland* 5). Walking into a tavern full of “heavy-duty hombres” wearing a lady’s dress and wielding a “lady’s chain saw” which is “tough enough for timber . . . but petite enough for a purse” (6), Zoyd believes, will give him “the element of surprise” (5). The plan at least shows imagination, even though he is not able to follow it through. Larger forces are at work to ensure that he sustains his official image.

Zoyd is bound by a deal made to protect his daughter; his devotion to her is his primary concern. There are other ways, however, by which Zoyd can resist the official “writing of himself” and exercise personal integrity. He has been pressured for years by DEA agent Hector to be a drug informer, but has resisted, maintaining his “virginity” (12, 24). Although Hector admits that Zoyd is “the chatee he’d be least likely to bag” (22), he will not admit that Zoyd’s refusal amounts to integrity. Several times Hector points to the fact that Zoyd has not changed his values since the sixties, that he is “[s]till simmerin’ away

with those same old feelings” (28). Hector, on the other hand, has become washed out, has “fallen,” becoming different from the man Zoyd once idealized (29). Now, Hector is a bureaucrat:

Stuck out in the field at GS-13 for years because of his attitude, he had sworn—Zoyd thought—he’d go out the gate early before he’d ever be some *cagatintas*, a bureaucrat who shits ink. But he must have cut some deal, maybe it got too cold for him—time to say goodbye to all those eyeswept parking lots back out under the elements and the laws of chance, and hello GS-14, leaving the world outside the office to folks earlier in their careers, who could appreciate it more. Too bad. For Zoyd, a creature of attitude himself, this long defiance had been Hector’s most persuasive selling point. (25-26)

Hector’s career advancement represents movement from uncertainty and chance to stability, order, bureaucracy—which is what the system strives for. This homogenization, witnessed later by DL and Takeshi in “a loose formation of midsize, neutral-colored, dingless and clean Chevs, each with exactly four Anglo males of like description inside” (333), disappoints Zoyd. On some level, he and Hector are like old friends. Hector evinces disappointment because Zoyd has neglected to send Christmas cards over the years, or to ask about Hector’s family (31). Hector’s “advancement” to a higher level of administration, however, along with his addiction to television as a structuring principle in his life, makes him a far less autonomous person than Zoyd.

Zoyd is a character not given enough attention by most critics of *Vineland*, who neglect the finer nuances of his character, his moments of integrity, awareness, and

wisdom. Zoyd is no fool; he is very aware of what is going on around him. In his daughter Prairie he witnesses “the sly, not yet professionally developed gift of staging a hustle, something she must surely have got from him” (18). These self-serving strategies, along with self-expressive modes like the “precious anger” which is Hub Gates’s “only real fortune” (291), and a firm sense of personal values—demonstrated, for example, when in response to Mucho’s assertion that the State makes the people “forget” what they know Zoyd vows, “I’m not gonna forget . . . fuck ’em” (314)—are passed down from old revolutionaries to those who would take up the struggle for autonomy, ensuring that in the end the abstract, rationalizing structure will not totally prevail over humanity. They make up the counterweight to the State’s tyranny, the counterweight which helps to balance the scales of divine justice, as epitomized in the Emerson passage read by Jess Traverse at the family reunion:

“ ‘Secret retributions are always restoring the level, when disturbed, of the divine justice. It is impossible to tilt the beam. All the tyrants and proprietors and monopolists of the world in vain set their shoulders to heave the bar. Settles forever more the ponderous equator to its line, and man and mote, and star and sun, must range to it, or be pulverized by the recoil.’ ” (369)

Mark Connor suggests that this quotation “reflects the novel’s closing tone” (77), which he finds to be optimistic, as does Eva Karpinski (41).<sup>90</sup> Pynchon and DeLillo demonstrate that such “secret retributions” come in rare but potent moments of personal expression and communion: “short, timeless bursts” (*Vineland* 117), “extrasensory flashes and floating nuances of being . . . pockets of rapport forming unexpectedly” (*White Noise* 34).

They may come unexpectedly, but they may also be sought out by characters who allow themselves, from time to time, simply to “be” (*The Names* 99), to discover that events and things can have a tremendous significance unperceived through the general rush of days (98-99).

De Certeau writes of such “propitious moments,” “opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’” (xix); Clayton suggests that “[r]esistance to disciplinary power can only be local and strategic, never absolute” (19). In other words, resistance must be characterized by movement, free-play, and unpredictability, the same things which define open systems. This combination of factors helps to found “local enclaves of mystery that disperse the hardened systems of order and that reassert the animate as a viable force in a world of twilight sameness” (Chambers 185). LeClair writes: “there are in DeLillo’s novels specific human moments, details that prove his participation in systems small as well as large” (*In the Loop* 27). There must remain in every individual a sense of his or her own humanity in order to establish these local enclaves, these minor but important systems. Again, the extent to which a subject has become reified as a digital profile, becoming, in a sense, one component of a large, ordered system, defines the limits of the subject’s humanity.

The freezing of the individual as a digital subject depends on the individual’s willingness to accept behaviour precedents which constitute a template governing his or her behaviour. If the individual acts out of character from time to time, however, there is hope for self-constitution. DeLillo’s narrator in *White Noise*, according to Lentricchia, occasionally “thinks, sees, and feels in the categories of art” which gives him a degree of critical agency, a measure of human value; such “small moments of the aesthetic image in

*White Noise* tend to be put into the background (where they belong and do their insidious work) by big interpretive moments when Jack sees his world demanding to be read” (“Tales” 104). Characters can be suddenly awakened into new insights by “moments of pain, fear, shock or exertion [which] are like toxic events, moments when the world reasserts itself against the dominance of concept” (Reeve and Kerridge 317)—moments when culture is subject to re-making by people.

When de Certeau calls his silent majority the “non-producers of culture,” he is talking about *dominant* culture. How might we characterize Jack Gladney? In many ways he is a producer of mass culture, a sustainer of “concept,” implicated as he is in an academic system which trades on popular images and exploits all the techniques of marketing and sensationalism; he does, however, consistently question his actions, the kind of disidentificatory practice necessary to begin reforming the self in one’s own image. Questioning is the primary step in a process that leads to the formulation of what Lyotard calls “*pétits récits*,” which contribute to the “assault on the totalizing perspectives of conceptual systems . . . that seek to embrace all phenomena” (Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 26). Daniel Aaron suggests that a mark of DeLillo’s characters is their perception of events: “how quick his speakers are to spot the extraordinary in the commonplace, how sensitive to shades and nuances, sounds and colors, and how perceptively they read the language of movement and gesture” (75). This is a good assessment of DeLillo’s goal for his characters: in his interview with Anthony DeCurtis, he propounds his idea of “radiance in dailiness. . . . I think that’s something that has been in the background of my work: a sense of something extraordinary hovering just beyond our touch and just beyond our vision” (63).

The roots of this radiance are lodged within human expression and community. *Vineland*, too, as Johan Callens argues, “bears witness to Pynchon’s enduring concern with viable and humane social intercourse” (139). Slade, echoing Newman, suggests that the novel “deals with the difficulties of establishing and maintaining genuine human relationships in a culture in which the electronic medium mimics community. At the same time, he reminds his readers that there *are* other channels that *do* offer authentic communication” (73)—something that Pynchon’s narrator calls “some finer drama the Movies had never considered worth ennobling” (*Vineland* 82).

This “finer drama” or “something extraordinary” is present within de Certeau’s “silent majority”; it does not manifest itself in any sort of revolutionary uprising. Pynchon, however, documents in his novels the attempts of a “counterforce” to subvert the dominant order, to overthrow the “they-system” with a “we-system.” The only counterforce viable in these texts, however, is based on something subtle, powerful, and undeniably human—community, especially as witnessed in familial relationships. Siegel argues that the lesson Pynchon’s characters teach us is that “we must create a We-system in order to counter Their strategy and to keep our paranoia from devouring us”; one becomes a member of the counterforce “simply by violating the behavior that They would predict, by creating uncharacteristic patterns within the regimen They have set up . . . . Ambiguity, not deterministic certainty, is the essential fuel for such Creative Paranoia” (19). The discovery of pattern leads to the establishment of a collective which is dedicated to movement, noise, disidentification. In Pynchon’s texts, any attempt to establish a collective based on new modes of liberation from oppressive systems may encourage “group political action” (P. Cooper 77), but many critics are doubtful of the efficacy of

such a counterforce. It is unlikely that the counterforce as a movement would ever take the place of the technological establishment, given the growing ubiquity of technology and surveillance which remove the element of chance from life. Furthermore, were it successful, revolution would establish “only a reorganization of power and a new discipline,” according to Clayton (19).<sup>91</sup>

This is not to say, however, that the idea of a “counterforce” is not a useful one; we need to avoid thinking of it in terms of a homogeneous group with a structured policy of antagonism against the dominant order (see de Certeau xvii). Rather, individuals belonging to such a group have in common their delving into unauthorized or illegitimate realms in their search for means to assert their individuality.<sup>92</sup> Newman has referred to this as “the underworld of . . . culture” which the dominant order has rejected because the “rich vein of metaphors” contained therein “threatens the fixed poles of belief upon which they premise their control” (8). This is, I think, what Joseph Tabbi is looking for: “What is needed, and what has been oddly lacking in recent fiction and theory, is a new style of resistance to the simulation culture that *Vineland* documents” (“Pynchon’s Groundward Art” 99). While Tabbi is not finding it in *Vineland*, I think that others have recognized where this mode of resistance is located.

Karpinski, for one, finds alternative possibilities in Vineland county, which she calls “the locus of Pynchon’s new utopianism encoded in the vision of home reclaimed and the vision of ‘other’ America”; Vineland is “the last sanctuary of the counterculture . . . . The community spirit still survives here, and there is room enough for all kinds of outcasts” (40). Maltby, recognizing that the counterforce in *Gravity’s Rainbow* fails in its attempt to beat the system, also points out that there is evidence in the text that the

counterforce's "descendants remain active in America . . . at least their 'unauthorized state of mind' may be a way, albeit a temporary one, of seceding from the System's totalitarian order of meaning"—especially on an individual level (*Dissident Postmodernists* 166). Bumás, as well, points out "the continuity of reaction to 'official reality,' which creates a continuous community and extended family of its own"—primarily through music: Sasha Gates's swing band, Zoyd's surf-rock band, Isaiah's punk rock band, and so on (157). The force of rock and roll, the "image, emblem, and social glue of an alternative community" (156), spans the generations. It also spreads to influence the dominant system: Brock Vond witnesses "defects of control" in the Justice Department, where the washroom stalls "boomed and echoed with Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix" (*Vineland* 279), good examples of the kind of alternative music enjoyed by youths in the sixties. Here is manifested the potential insurgent power of sixties subculture, which approached life as a gamble, and which experienced less of the surveillance we know today (see *Vineland* 37). It is a life characterized by *jouissance*, according to Berressem (*Pynchon's Poetics* 230).

The playful disruption of authority and the official word is often a means to achieve a kind of resistance. When Zoyd meets Takeshi Fumimota for the first time on a Kahuna Airlines flight (where Zoyd has a regular gig as a lounge musician), he is not fooled by Takeshi's disguise, but, always willing to help someone on the run from the "Man," he allows Takeshi to sit in for a couple of songs as cover. Being part of a ukulele band on a Hawaiian tourist plane, Takeshi is overlooked by his pursuers. Their music is also useful in throwing the Man off the trail:

The pursuers moved along among the boogeying and the cataplectic, none of them giving the strumming fugitive much of a look, in search, it seemed,

of some different profile. Further, Zoyd noticed that every time he hit his highest B flat, the invaders would grab for their radio headsets, as if unable to hear or understand the signal, so he tried to play the note whenever he could, and soon was watching them withdraw in a blank perplexity. (66)

Here again, technology works against those who use it to sustain their own power. It does not help the pursuers to penetrate the easy disguise offered by music, which itself seems to have some mystical, protective property.

There are, then, various forces from which our heroes can draw to help themselves. There is power in interpersonal cohesion—when underdogs stick together. Takeshi thanks Zoyd, giving him a business card which becomes a talisman or “amulet”: “At the point in your life when you really need this, you will—suddenly remember! that you have this card—and where you have stashed it!” (67).<sup>93</sup> It will be, literally, the last card Zoyd will have to play to protect his daughter; that it is, in a sense, a “stash” links it to other more unauthorized forms of subversive power. Over the years, the amulet-card survives “barrooms, laundromats, dooper’s forgetfulness,” as if it has a potency and a resilience.

It even seems to influence the structure of the chapter in which it plays a central role: at the end, the card is passed on to Prairie, which brings us back to the beginning of the chapter, the novel’s present. There is an undeniably human connection here.

Takeshi’s business card signifies that “because you have done me this good turn, I will repay you in kind.” Prairie, shortly after receiving the card, meets DL and Takeshi, who see to her safekeeping. This human element suggests that community of any kind is the key to effective resistance to, or at least avoidance of, the terror of the system.

Certainly there is a sense of community in Billy Barf's audience's reaction to his original composition "I'm a Cop," which propounds the message that we are all subject to any kind of harassment (the song expresses this idea somewhat more indelicately) deemed appropriate by the Man: "The crowd, reacting to this as if it were gospel singing, hollered back, clapping and footstomping, 'How true!' and 'I can relate to that, rilly!'" (357).

Although Chambers sees this as an example of how "all things remotely sacred have been . . . diluted" in the novel (194), the crowd's response seems instead indicative of a powerful sense of congregation. Billy Barf is not singing gospel, but the crowd reacts as if he is: the disenfranchised are in their own way hollering "Amen" to their own sense of gospel truth, a more honest religious communion than that offered by any creed lived by merely out of obligation. Billy has become a parodic spokesman for the Man in his song, appropriating the voice of authority—"Fuck your lady, / Yes I can, / Hey! I'm the Man!" (357)—a satirical act which holds the social power structure up for ridicule. Billy is like the wise fool, the clown who exposes the evils of his superiors: the Man is technology-ridden, obsessed with power, and loveless.

In Pynchon's novel it is clear that human love is a major part of the radiance which saves his characters from total dehumanizing subjectification: Chambers suggests that where language fails (I do not think that it does), "people still must attempt to act on the basis of such simple values as courage, kindness, and love" (xi); she further argues that the impulse towards humanity and justice "requires acting out of love, the one nonprescriptive, open-ended value . . . not love as affection, nor even the nostalgia-informed 'brother love' of the 1960s flower children, but love in its broadest and most

humane incarnation" (187). She insists that this love occurs rarely in Pynchon's novels, but presumably considers these rare moments to be potent ones.

Love, that "simple resource we once thought would save us" (*Vineland* 217), if placed in the wrong kind of context, is seen only as a sixties ideal, "the subject of all that rock and roll," something which, if one has lost the ability to experience it, becomes a degraded concept. This is how Frenesi appears to view love, when she considers it consciously. For others of her generation, however, love is a serious thing. Witness those moments when Zoyd thinks back to those precious few months when he was married to Frenesi, sharing "the groovy high known as Love": the wedding day itself is remembered as "gentle, at peace . . . a sunlit sheep farm" (38). Although this is the kind of situation which would be exploited by "'sensitivity' greeting cards in another few years," Zoyd seems innocent of this crass "trivialization and commercialization" of the pastoral (Bumas 159). Rather, he will recall sitting together under a tree and asking her, "Frenesi, do you think that love can save anybody? You do, don't you?" (39).

One recognizes the desperate need he has for her to affirm this simple belief. Although this question is followed by the narrative comment that "at the time he hadn't learned yet what a stupid question it was," we find brief but powerful passages in which Zoyd clearly *feels* this love: the clear concern he expresses for his daughter when he learns of the presence of federal agents in town (45); Prairie's intuition that he still harbours love for Frenesi and the need for closeness he feels (54); his memory of a look from the new-born Prairie to which he attaches great significance, albeit acid-inspired (285); his concern for the well-being of his infant daughter above all else, as when she becomes sick and he understands "that he would, would have to, do anything to keep this

dear small life from harm” (321; see also 294-98); and so on. As N. Katherine Hayles suggests, it is not the impossible and flawed “vision of the sixties” but rather these brief but saving “moments of grace” (“Who Was Saved” 28) which really matter. Such a moment may come, for example, when one recognizes the “devotional routine” of changing a diaper as “precious” (*Vineland* 296). Such a moment may last in memory: “I remember,” says Prairie to her best friend Ché, “I looked over at you during a commercial, thinking—I’ve known her forever” (330). Significantly, it is not the television which is memorable here, but the sense of deep connection with another human being.

*White Noise* gives us subtler but still potent hints that the real cohesive power of the family is still love. As Gladney watches his son Heinrich walk through the rain toward his school, he is struck with a profound feeling: “At such moments I find I love him with an animal desperation, a need to take him under my coat and crush him to my chest, keep him there, protect him” (25). Heinrich is walking through the rain “with deliberate slowness”: perhaps the “danger” of such behaviour triggers Gladney’s protective instinct. Whatever causes it, it is natural, powerful, and seemingly unappeasable. Scholars tend to focus on the description of Gladney’s Hitler course which seems to dominate this page of the novel. There is little mention of Jack’s desperate love for his son. I find the same phenomenon occurring later (29-30), where, in the midst of relating their discussion of how erotica influences their sex life, Gladney comments on the trust, love, security and identity established through intimate discourse with his wife. Paul Cantor, for example, focuses on the discussion of “the simulation of pornography,” but makes no mention of Gladney’s revelation. Cantor writes: “From the way they endlessly talk about and analyze

their love life, it is clear that they have become too self-conscious about sex” (42).

Perhaps this is true, but consider Gladney’s own perception, which goes beyond sex:

Babette and I tell each other everything. . . . when I say I believe in complete disclosure I don’t mean it cheaply, as anecdotal sport or shallow revelation. It is a form of self-renewal and a gesture of custodial trust. Love helps us develop an identity secure enough to allow itself to be placed in another’s care and protection. Babette and I have turned our lives for each other’s thoughtful regard, turned them in the moonlight in our pale hands, spoken deep into the night about fathers and mothers, childhood, friendships, awakenings, old loves, old fears (except fear of death). No detail must be left out . . . . The smell of pantries, the sense of empty afternoons, the feel of things as they rained across our skin, things as facts and passions . . . . In these night recitations we create a space between things as we felt them at the time and as we speak them now. This is the space reserved for irony, sympathy and fond amusement, the means by which we rescue ourselves from the past. (29-30)

I have quoted at length to provide a sense of the importance Jack places on this intimate dialogue. There is nothing “simulated” or cheap about the depth of his feeling here, and the completeness with which he wants to absorb and be absorbed into the life of his partner. He strives for a sense of immediacy and presence, to counter the possibility of being trapped in the past. It is true that Babette is not as entirely open with Jack as he believes, given her secrecy regarding Dylar. For Gladney, however, it is necessary to have

“complete disclosure” to achieve the ultimate in union and love. Later, Babette will disclose her painful secret, and though it is hard to bear, they do survive it.

These gestures of care in the family come not only through such discourse but also through physical connection, as when Gladney’s hand is taken by his daughter in the supermarket. He senses that this hand-holding “was not meant to be gently possessive, as I’d thought at first, but reassuring. . . . A firm grip that would help me restore confidence in myself, keep me from becoming resigned to whatever melancholy moods she thought she detected hovering about my person” (39). Thomas J. Ferraro discusses this hand-holding incident at some length, suggesting that Steffie intends to take on a “caretaking role,” emphasized by the holding of hands (33). These gentle gestures seem to communicate a maternal guardianship and care.

The love of the mother (or in Zoyd’s case, the father) is a powerful expression of human connection which many critics see as the primary saving grace in *Vineland*’s world of technocracy and co-optation. Sanford Ames suggests that it “falls to the women in *Vineland* to educate each other, to connect the lives”; Prairie’s search for her mother is emblematic of this attempt to connect (117). Some see Zoyd in the role of the mother: Hayles writes that Zoyd’s “maternal position in the kinship system opens him to connection (“Who Was Saved” 17), and Terry Caesar argues that “in a sense, he is a mother” (quoted in Bumas 166). The mother is an important figure in the disidentificatory practice of de Certeau’s silent majority: the “space” of the mother in the postmodern is “an abject one in which mothers prove unsettling because their very experience persists in being so authentic and singular. The mother provides a necessary figure for narratives to

comprehend themselves as constructions conceived out of reality, love, and fear, despite being saturated with the vast reproductive power of technology” (Caesar 120).

Caesar suggests that there is something mysterious about motherhood, that it “contains experience that has not been completely appropriated and reproduced by the politics of the culture at large” (126). Perhaps this experience is, as Molly Hite suggests, rendered mysterious to and unknowable by the totalizing, patriarchal structure because of the power of femininity:

Adversarial characters like DL, the Pisk sisters, Sister Rochelle, and Sasha Gates are, like all Pynchon characters, derivative, emblematic, and parodic, but they indicate that any Other against which masculine sexuality is defined necessarily encodes possibilities of resistance. . . . The protagonists of this novel’s quest—for identity, for origins, for the missing and potentially defining parent—are female, and the centrality of female figures sets up a collective “we” that can instructively be compared to the elegiac, universalizing “we” of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. (145)

That Frenesi perhaps feels a mother’s concern is suggested occasionally, as when she wishes she had done things differently, producing in a quiet moment some “hopeful rearrangements of the past” concerning her daughter (*Vineland* 68). Frenesi also desires to re-establish bonds with her own mother, her own “once-connected self” (292): this is more than mere “nostalgia,” as Berressem calls it (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 233), because it is something Frenesi wants “more than anything” (*Vineland* 292). She realizes that her failure to bond with her own daughter was “the basest betrayal.” Prairie’s first impulse seems to be to defend her mother against the charge of this maternal betrayal (189). This

faith in motherhood, however tenuous, might be enough to transcend the guilt and anger felt on both sides, as well as the easy prefabricated substitutions offered by the technological media.

Perhaps the most potent force in Pynchon's novel is family.<sup>94</sup> The novel provides family histories (74-83; 118-121), which set a foundation for the many instances of family connection in the story. Zoyd is able to put aside his political and personal differences with his mother-in-law Sasha in order to keep Prairie from being "a ward of the court, and no question, they had to keep her out of that. Like it or not, they would be forced, now and then anyway, to coordinate their lives" (57). They work together for the sake of family, and in recognition that the law is the real enemy when it can disrupt family. It has had a hand in severing the Wheeler family, and Prairie's need to re-establish it is clearly what motivates her search for Frenesi. Rosita Becke and Dirk Vanderbeke argue that this "recourse to family networks . . . signals an alternative to a fragmented and alienated modern American existence" (73); what is more important, however, is that the "family" of which they speak is not "the family concept sternly decreed by the so-called moral majority. Instead, it is a community criss-crossing the country with many-layered kinship and other ties, subverting all demarcations of in- or exclusion" (73). Booker, as well, recognizes that the myth of family sustained by the dominant culture "hardly corresponds to the real family lives of *Vineland's* characters" (31), which, regardless of the flaws, "can nevertheless function as a locus for genuine and valuable intersubjective connection" (32). Booker, however, is hesitant to see the notion of family in a too-optimistic light, asserting that family is easily co-opted by the establishment.<sup>95</sup> "Individual personalities and relationships in *Vineland* are constantly in danger of being undermined by television,"

according to Bumaz; he does refer, however, to the incident in which Prairie and Justin, losing interest in watching television, suddenly discover that they “have the opportunity to bond as family; in this case they communicate through some old-fashioned big-sisterly tickling” (164).

Connor suggests that Pynchon’s novel does present the possibility that human connection is a means to developing, through the domain of the “beautiful,” a sense of autonomy: “The integrity of the individual, the relations between the individual and the social realm, the preservation of the community, and the emphasis on reconciliation, regeneration, and forgiveness” are all connected and constitute a potent force (66). The family, especially, is a means for “reconciliation, renewal, and especially *survival*” (70). Hayles discusses “networks of family and friends that connect generations and overcome isolation”—the “kinship system”—which “yields representations with which even young readers can identify, encoding emotions and events that have not changed substantially over the generations” (“Who Was Saved” 15). What the Becker-Traverses represent, the cohesive element in their extended family, is an intuitive drive, a “moral obligation to oppose corporate control” (Slade 75). This sense of family solidarity buttressed by years of experience can be a powerful draw. Even Frenesi, who betrayed her counterculture, returns to family in the end to begin the task of reforming lost connections, a “prodigal daughter” as Hite calls her, who returns to represent how “co-opted innocence can still turn against the Man” (148).

This family reunion has been amply discussed by critics,<sup>96</sup> who point out that it makes for an unusual conclusion for a Pynchon novel; for this reason they are hesitant to accept it at face value. Barbara Pittman, who for the most part tends to nay-say

everything others find positive about the novel, argues that “the reader must not be lulled, by the fairy-tale conclusion that ends with the word ‘home,’ into thinking that all is well in *Vineland*’s America, in 1984 or thereafter” (49). Others look for evidence of parody: “Some could argue . . . that Pynchon’s picture-postcard conclusion is intended as a send-up of happy endings . . . and that it therefore means to establish, precisely by way of parody, a more imperfect, precarious terrain for the meeting of self and world in the contingency of time” (Wilde 179; see also Booker 20). While there is evidence that a distance remains between members of this clan, many of whom cannot sever themselves from television (*Vineland* 324), to pass this ending off as parody, to suggest that it mocks the family ideal it ostensibly portrays, is too easy. The Beckers and the Traverses awake into a day of gathering, moments of genuine family connection. Frenesi and Prairie meet and begin the process of reconnecting (368); Prairie takes an appraising look at Zoyd “having just spent hours with Frenesi’s face” (374),<sup>97</sup> suggesting that mother and daughter have given each other time to get to know each other. Prairie has found her mother to be nervous: “She’s lookin’ for anger, but she’s not gettin’ it from me” (375). As mentioned earlier, there is no reason to expect that their relationship will be easy; some critics find the meeting to be harsh (Safer 63) or anticlimactic (Pittman 42). We do not witness their conversation. Pynchon leaves us guessing, perhaps with the implication that we will construct the tenor of that conversation on the basis of what we extract from the rest of the action in the text.

Underscoring these moments, for example, is the “unprecedented” (325) “wakening” (324) of the Thanatoids.<sup>98</sup> Now the sort-of-dead Thanatoids become lively, seeking contact with other Thanatoids “as if for the first time” (325) and engaging in song:

Clapping and stomping, these Thanatoids tonight were acting rowdier than DL or Takeshi had ever seen them. Were changes in the wind, or was it only a measure of their long corruption by the down-country world, by way of television? The melody was rooted in Appalachia, in a tradition of hymn and testimony, and the beat was almost—well, lively. (363)

Like Billy Barf's audience, the Thanatoids have discovered "testimony"; they have awakened to discover live people instead of television; the technologized have made a crucial step toward humanization. Frenesi, too, has made an important move away from the deathless, abstract world she once inhabited to discover the rewards of the human.

This reasoning may be overly marred by sentimentality. In the end, it is academic. For every critic who insists that this ostensibly happy ending is parodic, another will assert that so many possibilities for human connection are clearly present that we *can* take Pynchon's tone at face value. It is easy to ask: why should these brief moments of revelation and connection suggest anything more than a temporary reprieve from the commercial television-inflected and computerized pseudo-lives of these characters? But why not? The lived experience—the touching, the talking, and the loving—is arguably what makes one human; otherwise, we are Thanatoids, death addicts bathed in the glow of the television screen. If Pynchon has suggested that the Thanatoids have been resurrected into life, why doubt his word? If he tells us that Desmond the dog has returned "home" (385), even though the Wheeler homestead has been taken by the Man, why doubt the author's word, as Thoreen does (62)?

It is, perhaps, sentimental to suggest that home is where one's loved ones are. Pynchon's ending, though, is decidedly pastoral; whether or not it is parodic, the reader in

the right frame of mind will feel the positive reaction that such imagery is designed to trigger. Prairie wakes up in a clearly non-technological world, “with fog still in the hollows, deer and cows grazing together in the meadow, sun blinding in the cobwebs on the wet grass” (385). Critics warn us not to be fooled by this *apparently* idyllic ending. This is Vineland, however; at least for the present it is a place of refuge from the tyrannical technological domain, and Prairie, alone in the wilds with her dog, represents unadulterated possibility. Like her mother, herself once a child who explored the wonders and mysteries of Vineland (305, 320), Prairie might become corrupted. For now, though, she is granted the perceptiveness which Pynchon bestows upon the children in his fictional world.<sup>99</sup> While Berressem suggests that Prairie’s “innocence . . . is in constant danger of being coopted” (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 236)—he uses her near-abduction by Vond as evidence—for now, her impulse is to reject what he represents, despite her curiosity about it: for all his seductive charm, Brock is unable to co-opt Prairie, who gives him a “complex insult” (376) in response to his claim that he is her real father. Prairie knows the truth of her parentage: she has read it in the faces of her mother and father.

DeLillo’s attitude toward children is similar: in an interview, he said, “I think we feel, perhaps superstitiously, that children have a direct route to, have direct contact to the kind of natural truth that eludes us as adults” (DeCurtis 64). Heinrich Gladney is the potential hero of *White Noise*. He is precocious; he is critical of the media and technologies which others, particularly his father and his father’s colleague Murray, attempt to make sacred or magical. Heinrich remains unimpressed, for example, by the amount of “knowledge” available to people: “What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of every

day. But nobody actually knows anything" (148-49). Babette's father would certainly agree with him.

DeLillo seems to take his child characters seriously, as reflected in the words of Jack Gladney: "Make no mistake. I take these children seriously. It is not possible to see too much in them, to overindulge your casual gift for the study of character. It is all there, in full force, charged waves of identity and being. There are no amateurs in the world of children" (103). Children represent untainted, unadulterated potential. They know how to turn the things of the world into tactics of consumption: witness Wilder, who, although he is perhaps too young to have fashioned a stable sense of self, views the world as "a series of fleeting gratifications. He took what he could, then immediately forgot it in the rush of a subsequent pleasure" (170). This is the *jouissance* of youth; as N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge point out, Wilder's "heedless commitment to the immediate moment" is the joy which his parents have lost (318). I have been arguing that the enjoyment of such moments need not be lost. Gladney is aware of Wilder's ability to turn the world to his own pleasure: "He is selfish without being grasping, selfish in a totally unbounded and natural way. There's something wonderful about the way he drops one thing, grabs for another" (*White Noise* 209). Reeve and Kerridge suggest that such an attitude, taken by an adult, would "unmistakeably [*sic*] qualif[y] one to be the ideal late-capitalist consumer" (319). This assessment represents a somewhat negative judgement of the individual who would recapture this "selfish" approach to life: such a person covets for the sake of ownership, sustaining the interests of capitalism. The "consumerism" Reeve and Kerridge refer to is not the popular consumption discussed by de Certeau: that latter refers to a refashioning of popular practices solely for the creative potentials it offers for the self. It

is important that we do not misunderstand Gladney's attraction to Wilder's enjoyment of his environment: as Jack says, "when Wilder does it, I see the spirit of genius at work" (*White Noise* 209).

Given that childhood is forever lost to the adult, one seeks to reclaim at least the freedoms of childhood. Along with those freedoms, one looks for sites which offer chances for individual freedom. Pynchon's individualists are searching for alternative realms of existence; in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the alternative mail system is one such realm, a "calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. . . . this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world" (124-25). Pynchon in *Vineland* continues his interest in alternative realms, though with the encroachment of the simulacrum into the wilds of Vineland, such realms are increasingly difficult to locate. Characters feel their individuality threatened, and react by seeking out alternative realms in an "attempt to re-establish differences" (Callens 134). The "mountainside retreat of the Sisterhood of Kunoichi Attentives" is one such alternative community, characterized by its secretiveness and difficult access (107). Although it has become commercialized, it seems to be one with the landscape: it does not "so much tower above the rolling, breaking terrain as almost readably reflect it" (108). This appeals to Prairie, who "trust[s] in vegetation." Vineland itself, beautiful and primal, is a "Harbour of Refuge" (316), "Vineland the Good" (322), the light of which represents a "call to attend to territories of the spirit" (317), and a great place to hide out (305, 318).<sup>100</sup> It is also the place which sees the end of Brock Vond.

Within the wilds of Vineland exists a place into which Pynchon never really gives us a clear glimpse: the dwelling place of the *woge*, “creatures like humans but smaller, who had been living here when the first humans came” but who now have withdrawn “into the features of the landscape” (*Vineland* 186). The *woge* have the potential to save humanity from the fallen world it has created (187): Hayles suggests that they “watch from the sidelines” (“Who Was Saved” 27). As we near the end of the novel, the real world intersects with the realm of these spirits, with Brock Vond’s deliverance across the river into death by Vato and Blood, tow-truck proprietors *cum* Stygian boatmen (378-80). Scholars have also noted the several dreams which are described toward the end of the novel (see, for example, 362, 365, 370, 374). Berressem writes that this is a “disintegration” of the text “into dream, mythological, and thus psychic space” which “runs counter to the exclusion of precisely these realms by modern culture” (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 214). However we interpret these realms, they seem to be aligned with humanistic forces, or at least with *life* principles: “the landscape of *Vineland* is quite literally *alive*, teeming with spirits and souls and participating in the balancing of scales that concludes the novel” (Connor 78). As well, the *woge* represent a connection to the spiritual (Strehle 105-6), another force antithetical to the digital system of the State. They exist within the abundance of the land around Vineland, the part as yet untouched by human encroachment on the land, raw nature, where an individual might withdraw from the dominant system and resume the process of self-discovery.

Nadeau argues that “a more primal sense of being” is, in both Pynchon and DeLillo, what constitutes the alternative, and that characters attempt to return to it in the intuitive knowledge that the survival of the human race depends on it; reality constructed

“in terms of closed systems and symbolics”—the abstract “either-or” model—is a danger that needs to be countered in a “fundamental restructuring of the dynamics of our world-conceiving minds” (161). In the next chapter I argue that language is perhaps the most powerful means of reconceiving, from moment to moment, our place in the world. It is the foundation for that primal sense of self which establishes itself through linguistic free-play. It is the best way of speaking one’s self—of “talking back” to the Man.

## CHAPTER SIX: SPEAKING SUBJECTS

In DeLillo's *Mao II*, Karen Janney suffers the loss of her self in the guise of contentment: the Moonie cult gives her the impression that she is "intact, rayed with well-being," but this sense of wholeness is false. The cost is the homogenizing of her identity, along with "young people from fifty countries, immunized against the language of self" (8). Language of self is the central concern of this chapter, which argues that certain uses of language—linguistic and non-linguistic codes—are examples of Foucault's "technologies of the self," means to empower individuals who seek to control their own identities. Karen's father Rodge hopes that she will always be "possessed of a selfness, a teeming soul, nuance and shadow, grids of pinpoint singularities they will never drill out of her" (7). I have argued in this paper that this sense of selfhood, characterized by all the traits to which Rodge Janney refers—vitality; abundance; fine, distinct shadings and intricacies—has great potential to resist the unseen powerful forces that work to reify the soul, to turn "pinpoint singularities" into digitally coded "preferences" or predilections, references in a database. The digitally reified self is a template, an official story, as opposed to a living one. The language of the self is one of the most important means for the soul to endure beyond the digital confines of its dossier.<sup>101</sup>

The subject can always speak. Speaking is a potentially powerful form of resistance which can disrupt both the appropriation of identity by the technocratic society and any attempts to situate a generalized conception of subjectivity within the arena of

academic discourse. The subject continually makes new discourses—his or her *own* discourses, created out of a polyglossia and heteroglossia<sup>102</sup> not constrained by the dominant power. This linguistic technology of the self is characterized by openness and the possibility of playful linguistic disruption, and is linked to the physical body in how it inscribes identity—or, better, refuses to inscribe it. The subject may be at the mercy of countless forces in society, including the effects of media conditioning, technological dehumanization, and surveillance, but the subject always has the power of unpredictable speech. Lyotard writes: “the limits the institution imposes on potential language ‘moves’ are never established once and for all (even if they have been formally defined)” (17). If we view communication between the dominant power and the subject as a “game,” then this lack of limits gives the subject the ability to plan new maneuvers, emphasizing play rather than competition. Subjects need only possess the drive to use language creatively, with the “knowledge that legitimation can only spring from their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction” (Lyotard 44). The power to create ruptures in the discursive world means that the postmodern subject possesses the potential to resist definition—which is in the very spirit of postmodernism itself.

In this chapter, several manifestations of potentially disruptive (or, to view it positively, “creative”) language are considered: polyphony, glossolalia, the “physical” word, disinformation, code-switching, antilanguage, and other creative uses of words outside the formal boundaries of “proper” language. This list is not exhaustive; nor is any attempt made to rank them. The point is to demonstrate the effectiveness of various types of language strategies as technologies of the self.

Pynchon and DeLillo are both known for avoiding the popular and academic gaze which seeks to define them; Pynchon especially eludes us both through his disruptive texts<sup>103</sup> and through his invisibility in the public sphere. Perhaps, as Johan Callens suggests, Pynchon's "invisibility is . . . prompted by the media's obtrusive role in the literary profession" (139)—not to mention the academic profession, which finds itself challenged to tame Pynchon's wild prose and to generate "reader's guides" to help us navigate. DeLillo is somewhat more visible, but similar to Pynchon in the protection of his privacy (Daniel Aaron 67). Both succeed in fashioning themselves as authors through their own words; DeLillo feels, in fact, that "it's possible for a writer to shape himself as a human being through the language he uses" (LeClair and McCaffrey 82). Arthur Saltzman argues that DeLillo has "bequeathed" this same self-shaping ability to the characters in his novels (821). These authors wish for their own characters what they wish for themselves: the freedom to fashion their identities in fresh acts of linguistic creativity.

Louise K. Barnett, however, is skeptical of the "postmodern" subject's ability to do anything of the kind. She argues that speech in postmodern fiction is insignificant and lacks confidence. On the one hand she recognizes that, *in general*, the "linguistic aims" of protagonists in American literature "diverge from those of whatever group they are defined against" (17), and that they have the freedom to choose "to embrace some form of verbal rebellion that asserts the primacy of self-expression over the collective vision" (46). Despite these expressions of resistance, Barnett on the other hand feels that characters in the *postmodern* novel ultimately lack such basic "entitlements" as "humanity and the dignity of individuality" (221). Because of the multiplicity of "competing ideologies" and their discourses, she argues, "[d]irect expressions of pure and unironic individual

intentionality are rare and generally unacceptable in ordinary social discourse” (2).

Further, the overbearing force of technology destroys “cherished human assumptions and values” as well as “social institutions, including language” (9). Silence, she argues, is all that is left to the postmodern protagonist, who, “inarticulate and diminished,” manifests an “alienation from society in linguistic terms” (23). Silence can itself be a form of resistance; I hope to show, however, that rather than retreating from language, as Barnett insists they do, some characters in these novels embrace the possibilities of language. They are by no means silent.

Pynchon in *Vineland* gives us a textual landscape akin to a living, social system. Bakhtin characterizes novels as “multiform” in style and “variform” in speech and voice. A novel is characterized by polyglossia, which is part of what he calls the “basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel”—a combination of several languages and styles (“Discourse in the Novel” 263). *Vineland* clearly exemplifies polyphony; its narrator’s voice ranges from lyricism,<sup>104</sup> through discourses of specialization, to unexpected gasps—“gaahhh!” (189, 238)—and the occasional stutter. Pynchon’s texts are often resistant to any kind of “unified” reading or totalizing hermeneutic because of this combination of diverse styles; they also demonstrate how a polyphony of voices and speech types can frustrate co-optation efforts by the dominant, unitary language represented by the digital matrix. *Vineland* acts as the environment for a tremendous biodiversity in terms of characters’ speech styles. E. Shaskan Bumas has already listed many of them:

its languages and slanguages include pretty standard Anglo-American as wells [*sic*] as some Spanish, Spanglish, Black English, Valley-girl dialect,

Yiddish bon mots, and Japanese question words and honorifics. What the novel knows is informed by U.S. philosophy, Yurok and Tobwa native, as well as Asian, philosophies, mythologies, and religion, and Hispanic history and literature. Pynchon's polyphony is enriched by the discourses of computer hacking, meteorology, conspiracy theories, TV culture, buddy movies and their critics, Japanese monster movies, Ninja lore, urban legends, higher mathematics jargon, the Bible and its heresies, mall iconography, labor history, poli sci, phrenology, astrology, and documents such as rock music lyrics, skywriting, graffiti, and trial and surveillance transcripts. A heteroglossic novel includes a variety of discourses to describe a variety of American experiences. (170)

To this list I would add the discourse of music (for example, the "ukulele talk" in which Zoyd and Takeshi engage (*Vineland* 65)); the speech of Thanatoids as perceived by outsiders due to a different experience of time (226); "recreational bickering" (185); and the speech style of talking with one's mouth full, which requires translation: "Uhk ee ahkhh uh akh uh Oomb" (170); "Ee-ee hukh ngyu huh ay!" (175).<sup>105</sup> This linguistic flux provides the freedom of possibility necessary to counteract the "false" variety of the media, which actually constrains variety because of how it is co-operative with a dominant teleology or unity; as discussed in chapter one, the media also "absorb" the natural variety of the individual.

Deleuze and Guattari take for granted that "everybody knows that language is a heterogeneous, variable reality" (100). They define "style" as "the most natural thing in the world; it is nothing other than the procedure of a continuous variation" (97). The

concept of “continuous variation” is crucial to an understanding of how language can be a potent source of individual expression and freedom. Language is made up of components which are “variables”—a word or a phrase can be substituted for other words or phrases—but continuous variation suggests a “chromatic” dimension; language is *continuously* affected by tones and colours which affect the meaning of utterances. Language used disruptively or subversively is not a “secret code” based on a system of “constants,” but is rather that which “*places the public language’s system of variables in a state of variation*” (97; See also Halliday 155). Attempts to engage what Paul Maltby calls “dissident” texts using a strategy which is unified and which depends on constants is bound to end in confusion and frustration.

The narrative terrain of *Vineland* is variegated with different kinds of linguistic disruptions. Consider Pynchon’s use of uncommon words and neologisms: “orthodontia” (19), “recrudescence” (21), “postprandial” (109), “zomoskepsis” (31), “absquatulation” (308), “octogenarihexation” (186), “herbaceous polyhedron” (295), “consanguineous discombobulation” (324). The author also turns common vulgar expressions into new phrases which defamiliarize the originals: note how his euphemisms—“profound feces” (85), “thick fluids in flexible containers” (172), “fecoventilatory collision” (280)—momentarily distance the reader but then stimulate a graphic awareness, when the originals very likely would not have elicited a second thought. To disrupt the flow of text with such challenges gives the narrator control over the facility with which we process its meaning; it demands a new kind of “literary competence” (Cohen and Shires 122), defamiliarizes recognizable tropes, and provides the illusion of a living system with its occasional warps, its brief moments of confusion and chaos.

The characters themselves have quite distinct voices. Note the mix of styles in the exchange between Zoyd Wheeler and his daughter's boyfriend:

Isaiah, in their greeting, wanted to slap and dap, having always somehow believed that Zoyd had seen combat in Vietnam. Some of this was bush-vet and jaiyard moves Zoyd recognized, some was private choreography he couldn't keep up with, though he tried, Isaiah throughout humming Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze." "Hey, so, Mr. Wheeler," Isaiah at last, "how you doing?" (18)

The practice of "slap and dap," a form of physical greeting which is non-codifiable and infinitely variable, and which derives from several sources, is also referred to as "private choreography," a more "formal" term which suggests a systematized arrangement of moves. The narrator mixes colloquial and formal, as does Isaiah: he greets Zoyd with "Hey, so," but calls him "Mr. Wheeler," a linguistic anomaly not lost on Zoyd, who wonders, "What's this 'Mr. Wheeler,' what happened to 'You lunch meat, 'sucker'?"

This latter designation "climaxed their last get-together, when, from a temperate discussion of musical differences, feelings had swiftly escalated into the rejection, on quite a broad scale, of most of one another's values" (18). Given the indelicate nature of Isaiah's insult, even this description of their prior discussion seems understated, and thereby suggestive, like a .44 bullet hole wound described as "a bit messy." In the passage which follows, Isaiah is described first euphemistically, then characterized profanely:

"Well then, sir," replied the NBA-sized violence enthusiast who might or might not be fucking his daughter, "I must've meant 'lunch meat' only in terms of our joint strange fate as mortal sandwich, equally exposed

to the jaws of destiny, and from that perspective what's it matter, rilly, that you don't care for the musical statements of Septic Tank or Fascist

Toejam?" jiveassing so obvious that Zoyd had no choice but to thaw. (18)

Zoyd recognizes that Isaiah is making an effort to pacify him with an utterance which is by turns respectful, rationalizing, philosophical, and mollifying. It is "jiveassing" with the intention of making Zoyd open-minded about Isaiah's business pitch. "Jive" talk is an expression that has entered the language mainstream, but what it represents is a use of language in continuous variation; it draws upon whatever linguistic elements will help to accomplish one's goal. Isaiah, whom we might be inclined to stereotype because of his "long Mohawk colored a vibrant acid green" (17-18), both empowers himself and disables simple prejudgmental characterizations. He does admire Uzis, dress unconventionally, and play in a punk rock band. More importantly, he displays a shrewd intelligence, genuine affection for Prairie, adaptability, and strategic employment of language. I will return to this character later, when I discuss code-switching as another technology of the self, another strategy for attaining selfhood.

Characters also depart from "proper" language at the syntactical and semantic levels, omitting parts of speech and playing with words. Pammy and Lyle Wynant in *Players* demonstrate, according to DeLillo,

the intimacy of language. What people who live together really sound like.

Pammy and Lyle were to address each other in the private language they'd constructed over years of living together. Unfinished sentences, childlike babbling, animal noises, foreign accents, ethnic dialects, mimicry, all of that. It's as though language is something we wear. The more we know

someone, the easier it is to undress, to become childlike. (Interview with LeClair 84)

These personal codes, these “lesions of speech” (*Players* 130) one notices in the discourse of two people intimately connected, signify that the language we use to communicate is subject to a kind of personal wounding and regeneration; the word “lesion” suggests a change in the surface texture of a body, an inscription which may be temporary and leave no mark, or which may scar as a language disposition. Only the digital code which inscribes the reified self is immune to such lesions; the living language of independently-thinking individuals is regularly prone to the nicks and cuts of linguistic variance. Any such “wounded” code as Pammy and Lyle speak is potentially empowering because it expresses the connection between them, without being subject to formal, ideologically-inflected constraints.

Although Pammy and Lyle are clearly becoming estranged in the novel—they watch television in separate rooms; they engage in dishearteningly functional sex, until finally they seek out other partners—Pammy still attempts to communicate with her husband by rupturing and rough-housing with formal language. When jostling for position in front of the refrigerator, she says, “No you push me, you” (*Players* 53); later, commenting on the television screen’s colour and contrast, she creates unusual utterances in response to her perceptions of the colours on the screen and her husband’s statements; eventually she speaks in a child-like register:

“Color very lurid.”

“Thanks, seeing what I spent.”

“Color is roloc.”

“We have to connect it,” he said. “It has to get hooked up on the roof.”

“Roof is foor.”

“They’ll get a guy.”

“There wis green. There wis pink. There wis o-range.” (56)

It does not appear that the two are communicating anything really meaningful, although Lyle is trying to maintain a conversational thread based on Pammy’s initial utterance. He is more interested in the television, at this point, than he is in engaging in linguistic play with her. Pammy, however, remains interested in taking this kind of play to its limits, as I will discuss later.

Rough-housing with words, the kind of play that is fun until—and even after—proper language gets hurt, represents an important technology of the self, a means of “perfecting” one’s own self-construction. The ultimate disruption of unitary language (and by extension the digital codes which represent the pinnacle of totalizing, reifying discourse) is glossolalia, in which no utterance is ever repeated, a complete breakdown of language and meaning which gives the “sense of immediate contact with reality” (David Foster 166) or with some spiritual other. The making of primitive noises represents a pure creative expression not subject to (and thus perhaps bypassing) the symbolic order of social life. Cornell Bonca writes: “DeLillo has been fascinated by the kinds of language that elude systems, classification, or semiotic analysis . . . this fascination with non-denotative, perhaps ‘pre-linguistic’ language has begun to occupy the center of DeLillo’s curiosities as a novelist” (27-28).

Owen Brademas in *The Names* believes that the power of speaking in tongues comes from its randomness as a pure product of the unrestrained individual mind. He recalls a day from his youth when, sitting in a church, he listened to a preacher discoursing on babbling, imploring the congregation to “speak with the tongues of angels,” to give free reign to the tongue in order to “[s]eal the old language and loose the new”: “Let me hear that babbling brook. What am I talking about but freedom? Be yourself, that’s all it is” (306). The “old” language is English proper; the new language is that unpredictable, non-codifiable sound, always changing and chaotic, which expresses the true self.<sup>106</sup>

Brademas was unable to speak in tongues (see “The Prairie,” the last section of *The Names*, Tap’s account of Owen’s failure to participate in glossolalia). Bonca argues that “The Prairie” “is about falling from grace, of course, about a boy’s recognition that he’s filled not with the Word, but simply words” (30). Bonca sees language as “fallen” in the novel; Tap’s own account, however, reveals that language is not fallen. James Axton discovers a refreshing power in his son’s writing, full of “spirited misspellings” and “mangled words” which he finds “exhilarating. He’d made them new again, made me see how they worked, what they really were. They were ancient things, secret, reshapable” (313). He quotes a phrase, “burch cruch,” which to him makes exceedingly manifest the “spoken poetry in those words, the rough form lost through usage. His other misrenderings were wilder, *freedom-seeking*, and seemed to contain *curious perceptions about the words themselves*, second and deeper meanings, original meanings” (313; emphasis added).

Tap has broken out of the constraints of “proper” spelling, the legitimate rendering of language, and in doing so he has in a sense (according to Axton) given language back

to himself, made it his own. The words contain their denotative meanings, because they are recognizable (if not immediately so), but they also contain something of the person who uses them, Tap's own "perceptions" about them. A rough, phonetic spelling of a word ("burch") which refers to "wood" seems somehow to convey its "wood-ness"; Axton believes that Tap's own engagement with the word manifests to the reader something more primal than the arbitrary relation of signifier to signified. It makes present the notion that meaning is contained in the word through its use by a human being. In this way language use can be "freedom-seeking," because it gives back to the user his or her deepest, sincerest intention—to express the self. More generally, Douglas Keeseey remarks that by reading Tap's writing, "James is able to get back in touch with his friend's, his son's, and his own emotions and to rediscover language's connection with an imperfect but aspiring humanity" (*Don DeLillo* 129; see Maltby, "Romantic Metaphysics" 263).

Similar to how James, as a reader, is profoundly affected by Tap's linguistic transgressions, one can be moved by the unfamiliar sounds of a foreign language. When Jack Gladney listens to the enunciations of his German teacher, he does not understand the meaning but is transfixed by the sounds. He believes that the speaker is transcending:

An abrupt emotion entered his voice, a scrape and a gargle that sounded like the stirring of some beast's ambition. He gaped at me and gestured, he croaked, he verged on strangulation. Sounds came spewing from the base of his tongue, harsh noises damp with passion. He was only demonstrating certain basic pronunciation patterns but the transformation in his face and

voice made me think he was making a passage between levels of being.

(*White Noise* 32)

Gladney may be alienated by his lack of understanding, but he is moved by the experience.

He, and not the teacher, is making a kind of “passage”; he is the one who feels an unaccountable power and passion, in spite of his awareness of what is “only” happening.

Later, he listens to his son Wilder’s inexplicable crying, and has a similar experience.

Wilder fascinates Gladney in part because of the limitations of his vocabulary (35–36) and because of his means of expressing himself: in the supermarket he greets Murray Siskind with a “tree-top screech” (168); although confined to a shopping cart, his animal-like utterance conveys the freedom and dominion of a jungle creature. Indeed, when Wilder begins to cry for no apparent reason, Gladney notices that at times it seems to be a kind of “animal complaint” (75).

According to Jack there is no “condition more basic” than what Wilder is communicating without words in his crying—and in an effort to render that condition in words, Gladney characterizes it as “something permanent and soul-struck . . . . It was a sound of inbred desolation” (77). Bonca suggests that Wilder is enunciating a primal “death terror” (35), and the fact that he is attempting to explain it in such finite terms suggests that he is just as moved and determined to explain it as Jack is. Wilder’s crying is the only “fact” we can ascertain. The reason is ultimately unknowable, despite Gladney’s best efforts to know it:

It was a sound so large and pure I could almost listen to it, try consciously to apprehend it . . . . He was not sniveling or blubbing. He was crying out, saying nameless things in a way that touched me with its depth and

richness. This was an ancient dirge all the more impressive for its resolute monotony. . . . The inconsolable crying went on. I let it wash over me, like rain in sheets. I entered it, in a sense. I let it fall and tumble across my face and chest. I began to think he had disappeared inside this wailing noise and if I could join him in his lost and suspended place we might together perform some reckless wonder of intelligibility. I let it break across my body. . . . I entered it, fell into it, letting it enfold and cover me. (78)

Gladney is drawing on a well-established interpretative schema: if Wilder were ascertainably injured or ill, the crying would indicate a distress-response to pain or discomfort. Since there is no clear physical explanation, Wilder's crying must, obviously, manifest something *other*, something on a metaphysical level. Critics tend to take stock in this hermeneutics, focusing on some unknowable thing that Wilder is attempting to communicate and on Gladney's reception of this communication,<sup>107</sup> rather than giving agency to Gladney's creative construction of meaning out of pure noise. There is clearly *something* being communicated here despite the absence of clear semantic markers, according to Thomas LeClair (*In the Loop* 231). It is a "pure" communication; it has "depth and richness"; it is almost palpable, and it gives Gladney a sense of connection to his son. His response to Wilder's nameless communication ("I sat there nodding sagely") suggests that he claims to understand some message in the wailing.

DeLillo may be suggesting that Wilder does indeed have a link to a transcendental realm: the motif does occur in the author's works, as many have argued. Still, it is difficult to see Wilder's crying as anything but pure expression, free of intention. Arguments regarding Jack's attempts at interpretation are beside the point. In responding

to the ineffable, the best one can do, often, is rely on vague, metaphysical concepts.

Gladney's response to an unfathomable communication uses a discourse which attempts to express the inexpressible. Short of crying along with Wilder, this is the only response that will suffice. There are some things, perhaps, that have not yet found their expression in the terms and concepts to which we are accustomed.

In *Great Jones Street*, Bucky experiences a powerful moment listening to the babbling of a radio disc-jockey:

Out of a next of static came a new voice now, fantastic and savage,  
beautiful to my ear, churning with gastric power.

*"Lissen what I say, bay-bee, this be Do-Wop here, bop and groove,  
yow yow yow, lissen what I say but no do what I do, boogie with your  
footie, ay chihuahua, stone gold monster music, down and round, popping  
at my console, Doo-Wop bay-bee, lissen and live, stone gold number  
eight, Bad Jasper Brown with Mama Mama Mama, jive and dive, Doo-  
Wop bopping your dead head, yow yow yow, stone gold eight, mama  
mama what's it all mean, Bad Jasper, cut me down."* (130)

Presumably this is the preamble to a song. The improvisational quality of the speech—the "jive and dive"—with its clear sense of freedom from constraints, is in marked contrast to the other radio voices Bucky has heard, in which "[w]ording was altered only slightly and vocal tones remained consistent all through the hour" (130). The "stone gold monster music," along with Doo-Wop's flamboyant speech, is his attempt at "bopping your dead head"—perhaps suggesting an attempt to enliven the monotonous lives of his listeners, all through music and spontaneous discourse. Michael Oriard writes: "A distinct play

element is evident in DeLillo's use of language. Many words are spoken for their own sake, for their feel in the mouth of the speaker, for the harmony of their sounds, and for their originality" (17). Doo-Wop's utterance illustrates all of these ludic elements; the enunciations of "listen" (*lissen*) and "baby" (*bay-bee*), and the repetition of "*mama mama mama*" and "*yow yow yow*," hint at a possible sensual enjoyment of language. In an interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo spoke of "letting go" in language: "The best moments involve a loss of control. It's a kind of rapture, and it can happen with words and phrases fairly often—completely surprising combinations that make a higher kind of sense, that come to you out of nowhere" (quoted in Saltzman 808). This kind of jazz-like communication appeals to Bucky, who has turned to babbling in his own music, as in such songs as "Pee-Pee-Maw-Maw" (*Great Jones Street* 118). Keesey suggests that Bucky may be infantilizing his communications in an "attempt to shape a new and better language, one more expressive of the self's true desires and less influenced by the media's conception of what buyers 'need'" (*Don DeLillo* 52-53). Established language, with its concomitant ideological inflections and constraints, is rejected in favour of a purely created set of personal speech units; "meaning" is optional.

The idea that pre-verbal noises made by infants indicates a purer expression of the self recurs in DeLillo's texts. I have already considered the example of Wilder in *White Noise*, and Bucky's withdrawal from society suggests a regression to a pre-verbal existence, in which life is less "mediated" and "more responsive to [one's] needs"; babbling or glossolalia may be an "attempt to begin again, to make a better world by finding a truer form of communication" (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 53). I discussed the possibility that children are linked to a "natural truth" in the last chapter; the Romantic

metaphysical notion that very young children are more closely linked to an idyllic transcendent realm is investigated by Maltby ("Romantic Metaphysics" 267-68). The infant Prairie in *Vineland* appears to talk to something in the trees as she rides on the bus with her father into Vineland: "It seemed now and then as if she were responding to something she was hearing, and in rather a matter-of-fact tone of voice for a baby, too, as if this were a return for her to a world behind the world she had known all along" (315). Given that Vineland seems aligned with powerful life principles, as I have argued, it is significant that the child seems equipped to communicate with those forces on a level unknown to her father—especially when she is only just starting to imitate her father's language:

They rose into the strange gold smothering, visibility down to half a car length, Prairie standing up on the seat gazing out the window. "Headin' for nothin' but trees, fish, and fog, Slick, from here on in," sniffing, *till your mama comes home*, he wanted to say, but didn't. She looked around at him with a wide smile. "Fiss!" (315)

She seems at this point to exist on a boundary line; when she has become assimilated into the social symbolic world of language she will lose contact with those mysterious forces. The adult, however, is never completely distanced from the child-comforts of juvenile language. In *Mao II*, there is an interesting scene in which Charlie Everson, Bill Gray's editor-agent, relates to Bill his version of how he deals with clients: "I take them to a major eatery. I say, Pooh pooh pooh pooh. I say, Drinky drinky drinky. I tell them their books are doing splendidly in the chains. I tell them the readers are flocking to the malls. I say, Coochy coochy coo. I recommend the roast monkfish with savoy cabbage" (101).

While there is clear information being conveyed here, by interpolating “baby talk,” a specialized discourse used to appeal to and comfort infants on a (mostly) pre-symbolic level, Charlie is essentially conveying the idea that the discourse of business transactions is a very basic mode of infantile comfort strategies dressed up with ostentatious, flattering rhetoric. It is discourse designed to make the client happy, because everyone likes to see the baby smile.

DeLillo suggests that glossolalia may exist as an alternate communicational force, every bit as complex as formal symbolic language, when he asks:

Is there something we haven't discovered about speech? Is there more? Maybe this is why there's so much babbling in my books. Babbling can be frustrated speech, or it can be a purer form, an alternate speech. I wrote a short story that ends with two babies babbling at each other in a car. This was something I'd seen and heard, and it was a dazzling and unforgettable scene. I felt these babies *knew* something. They were talking, they were listening, they were *commenting*, and above and beyond it all they were taking an immense pleasure in the exchange.

Glossolalia is interesting because it suggests there's another way to speak, there's a very different language lurking somewhere in the brain.

(LeClair and McCaffrey 84)

That alternate language may be at the root of the personal construction of identity. Learning to communicate without conforming to the code used by the dominant order, learning to speak *despite* it, is a powerful way of creating a personal code, and a means to supplement the legitimate linguistic code to make it more one's own.

At the end of *Players*, Pammy reads a word on a marquee and is momentarily incapable of assigning a denotative meaning:

It read: TRANSIENTS. Something about that word confused her. It took on an abstract tone, as words had done before in her experience (although rarely), subsisting in her mind as language units that had mysteriously evaded the responsibilities of content. Tran-zhents. What it conveyed could not itself be put into words. . . . Seconds passed before she grasped its meaning. (207)

Before recalling its “content,” Pammy understands the word at a more primal, abstract level (Bonca 28). The word itself, stripped of its semantic content, becomes powerful in a non-denotative manner, as pure sound, as “tran-zhents.” DeLillo, according to Hal Crowther, “believes that language is holy” (91) in part because of this aspect, a form of glossolalia in which a word is taken out of its semantic context and taken as a random sound, placed in a new, ineffable context. It can “bear great power in and of [itself]” (Oriard 18). DeLillo’s characters often enjoy words for their sonic beauty and power—the word “Maine” in *Players*, which has a “strength” and a “moral core” (20; see 63)—or for the visual and tactile resonance of the letters which compose them (*The Names* 35-36).

A word can engage one visually and acoustically. There is, however, another level to which we can take this non-denotative power: the physical. Owen Brademas talks about “how these marks, these signs that appear so pure and abstract to us, began as objects in the world, living things in many cases” (*The Names* 116). Pammy and Jack demonstrate how one can reconnect with the physical, tactile aspect of language. Their

conversation, prior to making love, is a reduced form of language, child-like, object-oriented, without the clutter of formal syntactical elements:

“Be one with the grass.”

“The earth, the ground.”

“Earth, creature, touch.”

“Blend,” she said.

“Air, trees.”

“Feel wind.”

“Birds, fly, look.”

“Wing, beak.”

“Sound they make, calling.”

“Up in sky.”

“Make sound, talk.” (*Players* 164-65)

Pammy and Jack connect the sentiments “Make sound, talk”—communicate through basic sounds—and “Earth, creature, touch” as they disrobe and engage in physical love.

Whereas digital codes in a dossier exist primarily to interpellate the individual as a subject who moves according to a preferred plan, Pammy and Jack here link sensuality and linguistic units into a private code which leads to unauthorized love (for Pammy, it is a betrayal of the marital bond; for Jack, heterosexual love betrays both his partner Ethan and subverts his own sexual “preference”), but love which is liberated, which generates the desire for a new vocabulary: “The aspect and character of these body parts, the names, the liquid friction. Dimly she sought phrases for these configurations” (167). DeLillo uses a juxtaposition of word and thing, talk and touch, to suggest a mutual reinforcing, a new

dimension of language, in opposition, perhaps, to a system which seeks to hybridize the subject as a physical body guided by digital codes in a simulated existence.

Keesey uses the term “living word” to describe the attempt to keep “oral tradition” alive (*Don DeLillo* 129), a continuity of narrative through generations of speakers. I am suggesting a linguistic concept that is physical and present, not just the word made physical, and not just a “performative” language, but a language that combines—one might call it a “physiolingual” code. Such a code could very well be the primary linguistic technology of the self. It is, of course, dependent on an ineffable but powerful shared understanding between speakers. The physical body is important to such a language; it is not enough to suggest, as Kerby does, that the self is “embodied” as a linguistic construct by language, by narrative (1). Any story can be subsumed by a more powerful one, one which has the power to “subdue and codify” (*The Names* 80). The individual must embody him- or herself along with language in forceful utterance.

Occasionally language seems to transform into physical communication. Through intimate language Jack Gladney and his wife Babette create a space in which they “turn” their “lives for each other’s thoughtful regard . . . in the moonlight in our pale hands” (*White Noise* 29), a space in which “things as we felt them at the time” are connected to things “as we speak them now” (30). While this space may be purely fanciful, it is meant to convey the intensity of their communication. Later, when they engage in their “major dialogue” (190) regarding Babette’s use of Dylar and the means she used to procure it, she insists on “tell[ing] it in [her] own way” (191). This difficult account of the extent to which she went to combat her fear of death leads to a verbal competition about who is more fearful (198), which in turn becomes a physical manifestation of the contest:

We held each other tightly for a long time, our bodies clenched in an embrace that included elements of love, grief, tenderness, sex and struggle. How subtly we shifted emotions, found shadings, using the scantest movements of our arms, our loins, the slightest intake of breath, to reach an agreement on our fear, to advance our competition, to assert our root desires against the chaos in our souls. (199)

The “embrace” includes all the elements of the conversation (perhaps a kind of linguistic foreplay) which preceded it. Their lovemaking is an attempt to take up where talk left off; the communicating continues in the physical mode so they may “reach agreement” and “advance [their] competition.” Rather than language inscribed on the body, or for the body, here the body *does* the inscribing. Their bodies shape the words which form their communication; this is experience which cannot be formularized or coded, as evinced by the explorative nature of their sexual union, their attention to nuance. We might perhaps call it “illiterate” communication, because it stands in opposition to the kind of technology associated with literacy, which, as LeClair argues, “allows and encourages” such things as “discreteness and analysis, originality, abstraction, absolutism, and possible self-destructiveness, a way of preserving almost everything whether valuable for survival or not” (*In the Loop* 190-91). Babette and Jack constitute a wholeness of perfect, *unspoken* understanding; they are sender, receiver, and medium in one. Anthony Wilden points out that “[a]ll language is communication but very little communication is language” (137). There are many non-linguistic codes, and Jack and Babette have tapped into a very powerful one.

In the preceding two examples, talk transmutes into a purer, physical form of communication. Pammy and Jack use words which convey only the sensual, then engage

in physical intimacy; Jack and Babette make sex a continuation of a “struggle” or contest. DeLillo also suggests the power of talk mixed with gesture and contact in Greek conversational practice, in which “gestures drive the words” (*The Names* 52; see 85-86, 238), a “punctuation of speech with touch” (LeClair *In the Loop* 187), a “cultural discourse manifesting crucial reciprocities between the kinesic and the symbolic” (189). These reciprocities emerge in the discussion about family that James Axton has with his wife: “The subject of family makes conversation almost tactile. I think of hands, food, hoisted children. There’s a close-up contact warmth in the names and images. Everydayness” (*The Names* 31). For James, this conversation seems “to yield up the mystery that is part of such things, the nameless way in which we sometimes feel our connections to the physical world” (32).<sup>108</sup> Although it is nameless, it is still effected through talk, which conjures “tactile” sensations, if only in imagination. Use of language in this way effects a kind of conjuring trick, the same kind Bill Gray uses in *Mao II* to connect with the poet-hostage:

he tried to write about the hostage. It was the only way he knew to think deeply in a subject. He missed his typewriter for the first time since leaving home. It was the hand tool of memory and patient thought, the mark-making thing that contained his life experience. He could see the words better in type, construct sentences that entered the character-world at once, free of his own disfiguring hand. He had to settle for pencil and pad, working in his hotel room through the long mornings, slowly building chains of thought, letting the words lead him into that basement room.

Find the places where you converge with him.

Read his poems again.

See his face and hands in words. (160)

Through words, Gray tries to picture the room in which the poet is chained; through reading the poems of the hostage, he tries to envision who the poet is. It is important to Bill that the words be clear and distinct, because his “disfiguring hand” will only obscure the contact he is trying to make.<sup>109</sup> Bill believes in the power of his words to make this kind of connection: he has

hidden himself from the media in an attempt to escape their increasingly pervasive influence, and he writes to keep alive the possibility of another kind of language, one combining personal voices in a democratic shout, private identity within public community. Bill wants people to find themselves and each other in his words, to feel an emotional connection so strong that it is almost physical. (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 186)

Just as Gray strives to make this connection, the poet responds with a need to express himself in words: “Only writing could soak up his loneliness and pain. Written words could tell him who he was. . . . The only way to be in the world was to write himself there. His thoughts and words were dying. Let him write ten words and he would come into being once again” (*Mao II* 204). The poet longs to enact himself through words. Without the means to utter his diversity, the poet does not exist.

Diversity is an important aspect of language as a technology of the self.

Individuals construct micronarratives which counter the dominant narrative, which resist the coded story etched into the system’s computer files. There is, however, another creative and subversive use of diversity I would like to investigate: “disinformation.”

Adversarial and unpredictable, disinformation (or in some cases “misinformation”) is one mode DeLillo’s (and to some extent Pynchon’s) characters use to keep themselves in some form of motion. Disinformation is a relatively non-malicious and at times unconscious twisting of language and logic resulting in an amorphous linguistic space. Usually some ostensible attempt at “information” is made, but the broken threads resulting in, for example, poorly remembered facts or faulty syllogisms in conversation mean that any meaningful context is avoided. This disinformation is one aspect of a realm of non-denotative language, a form of speech that defies stable meaning in order to facilitate a sense of free-play, a sense of connection with the unknown, in certain cases, and a resistance to the legitimating, stable, unified structures which seek to impose a static identity on the subject.

Because of disinformation, Barnett’s assertion that the postmodern text “images a condition of verbal exhaustion in society in which automatic responses, endlessly recycled, have supplanted individual expression to the extent that almost all utterances are predictable and clichéd” (196-7) is problematic. Maltby suggests that the meanings of utterances can be rendered uncertain to the extent that they function as a kind of entropy:

as the measure of uncertainty increases, the meaning of a message becomes less probable and more *ambiguous*. In excess, informational entropy may be regarded as undesirable, a state of communication marked by irrelevance, redundancy (repetition), and leakage . . . . But, within limits, this entropy may be positively valued as enriching a message, making its significance less predictable and investing it with a diversity of meaning through ambiguity or indeterminacy. (*Dissident Postmodernists* 145)

Maltby suggests that Pynchon (and I would add DeLillo, to whom these ideas are applicable) creates this kind of ambiguous discourse deliberately, as a “strategy designed to fracture the positivist logic which orders meaning into uniform, standardized patterns . . . a logic, that is, which represses diversity of meaning” (146). One approach is to deny sensory evidence and to refuse to make assertions based on expectation in lieu of alternative possibilities. One then becomes a purveyor of “faulty” information.

In a conversation with his father about rain, Heinrich Gladney consistently diverts attention away from accepted facts by suggesting other, often abstract, possibilities. The conversation begins with an assertion made by Heinrich: “It’s going to rain tonight” (22). Although this “claim” is really a prediction, Heinrich gives it the authority of a direct assertion: not “it might rain” or “they are calling for rain,” but “it’s going to rain.” His father, on the evidence of his senses, makes a counter-assertion: “It’s raining now.” Heinrich, playing devil’s advocate for the media, replies, “The radio said tonight.” This statement is clearly meant to be taken as a sign of the average person’s faith in the media *before* the senses, as Jack points out: indicating the rain on the windshield of the car, he tries to make his son admit that there is rain *now*, arguing that “[j]ust because it’s on the radio doesn’t mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses” (22-23).

Heinrich chooses to use language to subvert this evidence; he refuses to give in and speak the correct signifiers despite the brute fact of the rain. The two are now engaged in a kind of language game. Lyotard suggests that conversation can be likened to a game between players who make “moves.” There is a pleasure to be derived from beating an “adversary,” which in the end turns out to be “the accepted language” (10). Victory over public language entails power for the subject:

No one . . . is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. One's mobility in relation to these language game effects . . . is tolerable, at least within certain limits (and the limits are vague) . . . the system can and must encourage such movement to the extent that it combats its own entropy; the novelty of an unexpected 'move,' with its correlative displacement of a partner or group of partners, can supply the system with that increased performativity it forever demands and consumes. (15)

Indeed, by challenging (and aggravating) his father, Heinrich is opening up possibilities: he is not, as Gladney suspects, an unthinking consumer of the radio's forecast. He has found a way to engage his father in a language game which is not pointless chatter but a way of displacing them both, in Lyotard's terms. Rather than falling into a stagnant prescribed pattern ("It's raining." "Yes, it is."), "it is important to increase displacement in the games, and even to disorient it, in such a way as to make an unexpected 'move' (a new statement)" (Lyotard 16). Rather than giving in to his father, Heinrich points out that human perception is in fact limited (*White Noise* 23), and, like a modern-day Bartleby, "wouldn't want to have to say" if it is raining or not. In accordance with a sense of the playfulness of continuous variation, Heinrich draws on relativity to prove that there are multiple "truths": the instant of time is undefinable; the locale is non-locatable (23-24).

Gladney is being out-witted, and he ends the conversation with sarcasm. Heinrich, however, has made the point for the reader. One can choose to contest even the most legitimate of assertions, if only for the sake of disrupting communicative patterns. Using strategies of disidentification and disinformation, Heinrich attempts to subvert authority—

the very same authority which imposes that stored, static identity I have called Digital Information Storage (with the ironic acronym, given this argument, of “DIS”). Thomas Ferraro’s reading of the rain argument is useful:

On the one hand, Heinrich is behaving like any other precocious fourteen-year-old boy, what my mother called being “disagreeable” (she meant it literally) . . . . On the other hand, by his facetiousness (he knows it is really raining), and quite unlike Murray and the other avatars of postmodernity, he . . . distances himself from a medium that wills to displace his senses with its word . . . . (29)

Heinrich is, then, being both a brat and a champion of the self. In his contestation of his father’s word and his ironic advocacy of the radio, he is eluding the legitimate discourse in favour of a variable discourse which works to obscure and strengthen his individuality.

The family conversation which occurs in chapter 17 of *White Noise* provides another example of this disinformation (actually “misinformation”: the family is misinformed about things they attempt to discuss), taking the form of a general abuse of fact and trivia. Denise begins the conversation by asking about Dylar. How quickly they get off the topic, as Babette responds:

“Is that the black girl who’s staying with the Stovers?”

“That’s Dakar,” Steffie said.

“Dakar isn’t her name, it’s where she’s from,” Denise said. “It’s a country on the ivory coast of Africa.”

“The capital is Lagos,” Babette said. “I know that because of a surfer movie I saw once where they travel all over the world.” (80)

After these two factual errors, more follow in rapid succession: Denise refers to tsunamis as “origamis” (80); Heinrich misremembers the title of a Tennessee Williams play (81), and so on. What is the effect of these essentially meaningless locutions? Gladney’s assessment is that the “family is the cradle of the world’s misinformation. There must be something in family life that generates factual error. Overcloseness, the noise and heat of being. Perhaps something even deeper, like the need to survive” (81). Gladney has not come to this conclusion unassisted; he has been influenced by Murray Siskind: “Murray says we are fragile creatures surrounded by a world of hostile facts. Facts threaten our happiness and security. . . . The family process works toward sealing off the world” (81-82). The fact, as a legitimate meaning-unit, can be a threat to a sense of individuality which thrives on potential, change, the malleability of the world. Disinformation, however, by no means entails a “sealing off” of the world. The intention is not ignorance, necessarily; it is not a subversion of “objective reality” (82), but rather an exercise in subverted meaning for the sheer joy of it.

This amusing passage demonstrates vivid and spontaneous conversational transactions, even if the participants are ill-equipped to make “legitimate” statements. Everyone here (with the exception of Wilder, who seems to prefer not to participate, and Jack, who chooses to listen in, presumably with great interest) is allowed to contribute to this morass of disinformation. Such creative noise is what keeps the system alive; this “charmingly fact-bending family chat” (Bonca 32) brings an element of unpredictability and sport to the family’s discursive space. Paula Bryant refers to the conversation as a “feeding” which lacks “nourishment” because it is “rehashed from the continuous chatter of radio and television”; she defines the “white noise” they are making as “frequency

signals designed to protect security, but which serve only to scramble communication” (158). On the contrary, this bizarre conversation *provides* the security that comes from comfortable, familial play. It *is* nourishing, because the family members communicate, and with every word they reinforce their bonds.

Paul Cantor argues that this disinformation represents a “dilemma”: “One can have community, but only if it is rooted in myth or error; if one wants truth and rationality, one will have to pay for it in the form of widespread anomie and rootlessness” (50). This assertion begs the question of what is more important: community or “truth”; as well, one wonders: whose truth? In a community of the misinformed, one selects the facts which appeal to one, thereby fashioning one’s own identity. Cantor’s pejorative use of “myth” and “error” denies the creative possibilities of both. Another negative interpretation of the family’s conversation is that of Noel King, who emphasizes that they do not know what they are talking about; they are *ignorant*. They live in an atmosphere of “floating remarks,” all of which are “impossible to trace back to any point of origin, impossible to fix or ground in any decisive way” (72). It is precisely this fixity that the playful use of language subverts. Whether it is intentional or not, beneficial or not, misinformation frees up the self, allows it actively to select—to “eclect” in Charles Jencks’s terms—from the multiplicity of signifiers which endlessly circulate. No one verifies; no one really challenges a claim: all claims are equally valid when false, and all claimants have equal power.

During the airborne toxic event, when fear and uncertainty predominate (they stem from a technological terror), there is a sense of comfort and community in the fact that “[r]emarks existed in a state of permanent floatation. No one thing was either more or

less plausible than any other thing. As people jolted out of reality, we were released from the need to distinguish” (*White Noise* 129). Here is an expression of the floating signifier; I should say, rather, floating *signifiers*. All possibilities have equal value. There is no sense of hierarchy or proper meaning; it is endlessly deferred.

Variation in language, the infinite substitution of signifiers in a discourse, is what gives language its power. The power to defy expectation, to subvert established patterns of meaning and thereby outmaneuver one’s opponent with a clever “move,” in Lyotard’s terms, may seem paltry when considered against the massive ideological-rhetorical engines of domination which hold sway in a society, but it is the very ingredient which gives the individual control over the direction of the self. Consider the playful “theme song” variations of Vato and Blood in *Vineland*: DL and Takeshi discover them at one point “humming back and forth in a strange free-form antiphony, sometimes falling silent, picking up the tune two and a half bars later together, latently menacing, like a bee swarm. It was the famous V & B Tow Company Theme, based on the Disney cartoon anthem “‘I’m Chip!’—‘I’m Dale!’” . . .” (180). The “antiphony”—in which two singers respond to each other— suggests a structured, alternating form of communication, but here it is “free form,” subject to variations in volume and intensity; the sound-image of the droning bee swarm seems appropriate. The duo has appropriated the whimsical (albeit complicit with the corporate entertainment industry which serves to co-opt individuals through cartoon representations of dominant cultural and family values) cartoon melody, substituting lyrics which express their own experience—but not always harmoniously. I quote here at length regarding the history of the song’s genesis:

After listening to the chipmunk duo's Theme a couple of times, getting the lyric and tune down, Blood, turning to Vato . . . sang, "I'm Blood," and Vato immediately piped up, "I'm Vato!" Together, "We just some couple of mu-thuh-fuck-kers / Out—" whereupon a disagreement arose, Vato going on with the straight Disney lyric, "Out to have some fun," while Blood, continuing to depart from it, preferred "Out to kick some ass," turning immediately to Vato. "What's 'is 'have some fun' shit?"

"OK, OK, we'll sing 'kick some ass,' no problem." Singing, "I'm Vato—"

Still annoyed, "Uh, I'm Blood. . . ."

"We just some couple of—" at which point Vato maliciously sang "crazy bastards" instead of "motherfuckers." The two broke off and glared at each other. (181)

They agree in principle, but not in terms of content. The song, in its discord, still manages to express the individuality of each, as they each seek to contribute their own phrases. It also expresses the fundamental nature of their friendship, as it is characterized by what the narrator later calls "recreational bickering" (185); they engage in meaningless argument purely for the sake of itself, to pass the time, to assert their own voices in a contest for discursive superiority. The theme song, then, stands as a symbol of their partnership:

Over the next few years, as they were getting their business going, this was to keep happening—sometimes they managed to get from one end of the song to the other in perfect agreement, but most of the time they did not. The song became a kind of bulletin board for the partnership, a space on

which they could hang these variations to remark on questions of the moment and plans of the day. The night before, for example, out in the truck, Blood had been singing, “End up eatin’ some fast food that you *know* / Will taste like shit—” referring to an argument that had been going on all week about where to take the third partner at V & B Tow, Thi Anh Tran, to lunch for her birthday . . . . (181)

A song of infinite creation, the theme becomes a forum for communication on a variety of topics.<sup>110</sup> Although Rosita Becke and Dirk Vanderbeke are hesitant to suggest that Vato and Blood are “the sources or harbingers of a new mythology for a mobile media culture” (75), they are important figures in the text. Pynchon gives them the power to convey the living to the land of the dead (*Vineland* 378-80), but most important to this discussion is the way in which they have utilized a corporate-cultural artefact tactically to assert their individuality, as a billboard of their discourse.

Another way in which resistance is manifested is the phenomenon of “code switching” (M. A. K. Halliday 65). Code switching, as well as what Halliday calls “dialect switching” (34), has the effect of destabilizing assumptions about where in the social system an individual is expected to be. A social system has a diversity of such codes or “registers,” each of which reflects some part of the “social hierarchy” (65; 123); the extent to which an individual may move or “shift” between codes indicates the measure of his or her versatility, and in some cases power, within the social system. Halliday writes that “the notion of register is . . . a form of prediction: given that we know the situation, the social context of language use, we can predict a great deal about the language that will occur” (32). Sometimes, though, our expectations are subverted. An interesting

occurrence of code-switching in *Vineland* arises when Isaiah's punk band "Billy Barf and the Vomitones" is placed in the awkward position of playing a wedding reception, the audience of which is made up primarily of the mob:

They got through the first set on inoffensive pop tunes, rock and roll oldies, even one or two Broadway standards. But during the break, a large emissary with a distinct taper to his head, Ralph Sr.'s trusted lieutenant "Two-Ton" Carmine Torpidini, arrived with a message for Billy. "Mr. Wayvone's compliments, says thank you for the contemporary flavor of the music, which all the young people have enjoyed fabulously. But he wonders if in the upcoming set you might play something the older generations could more readily relate to, something more . . . Italian?"

(95)

The Mafia henchman here speaks formally, ironically using what Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson refer to as a negative politeness strategy, a "redressive action addressed to the addressee's . . . want to have his [or her] freedom of action unhindered and his [or her] attention unimpeded" (129), to minimize the "imposition" of asking the band to play what the audience wants to hear.<sup>111</sup> Wayvonne "wonders"; he does not demand; the band "might" play something different, and so on. It is difficult to discern, in the language and tenor of Torpidini's request, the implicit imperative and threat which must exist, given his line of work: he is not really "requesting" at all. Later, when the band fails to satisfy the request, Torpidini again approaches the band, but his speech changes as he begins "to do some of the untidy work he received his paycheck for," physically torturing Billy with his

own guitar strap, until finally Torpidini speaks in a more thug-like manner. He begins by inquiring,

“ . . . You gentlemen are Italian, are you not?”

The band sat silent, feckless, watching their leader being garrotted. Few Anglos, some Scotch-Irish, one Jewish guy, no actual Italians. “Well, then, how about Catholic?” Carmine went on, punctuating his remarks with sharp yanks on the strap. “Maybe I could let yiz off with ten choruses of ‘Ave Maria’ and a Act of Contrition? No? So tell me, while you can, what’s goin’ on? Didn’ Little Ralph say nothin’ ta yiz? Hey! Wait a minute! What’s this?” In the course of having the head on which it sat shaken back and forth, Billy’s “Italian” wig had begun to slide off, revealing his real hairstyle, dyed today a vivid turquoise. “You guys ain’t Gino Baglione and the Paisans!” (96)

This code is, perhaps, more recognizable and stereotypical, more “Hollywood”: it brings the character into focus based on precedents we have of criminal henchmen. For the purposes of this argument, however, it is more fitting to view Torpidini as a figure who can slide between styles as the occasion seems to warrant. It gives the character an extra dimension, just as the smooth rhetorical strategies of the punk rocker Isaiah give him more credibility as an individual. Isaiah, whose “jiveassing” we have already witnessed, ameliorates the situation here by confusing Carmine with a long flow of verbiage: “as a connoisseur and from the story your face seems to tell a recipient of some of Life’s hard knocks yourself, you can see the present crisis may not be worth emotional investment on the scale you contemplate . . .” (97). This discourse “hypnotizes” the “oversize gorilla,”

who goes away disappointed that a “multiple confrontation” has been avoided; the bride then saves the day by giving the band “a copy of the indispensable *Italian Wedding Fake Book*, by Deleuze & Guattari” (97). Perhaps the authors of that fictional but useful text suggest “continuous variation” as the main strategy for “faking” it.

Another unusual code switch occurs during Takeshi and DL’s account of what happened in Tokyo, the fatal case of sex and mistaken identity. The two consider “skip[ping] over the sex part” (149) in order to spare Prairie’s innocence, and when she protests, Takeshi obliges by erotically overlexicalizing the events leading up to his sexual encounter with DL. He describes, for example, entering a locked room: “Heedlessly then—fingering its smooth rigid contours, I—took the plastic card and—thrust it into the slot, shuddering as—something whined and the object was—abruptly sucked from my fingers” (150). Takeshi is clearly playing here, but the ease with which he negotiates this provocative discourse emphasizes the lasciviousness of his character (see 165, for example).

Pynchon has managed to make his characters recognizable without making them stereotypical. The ability to switch from style to style with ease and grace gives his characters the flexibility to define themselves in particular moments. A sense of “expressive intonation” (Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres” 85) is clear in the speech of Carmine Torpidini, Isaiah, Takeshi, and others. The particular way they use words—the “specific sense” (86) they give to them in these situations (threat, pacification, lasciviousness)—make of the words “utterances,” which for Bakhtin is the “*real unit* of speech communication” (71). The utterance has what the mere sentence or word lacks: “semantic fullness of value” (74); it elicits a response. Part of that response, I argue, is

our acknowledgement of the individuality of the speaker, a fundamental aspect of language in use; part of it, as well, is our desire to see beyond the surface meaning of words. Without a basic sense of intrigue regarding how language is used by characters, they are dead to us.

The mystery is heightened when characters possess the means to elude practical structures of meaning. When Ditzah Pisk suspects her phone conversation is being monitored, she speaks to her twin sister “in a strange personal code, kind of idolalia you find in twins, so I don’t know if anybody bugging us heard much” (263). In *Mao II*, Karen Janney discovers a whole society of homeless people who have their own language, perhaps akin to what Halliday calls an “antilanguage” (164ff):

The woman spoke out at her from inside the bag, spoke in raven song, a throttled squawk that Karen tried to understand. She realized she understood almost no one here, no one spoke in ways she’d ever heard before. The whole rest of her life had been one way of hearing and now she needed to learn another. It was a different language completely, unwritable and interior, the rag-speak of shopping carts and plastic bags, the language of soot, and Karen had to listen carefully to the way the woman dragged a line of words out of her throat like hankies tied together and then she tried to go back and reconstruct.

The woman seemed to be saying, “They have buses in this city that they crouch for wheelchairs. Give us ramps for people living in the street. I want buses that they crouch for us.”

She seemed to say, “I want my own blind dog that it’s allowed in the movies.”

But maybe it was something else completely. (180)

In order to comprehend, Karen has to unlearn the rigid language strictures and unifying principles which have indoctrinated her. It requires “a new way of hearing”; until she learns it, she will only “seem” to understand.

We might also say that engaging the texts of Pynchon and DeLillo requires a particular way of reading, a particular “literary competence,”<sup>112</sup> and more importantly a receptive way of listening to the characters within them. Amid the noise of the media in these texts, the references to commodities and sit-coms, commercials and lifestyle trends, muzak and corporate promise, existing alongside pervasive threat of technological surveillance and computerized databases, are individual voices. They are not quiet voices. Sometimes they utter obscenities, which can represent resistance;<sup>113</sup> they talk back; they argue and bicker. Not all are as vocal, perhaps, as Frenesi’s husband Flash, that “flaming and extravagant complainer, having learned how to use this aggressively, to negotiate for some of what he wanted from the world” (*Vineland* 73):

His whammy was indignation—believing he’d been injured, he was able with the force of his belief to convince strangers with no possible connection to the case at hand that they were guilty. Out on the highway, especially, he’d been known to go actively chasing down motorcycle police, forcing them over to the shoulder, jumping out to pick fights. . . . “Furthermore, just ’cause they let you ride around on this li’l—lookit this piece of shit, I seen mopeds’t could shut this ’sucker down, what *is* this,

who *makes* it, Fisher-Price? Mattel? Zis Barbie's Motorbike or some shit?" In some men such querulousness might indicate a soft streak a yard wide, but not in Flash, a vigilante of civil wrongs, settling things with his lethal and large-caliber mouth. (73-74; my ellipses)

A firm belief or principle, combined with a "lethal" use of language, can often help one to achieve just about anything. Flash puts his talent to use later in the novel to elicit funds from Roy Ibble, the government worker assigned to his case (353). Such a talent may also give one the means to reclaim one's own identity.

Most characters are not as "extravagant" as Flash, but they do have their moments. At the close of the novel, Prairie, as if drawing on all the rebellious back-talk of youth, defeats Brock Vond in his attempt to impose a patriarchal truth:

For a second it seemed he might hold her in some serpent hypnosis. But she came fully awake and yelled in his face, "Get the fuck out of here!"

"Hello, Prairie. You know who I am, don't you?"

She pretended to find something in the bag. "This is a buck knife. If you don't—"

"But Prairie, I'm your father. Not Wheeler—me. Your real Dad."

Nothing that hadn't occurred to her before—still, for half a second, she began to go hollow, *before remembering who she was*. "But you can't be my father, Mr. Vond," she objected, "my blood is type A. Yours is Preparation H." (376; emphasis added)

Her recognition of who she is, her sense of identity, is all she needs to banish Vond with a powerful utterance—not the blunt and mostly meaningless obscenity she screams at him

(although it is important in that it is her first, instinctual reaction), but rather the “complex insult” she delivers calmly, even politely. Despite the fact that she draws from a “commodified tubal language” for her rejoinder, she nevertheless “repudiate[s] the official Father” (Hite 148).

Several critics point out that Prairie’s rejection is not complete: after Vond is gone, she wishes him back (*Vineland* 384). Pynchon seems significantly to place this fantasy close to the end of the novel, as if to seed the ostensibly happy ending with the weeds of a dark complicity with the sado-sexual dominant power represented by Vond. Hanjo Berressem refers to Prairie’s “emptiness” when Brock is whisked away (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 235); Mark Robberds remarks that this expressed desire “does not sit very well with [N. Katherine Hayles’s] recuperative thesis” (243); Molly Hite worries that it represents “a deeply problematic concluding note that suggests complicity may be as ingrained and inherent as mortality” (141). Perhaps most strongly, Joseph Tabbi claims that “[t]o the end, she remains held by the same shadows and simulated passions that govern her mother” (“Pynchon’s Groundward Art” 97).<sup>114</sup>

Such assessments, although they do point to a problematic aspect of the novel’s conclusion, do not place enough value on how Prairie performs in the moment of the threat of abduction, her immediate impulse. True, it is not really her utterance which “causes” Brock’s expulsion, but her words do banish him symbolically. She rejects his claim to be her father; later, she fantasizes about him as a sexual being. She must know that there is no real possibility of his return: her “midnight summoning [will] go safely unanswered” (384). There is no real need for critical worry-mongering about the fact that

she envisions Vond as an object of desire: her desire is clearly her own business. More importantly, she has used language to assert herself against the patriarchy he represents.

The blunt use of language, however, is not all that makes up this linguistic counterforce, this uncentred space of random creativity, this discernable form of autonomous power. These characters are also capable of lyricism, beautiful and poignant utterances which, again, sometimes catch us off our guard. DeLillo's characters, according to Eugene Goodheart, demonstrate "extraordinary and eloquent plenitude of speech. Characters become meditative voices, capable of extended vatic aphorisms about the world" (121). Characters' engagement with the world in which they live, and with each other, is often at a significant level of awareness; they are seeking what DeLillo calls the "radiance in dailiness" (DeCurtis 63). Saltzman writes: "Tenor and vehicle—worldly origin and word-driven ambition—are interdependent components of successful metaphorical operations, which promise a livelier, more vivid transaction than what grocers or governments purvey" (819). The bright, cheap images of the television screen, along with the bright, cheap commodities offered by the consumer wasteland cannot, in the end, provide a viable substitute for individuals conscientiously searching for meaningful ways in which to express their selves. With unexpected moves they seek to avoid the pre-programmed routes society offers; with unanticipated linguistic maneuvers they circumvent the patterned discourses of the dominant order which seeks to inscribe them into a predictable lifestyle.

A lifestyle is not a life. In talking around the prescribed patterns, the postmodern subject discovers life and identity. James Axton, at the end of *The Names*, senses that language—"rich, harsh, mysterious, strong" (331)—is what an individual can "bring to the

temple” as an “offering.” This belief sums up “what DeLillo feels is immanent in language. Language is the organized utterance of mortals connecting themselves to other mortals” (Bonca 30). A stable identity begins with the self in its creative expression through language. Only through meaningful communication with others, though, is the self allowed to flourish as a recognized, independent, and free entity.

## Conclusion

In a recent critical study, Philip E. Simmons argues that in *Vineland* “we have characters in quest of deeper understanding of self and history. In each case that quest not only fails but fails in a way that lacks the kind of intensity we expect from modernist works” (14): even the failures of the postmodern subject fail. He also suggests that while “DeLillo’s characters are restless seekers of self,” the “televisual exposure . . . [they] suffer develops into a self consciousness that is not the development of a sustainable interiority but rather an emptying of the self into the domain of image production” (42). Other critics besides Simmons argue that technology and mass media culture have given rise to a stale system of clichés and impoverished language, and they tend not to give the same consideration to the creative possibilities of various situations and the language games which are in evidence in these texts. Television, computers, bureaucracies—all the elements of a system of organization, rationality, and simulation—have been raised to the level of a metaconceptual juggernaut, one which may blinker a cynical academic’s eye to the possibilities which still remain interlaced between the functionalist and dehumanizing forces within the text. These are human possibilities.

This thesis has been deliberately structured to leave the reader pondering those possibilities. The first several chapters have engaged the discourse of domination and of technological determinism: key concepts include dossier selves, technological interpellation (an

extension of Louis Althusser's original theory), digital information storage, digital "space," variety attenuation (a useful concept originating with Stafford Beer), mediation, surveillance, Baudrillard's notion of the "simulacrum," image-conditioning, the "invisible" and ubiquitous nature of technology (as perceived by Albert Borgmann and others), and the co-optation of all things spiritual and mysterious, including language. The "data" of one's life—actions, medical history, credit, sometimes even thought—are encoded and filed, becoming precedents which create expectations and which represent an official destiny, partly because, as Jacques Derrida suggests, a written sign remains as an iterable (reusable) trace of the subject in his or her absence. The elements listed here effectively create the subject of technology, a being caught in a double bind, "always already" complicitous with the forces of domination.

Despite this sense of eternal and pre-existing co-extension with the technological system of power, there is another force to be considered, which can be called—to counter-balance the "always already" of the critical theorist—the "sometimes presently" force of human values and human potential. It may be occasional, but its power should not be underestimated; it may not pre-exist the individual—tactics and creative linguistic practices must be learned—but when they appear, they help to sustain the individuality of the self. The fact that they are *learned*, that they develop from a human being engaging his or her environment, determining what is amiss, and acting in ways (bodily, communally, or linguistically) to correct a perceived discordance between self-fashioned identity and system-enforced identity, gives them a higher legitimacy. Strategies of resistance grow out of connections with others, in a space which is real, limitless, and full of new discursive possibilities. They are elements which contribute to

what Jean-François Lyotard calls *pétits récits*. They are part of a resistance toward abstract, bureaucratically defined spaces.

This study ends with a positive affirmation of the creative potential of the late twentieth-century Western subject. The self is more than a constructed image. The disruptions evident in the communications of these characters scatter the image and causes it to lose its focus, so that one may only make a vague tracing. This thesis has investigated the body's creative negotiations with reality, its movements, maneuvers and tactics; it has considered the "self"-sustaining potential of human community, the power of love and family; it has also explored linguistic strategies: polyphony, linguistic variation, new discourses, unexpected conversational "moves," movement between codes, demystifying approaches to established structures and epistemes, and the merging of language with physical reality. Used consciously, covertly, and without fear of reprisal, these tactics—Michel Foucault's "technologies of the self"—can help the individual to create a self-image untainted by invisible, governing forces.

Pynchon's latest novel, *Mason & Dixon*, is a text resonating with many of the same concerns investigated here. While there are no computers present in the eighteenth-century America of the novel, there is a concern with dossier selves. The Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, who narrates the tale, tells of his incarceration for daring to commit "the Crime they styl'd 'Anonymity'" in making public his accounts of oppression "by the Stronger against the Weaker" (9), as well as his subsequent realization that "my name had never been my own,—rather belonging, all this time, to the Authorities, who forbade me to change it, or withhold it, as 'twere a Ring upon the Collar of a Beast" (10). At another point in

the novel, Mason is “enter’d in the Records as a Person of Interest, thereby taking up residence, in a pen-and-paper way, in the Castle of the Compagnie” (59). This “entering” into the space of the dossier represents the individual’s entrance into a system of control, which two centuries later will find its ultimate manifestation in the abstract realm of the digital.

DeLillo’s recent fiction is also concerned with the effects of the dossier. I quote at length from a recent short story about J. Edgar Hoover, “The Black-and-White Ball”:

In the endless estuarial mingling of paranoia and control, the dossier was an essential device. Edgar had many enemies-for-life, and the way to deal with such people was to compile massive dossiers. Photographs, surveillance reports, detailed allegations, linked names, transcribed tapes—wiretaps, bugs, break-ins. The dossier was a deeper form of truth, transcending facts and actuality. The second you placed an item in the file, a fuzzy photograph, an unfounded rumor, it became promiscuously true. It was a truth without authority and therefore incontestable. Factoids seeped out of the file and crept across the horizon, consuming bodies and minds. The file was everything, the life nothing. And this was the essence of Edgar’s revenge. He rearranged the lives of his enemies, their conversations, their relationships, their very memories, and he made these people answerable to the details of his creation.

(82)

Hoover’s concept of the dossier illustrates what I have argued in earlier chapters: information begets identity, and allegations are legitimated by the mere fact of their documentation. “The file was everything, the life nothing,” according to Hoover. Does DeLillo believe that the

dossier “consum[es] bodies and minds”? It is unlikely that an author so concerned with the possibilities of language takes much stock in such a thing. Despite the fact that he maintains, in his latest novel *Underworld*, that a sense of paranoia “comes from the huge overarching presence of highly complex and interconnected technological systems,” and that “people lose a measure of conviction as technology becomes more powerful and more sophisticated” (Howard 15), DeLillo has consistently referred to language as a potent force. In several interviews he has discussed the pleasurable nature of writing (Remnick 44), its potential for “personal freedom” and individual survival amid mass culture (48), and its ultimate origin within the self:

I think my work comes out of the culture of the world around me. I think that’s where my language comes from. That’s where my themes come from. . . . But the work itself, you know—sentence by sentence, page by page—it’s much too intimate, much too private, to come from anywhere but deep within the writer himself. (47)

The self engages the culture, transforming perceptions into art. Because such writing activity inherently opposes “what power represents, and often what government represents, and what the corporation dictates, and what consumer consciousness has come to mean,” the writer may be perceived as a “bad citizen” (48). The pursuit of selfhood often entails opposing the state’s constructed images.

Most recently, in a CBC interview aired on November 20, 1997, DeLillo again spoke of the “beauty” of language being the primary motivating factor in his writing, an “obsession,” a “transcendence,” and an “enlightenment”: “I still feel that in my work, before history, before

politics, there is language.” Asked what he thought of the idea that the computer might one day “kill the novel,” he responded:

I think this is a sort of shallow conviction that people have. I think the novel continuously renews itself, and at some level while I was writing this book I honestly think that I was performing a personal act of faith in the novel itself, the form itself, the ever-challenging form that invites, encourages and finally dares a writer to extend his own limits.

Although Pynchon remains unheard over the airwaves and within the rapidly consumed forum of print media, we can certainly take *Mason & Dixon* as an example of his tacit agreement with DeLillo’s sentiment.

All people are language users; all have the drive for selfhood, for autonomy. In this respect, the fiction of Pynchon and DeLillo reveals the most dangerous threat to the self to be the technological other, a force becoming increasingly powerful, Wallace Stevens’ “rage for order” taken to its limit. The system assumes control, coding and ordering everything within its purview. Without denying that there is corruption in the hearts of some people, that some officials may have their own dark agendas, the greatest source of darkness in evidence in these texts can be traced back to a closed system which exercises the power to reduce life to a metanarrative, to restrict the freedoms of people by blinding them to possibility. Even villains like Brock Vond seem not so much personally as they are bureaucratically motivated. Vond is sadistic and “stupidly brutal” (*Vineland* 217), but he is also pathetic, a subject constructed as “the careful product of older men” (274); like any person he can be characterized as “unhappy”

(216), vulnerable (271), and plagued by anxieties and nightmares (274). Without excusing his behaviour, we can still recognize that he is, to some extent, constructed by the system.

As the measure of its influence increases, however, so too does the measure of human expression. Not in silence but rather with exuberant word choices, distorted communication, random code-switching, creative babbling, and tactile communication does the individual resist the reifying forces of technological subjectification. Postmodernism can have a human agenda if not a politics, and part of that agenda is to laugh in the face of definition—if only “sometimes, presently.” To discover that human motivation, one need only foreclose the gloomy discourses of subjectivity in favour of the human possibilities to be discovered in these texts, never with an eye for exhaustiveness but rather with an appeal to elusiveness.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This claim is based on the assumption that the file is not tampered with: one can, of course, imagine a scenario in which an individual's past is "changed" by someone manipulating personal records—a student hacking into school files to change grades, for example, or a corrupt official giving an enemy a criminal record.

<sup>2</sup> This is a form of oppression, according to Beer—to be robbed of credit is to be robbed of one's "good name" (94). See also Wicklein 3.

<sup>3</sup> Or at the very least a "strong totalitarian potential" (Lyon 53)

<sup>4</sup> See *Language and Symbolic Power* 72ff.

<sup>5</sup> Wicklein provides a lengthy study of the extent of this kind of database in his book *Electronic Nightmare*; see also Poster 70ff.

<sup>6</sup> Definitions of these two terms differ. W. Martin, for example, considers information to be "data processed into some useful form" (8).

<sup>7</sup> "Conversion" is an appropriate term, given that "identity" is transplanted, in a sense, from one "operating system" to another. I am not suggesting, however, that the complex of experience, disposition, birthright and potential which makes an identity is mere data to be converted. To call the *observed and recorded* experience and dispositions of the subject (the dossier) "identity" is to deny the flux and dynamism of the self.

<sup>8</sup> Borgmann uses this example in another work, "The Moral Significance of the Material Culture"; see also Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Dumouchel refers to this as “an elementary black-box theory of technology which defines a telephone or a battery by its input-output functions” (257). See also Turkle 272.

<sup>10</sup> Part of this simplification is due to the use of a non-ambiguous “linguistic form,” the encoding of symbols with ASCII without which the bureaucratic structures would be unable to monitor the citizenry (Poster 38).

<sup>11</sup> In English, “precession” is a specialized term having to do with how a cone is formed by forces acting on a spinning object (*Webster’s*). Perhaps the translator simply meant “a preceding”: the simulation *comes before* the real.

<sup>12</sup> In the hyperreal, we are able to hold on to the “myth” of reality through the establishment of sites of “deterrence” (such as Disneyland) which claim to be ostensibly “imaginary” or unreal “in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 13). Television is a primary deterrence mechanism in these texts. De Kerckhove sees television as “a collective organ of democracy” (xvii) and as representing our “collective imagination” (3). I, on the other hand, agree with Althusser that television is just a key means for the state to “cram . . . every ‘citizen’ with daily doses” of the dominant ideology (146); it works to render the subject as a simulation while claiming to provide an imaginary other.

<sup>13</sup> People will be happy to exist “in behind their futuristic technologies, behind their stores of information and inside the beehive networks of communication where time is at last wiped out by pure circulation” (*The Illusion of the End* 9).

<sup>14</sup> By “singularity” I believe Baudrillard means the state of being a distinct unit.

<sup>15</sup> Bukatman, drawing on Baudrillard, refers to such a process as an “implosion”: “the reduction of all things in the world to blips, to data, to the message units contained within the brain and its adjunct, the computer” (70). See also R. Cooper 279-280.

<sup>16</sup> See Wicklein 8ff.

<sup>17</sup> Althusser recognizes the ambiguity of the term “free subject” (169).

<sup>18</sup> I make no claim to “define” such a thing as the “soul” or essential self. Indeed, I am arguing that to equate such a thing with a D.I.S. profile diminishes the self.

<sup>19</sup> We might also characterize them as “analogue.” Wilden writes: “Denotations and literal significances in language are predominantly digital, as are naming and definition: these are all well-bounded terms reminiscent of Descartes’ ideal of ‘clear and distinct ideas.’ Connotations and meanings, however, including metaphors and other figures of speech, and of course rhetoric and poetic diction, are predominantly analog and iconic: these are loosely bounded terms reminiscent of Pascal’s preference for the ‘esprit de finesse’ over the ‘esprit de géométrie’” (224). One could make a clear connection between D.I.S.—digital, definitive, well-bounded, “clear and distinct”—and a self-governed, dynamic identity, analog, poetic, loosely-bounded, and free in the use of tropes to keep experience variable. See also Wilden 225.

<sup>20</sup> Attempts have been made, however. Madsen, for example, quite convincingly writes: “The need to develop new systems of representation that liberate the text, history and the individual subject from the ‘tyranny of the signified’ is matched by a desire to create new uses of language and structures of knowledge with which to define the postmodern awareness of a pervasive discontinuity” (123).

<sup>21</sup> See John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, and John Searle, *Speech Acts*.

<sup>22</sup> This is essentially LeClair’s view as well, but it is criticized by Schaub, who writes, “I can’t see what good it does to distract our attention from politically motivated mystery-creation to the (existential) mystery of our being. [¶] All of which makes me

wonder about the ideological implications of DeLillo's aesthetic intention to create mystery" (131). Most of a colonizing force's power comes from its "unknowability."

<sup>23</sup> "The Firm" in *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose "mandate is 'non-being'" (Tanner 79).

<sup>24</sup> Booker argues that *Vineland* is essentially a dystopian novel because it portrays "a place where huge, impersonal forces have subtly gained the power to dictate the courses of individual lives" (5). Karpinski is another who sees the novel as dystopian (38).

<sup>25</sup> On paranoia stemming from the apprehension of near-omnipotent "shadowy figures," see Sanders 139-40; Slade 69, 72; and Tabbi, "Pynchon's Groundward Art" 90.

<sup>26</sup> See also Siegel 94.

<sup>27</sup> This is basically Leverenz's argument as well (229-30), though a great many critics still seek in Pynchon's novels self-motivated characters who are interested in understanding how they are controlled and in creating means of autonomy.

<sup>28</sup> See also Clerc 12.

<sup>29</sup> *White Noise* is thus a work which plays with "the classic naturalist vision" (103); see Civello 123.

<sup>30</sup> Bureaucratic language also makes use of acronyms, which seem concise but are highly elliptical: "The inconceivable bureaucracies, corporate conglomerates, and technological systems of our modern pantheon become both familiar and mysterious in their acronymic garbs," writes Foster (157-8), citing the CIA as an example. In DeLillo's *Ratner's Star*, the protagonist Billy is harassed by a company called ACRONYM, which has tapped into the powerful computer which resides in the complex in which he works, and has thereby accessed information about him. DeLillo clearly means for us to see the

company's name as an ironic comment about acronyms, pseudo-words which have mysterious but powerful meanings. See Keesey's relevant discussion in *Don DeLillo*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Aaron 80; Civello 158-59; Crowther 92; Lentricchia 203ff; Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime* 190. Strictly speaking, Civello does not refer to the conspirator's remaking of Oswald's identity; rather Oswald's consciousness is "effaced by the cultural matrix," which "encodes" his identity. See also Carmichael.

<sup>32</sup> See Bukatman 26.

<sup>33</sup> Callens writes: "the media foster a regression to infantilism which threatens to dissolve the difference between the self and the other, or between reality and fiction" (135). If an artificial "other" can substitute for that which one encounters in life, the State can too easily direct the identificatory life of the individual. Consider also McHale, who argues that TV distracts our attention away from "our revolutionary aspirations" and, "perhaps even more sinisterly, from the natural world, here, as everywhere in Pynchon, an unequivocally positive value, so that whatever intrudes upon nature or obscures our vision of it must presumably be negatively valued" (123). See also Slade 76.

<sup>34</sup> See LeClair, *In the Loop* 230. "Panasonic" appears on page 241 of the novel.

<sup>35</sup> That is, it creates a simulated reality. Several critics take the Baudrillardian approach in their discussions of the novel. A typical example is Wilcox's article.

<sup>36</sup> See also Moses 77.

<sup>37</sup> See also "'Forward Retreat'" 365ff. Many of these articles seem somewhat ambiguous. Berressem's Lacanian approach insists on the complicity of the subject, but at the same time does not rule out other possibilities. Neither does Hite, who writes that in

*Vineland* “complicity is a fact of life, but it is not inevitable any more than it is always advertent” (147). Hite clearly argues for the potential freedom of these characters.

<sup>38</sup> Booker makes a similar point: “the kinds of selves available to us are also limited by the constraints imposed on individuals by the institutions, conventions and expectations of society at large” (6).

<sup>39</sup> He also writes: “In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government” (9).

<sup>40</sup> In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin calls discourse which is heteroglossic, representing social diversity, “centrifugal”—it tends away from the “centre.” “Centripetal” language, on the other hand, is monologic, unitary, centralized, official (270ff).

<sup>41</sup> I made reference, above, to DeLillo’s original title for *White Noise*. “Panasonic” was scrapped when “the Matsushita Corporation refused permission” (Keesey, *Don DeLillo* 8). What better example is there of corporate ownership of the word?

<sup>42</sup> See also Oriard 13. Morris calls euphemism the use of “bland, smooth, and inoffensive language” for the “concealment of evil” (121).

<sup>43</sup> For example, Booker argues that there are “hints in *Vineland* that drugs function as a tool of official power, not as a subversion of it” (32); Madsen argues that, in general, “the forms of nonconformity and rebellion have already been taken into account and neutralized by the ‘establishment’” (127). “In the consumer society,” writes Thoreen, “[r]evolutionary aims are transformed into just another commodity” (60).

<sup>44</sup> See also Becke and Vanderbeke 63-64, Bumás 171, P. Cooper 86, and Tanner 20; DeLillo is similar to Pynchon in “his sympathy for the maimed, the disfigured, and the excluded people in his novels” (Aaron 68).

<sup>45</sup> In fact, such totalizing discourses “produce” these “excluded middles,” according to Madsen (123).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Berressem, ““Forward Retreat”” 368; Slade 69; Duvall 127.

<sup>47</sup> See Keesey’s discussion in *Don DeLillo* 145, 179-80.

<sup>48</sup> Hinds provides a detailed analysis of this incident (99).

<sup>49</sup> See Callens 127 and Berressem, *Pynchon’s Poetics* 223.

<sup>50</sup> The cult chooses a victim whose initials match those of his or her community.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the “television world” in Pynchon, see McHale 116ff; regarding television in DeLillo, see for example Duvall.

<sup>52</sup> This fast-food establishment is a good example of precisely the kind of spirituality co-opted by Western consumerism.

<sup>53</sup> Thoreen points out that the two career choices are not really that different: “In the consumption economy, movie production and law enforcement are complements: people who are watching do not need to be watched” (60).

<sup>54</sup> Zoyd’s transfenestration as a media spectacle has been amply discussed: see Berressem, “Forward Retreat” 362 and *Pynchon’s Poetics* 202, 205; Booker 13; Callens 117-18; Cornis-Pope 86; Gochenour 173; Hayles, “Who Was Saved?” 24; Madsen 132; Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 178; McHale 115-16; Pitmann 45-46; Safer 48-49; Tabbi, “Pynchon’s Groundward Art” 98; Thoreen 54.

<sup>55</sup> See Duvall 130-34 for a lengthy discussion of this incident.

<sup>56</sup> S. Ames writes: “The surface of Pynchon’s novel obsessively, distractingly (distressingly to some), bears witness to the impact of media and popular culture” (115); complicity with the state’s culture machine is “operative in *Vineland*’s mode of writing” according to Berressem (*Pynchon’s Poetics* 236); Cowart thinks that “the density of reference to the ephemera of popular culture is almost numbing” (7); these allusions “lack any historical, literary, or mythic richness. They were out of date, if not obsolete, by the time the book hit the stores” (Chambers 191)—which greatly overstates the case; McHale thinks the novel needs to be “redeemed” “from its debilitating association with TV ephemera” (121); Slade believes that “the references to television shows . . . are numerous enough to turn off academic audiences” (68)—which is clearly not the case. Booker, on the other hand, argues that the allusions suggest “the creative possibilities in an active reclamation of popular culture for the populace it supposedly serves” (20), and Burnas finds these references “enriching” (170). DeLillo earns the same kind of criticism: “the subtle devices DeLillo uses to document our insecurity are as insidious as white noise itself” (Bryant 158); LeClair suggests that *White Noise* could be seen as “a novelistic heap of waste” (*In the Loop* 212).

<sup>57</sup> Frenesi’s mother talks about how life during the blacklist period was “no more worthy of respect than the average movie script”; significantly she compares the situation to a silent movie: “heartfelt language gets pounded flat when it isn’t just removed forever” (81). Yet, how does she temper her anger? With a “deliberate cool flippancy learned from watching Bette Davis movies” (81). See Chambers 195; Cornis-Pope 86; Pittman 46.

<sup>58</sup> Wilde reads the use of “perilously” as evidence of something that “contravene[s] the possibilities of unity” (177). I see no reason why it cannot be read, alternatively, as suggestive of the pain of lost years and past mistakes.

<sup>59</sup> Consider also the image of JFK in *Libra*, which “floats through television screens into bedrooms at night” to become “the object of a thousand longings” (324).

<sup>60</sup> See also *Pynchon’s Poetics* 205 and McHale 118.

<sup>61</sup> Compare this episode to a similar one in *Libra*. Seeing herself on a department store monitor, Marina Oswald is unable to reconcile the screen image with reality (227).

<sup>62</sup> For discussion, see Duvall 133-35; LeClair, *In the Loop* 217; Osteen 153; Reeve and Kerridge 310. Compare also the words of the SIMUVAC coordinator for “Advanced Disaster Management”: “The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we’ll be from the real thing. Life seems to work that way, doesn’t it?” (205).

<sup>63</sup> Critics are divided as to whether or not Thanatoids are really “dead.” Safer suggests that they are only dead insofar as they “epitomize a loss of humanity to the machine” (52; see also S. Ames 118; Karpinski 41; Wilde 171; Tabbi, “Pynchon’s Groundward Art” 95), while Pitmann, arguing that they are dead, somewhat harshly criticizes those readers like Hayles who don’t agree (47), as does Hite (151n.19). Hawthorne sits on the fence, calling them “ambiguous” (81); Jenkins suggests that they exist in “the boundary between life and death” (108; see also McHale 118, 140), although what this means is not clear. For more discussion, see Callens 137-38 and Hite 151n.19

<sup>64</sup> Bukatman argues that such technology moves “outside of the human experiences of space and time” (2).

<sup>65</sup> See Thoreen 59. Compare Jack Gladney's reference to his ex-wife, who belongs to an ashram: "Her name is Mother Devi now. She operates the ashram's business activities. Investments, real estate, tax shelters. It's what Janet has always wanted. Peace of mind in a profit-oriented context" (*White Noise* 87).

<sup>66</sup> Chambers makes a similar claim, although she focuses on how commercialization "dilutes" the sacred (194).

<sup>67</sup> Consider also her daughter Prairie's musings about a ghost as being "responsive totally to the needs of the still-living, needs like keystrokes entered into [its] world" (114).

<sup>68</sup> God and computer are also aligned in *The Crying of Lot 49*, when the hairspray can caroms around the bathroom at Echo Courts: "The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel" (37).

<sup>69</sup> The character of Nicholas Branch is DeLillo's vehicle to provide a sense of the sheer volume of what "they" know (e.g. 181-2, 301, 378, 441). The small room in which he sits, filling up with paper documents, is a physical contrast to the limitless document universe of the Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>70</sup> Compare Gladney's description of "College-on-the-Hill" students in *White Noise*: "There is an element of overrefinement and inbreeding. Sometimes I feel I've wandered into a Far Eastern dream, too remote to be interpreted. But it is only the language of the economic class they are speaking, in one of its allowable outward forms" (41).

<sup>71</sup> See Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics* 206.

<sup>72</sup> There are several discussions of this topic. See, for example, Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics* 206, 233; Booker 15; Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 198n. 25; Slade 74.

<sup>73</sup> He returns as a Thanatoid. There is evidence in the text to suggest that he does not die in the murder attempt (233, 246), although Berressem believes he does (“Forward Retreat” 364 n.14), as do Callens (131), Hite (142), Thoreen (159), McHale (138), and others. These critics refer to the “loss of spirit that could almost be seen on film . . . some silvery effluent, vacating his image, the real moment of his passing” (*Vineland* 246) as evidence that Weed’s soul has departed him. I think, however, that Pynchon here means to suggest a “film death” only; Weed “dies” in the sense that his betrayal is caught on film, and although we have an image of a fallen Weed (246), the “real moment of his passing” is more likely only a “reel” moment; what he “passes” into is a new existence as a Thanatoid.

<sup>74</sup> In *Libra*, David Ferrie makes a similar assertion: “They’re on you like the plague. Once you’re in the files, they never leave you alone. They stick to you like cancer” (45).

<sup>75</sup> Hector has tried to “develop [Zoyd] as a resource” for several years. Zoyd refers to his own resistance to this appropriation as his “virginity” (12, 295, 303). Hayles explores this metaphor at length (16). On the idea of human life reduced to resource, see also DeLillo’s *Running Dog* 183-84.

<sup>76</sup> Later, she positions herself where she knows he will find her, at her mother’s home, where all the machinery of surveillance is in place so that she will “be seen, and seen by him” (282).

<sup>77</sup> Babette's appearance on the television screen in *White Noise* is also described as "timeless" (104).

<sup>78</sup> Prairie's search could be analyzed in terms of Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope," a technique "for reflecting and artistically processing such appropriated aspects of reality" as time and space ("Chronotope" 84).

<sup>79</sup> Later, watching film footage taken by her mother, Prairie tries to imagine herself in the place of Frenesi, allowing herself to become "ghostly light of head" and, "mediated by projector and screen," establish contact with her mother (199). This may be a more "direct" connection, because the images are Frenesi's and therefore suggest who she is—but it is still a mediated connection. We must consider that the camera's truth is really just one example of the "many framings" which hinder one's apprehension of the real "human story" (Cornis-Pope 87); also, the images can only present a limited idea of who Frenesi is (or was)—not other things she might have been, not what she might have become.

<sup>80</sup> See Porush, "Purring" 41; Hayles "Who Was Saved" 25; Tabbi, "Pynchon's Groundward Art" 94.

<sup>81</sup> Visiting Zoyd in his cell (Zoyd has just been set up for drug possession), Vond gives him an ultimatum: as long as Zoyd stays away from Frenesi, he can live with his daughter as a free man (or as free as one can be in a state of constant surveillance).

<sup>82</sup> Shortly after a sixties miracle, in which, "[l]ike loaves and fishes, the hand-rolled [marijuana] cigarettes soon began to multiply" (206), Atman, whose name in Hindu means Brahma, or "the supreme universal self" (*Webster's*), is "chosen" (207) to lead the students away from a police raid.

<sup>83</sup> During another SIMUVAC exercise, volunteers are told, “you’re not here to scream or thrash about. We like a low-profile victim. This isn’t New York or L.A.” (206).

<sup>84</sup> For more discussion of this shopping incident, see Duvall 136-38; Ferraro 21-24, Keeseey, *Don DeLillo* 138-39; LeClair, *In the Loop* 215.

<sup>85</sup> Later this kind of drug community will band together and practice countersurveillance to stay one step ahead of DEA agents advancing on their hidden marijuana fields (221).

<sup>86</sup> Lentricchia prefers to read a pun on “panorama”: “What we see from a Dylaramic perspective is everyday life in America as a 360-degree display of what are called ‘controlled substances,’ America as the culture of the Dylar effect” (“Tales” 103).

<sup>87</sup> Eating could be considered one of the kinds of “consumption” de Certeau has in mind. Gladney comments on both his son Heinrich’s eating habits (174-75) and those of his son’s friend Orest Mercator (265, 267).

<sup>88</sup> I am indebted to McConnell for this quotation.

<sup>89</sup> A common complaint with *Vineland* is its so-called lack of “high culture” or “poetry” (for example, Chambers x-xi, 186, 202; Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime* 125), although Bumas finds “Pynchon’s polyphony” to be “enriched” by the same pop culture discourses those critics disparage.

<sup>90</sup> Others, such as Pittman (47) and Wilde (177), find the passage suspect or overstated.

<sup>91</sup> See also P. Cooper 105; Tabbi, “Pynchon’s Groundward Art” 99; Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 166. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Roger Mexico thinks about “the

failed Counterforce” and realizes that “We will help to legitimize Them, though They don’t need it really, it’s another dividend for Them, nice but not critical” (713).

<sup>92</sup> Olderman calls such individuals “freaks,” distinguishing them from “straights,” who are “[d]efenders of the old world view . . . equated with the Father, with Patriarchy, with the ‘White Metropolis,’ with the Man, with Them.” Freaks, on the other hand, are associated with “multiple perspectives” (202), balance, possibility (205), action, “the continuance of life and the secret preservation of alternate realities” (206).

<sup>93</sup> Pynchon’s use of punctuation to suggest Takeshi’s inflections works very well, not only to render his speech authentic, but also to suggest a vitality and playfulness in language rather lacking in the homogenized voice of the Man’s representatives.

<sup>94</sup> Several critics see *Vineland* as a departure from Pynchon’s earlier novels, seeing within it the possibility of reclaiming autonomy through family (see, for example, Connor 73, 80; Hayles “Who Was Saved” 29n.9; Tabbi *Postmodern Sublime* 124).

<sup>95</sup> Pittman, as well, warns against an optimistic appraisal of family in the novel (41).

<sup>96</sup> On the family reunion in *Vineland* see Berressem *Pynchon’s Poetics* 202; Callens 127; Chambers 199, 206; Connor 72, 77; Cornis-Pope 87; Gochenour 179; Hayles 26; Hinds 94; Karpinski 40; Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists* 183; McHoul 98; Olster 131; Piela 126; Safer 60; Wilde 175-6.

<sup>97</sup> Prairie is interested in finding her own face in the faces of her parents.

<sup>98</sup> They awaken to Bach’s “Wachet Auf” played through “wristwatches, timers, and personal computers” (324). Cowart sees this as clearly parodic (“Attenuated Postmodernism” 7); Hite, however, refutes his opinion (149 n.3). Among other things, she cites the text itself: the music is “not the usual electronic stuff—this had soul”

(*Vineland* 325). Again, music is able to transcend its electronic purveyance, so that the message, not the medium, holds sway.

<sup>99</sup> See Becke and Vanderbeke 70ff, Callens 129, Hawthorne 87, Hite 148, and Tanner 32. Maltby discusses a similar theme in DeLillo's works ("Romantic Metaphysics" 267-68).

<sup>100</sup> Hawthorne provides a detailed discussion of *Vineland* (78-80). See also Connor 72-73, Karpinski 40, Safer 49-50, Solomon 165.

<sup>101</sup> In this respect I concur with Lyon, who wants "to hold onto the notion of humans as self-communicating creatures as being crucial to personhood" (192), and Porush, who insists that "in a world where computers seem to have nothing forbidden to them, the enriched, spontaneous and playful way that humans regularly and almost unthinkingly live inside their language represents the last bunker where those who fear the machine have taken their stand" (6).

<sup>102</sup> Polyglossia refers to a discursive field characterized by a multiplicity of language styles or codes; Heteroglossia is a practical (and tactical) employment of the knowledge that any utterance or word changes meaning depending on context. These definitions are found in the "Glossary" in the back of Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*.

<sup>103</sup> Barnett would likely see this disruption as a manifestation of how "technique" "becomes the ideology of postmodern fiction not only as the perfection of art for art's sake . . . but as a further, more radical response to the ongoing thrust of modern technology towards dehumanization and to the continuing crisis of institutional authority" (195). Maltby calls it "unwriting," fiction which "can be productively read as a powerful

source of resistance to the force of late capitalism's hegemonic discourses" (*Dissident Postmodernists* 187).

<sup>104</sup> Even Chambers, who is adamant in her claim that *Vineland* reveals how language has become diminished, allows that Pynchon "sprinkl[es] it periodically with the 'secret retributions' (*VL*, 369) of pun, sophisticated vocabulary, and poetry" (106).

<sup>105</sup> "But we watch a lot of tube"; "Easy for you to say."

<sup>106</sup> Bonca, as well as Maltby in "Romantic Metaphysics," both discuss glossolalia at length. Foster writes that glossolalia produces an "ecstasy": "It is the brain's speech-maker producing its stuff without any allegiance to a symbolic order, without reference, and yet it is accompanied by an ecstatic sense of immediate contact with reality" (166).

<sup>107</sup> See Bonca 35 and Maltby, "Romantic Metaphysics" 266. Saltzman also responds with a metaphysical interpretation, but does not believe that Gladney is truly "enlightened"; rather he remains "distant to the sublimity," and is actually only expressing the very same sense of awe that he does when faced by the media and by consumerism, which can be harmful: "Saturation by awe renders us immune to alert" (816).

<sup>108</sup> See LeClair's discussion (*In the Loop* 190).

<sup>109</sup> One might argue that Gray's handwriting, in spite of its untidy appearance, would be more honest, closer to the human motivating it, whereas the typewriter mechanically makes the letters uniform. The machine, however, facilitates the writer's entry into the "character world" whereby he can make contact with an image of the prisoner, so the distinction between cursive and type is not significant to this argument. The machine in this case is clearly a tool, and poses no threat to Bill's identity.

<sup>110</sup> Becke and Vanderbeke point out that their use of the theme song is anachronistic (the show first aired in 1989); they also suggest that Vato and Blood, the “helpers and mediators” of Vineland, are “time transcending” (75).

<sup>111</sup> Later, Torpidini has no problem at all initiating what Brown and Levinson call a “face threatening act”—although he threatens to initiate it a little more literally.

<sup>112</sup> This term was invented by Jonathan Culler to suggest a set of “conventions” for reading literature; as Cohen and Shires point out, “one must acquire knowledge of formal conventions” (22).

<sup>113</sup> See for example Christopher Ames.

<sup>114</sup> For more discussion of Prairie’s disturbing desire for Brock’s return, refer to Callens 127; Chambers 204; Hinds 100; Slade 87; and Thoreen 61.

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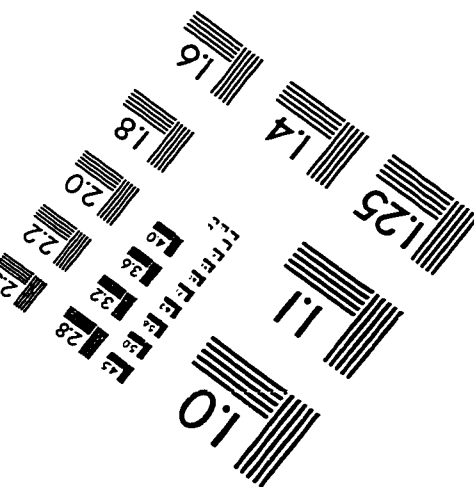
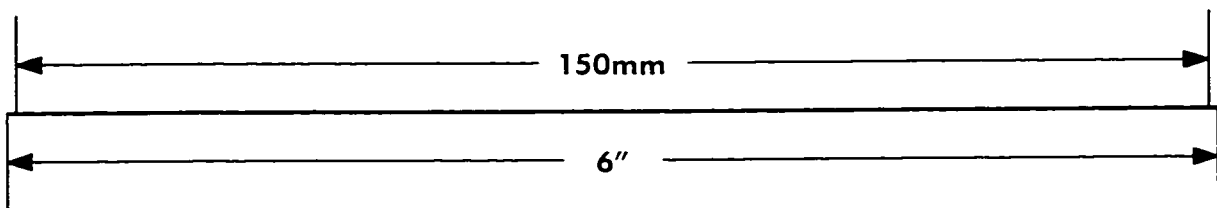
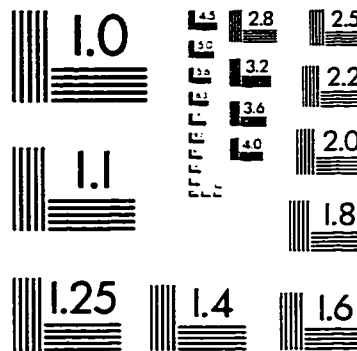
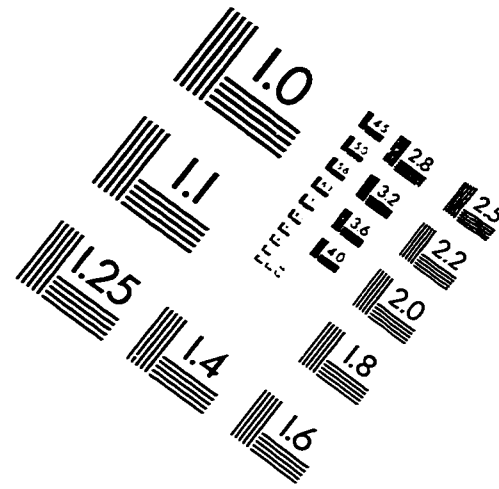
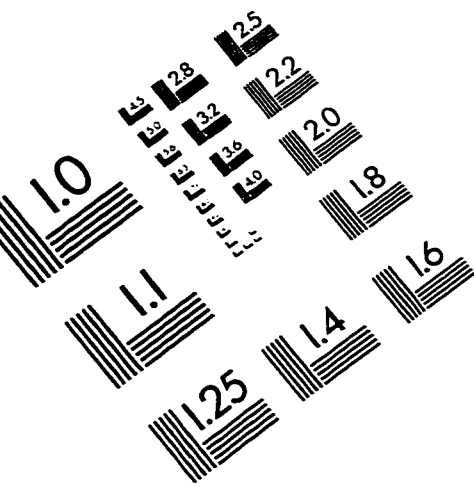
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