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DON DELILLO AND THE HARBINGERS OF MORTALITY

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RESUMO
O objetivo do presente texto é capturar os sinais e contingências que podem dificultar e impedir o progresso de um escritor. A relevância de Don DeLillo para a literatura mundial é apresentada e corroborada por uma lista comentada dos prêmios recebidos pelo autor e dos temas abordados individualmente em suas obras. O texto também discute os predecessores de DeLillo, as raízes históricas de seu tipo de representação realista da sociedade contemporânea e as sementes de seu estilo de escrita pós-moderno. A parte final traz um quadro geral dos sintomas como evidenciados pelos argumentos que seus críticos oferecem para consideração. O texto conclui reconhecendo os efeitos colaterais de escrever com tamanha profusão, intensidade e diversidade.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Don DeLillo; reconhecimento literário; temas na literatura; crítica negativa.

ABSTRACT
The aim of the present text is to capture the signs and contingencies that may hamper and prevent a writer's progress. It acknowledges Don DeLillo's relevance to world literature, corroborated by an informed listing of the awards the author has received and of the themes approached in his individual novels. The text also discusses DeLillo's predecessors, the historical roots of his kind of realistic portrayal of contemporary society and the seeds to his post-modern writing style. The final part brings an outline of the symptomatic evidence as shaped by the arguments that critics offer for consideration. The text concludes by acknowledging the side-effects of writing with such profusion, intensity and diversity.
KEYWORDS
Don DeLillo; literary acknowledgement; themes in literature; negative criticism.

Don DeLillo is nowhere near entering the list of underappreciated writers; that dreaded list that has once relegated foremost writers, the likes of Richard Yates, Shirley Jackson, Gerard Donovan, Georgette Heyer, Anya Seton, Charles M. Doughty, and Anthony Hecht, into oblivion. Either haphazardly or surreptitiously contrived, the list of the world's most undeservingly *hyped* authors — who often are literature's hidden gems — is often generated accompanied by typical symptomatic evidence, and is historically influenced by certain unsettling effects that have, more than once, undermined and eroded illustrious careers.

As I said, Don DeLillo is nowhere near entering that list of half-forsaken writers, but the symptoms in attendance are distinctly perceptible. There are certain critical contingencies that must be paid attention; certain jurisprudent signs that urge caution. The aim of the present text is to capture these signs and contingencies. So as to better administer this task, for reasons of both pedagogy and clearness, it has been divided into three parts.

The first part intends to acknowledge Don DeLillo's relevance to world literature and to inquire as to why he has not received attention from Brazilian specialized academic circles — this section's argumentative character is corroborated by an informed listing of the awards the author has received to the present and earnestly entreats for an investigation — for better or worse — of the ramifications and ideological implications of his recognition.

The second part discusses the predecessors of DeLillo's enterprise, the historical roots of his kind of realistic portrayal of contemporary society and the seeds to his post modern writing style. Furthermore, the author's remarkable scope is observed through the presentation of the themes as provided in each of the author's individual novels.

And the third and final part brings an outline of the symptomatic evidence that hampers and prevents an author's full appreciation, and from enjoying critical acclaim and academic recognition. It is shaped by approaching the arguments that each individual critic offers for consideration. There, their

arguments must be construed not so much by virtue of what they openly state but of what they imply. This section expands on the idea that negatively misguided criticism can lead to career suicide, or, in a worst case scenario, career assassination. Finally, the text concludes by acknowledging the dangers and side-effects of writing with so much profusion, intensity and diversity, and closes the argumentative circle by interlacing the symptoms with the adverse consequences of being black-listed.

Of presentations and recognition

Once acknowledged that Don DeLillo's relevance to world literature is of great consequence, one is free to inquire as to why he has not received attention from Brazilian specialized academic circles, while international critics — as well as critics from his own country — have hailed him as "one of the most significant American novelists" and positioned his "postmodern masterpieces *White Noise* and *Underworld* among the great books of the 20th century" (CAESAR, 2010, p.1).

Born in 1936 in the Bronx, New York, and educated at Fordham University, DeLillo is part of the select group — of which Toni Morrison is included — of the most awarded living literary figures. As far as 2010, Don DeLillo had published sixteen novels, four stage plays, a screenplay and several significant essays.

He is the recipient of great many awards. In 2010 alone he received two of the most prestigious contemporary prizes bestowed to distinguished literary talents, the *St. Louis Literary Award*, conferred to prominent figures in literature, yearly presented by the Saint Louis University Library Associates and the *PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction*, awarded by the PEN American Center to "a distinguished living American author of fiction whose body of work in English possesses qualities of excellence, ambition, and scale of achievement over a sustained career which place him or her in the highest rank of American literature" (GARDNER, 2002, p.1). In the previous

year, DeLillo was granted the 2009 *Common Wealth Award of Distinguished Service*, presented by PNC Bank, in Wilmington, Delaware, for his achievements in literature.

Many other awards and nominations were presented the previous years; the most relevant include the *William Dean Howells Medal* and the *"Riccardo Bacchelli" International Award* in 2000; his novel *Underworld* earned him nominations for the *National Book Award*, and the *New York Times Best Books of the Year*, the latter of which was conferred in 1997; he received his second *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction* nomination in 1998 (the first being for *Mao II* in 1992). *Underworld* went on to win the 1998 *American Book Award* and the 1999 *Jerusalem Prize* — the latter being granted for the first time to an American. Before that, he had earned the *PEN/Faulkner Award*; the *Irish Times Aer Lingus International Fiction Prize* for the novel *Libra*, in 1989; the *National Book Award* for *White Noise*, in 1985; and the *Award in Literature* from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, in 1984.

One can now, authoritatively enough, affirm, with abundant evidence to uphold the validity of their claim, that an author of the stature of DeLillo does deserve some attention from Brazilian Academia. The fact that this is not so is to be, hopefully, remedied by the present enterprise. The real outcome will only be reaped as his canonical status becomes clearer in the coming years.

The list-related outward signs mentioned in the introduction attest for the necessity that an earnest investigation impels, that is, the search for the ramifications and ideological implications of this recognition; and that is the subject matter of the following section.

On variety and scope

Due recognition apart, one must turn to the sources, and thus discuss the predecessors of DeLillo's enterprise, the historical roots of his kind of realist portrayal of contemporary society and the seeds to his post modern writing style. Furthermore, the author's remarkable scope is to be observed through

the presentation of the themes as provided in each of the author's individual novel.

A sound place to start is to think back to the early characteristics of the Realist tradition, and its purpose to *map the terrain* — to use Brown University Professor Arnold Weinstein's metaphor. A map of the terrain is meant to uncover the social, the political, the cultural and/or the economical artifacts that make up the events in the readers world, of his or her *status quo*. Aiming at better visualizing the Realist agenda for the present purpose, one should follow the paths of DeLillo's predecessors, e.g., Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, in France and, Charles Dickens, in Britain.

In France, Balzac divided his enormous range of novels into very specific structures and categories. He claimed his goal was to rival with the *état civil*, in other words, to have a literary output so faithful to reality that could really rival with the official documents that usually register history. He wrote numerous books about scenes of life in the provinces, scenes of Parisian life, scenes of military life, and this organization was meant to convey the sense that the author was attempting to give his readers the most complete composite portrait of the events that were occurring in France in that period. His country was rapidly changing — he was writing at the particular moment when industrial capitalism was altering French society and consequently the values that were, not long before, taken for granted (WEINSTEIN, 1997).

Zola attempted something similar and did his own share of mapping the terrain by dedicating each one of his novels to a theme, which would ultimately contribute to the understanding of the country he was trying to portray. There was a novel dedicated to prostitution, another to alcoholism, to department stores, to art, to architecture; he seemed to be always trying to come up with the most accurate picture of what the current state of events was at each particular moment in each of those arenas. And that is also the backdrop for what Dickens was trying to accomplish with his own England (WEINSTEIN, 1997).

At roughly the same time, Dickens was writing not so much to write about fictional individuals, but also about the inevitable changes which were taking place in his country's modern economy. In the novel *Great Expectations*, published in serial form from 1860 to 1861, Dickens was not writing only about Pip, but about the nature of a *sell-out*, or what it meant to be one in his modern urban economy. Dickens was asking the most fundamental questions, for example, what does it take to make it in London? How much does one have to give up? In the novel *Bleak House*, published between 1852 and 1853, Dickens's effort seems to be even greater towards mapping the city, which was growing beyond the comprehension of its own inhabitants, and Dickens was doing a public service at describing this unknown and mysterious London, unknown to the very readers of that moment, who were reading Dickens's installments in order to gain a better grasp of the very city whose streets they were walking (WEINSTEIN, 1997).

With these insights, one can begin to understand DeLillo's enterprise. Following the footsteps of his predecessors, DeLillo's variety of interest is not only quite impressive but his dominion of the subjects he proposes to write about, as we will see, is truly remarkable. Clearly with a Realist's drive, DeLillo has dedicated each of his novels to a variety of distinct subjects, making himself a chronicler of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

His subjects vary as much as professional football, professional mathematics, wall street, rock music, pornography, cults, terrorism, espionage, college campus, nuclear threat, the Kennedy assassination, television, the complexities of language, performance art, the Cold War, the advent of the digital age, among others. Let us see each one of them — tackled solely in his full-length novels — individually.

DeLillo's first novel, *Americana*, published in 1970, concerns a former television network programmer that is trying to become an avant-garde filmmaker and creates an autobiographical road-movie. His second novel, *End Zone*, published in 1972, is an American college football/nuclear war black

comedy. His third novel is the rock-and-roll satire *Great Jones Street,* published in 1973. *Ratner's Star*, DeLillo's fourth novel, published in 1976, is a picaresque story of a 14-year-old math genius who joins an international team of scientists in order to decode an alien message. The 1977 novel *Players* tells of a young yuppie couple and the adventures that follow from their getting involved with a cell of domestic terrorists. *Running Dog*, from 1978, was a mock pornographic thriller that accompanied a series of individuals in their hunt for a celluloid reel allegedly containing Hitler's sexual exploits. Published in 1980, the sports novel *Amazons* is a mock *memoir* of the first woman to play in the National Hockey League. *The Names*, published in 1982, is a complex thriller that tells the story of a risk analyst whose paths are crossed by a cult of assassins in a Middle Eastern environment.

The 1985 novel *White Noise* explores several themes that emerged during the mid-to-late twentieth century, e.g., Hitler studies, chemical spills (an Airborne Toxic Event), anger, paranoia, experimental drugs, fear of death, absurdity and "the quality of daily existence in a media-saturated, hyper-capitalistic postmodern America" (GROSSMAN, 2005, p.1). The novel also captures "rampant consumerism, media saturation, novelty intellectualism, underground conspiracies, the disintegration and re-integration of the family and the potentially positive virtues of human violence" (GUY, 2010, p.1).

Published in 1988, *Libra* is a speculative, as well as fictionalized, take on the life of Lee Harvey Oswald and the events that built up and preceded the 1963 Kennedy assassination. In 1991 *Mao II* details the writer's established views on the novel form and on the novelist in a society dominated by media and terrorism. The 1997 *Underworld* is an epic cold-war story. *The Body Artist*, published in 2001, contains DeLillo's concerns and interests in performance arts and their relation to domestic privacies set out against a broader scope of events.

Said to be a modern reinterpretation of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the 2003 *Cosmopolis* takes place in New York around the time of the collapse of the dot-

com bubble in the turn of the millennium. The novel has latterly being been reviewed as prescient, due to its foreshadowing views regarding the flaws and weaknesses of the international financial system, and of cyber money. *Falling Man*, published in May, 2007, deals with the impact on one family of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City.

In February 2010 DeLillo's fifteenth novel, titled *Point Omega* tells of a young filmmaker set out to visit the desert home of a secret war advisor while attempting to shoot a documentary. The narrative takes a dark turn when the situation is complicated by the arrival of the older man's daughter.

According to Professor Weinstein (1997), common to all of these ventures is a fascination with power — which would also equally be truth if said about Dickens, Balzac or Zola. DeLillo differs in his treatment not only of the picturesque image of what life is like, but also in discerning what lies behind those surfaces; in other words, he seeks out to unravel the ideological forces that are at invisibly at play. DeLillo's interest in systems is possibly what drives him apart from the other writers. He is interested in how large anonymous impersonal systems have come to dominate contemporary life and, as a consequence, the inevitable changes we are going through — including specially our relations to one another, and with our environment — yield consequences that, as he understands them, are leading to new kinds of writing (WEISTEIN, 1997).

DeLillo's writing style has been under attack for a number of years now. Critics complain that his writing is, sometimes, dull:

> If you complain that it's just dull, and that you got the message about a quarter of the way through, he can always counter by saying, "Hey, I don't *make* the all-inclusive, consumption-mad society. I just report on it". (MYERS, 2001, p.1)

Nonetheless, his amazing list of awards, selected by the most rigorous and distinguished boards and committees, has distortedly led to a scrutiny by others, who embarked in close and minute inquiries regarding the so-called negative aspects of DeLillo's works. The following section sheds light on the

symptoms – that can go from mere envy to elaborate conspiracy theory plans — that heavily question the author's creative production and its merits.

Criticism and mortality

The symptomatic evidence that typically hampers and prevents an author's due recognition and critical acclaim is hereby outlined through the systematic examination of the arguments that each individual critic offers for consideration. With the awareness that these are not simply isolated pieces of unsound and ill-intentioned criticism, their arguments here must be construed not so much by virtue of what they openly state, but of what they imply. These shreds of evidence, found in scarcely detectable amounts, will, hereon, be alluded to simply as *symptoms*, much like in the medical sense, i.e., as the sensations experienced, in this case by careful readers, and associated to a particular malaise that afflicts certain writers.

Novelist and critic Dale Peck, in what started out as a rave review of the *memoir* entitled *The Black Veil* — written by contemporary writer Rick Moody — went out of his way to direct his efforts into a severely negative critique, merciless lacking in refinement and grace, and in good taste, to unfavorably address a number of solidly credited authors; the likes of James Joyce and Don DeLillo:

> In my view, the wrong turn starts around the time Stephen Dedalus goes to college in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and echoes all the way through Don DeLillo's ponderously self-important rendering of Bobby Thompson's shot heard round the world in the opening chapter of *Underworld.* (PECK, 2002, p.1)

Later in the review, Peck claims a number of novelists basically create their pieces of fiction — that he might as well had called something else – only with the intention of attracting attention — probably undeserving in his opinion; first symptom. Furthermore, he refers to these author's textual productions as

dispensable, not essential and unimportant; he does so, however, with harsher words.

> And yet there is that urgency I mentioned before, the hysterical desire to be heard. For all its shrillness, Moody's volume strikes me as something more than the antics of a child needing attention. I say this as a fellow novelist: though he has never put together a single sentence that I would call indispensable, there is a true empathetic undercurrent in Moody's work. I find the same current in the work of David Foster Wallace and Jeffrey Eugenides and Colson Whitehead, but not in the work of Richard Powers and Dave Eggers and Donald Antrim and Jonathan Franzen and Jonathan Lethem. I find it in Thomas Pynchon but not in Don DeLillo, here and there in John Barth and Donald Barthelme but almost entirely absent in John Fowles and John Hawkes and William Gaddis, in *Lolita* but not in *Pale Fire*, in the early Joyce, the first one and a half books, but not in the last two and a half books. (PECK, 2002, p.1)

Peck includes DeLillo in this list of authors whose work possesses what he calls a "true empathetic undercurrent". According to him, the aforementioned writers represent the most esoteric strain of twentieth-century literature, and what others would call the highest of the high canonical postmodernist exemplars, he refers to the same group as the "white man's ivory tower" (p.1). Claiming his intentions are not to malign these writers, their editors, nor *The New Yorker* or *Harper's* or *The Paris Review* — and with this we confirm the hypotheses we have been raising as to where his discourse is trying to reach — but rather his intention is to suggest that:

> [...] these writers (and their editors) see themselves as the heirs to a bankrupt tradition. A tradition that began with the diarrheic flow of words that is *Ulysses;* continued on through the incomprehensible ramblings of late Faulkner and the sterile inventions of Nabokov; and then burst into full, foul life in the ridiculous dithering of Barth and Hawkes and Gaddis, and the reductive cardboard constructions of Barthelme, and the word-by-word wasting of a talent as formidable as Pynchon's; and finally broke apart like a cracked sidewalk beneath the weight of the stupid — just plain stupid — tomes of DeLillo. (PECK, 2002, p.1)

He insists that his idea is not to suggest that they all are uniformly talentless or misguided, neither that there is a conspiracy among them and

their editors, and even less the fact that they commit their efforts and energy to exclude others from "the upper echelons of the literary world" (p.1). This last phrase is the crowning moment of his why-they-not-me type of discourse; second symptom.

If nothing else, Peck is clear on his point that he finds the literary tradition of these authors he condemns and reproaches as divested from the ability to comment on anything other than the inability to comment on something. In his opinion, this is the very tradition that has transformed the writing of a novel into nothing but a formal exercise "judged either by the inscrutable floribundity of its prose or the lifeless carpentry of its parts, rather than by the quasimystical animating aspect of literature" (2002, p.1).

Another critic who has lent his voice to voluntarily debasing DeLillo's work is B. R. Myers. In the *Books & Critics* section of the monthly magazine *The Atlantic*, Myers (2001) soon exposes what he has come to do in the piece he entitles *A Reader's Manifesto* and subtitles *An attack on the growing pretentiousness of American literary prose*. Interestingly, the magazine, inadvertently or not, provides very little information about this author. He, on the other hand, saves no strength at overtly stating that modern American literary fiction is clumsy and pretentious, and at naming names, providing a list of examples from a number of authors; among them Annie Proulx, Cormac McCarthy, Paul Auster and, of course, Don DeLillo.

In a subsection labeled *Edgy Prose*, Myers focuses specifically on DeLillo's 1985 novel *White Noise*. According to him, this piece of work is a perfect example of the kind of writing that makes readers ask not what the author is saying but *why* he or she is saying it. Concerning the novel's opening paragraph, Myers indites:

> This is the sort of writing, full of brand names and wardrobe inventories, that critics like to praise as an "edgy" take on the insanity of modern American life. It's hard to see what is so edgy about describing suburbia as a wasteland of stupefied shoppers, which is something left-leaning social critics have been doing since the 1950s. Still, this is foolproof subject matter for a novelist of limited gifts. (MYERS, 2001, p.1)

Somehow Myers seems to be uncomfortably bothered by DeLillo's prose style in general, but especially by his comic and irreverent vein, marked by a unique clever and sarcastic — and amusingly facetious — tone. He condescendingly asks how much of what DeLillo wrote the reader is supposed to bother to visualize — referring to the first paragraph of *White Noise*. In his opinion, similar questions will nag at the readers throughout the novel. Myers complaints extend to the characters and their dialogs, which he describes as "paper-flat contrivances" (2001, p.1). In one passage, in which the narrator's young daughter, Steffie, talks in her sleep, what one reader may see as an exciting, tender and magical moment in human experience, Myers sees as the propagation of a long intellectual tradition of exaggerating the effects of advertising. In the novel, the little girl utters mid-sleep two words audibly; words that her father sensed "that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant" (DeLILLO, 1986, p.155). The girl says *Toyota Celica*. A period of time passes before the father realizes it was the name of an automobile. He thought the utterance was beautiful and mysterious "gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform... Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence" (DeLILLO, 1986, p.155).

Myers lacked the sensitivity to understand that – a third symptom. He thought the effects of the scene so uninvolving and so downright silly that it could baffle even sympathetic readers. In his words:

> DeLillo has said that he wants to impart a sense of the "magic and dread" lurking in our consumer culture, but what a poor job he does of this! There is so little apparent wonder in the girl's words that only a metaphor drawn from recognizable human experience could induce us to share Jack's excitement. Instead we are told of an un-named name carved on a tablet in the sky, and in cuneiform to boot. The effect of all this is so uninvolving, so downright silly, that it baffles even sympathetic readers. (MYERS, 2001, p.1)

Later on he claims that people might need an academic intermediary to explain what happened in the passage to them and to argue in favor of the

plausibility of what DeLillo was trying to say. “A good novelist, of course, would have written the scene more persuasively in the first place” (p.1), he writes; there, a fourth symptom.

The next critic, George Will, wrote an article which became somewhat famous at the time of its publishing in September 1988. The text, printed in the *Washington Post*, described Will’s feelings about DeLillo and about the novel *Libra*. The first impression the reader gets is through the words: “[...] the book [...] is an act of literary vandalism and bad citizenship (In: GARDNER, 2002, p.1). Perhaps severely misunderstanding the concept of fiction and of what an imaginative, creative and artistic piece of production a novel is, Will says “there is no blank space large enough to accommodate, and not a particle of evidence for, DeLillo's lunatic conspiracy theory” (In: GARDNER, 2002, p.1).

He is, of course, referring to the fact that DeLillo retells the events that anteceded the John F. Kennedy assassination in November 1963 — which is not really a taboo, but a sort of an open wound in American lore. Even though DeLillo did say in the Author’s Note of *Libra* that he was just filling in “some of the blank spaces in the known record” (DeLILLO, 1991, p.458), he meant he purposely chose what, in his opinion, was the most obvious possible theory, because he wanted to do justice to historical likelihood. In the book’s afterword, the author clearly states that he had made no attempt to furnish factual answers — nor could he.

A very own DeLillo character, in *Libra*, provides a definition for what history is: “Something we don't know about. There's more to it. There's always more to it. This is what history consists of. It's the sum total of all the things they aren't telling us” (In: PATE, 1988, p.1). At the time, book critic Nancy Pate wrote her review of the novel for the *Sentinel*, it was almost 25 years of the Kennedy assassination but, according to her, Americans were still haunted by that historical event that became a trauma.

As I see it, there is no crime in being a “conspiracy addict”, as DeLillo was called by Will, whom in turn is Pate’s exemplar of what seems to be a haunted

and traumatized American. The author of *Libra* just happens to think that the utter absence of evidence, even after 25 years of investigative research — at that time —, does not prove that there was no conspiracy, but rather that the conspiracy was "diabolically clever" (WILL, 1988, p.1). In fact, it is not bad to be reminded that there is something loathsome in killing people and hiding the real reasons. At least something may be said about DeLillo that was once said, unfairly, about T.S. Eliot: that "he is a good writer and a bad influence" (WILL, 1988, p.2).

The *Washington Post* book reviewer and chief critic Jonathan Yardley has exhibited unresolved issues towards DeLillo as well. His critique regarding the novel *The Names*, published in 1982, revisits the questions of variety of scope and diversity of themes that, now and again, pester DeLillo — a fifth, though sort of unique, symptom. To Yardley, "*The Names* is an accomplished and intelligent novel, the work of a writer of clear if chilly brilliance, but it takes on too many themes and wanders in too many directions to find a coherent shape" (In: GARDNER, 2002, p.1).

His 1985 review of *White Noise* was not very far from the precedent. Claiming the novel to be another of DeLillo's exercises in fiction as political tract — although not necessarily charged with negative semantic meaning, my suspicion is that this commentary is not exactly a compliment —, Yardley writes: "for lovers of pure prose, the novel is a trip; the trouble is that when you step back from it and view it clinically, it proves to be a trip to nowhere" and continues:

> [...] this is what makes DeLillo so irritating and frustrating; he's a writer of stupendous talents, yet he wastes those talents on monotonously apocalyptic novels the essential business of which is to retail the shopworn campus ideology of the '60s and '70s. (GARDNER, 2002, p.1)

In 1988, while reviewing the novel *Libra*, Yardley comments that the book would be "lavishly praised in those quarters where DeLillo's ostentatiously gloomy view of American life and culture is embraced" (GARDNER, 2002, p.1), which anticipates his opinion as likely to be received with little surprise.

Yet another critic, Bruce Bawer, notes that DeLillo's books are easy to find in most bookstores — in the United States, that is; here in Brazil it takes 6 to 8 weeks to get one —, but books by Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Faulkner are, according to him, hard to find, even in reputable literary establishments:

> [...] but at many such establishments one can, without any trouble, find the novels of DeLillo in attractive, attention-getting Vintage paperback editions, their uniform front covers decorated with striking, surrealistic, black-and-white photographs, their back covers (and front matter) crammed with critical testimony [...]. (BAWER, 1985, p.1)

Nevertheless, he acknowledges that DeLillo's books are not bestsellers, though they may seem, at times, ubiquitous — here we see the second symptom revisited, though slightly altered. A revisitation of this symptom is restated — perhaps for the wrong reasons, but then again, who knows? — through the assertion that DeLillo has, somehow, managed to become a member of that elite circle of writers whose books are ever kept in print (BAWER, 1985).

These symptomatic pieces of evidence can be found in the critical essay entitled *Don DeLillo's America*, published in *The New Criterion* in April 1985, where Bawer makes the following claim: "most of his [DeLillo's] novels were born out of a preoccupation with a single theme: namely, that contemporary American society is the worst enemy that the cause of human individuality and self-realization has ever had" and goes on to say that "one thing that these novels all share, aside from the goodbye-American-dream motif, is a stunning implausability [sic]. Representation of reality is not DeLillo's strong suite" (In: GARDNER, 2002, p.1). Later on, he sensibly acknowledges that DeLillo's novels are not meant to be true-to-life tales. Instead, in his opinion, these novels are tracts designed to batter readers continuously with the single idea that life in America, in their day, was boring, benumbing and dehumanized:

> While those of us who live in the real America carry on with our richly varied, emotionally tumultuous lives, DeLillo (as *White Noise* amply demonstrates) continues, in effect, to write the same lifeless novel over and over again — a novel contructed

> upon a simpleminded political cliche, populated by epigram-slinging, epistemology-happy robots, and packed with words that have very little to say to us about our world, our century, or ourselves. If anyone is guilty of turning modern Americans into xerox copies, it is Don DeLillo. (GARDNER, 2002, p.1)

In conclusion, with the risk of sounding too simplistic, I dare affirm that few writers have written so profusely, so intensely, so diversely, as Don DeLillo. It may sound a little excessive or overinflated to say that history will tell, but what can be said with a fair degree of safety — and the critics above mentioned will undoubtedly agree with me — is that, *even* with so much diversity, so much variety, so much noticeable heterogeneity, one cannot please everybody.

That is not reason enough to be included in the dreadful list of historically half-forsaken writers, but I have been wrong before.

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