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Introduction: The American and the European DeLillo

Philipp Schweighauser and Peter Schneck

In Mao II (1991), Don DeLillo lets his protagonist, the novelist Bill Gray, speak words that have been read as eerily prophetic in the aftermath of 9/11: "Years ago [...] I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness" (41). While the collective imagination of the past was guided, DeLillo seems to suggest, by the creative order and ethos of narrative fictions told by novelists, our contemporary fantasies and anxieties are completely controlled by the endless narratives of war and terror constantly relayed by the mass media. Where terrorists make the headlines, using global mass media to publicize their message, the ethical craft of the

novel has become obsolete, an almost pathetic remnant of the past. And indeed, as many commentators drawing on the work of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard have pointed out, the fictional worlds of Americana (1971), Players (1977), Running Dog (1978), White Noise (1985), Libra (1988), Mao II (1991), Underworld (1997), Valpararaiso (1999), and Cosmopolis (2003) are saturated with mass-mediated images to such an extent that the very distinction between fact and fiction is almost erased. As one of our contributors, Martyn Colebrook, notes,

[i]n DeLillo's work, the camera--be it that of the photographer or that of the film director--is a constant presence: in Libra, it records the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald; in Running Dog, murderous conflicts ensue over the search for a film that has the final moments of Adolf Hitler captured on a grainy piece of celluloid; in Americana, the advertising executive David Bell records himself on a personal odyssey; and in Cosmopolis, Eric Packer watches a personal preview of his own death.

DeLillo's incisive analyses of the performative force of media images, the visibility of terror, and the collapsing division between reality and simulation are more than mere illustrations of theoretical positions in contemporary media studies. To take DeLillo's literary reflections on media, terrorism, and literature seriously means to engage with the obvious ethical implications of his media critique. In exploring DeLillo's negotiations of the intricately related issues of terrorism and the place of literature within late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century media cultures, this essay collection begins

with the premise that there is a need for a broader investigation of the ethical dimension in (and of) DeLillo's works.

To launch that investigation, we have invited DeLillo scholars from both sides of the Atlantic to share their thoughts on these timely issues. What has emerged is a set of thirteen essays and a coda that probe--sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly--the convergences and differences between American and European responses to one of the most powerful voices in contemporary U.S. fiction. This essay collection, then, approaches DeLillo's reflections on the place of literary fiction in the age of mass media and global terrorism from a decidedly transatlantic perspective.

If one adopts such a perspective, one conclusion almost immediately suggests itself: that Don DeLillo's work has met with very different receptions on opposite sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, DeLillo's acute observations of contemporary American culture and society, as well as his poignant descriptions of states of collective consciousness troubled by media spectacles and narratives of terror have been celebrated as one of the most important contributions to cultural criticism in American literature today. In contrast, in the United States, DeLillo's work in general and his most explicitly political novels--Libra and Falling Man--in particular have received a very mixed reception, ranging from George Will's, Bruce Bawer's, and Jonathan Yardley's acerbic critiques of DeLillo as yet another misguided liberal who keeps barking up the wrong tree to literary scholars' as well as fellow writers' insistence on the magnificence of DeLillo's style and his cardinal status among contemporary American authors.

Yet the essays collected in this volume do not always testify to such a European-American divide. To give but one example: while Linda S. Kauffman is but one of our

American contributors who praise the subtlety with which DeLillo probes the psychological and political reverberations of 9/11 in Falling Man, Sascha Pöhlmann, one of our German contributors, stridently critiques the novel's portrayal of Hammad, which "does not succeed in imagining the terrorist as anything other than an Orientalist construction of an Islamist terrorist." The line between American and European responses to DeLillo cannot be drawn as readily as our preceding paragraph suggests. But what, precisely, are those convergences and differences that we postulate?

To answer that question, it makes good sense to divert our gaze for a moment from literary scholarship to literary reviews because it is there that we may expect disparities to emerge most sharply. In the remainder of this introduction, we compare and contrast American reviews of DeLillo's oeuvre with German, French, Swiss, and British reviews of the same. We embark on this survey of DeLillo's reception with one specific goal: to embed the essays collected this volume in a broader transatlantic context that helps us make sense of their differing takes on DeLillo's probing of the intersections between terrorism, media, and the ethics of fiction.

Since the publication of Underworld in 1997, it has become a commonplace for European reviewers to affirm the literary stature of Don DeLillo in words that range from praise to veneration. DeLillo has been called "one of the most famous contemporary American novelists" (Solis 2002, 39), "the greatest American novelist at the beginning of the 21st century" (Busnel 2003, 88), "a master" (Busnel 2008b, 92), and "the superstar of American letters" ("Don DeLillo, la solitude au scalpel").[1] European reviewers especially admire DeLillo's writing style, which has been compared to "the hoods of Cadillacs: shining" ("Don DeLillo, la solitude au scalpel"); highlighting what one German critic

wrote of Falling Man: "language [...] is the central event" (Diez 2007). That style, most European reviewers agree, has been perfected in Underworld, a novel that one German reviewer has praised lavishly for DeLillo's "tremendously mutable language" (Spiegel 1998) and which Nathalie Crom called "one of the most magisterial works of fiction that have come to us from the United States in the last 15 years" (2004, 18). A further aspect of DeLillo's literary fame stressed by European reviewers is his considerable influence on (mostly younger) fellow writers such as Bret Easton Ellis, Jonathan Franzen, Richard Powers, James Ellroy, David Foster Wallace, and Rick Moody (Busnel 2003, 11; "DeLillo ou le temps de 'l'après'"). Surprisingly, perhaps, even Paul Auster is mentioned in that context (Busnel 2008a, 122). That take on DeLillo's literary filiation would certainly put a smile on the face of at least one of our American contributors. In his coda to our volume, "The DeLillo Era: Literary Generations in the Postmodern Period," David Cowart joins European reviewers in affirming DeLillo's high stature and his influence on fellow writers, noting in passing that "[t]he other day, asked whether I had yet read the latest Paul Auster, I found myself thinking: no--I've read all the Auster I need to."

The European reception of DeLillo's oeuvre is perhaps summed up best in French critic Jacques-Pierre Amette's review of Cosmopolis:

On the American stock exchange, Don DeLillo is valued very highly. Nevertheless, the writer gives back his fellow citizens an image of their country that is less than tender. [...] So this writer from the Bronx has traveled, written, disappeared, and reappeared, in his leather jacket, with a manuscript that he dropped off at Houghton Mifflin or Knopf or Scribner, all prestigious publishing houses. Each of his manuscripts left his literary

managers, who had never read such prose, dumbfounded and dreamy. In describing the roads that appear in red on American maps, in describing American stones and herbs, American bungalows, and old, rotting American shacks, why does he pulverize the comfort felt by American citizens proud of their lawn mowers and Plymouths? [...] He has always been prey to sinister predictions. His books are marked by that strange foreboding of possible terror or at least ultimate disorder. He has pushed his forebodings even as far as to imagine, already in Underworld, his 1997 masterpiece, a gigantic bird menacing the World Trade Center [...]. Having turned into quite a misanthrope, the author has his literary takeoff in the 90s. He receives the National Book Award and places himself ahead of the novelists of his generation. (2003)

In Amette's review, we find everything we have already encountered--and more. Amette's DeLillo is a reticent writer who grew up in the Bronx, wears a leather jacket, and these days emerges from hiding only to deliver yet another manuscript at the door of one of the most prestigious publishing houses; he is a prophetic writer who cultivates a style that is in a class of its own; with his masterpiece Underworld, he has placed himself at the forefront of contemporary writing; he is a fierce critic of his culture, who denies his fellow Americans even the small comforts that consumer culture has on offer. All of this is familiar from American reviews of DeLillo's work, which comes as little surprise given that European assessments of DeLillo's stature always also take into account American assessments of the same. This is also true for our European contributions, most explicitly Paula Martín Salván's essay, which reflects at length on the mixed reception Falling Man received in the United States, and Philipp Schweighauser and Adrian S. Wisnicki's

contribution, which comments on DeLillo's refusal to meet U.S. reviewers' expectations for a 9/11 novel in ways that tie in with our Canadian contributor Marie-Christine Leps's observation that "Falling Man's reader is not presented with an overall analysis, a final truth, [...] which would make world economic and political movements coalesce into a whole that would somehow rationalize, explain, make the events of September 11 make sense."

Yet there is one significant difference between Amette's take on DeLillo and that of American reviewers. It would be difficult not to be struck by the string of stereotypes Amette buys into in his characterization of both the American writer and the country he lives in. For Amette, America is a thoroughly commodified space in which a writer's worth is assessed on the stock exchange and in which people find comfort in their lawn mowers and Plymouths. One cannot help thinking that more than a slice of the kind of French Anti-Americanism that also informs, to give but one example, Jean Baudrillard's America, has crept into Amette's review. His portrayal of DeLillo needs to be qualified, too. By the time Amette wrote his review, DeLillo had come a long way from the Bronx and had been living in Westchester County, N.Y.--a mostly suburban area that has one of the highest per capita incomes in the whole country--for years. Moreover, at least since the publication of Underworld in 1997, DeLillo has also abandoned some if by no means all of his reservations about being a figure of public interest: he has accepted prizes; collaborated on productions of his plays; and given speeches, readings, and interviews (though not on TV). And yet, despite of, or perhaps precisely because of its shortcomings, Amette's review crystallizes some of the main currents that run through the European reception of Don DeLillo.

Most crucially, Amette sums up the central role European critics assign to DeLillo: he is one of America's most eloquent and fiercest cultural critics. To some extent, this is also the role DeLillo assigns to himself. Quoting from Vince Passaro's interview with DeLillo from 1991, Leif Grössinger in his contribution to our volume notes DeLillo's conviction "that if writers should aspire to bear on public consciousness again, they would be among 'the nationless, the outcast and the hunted' and be regarded as socially dangerous." This conviction, Martyn Colebrook notes in another essay in this volume, also infuses DeLillo's oeuvre, which "is characterized by a sense of the beleaguered, oppositional artist or writer, the presence of spectral, marginalized figures located in small cells." European reviewers regularly reiterate that assessment. Take the French reception for an example: Christian Salmon asserts that "all of DeLillo's work undertakes to deconstruct the myths of an America that is bogged down in its fictions much like the Spain of Cervantes is bogged down in its romances" (2008, 31); Bruno Corty writes that "DeLillo puts America under the scalpel, triturates its entrails and its lesser creases in search of vices, of tumors that make it paranoid, dangerous and thus fascinating" (2000); and Josyane Savigneau affirms that DeLillo is one of those writers "who confront social norms with their words, opposing narration to information in order to restore a genuine exchange" (1999). In a similar vein, German critics almost habitually point to DeLillo's uncanny ability to tap into the unconscious undercurrents of the American cultural psyche. As Georg Diez has it, DeLillo's writing is seismographic: "He tries to trace in his language changes in the tectonics of our consciousness, with a kind of secular spirituality that is deeply American" (2007). What is also rather typical for European assessments of DeLillo is the way in which Diez emphasizes DeLillo's

"Americanness" while at the same time accepting the universal validity of the author's "seismographic" probings of a collective postmodern consciousness which is somehow both American and European.

So what are the objects of DeLillo's cultural critique? From the Europeans' point of view, they are American consumerism, the mass media, and, most fundamentally, language itself. Given DeLillo's own media reticence and his sustained engagement with the mass media since his first novel Americana, the European focus on DeLillo's media critique is entirely congruous. Thus, the French critic André Clavel speaks of his "constant demystification of clandestine powers that alienate and manipulate us--particularly those of the image" (2008); Jacques-Pierre Amette comments on DeLillo's opposition to "mass-medial voracity" (2003), and Josyane Savigneau reads Running Dog as a critical comment on "a world in which the image has become that through which social control passes" (2000). One can find similar assessments in German and British reviews, for instance in Tim Adams's assertion in The Observer that "no writer since [the late 1960s] has been as alive to the congruence of violence and its media" (2007). At the same time, though, these critics realize that DeLillo's critique reaches deeper than a media critique à la Neil Postman or Jean Baudrillard. For them, DeLillo's writing is "scandalous" because "it seems to offer the safety of known and comfortable genres and crumbles, denounces, problematizes, 'betrays' them" (Chénetier 1994), and that dissection of popular genres is part of DeLillo's larger project of exposing and ultimately redressing "the malady of words" (Salmon 2008, 31). Thus, in DeLillo, cultural critique and media critique are always also language critique. This is perhaps, inevitable, for writers have--to quote Nabokov's Lolita--"only words to play with" (1995, 34).

Our contributors, too, have a keen ear for the ways in which DeLillo's words resist the languages of advertising and news shows. One of our contributors, David Cowart, has, after all, written a book entitled Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language. In his coda, Cowart asserts that "[g]reat contemporary fiction" such as DeLillo's critically engages with "the sprawling, vital, endlessly vulgar culture of the American moment" in ways that "tend to illuminate fresh thinking about the mechanics of language." This insight--which traces DeLillo's cultural and media critique to the particulars of his style--runs like a red thread through the essays collected here. Discussing DeLillo's 9/11 novel Falling Man, Julia Apitzsch notes "the near-total absence of the media images that constitute our experience of the event" and probes how "DeLillo contrasts the violent images of the collective memory with [the] fresh and surprising art images and performances" of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi and the fictional performance artist Falling Man. Thus, she continues, DeLillo's novel "open[s] up new perspectives beyond the exhausted mainstream comparisons, a new and unconsumed realm of images and language." As our contributors probe the ethics of fiction in times of mass-mediated terrorism, it becomes clear that DeLillo's refusal to employ the languages we already have for speaking about political violence is at the heart of his take on contemporary American culture. In Leif Grössinger's words, "DeLillo [in Falling Man] refuses to use emotionally charged and over-determined terms such as '9/11' or 'Ground Zero,' and even has Bin Laden's name confused with 'Bill Lawton' by Keith and Lianne's son Justin. The images DeLillo uses are generally known and discernable, but adapted and defamiliarized; he resists the spell of the images and the language provided by the mass media." DeLillo inherits this insistence on speaking differently from modernist literary

practice and thus aligns himself with an aesthetics of the disruption of dominant social discourses--an aesthetics of what Adorno has called "negativity." But he does so only to a certain extent. Several of our contributors are as aware as DeLillo himself that the writer cannot fully extricate himself from what he critiques. Grössinger, for instance, interprets DeLillo's artist figures, especially Bill Gray and Falling Man, as sites that allow DeLillo to explore the extent to which postmodern writers are forced to "rely on the mass media that sustain the very postmodern society they oppose." Thus, it may be more accurate to consider DeLillo's cultural and media critique a form of what Linda Hutcheon has called "complicitous critique" in The Politics of Postmodernism: a "strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine" (1989, 4).

How do U.S. reviews of DeLillo's work relate to all of this? More so than in Europe, reviews differ depending on the work under consideration. Generally, Underworld has received the most favorable reviews. It has been called "his masterpiece" (Fry 1997), "the crowning achievement of a career that already had him at the top of American literature" (Baker 1997), a "great great novel" (Harris 1997), "a Moby Dick for the 20th century" (Hoover 1997), and "perilously good so good, so strong, deep, knowing and funny, that you might be tempted to read it and it alone, fanatically, the rest of your days" (Hanrahan 1997). Conversely, Cosmopolis has received mostly slating reviews. It has been critiqued for its "trite, superficial satire" and called "his worst novel" (Allen 2007); it has been judged as "frigid" by a fellow novelist (Cobb 2003); it has been characterized as having "all the cautionary timbre of an anonymous car alarm" (Caldwell

2003); and it has been brushed aside by Michiko Kakutani as "a major dud, as lugubrious and heavy-handed as a bad Wim Wenders film, as dated as an old issue of Interview magazine" (2003). This cursory glimpse at U.S. responses to two of DeLillo's novels already indicates that his American reception is far more ambivalent than European critics such as Jacques-Pierre Amette suggest. But the ambivalence of American reviews of the author's work reaches much deeper than divergent responses to different texts.

Yes, a great number of critics and writers revere DeLillo. When, in May 2006, The New York Times Book Review asked "a couple of hundred prominent writers, critics, editors and other literary sages" to identify "the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years," three of the top 22 books were by DeLillo: White Noise, Libra, and Underworld (Scott 2006). David Streitfeld of The Washington Post already in 1992 noted that "DeLillo these days is more than recognized; he's practically anointed. [...] [T]here's an increasing sentiment that he's one of the major forces in American fiction;" Jan Wildt of the San Diego Union-Tribune calls him "the current senior statesman of mandarin-American literature" (2003); Jon Barron of the Chicago Sun-Times muses that "[y]ou may say of other writers that they are the heart of American literature, or the muscle, or the brains. If that's the case, DeLillo is the DNA" (2003); and Michael Shannon Friedman of the Charleston Gazette sums up DeLillo's stature thus: “Don DeLillo is one of America's most acclaimed living authors, having won the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, and most recently, the Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters for Underworld" (2001). Reviewing The Body Artist for the Intelligencer Journal, Michael Long puts it wittily: "'You haven't read

Don DeLillo? Where have you been?' The only acceptable response to which is: 'In a cave'" (2001).

Yet as both European and American DeLillo scholars well know, there are quite a few critics who pull apart almost any work DeLillo's publishes, and Curt Gardner's supremely useful Web site Don DeLillo's America has a whole section devoted to his fiercest critics ("DeLillo Detractors"). Long-standing members of that group are George Will, Bruce Bawer, and Jonathan Yardley; B. R. Myers and Dale Peck are more recent additions. Roughly, these critics can be divided into three factions: those that find fault with his politics, those that find fault with his style, and those that find fault with both his style and politics. The novelist and critic Dale Peck belongs to the first group. In a scathing review essay that begins with the declaration "Rick Moody is the worst writer of his generation" and goes on to explain that Moody is "the lowest common denominator" of a whole generation of writers, he tears into a range modernist and postmodernist writers to conclude that DeLillo is one of the worst of their kind:

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. [...] [T]hese 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. (2002)

For Peck, DeLillo is a pretentious writer whose work exhausts itself in a display of linguistic virtuosity that lacks substance. Thus, DeLillo aligns himself with "the most esoteric strain of twentieth-century literature," a high postmodernism that "has turned the construction of a novel into a purely formal exercise, judged either by the inscrutable floribundity of its prose or the lifeless carpentry of its parts." Peck has certainly become the most prominent critic who attacks DeLillo for his style, but others have joined in. Thus, Allen Barra calls DeLillo's dialogue in his script for the movie Game 6 "labyrinthine, [...] pretentious, stilted, and alienating" (2006), and Lewis Beale trashes Underworld as "a work of supreme self-indulgence" and "supreme hubris" (1997).

A second group of DeLillo critics focuses more on his alleged politics than on his style. George Will's review of Libra has set a standard here: he calls the book "an act of literary vandalism and bad citizenship" that peddles a "lunatic conspiracy theory" whose only virtue is to remind its readers "of the virulence of the loathing some intellectuals feel for American society, and of the frivolous thinking that fuels it." Will concludes his diatribe thus: "What was unfairly said of a far greater writer (T.S. Eliot, born in St. Louis 100 years ago this Monday) must be said of DeLillo: He is a good writer and a bad influence" (1988). This kind of assessment of DeLillo--good writer, bad politics--is not uncommon among the naysayers. One of his most prominent critics, Jonathan Yardley of The Washington Post, has traced the author's work for over two decades, affirming over

and over again what he already proclaimed in his review of White Noise: "Don DeLillo is a prodigiously gifted writer. His cool but evocative prose is witty, biting, surprising, precise" (1985). DeLillo's politics are, however, far less to Yardley's liking. For him, White Noise is "yet another of DeLillo's exercises in fiction as political tract," fiction "as op-ed material" that "retail[s] the shopworn campus ideology of the '60s and '70s" and is ultimately "more interested in the message than the medium." The outcome is books "that, while their sheer intelligence and style are dazzling, are heartless--and therefore empty--at their core" (1985). With this review in mind, it came as little surprise when Yardley dismissed DeLillo's much more explicitly political novel Libra three years later: "He is a writer of skill, wit and ingenuity, but he employs these considerable gifts in the evanescent craft of pamphleteering rather than the durable art of fiction. [...] [T]he liberties he has taken with the dead range from the plausible to the unwittingly comical, but those he has taken with the living are beneath contempt" (1988).

The third group of DeLillo critics comprises those who dislike both his style and his politics. With his review of Falling Man, Yardley seems to have joined this camp: "At his most confident and accomplished, DeLillo can write. But Sept. 11 seems to have paralyzed him stylistically. [...] What is certain, though, is that people simply don't talk that way. [...] None of the characters ever emerges from cardboard wrapping, and none of the emotions DeLillo tries to arouse feels earned" (2007). Yardley here stages a critique that runs like a red thread through most of the negative reviews: that his characters are flat and their dialogues unrealistic. Thus, Bruce Bawer asserts that DeLillo's writing "defeats any hope of verisimilitude," is characterized by "a stunning implausibility," and features characters that "do not think, they cogitate; they do not talk, they engage in

dialectic and endless monologues about the novel's major themes" (35). A case in point is the dialogue between Jack and Babette Gladney in White Noise--the novel Bawer reviews: "It's consistently fast-paced and facile, and occasionally witty, and absolutely never sounds like two married people talking to each other. Most of the time it sounds just like what it is: an author's collection of stale cultural barbs" (37). In Bawer, the connections some reviewers draw between DeLillo's style and his politics become clear: DeLillo is a novelist of ideas who delivers sententious, shallow philosophizing rather than a good plot and credible characters. Bawer's DeLillo is so enamored of repeating liberal clichés about consumerist America as "the worst enemy that the cause of human individuality and self-realization has ever had" (34) that he reduces his characters to "little more than authorial mouthpieces" (41). Bawer concludes his review in the same spirit: "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. […] If anyone is guilty of turning modern America into xerox copies, it is Don DeLillo" (42). More recently, B. R. Myers has made very much the same point in his oft-cited "Reader's Manifesto." For him, too, DeLillo belongs among the "Consumerland writers," whose fiction is populated by characters that are "paper-flat contrivances." The effect of this kind of fiction, Myers continues, "is so uninvolving, so downright silly, that it baffles even sympathetic readers" and raises the rhetorical question, "why should we bother with Consumerland fiction at all, if the effect of reading it is the same queasy fatigue we can get from an evening of channel-surfing?" (2001). Ironically, perhaps, what critics such as Yardley, Bawer, and Myers diagnose in DeLillo's writing is precisely the malaise that affects Bill Gray. In

David Cowart's words: "he has been brought low by the great paradox of modern and postmodern poetics: politicized expectation diminishes the art it affects to take seriously."

If we compare the European reception of DeLillo's work with its American reception, it quickly becomes clear that while DeLillo has a great number of fervent admirers on both sides of the Atlantic, scathing attacks on this particular author are an American specialty. DeLillo's work seems to divide American reviewers much more deeply than it does their European colleagues. This corresponds to the impression most American scholars familiar with the writer's European reception have, and it corresponds to most European DeLillo scholars' perception. That perception is, however, somewhat skewed for two related reasons. First, negative reviews by a relatively small number of prominent critics (Will, Bawer, Yardley, and, more recently, Kakutani) tend to obscure that the vast majority of reviewers, including especially those in smaller newspapers, are full of praise and admiration. Second, in staking out their own claims, reviewers and scholars who admire DeLillo's work tend to quote the same three or four naysayers over and over again. Thus, those few critics--who publish their reviews in The New Criterion, The Washington Post, and The New York Times--are given even greater prominence. Still, the fact that DeLillo's work does provoke deeply hostile responses from some prominent U.S. critics bears further scrutiny. Why all that anger?

The U.S.-European comparison shows that DeLillo's fiercest American critics attack precisely what European reviewers value: the writer's cultural and media critique. That critique, they argue, is misguided in a number of respects: it caters to conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination, the surveillance society, environmental pollution, and a host of other issues; it stages an outdated critique of consumerism and the

power of the mass media to shape individual consciousnesses; and it falsifies history, particularly in Libra. In all of this, DeLillo adheres to an outmoded leftist ideology straight out of the 1960s and 1970s that is, at least for Bawer and Will, ultimately un-American.

So why do we not find those kinds of attacks on DeLillo in European reviews of his work? On the face of it, the answer is simple: Europeans, conservative or not, have little incentive to call any American writer either "un-American" or--as George Will did--a "bad citizen." Such judgments are usually made by fellow citizens, not by foreigners--and that holds true for both the United States and Europe. A second reason for European critics' refusal to chastise DeLillo's politics is that if we boil down his cultural and media critique to what might be considered its most basic assumptions--which is something DeLillo's fiercest critics are much guiltier of than DeLillo himself--it does cater to long-standing European stereotypes about America as a land without culture and history that is inhabited by overfed citizens numbed by television and an insatiable appetite for commodity consumption. If B. R. Myers disparages DeLillo as a "Consumerland writer," he does justice to neither the self-reflexivity nor the complexity of DeLillo's cultural and media critique, but part of that critique is too eagerly embraced by European reviewers because it seems to confirm their ideas about what some Germans derisively call "Amiland."[2] A third and final reason for DeLillo's differing reception on opposite sides of the Atlantic lies in the diverging social positions writers are assigned to here and there. While American reviewers of whatever political persuasion tend to discuss DeLillo as an author who writes from the political-ideological margins of U.S. culture, European reviewers tend to position him at a hypothetical Archimedean point outside that culture.

The American perspective has two decisive advantages. First, it cautions us against demanding from postmodern writers the kind of "pure" critique many a modernist still aspired to. To position DeLillo within the culture he depicts is to acknowledge that his critique is always already complicit in Linda Hutcheon's sense. After all, DeLillo is, as are all writers, part of and shaped by the very culture he critiques. Second, it registers that cultural critique is alive and well within a U.S. culture that many a European observer tends to characterize as fully homogenized and brought into line by Fox News and CNN. The downside in the American take on the oppositional writer's positionality can be witnessed in Will's slating. If the writer of differing political persuasion is acknowledged as an American citizen who exercises the right of free speech--a right that is valued much more unconditionally in the United States than in Europe--then he must be vilified as a "bad citizen."

The European perception has its own advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages of positioning the oppositional writer in a putative outside is that one does not need to gauge whether a given writer is a "good" or a "bad" citizen, whether s/he is "patriotic" or "un-patriotic." What one can continue to gauge from such a vantage point is whether a given cultural and media critique is accurate, precise, eloquent, witty, and so on. A clear disadvantage of the European take on American writers is that it tends to set up a false opposition between the oppositional writer on the one hand and the culture at large on the other. Thus, the polyphonic nature of the American nation is obscured and stereotypes about America as a monolith in which all dissent has been drowned out by the white noise of the mass media are reinforced.

As the editors of this volume, we firmly believe that in their engagement with the intersections of media, terrorism, and the ethics of fiction in DeLillo's work, both our American and our European contributors successfully avoid the potential pitfalls we have just outlined. We further believe that our authors' success is partly due to the willingness and enthusiasm with which they have entered this transatlantic dialogue on Don DeLillo's fiction. In the process, many an American contributor's views have been Europeanized, and many a European contributor's views have been Americanized. Thus, our readers will find that the line between the American and the European DeLillo is not always an easy one to draw. But we do hope that our reflections on that line help you to judge how fair and balanced our assessment of the writing collected in this volume is.

The essays that follow are divided into five sections and a coda. In our first section, "Memory Work after 9/11," Linda S. Kauffman, Silvia Caporale Bizzini, and Sascha Pöhlmann ask, how does one mourn 9/11, and what acts of remembering are appropriate to it? All three essays engage with the specifically literary nature of DeLillo's memory work. While Kauffman and Bizzini contrast DeLillo's representations of terror favorably with the mass-mediated spectacles we know so well, Pöhlmann takes a critical look at DeLillo's Orientalist stereotyping of the terrorist in Falling Man.

In the second section, "Writers, Terrorists, and the Masses," Mikko Keskinen, Leif Grössinger, and Julia Apitzsch discuss DeLillo's engagement with postmodern mass society and its spectacular world of images. While Keskinen's discussion of Mao II and Falling Man probes the challenges a fundamentally individualist genre such as the novel faces in the attempt to represent crowds and masses, Grössinger in his discussion of Players and Falling Man scrutinizes the discrepancy between both writers' and terrorists'

claims to shape mass consciousness from a putative outside perspective and the smaller-scale real world effects of their actions. Apitzsch traces DeLillo's strategy of countering mass-mediated representations of 9/11 with a strikingly different set of images: the disturbing performances by Falling Man and the still-lives of the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi to which DeLillo refers throughout Falling Man.

In "Don DeLillo and Johan Grimonprez," our third section, Eben Wood and Martyn Colebrook probe the intricate relationships between DeLillo's work and Belgian video-artist Johan Grimonprez's use of textual fragments from Mao II and White Noise in his experimental documentary Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y. While Wood analyzes both artists' divergent challenges to the reader's sense of resolution as a visual as well as narrative concept, Colebrook picks up the concerns of Grössinger's essay in the preceding section to discuss both artists' and terrorists' diminishing significance as agents of change in contemporary society.

The fourth section, "Deathward and Other Plots," contains a single-author essay by Paula Martín Salván and a joint essay by Philipp Schweighauser and Adrian S. Wisnicki. Both explore plotting in its narrative and sociopolitical senses. While Salván identifies what she calls an 'ascetic process' at the heart of DeLillo's thematic and stylistic concerns in Falling Man and many of his earlier works (including The Body Artist, Underworld, and Libra), Schweighauser and Wisnicki's discussion of Libra and Mao II examines the ethical implications of DeLillo's refusal to provide narrative closures in his use of and critical engagement with Victorian detective novels and their closural patterns.

More explicitly even than the other sections, the fifth and final section, "The Ethics of Fiction," engages with the question of the ethics of fiction in the age of global

terrorism. While Peter Boxall and Marie Christine Leps both detect in the DeLillo's work a process of slowing down that they consider an ethically viable response to "the globalization both of U.S. capital and of terrorism" (Boxall) and the "(bio)politics of truth" (Leps), Peter Schneck's essay addresses DeLillo's continuing interest in the function and aesthetics of quasi-religious moments of experience and the promise of transcendence which his novels both criticize and employ for specific effects. Using examples from The Names, Mao II, Underworld, and Falling Man, Schneck investigates the peculiar "secular spirituality" which has characterized DeLillo's writing from the beginning, and which has turned from ironic detachment to an increasingly poignant reflection and meditation on the state of faith and the sacred in a culture of mediated terror and violence. Finally, in his coda to our volume, David Cowart probes the pivotal relevance of DeLillo's work to a younger generation of contemporary American writers.

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[1] All translations from German and French are the authors'.

[2] In German, "Ami" is short for "Amerikaner" (American, i.e., one American individual). It has a slightly pejorative ring to it, which is more pronounced in "Amiland" (instead of "Amerika").