

**Liquid Globalisation and Connectivity in Don
DeLillo's *Underworld***

Master of Research Thesis

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Research at Macquarie University. I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that I have given fully documented reference to the work of others. The thesis has not previously, in part or in whole, been submitted for assessment in any formal course of study.

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Abstract

The notion of connectivity is at the very core of DeLillo's novel *Underworld* (1997). Indeed, the novel's most cited dictum—"everything is connected in the end" (826)—forms the theoretical mantra that DeLillo works toward in his sweeping overview of Cold War and post-Cold War America. But how do we best understand this narrative of seemingly endless points of connection between characters, contexts, motifs? Thomas Friedman's analysis of post-Cold War Globalisation in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) provides a way of considering narratives of connection as indicative of a contemporary integration of individuals, markets and nation-states into a globalised, free-market capitalist network; while sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000), constructs a more theoretical overview of the post-Cold War condition that provides a way of interpreting the diffuse nature of contemporary social bonds. Taken together, these theoretical approaches construct a way of understanding the post-Cold War world as subject to what I call 'liquid globalisation'; and I will argue that it is a liquid globalisation framework that provides the soundest basis for understanding the dominant narrative at work in DeLillo's text. I begin by examining how *Underworld's* post-Cold War spatial and social organisation reflects Friedman and Bauman's respective constructions of the globalised context. Then I look at the role of recycling in the text, specifically how DeLillo constructs his central characters as advocates of recycling as opposed to waste creation, thus reinforcing the notion that integration with the dominant socio-economic paradigm of globalisation is a core principle of the post-Cold War condition. Finally, I consider how *Underworld* works as a historical narrative that charts the evolution of liquid globalisation over a number of years, from a foundation in nuclear rather than information technology. The main aim of this thesis is to add a liquid-global dimension to the growing critical corpus that aligns *Underworld* with post-Cold War Globalisation rather than postmodernity.

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Introduction

How the intersecting systems help pull us apart, leaving us vague, drained, docile, soft in our inner discourse, willing to be shaped, to be overwhelmed—easy retreats, half beliefs.

Don DeLillo, Underworld, 826.

Among critics, Don DeLillo is widely considered to be an author of novels that engage with the integration of characters and contexts into capitalist systems. More frequently than not, such readings have led to the classification of DeLillo as a postmodern author. However, this thesis offers a different interpretation of DeLillo's magnum opus *Underworld* (1997). Rather than suggesting that the novel departs from the core dictum of postmodernity—an encasement of the 'real' by capitalist systems—I will argue that intricate connectivity to capital lies at the heart of *Underworld*, but that it may best be contextualised according to a theoretical model I will call 'liquid globalisation'. In this introduction I will interpret connectivity as a core principle of DeLillo's oeuvre, as well as unpacking how, from a critical standpoint, connectivity has primarily been related to either DeLillo's paranoia or postmodernism. I will then suggest that neither of these frameworks is appropriate for classifying connections between capital and *Underworld*, but that a separate theoretical frame is required; one that conflates the post-Cold War globalisation theses of Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999).

“Everything is connected” (*UW* 786) has no doubt become *Underworld*’s most widely quoted phrase, because, I would suggest, it is the text’s most obvious apothegm. Indeed, Robert McMinn has argued that it is possible to become a “slave to connection” (37) as a reader of *Underworld*, because the text fixates on multitudinous links between characters and plot lines. David Evans supports such a claim, arguing that *Underworld* offers “endlessly proliferating narrative intersections” (125); while Mark Osteen argues that the novel’s intersections make up the “major theme and organizational principle of *Underworld*” (214).¹ But how are we to best understand this major theme of the text, and to what theoretical framework are we to most appropriately link its implications?

Certainly, it is feasible to unpack the many connections in *Underworld* as symptomatic of the paranoid approach to social systems that has resonated throughout DeLillo’s career—after all, connection “is the first article of faith of the paranoid” (Evans 125). Indeed, such an argument seems applicable when one considers the connection theories held by members of the novel’s central cast. For example, baseball fanatic and conspiracy theorist, Marvin Lundy, senses a distinct link between a baseball and a nuclear bomb given that the proportions of the atomic core exactly match that of the ball (172). Further, Sister Edgar claims to understand why an American chess player would remove all of his fillings so that the KGB could not control him “through broadcasts made into the amalgam of units packed in his molars” (251). The novel is filled with similar examples, perhaps highlighting that *Underworld* demonstrates a revival of “the great age of American paranoia” (Knight 1999: 813), and thus falls thematically in line with earlier DeLillo works such as *Libra* (1988).

¹ For further discussion see Daniel Grausem’s “Atomic Nostalgia and the Ends of

Paranoid linkages stem from the moment at the core of *Libra*: the assassination of President Kennedy, which marked the genesis of a spirit of suspicion and conspiracy that has “infected American culture” ever since (Green 95). In turn, DeLillo conducts a “paranoid speculation search for a redemptive narrative that might rescue [the] history [of Kennedy’s assassination] from apparent confusion” (Green 99). He does so in an attempt to make ends meet, and therefore convert uncertainty into a body of knowledge that essentially “closes the gap” on mystery (McGowan 133); or as Patrick O’Donnell puts it, forms a “history conceived as a totality” (108). Of course, DeLillo’s quest here is in vain and instead what emanates from *Libra* is a sense of history as “multiple, fragmented, accidental” (ibid), thus echoing other postwar classic American fictions of paranoia by the likes of Thomas Pynchon and Norman Mailer.² Connections formed under a paranoid structure in *Libra* are therefore not what Annesley calls “real” connections between individuals and an integrated cultural system (91); rather, they aspire to make a full historical record “while making no secret of the fact that this will remain an exclusively literary endeavor” (Noya 240). As such, the text’s paranoid version of history becomes overtly subjective, and thus complete with its own “mode[s] of truth” (ibid).

Emphasis on subjective conspiratorial connections has characterised not just *Libra*, but much of DeLillo’s work preceding *Underworld*. In *Running Dog* (1978), for example, conspiracy and paranoia lie at the centre of the novel “explain[ing] the world . . . without elucidating it, by positing hidden forces which permeate and transcend the realm of ordinary life” (McClure 103). Further, *Ratner’s Star* (1976)

² See Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973); Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* (1979); and William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* (1959).

is a text complete with “proliferating plots” and “daunting intertextual connections” that see central protagonist Billy Twillig fall victim to delusional paranoia (Allen 11). Once more, however, the paranoid connections and buried meanings that characterise these novels are, at best, “half-imagined histor[ies]” (Annesley 87); a series of plots where “delusional” fragmented strands step in to problematise any realistic version of events (O’Donnell 109; 114).

Certainly DeLillo’s ‘paranoid’ novels are valuable, in that they form part of a wider critique of the “structures of history and knowledge” that have defined western culture (LeClair 87).³ However, I want to argue that this ‘type’ of conspiratorial connectivism does not bleed into *Underworld’s* central narrative of connection to capitalist systems, and thus warp it accordingly. I would agree with Michael Wood’s argument that *Underworld* is a post-paranoid epic: “when one of DeLillo’s characters thinks of ‘the paranoid elite’, we are meant to catch the friendly irony, the flicker of nostalgia” (3). O’Donnell concurs, suggesting that the novel is post-paranoid because rather than basing it on conspiracy, DeLillo finds that “the vast socio-economic system of global capitalism” (113) configures such a framework of connection. Peter Knight furthers this argument, claiming that agents in *Underworld* no longer have unmediated access to the world outside of capitalism, but are rather locked in-step with it and constituted according to their connections with the diffuse nature of media saturation (2008: 30-32).

Knight’s reading is indicative of a postmodern critique taken up by Peter Boxall, who argues that *Underworld* is “made out of advertising slogans and rock lyrics, snippets of film and television” (2008: 44) that highlight the inescapability

³ For further discussion see Glen Scott Allen’s “Raids on the Conscious: Pynchon’s Legacy of Paranoia and the Terrorism of Uncertainty in Don DeLillo’s *Ratner’s Star*” (1994).

and hermeneutic cycles of consumer culture. Todd McGowan adds that *Underworld* becomes a postmodern “waste land because it is a [text] without a site for the sacred, a world without the gap in the other” (135). The suggestion that nothing escapes the “aura” of media culture in *Underworld* is nothing new in the context of DeLillo’s career. In fact, Boxall suggests that DeLillo’s primary “means for absorbing and articulating an entire culture” (43) derives from the postmodern lens applied to his work.⁴ Consider also, Douglas Keesey’s contention that DeLillo’s first novel, *Americana* (1971), demonstrates a failure on the part of the novel’s protagonist, David Bell, to model his life on film as one lived outside of contemporary postmodern conditions: “a failure of the sympathetic imagination . . . basically another Hollywood production” (32). Moreover, consider Anthony DeCurtis’s reading of DeLillo’s *Great Jones Street* (1973), which analyses how it is ultimately impossible for protagonist, Bucky Wunderlick, to “withdraw” from commodified ‘Rock and Roll’ and create meaningful, experimental art: all art is “bound in the cash nexus and the exchange of commodities, outside of which there stands nothing” (140).

The works of Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson are perhaps most frequently drawn upon in theorising DeLillo’s apparent postmodernism. For Baudrillard, the ‘simulacrum’, or simulated representation of reality, is inescapable

⁴ At this point I would like to acknowledge other critics who present an alternate position: see Philip Nel’s chapter “DeLillo and Modernism” pp. 13-26 in the *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (2008); Leonard Wilcox’s “Baudrillard, DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative,” *Contemporary Literature* 32.3 (1991); and Frank Lentricchia’s “Tales of the Electronic Tribe,” in *New Essays on “White Noise”*, p. 79 (1991). Further, in *American Magic and Dread* (2000), Mark Osteen notes that DeLillo’s writing is often the result of a “collision and collusion between image and anti-image, between high culture and consumer culture” (25); also see Osteen’s text for further discussion on how DeLillo is potentially a modernist writer commenting on postmodernism.

in a contemporary media-driven culture. According to Leonard Wilcox, he finds “nothing outside the play of simulations, no real in which a radical critique of the simulational society might not be grounded” (1991: 363). As such, the authentic agent, one detached from “simulational society” is no longer possible, instead every action is the product of a recycling of past styles in a process of “hyperbolic intertextuality” (Knight 2008: 28). While Baudrillard’s totalising vision founded upon a boundless age of consumerism—elsewhere referred to as a “society of the spectacle” (Evans 106)—is certainly taken up thematically by DeLillo in the earlier works noted above, perhaps it is never more evident than in the seminal postmodern work *White Noise* (1985).

White Noise is one of the most frequently cited literary representations of American postmodernism as it is explicitly made up of product placements and incessant television references (Boxall 44; Olster 82). What is more, the text’s diffuse consumer culture drives characters to locate themselves via television or movie images (Olster 83); thus to “seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach” (Jameson 25). There is arguably, then, nowhere left for an authentic conception outside of systems of control and coercion (Knight 2008: 30-32). For example, when Jack Gladney attempts to kill the man who has manipulated his wife, he cannot focus on the act of shooting the man. Rather, he obsessively focuses on the description of the act, which is made up of pastiche assemblage taken from countless films and novels: “I fired the gun, the pistol, the firearm, the automatic” (*White Noise* 312).

While it is certainly plausible to interpret *White Noise* as an exemplary postmodern work, in this thesis I stop short of offering a similar reading of *Underworld*. To be sure, I agree that by presenting conditions mediated by

technology, language, and social formation, *Underworld* engages with ideas at the core of postmodernity (Knight 2008: 30). However, I disagree with three key aspects of postmodern theory in relation to *Underworld's* narrative of connection: that the nexus of connectivity is intrinsically bound to a decentred and depthless western culture (Jameson 37), a waning sense of historicity (Jameson 5), and an “endless commodification of objects and humans alike” (Olster 89). As such, I will proffer an alternative framework that retains connectivism to capitalist systems at its core, while also accommodating *Underworld's* centeredness in the era of software technology; its adherence to recycling principles rather than a commodity-waste dynamic; and its strong sense of historicity.

Utilising globalisation theory to more accurately locate *Underworld's* myriad of connections in the software era of the post-Cold War has become a burgeoning strain of criticism related to the text. James Annesley, for example, contends that *Underworld* “identifies a relationship between its integrated narrative trajectories and coordinating processes of globalization” (88); while Philip Wegner suggests that intricate connections in *Underworld* demonstrate the presence of “new global social and spatial formations”. I would certainly agree with such theorists that the novel’s emphasis on convergence, especially in relation to “media, cyberspace, and corporate policy” (Annesley 87) underscores a desire to engage specifically with the context of globalisation. Moreover, I aim to extend this growing body of scholarship that situates DeLillo’s *Underworld* as a globalisation narrative. However, I will do so by suggesting that a particular ‘type’ of globalisation interpretation is most applicable to the novel.

It does, after all, seem somewhat vague to suggest that globalisation theory is the most applicable to *Underworld*, because globalisation is a field defined, at best,

within loosely drawn parameters. For example, Francis Fukuyama's seminal text *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), focuses on liberal democracy in the post-Cold War age, while proffering the idea that multinational or market capitalism is the unequivocally dominant economic paradigm; Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) sees the rise of renewed ethnic and religious tensions following the Cold War (Eichengreen 119); Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw's *The Commanding Heights* (1998) demonstrates the problems posed to statehood by the maturation of global economics (Malloy 417); and Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999) emphasises how globalisation fosters the modern phenomenon of synergy and branding at the expense of offshore production industries in developing countries.

As such, I will focus specifically on liquid globalisation theory—a conflation of Zygmunt Bauman's liquid modern theory and Thomas Friedman's interpretation of globalisation—to most accurately situate *Underworld's* narrative frame. In chapter one, I will provide detailed exposition of both theories and show how they work in tandem to contextualise *Underworld's* connected narrative structure within a software capitalist framework. In doing so, particular emphasis will be paid to how postmodern thought is, technologically speaking, inept for classifying the “vast array of systems” that foster connectivity in *Underworld* (UW 241).

In chapter two, I will analyse the commodification-to-waste dynamic at play in the text in order to suggest that through the employment of recycling as one of the novel's key themes, DeLillo demonstrates a break from the inevitability of the postmodern wastes in novels such as *White Noise*. Further, I will argue that recycling is a crucial component in the movement toward a “weightless” future (Bauman 119), and that by engaging with it, DeLillo actively establishes deeper

connections with an integrative liquid-global framework.

In my final chapter, I will discuss *Underworld* as historicised narrative in order to separate it from postmodern tropes relating to a waning sense of historicity. *Underworld*, by contrast, utilises American technological history of the late twentieth century in order to show precisely how technology has increasingly connected culture to a globalisation framework—from a genesis point in 1951, up until the Internet age of the post-Cold War. I will ultimately aim to demonstrate that by engaging with historical novel form in *Underworld*, DeLillo moves further away from the postmodern by reinforcing the liquid global sense that historical forces shape context.

Taken together, this tripartite scheme will posit a way of interpreting *Underworld's* seemingly endless connections as intrinsically linked to a global market nexus that may most aptly be termed liquid globalisation. Further, by providing three paths for separating *Underworld* from postmodernity, this thesis aims to contribute to a growing critical firmament that locates the novel in a post-postmodern context.

Chapter One:

Liquid Globalisation

Spring-Summer, 1992: *Underworld's* central protagonist, Nick Shay, is driving a Lexus through a wind swept American desert. He feels completely contained by and engaged with the Lexus, as though he is only a "barely there" part of the driving process: "The system flows forever onward, automated to priestly nuance, every gliding movement back-referenced for prime performance. Hollow bodies coming in endless sequence" (*UW* 63). Like the "global markets" that Don DeLillo mentions in the novel's epilogue (*UW* 785), the Lexus functions as a culmination of machines and networks "shaped outside the little splat of human speech" (*UW* 63). Further, the Lexus leads toward a "planing away of particulars" (*UW* 824), in that, Shay is only "barely there", thus signifying the car's role as metaphor for a globalised economy that crafts an erosion of nuance and the promotion of "greater conformity and integration" (Annesley 88)

In this chapter, I want to argue that "global markets" shape the novel's central narrative in much the same way that they shape the above scene: by planing away nuance and attempting to connect all elements with capitalist systems. I will do so by first establishing consistent links between *Underworld* and global markets. But the main trajectory of this chapter will be to arrive at an understanding as to how *Underworld's* seemingly infinite connections to capitalism may best be theorised. I will consider postmodern theory in this discussion, but I will aim to discredit its efficacy in relation to *Underworld* due to instability in terms of contextualising the technological conditions that frame the novel. In place of postmodern theory, I will suggest that a liquid globalisation framework acts as the best way of grasping connectivity in *Underworld*. Precisely what liquid globalisation means will be highlighted through a conflation of the central

theoretical positions given in Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* and Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.⁵ The purpose of providing a detailed analysis and conflation of these theories here, is so that I can demonstrate how liquid globalisation applies to the mediation of character and spatial organisation in *Underworld*; moreover, so that I have a theoretical base to draw upon in the following chapters, which aim to affirm a liquid globalisation frame at the expense of postmodernity in two further respects: through adherence to recycling principles, and an emphasis on historicity.

Floating Frame

In the above scene, one may readily interpret the role of technology as emblematic of all-encompassing global markets, and according to many critics, this theme remains consistent throughout the novel. Liliana M. Naydan, for example, argues that "very few things escape the economic cycles of late capitalist existence in the text" (192), and she does so by conducting an overview of the novel's "array of systems" (*UW* 241) that displace the presence of idiosyncrasy. Daniel Grausem agrees with Naydan's summary, arguing that the novel's structure and themes "revolve around the final stages of globalization" (310) which produce the intricately networked impacts of capitalism. Both David Evans and Philip Wegner arrive at similar conclusions regarding the novel's structural attempts to acknowledge newly globalised formations based upon the transnational abilities of capitalism (Evans 106; Wegner 54). Upon analysis of the text it is difficult to disagree with these arguments. After all, *Underworld* inundates the reader with

⁵ Hereon *Lexus*.

characters who find comfort in the feeling of “linked grids” lapping around them in office spaces (807); and characters who feel as though the world of “product development and merchandising and gift cataloguing” (86) understands their every need. Such examples arise because, as the critical tide suggests, characters are “glassed in at press level, set apart from the field” (*UW* 91) by capitalism; or as Evans points out, experiences are mediated by comprehensive economic and social systems that envelope the novel’s agents (131).⁶

Postmodern readings of *Underworld* suggest that these connections between characters and capital derive from DeLillo’s attempts to capture “what it feels like to live in a postindustrial nation at a time when media forms absorb increasingly more of our daily attention, so much so that these forms cease to feel like mediations of the real and are simply experienced as the real itself” (Duvall 4). John Duvall’s reading here is largely dependent upon the works of Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson. Baudrillard, for example, suggests that image-obsessed media masks reality to the point where representation bears no relation to reality whatsoever—what therefore exists is pure simulacrum, “a copy of a copy that has no original” (Baudrillard 43). Experiences are therefore “no longer immediate but always mediated through other, prior experiences” (Knight 2008: 31). Take Shay’s experience of watching a live baseball game in the 1990s: “We had the real Dodgers and Giants. Now we have the holograms” (91). Shay seems to be directly acknowledging the presence of simulacra here—the notion that there are no longer any “real” Dodgers or Giants, only representations.

⁶ I should point out, however, that Evans argues that although these systems are comprehensive, they do not mark the “obliteration of uniqueness and free choice” (*UW* 507) in the novel. Rather, “uniqueness” still exists on the social fringes, according to Evans. For further discussion see Evans’s “Taking Out The Trash” p. 127-131 (2006).

Jameson would certainly agree with such a reading of this scene, given his argument that people have become so thoroughly immersed in the multinational capitalist language of advertising and the flow of media imagery, that escape is no longer possible (36-37).⁷ As such, one would find that not only Shay's experience of the baseball game is mediated by simulacra, but that countless other textual examples are too: Shay's experience of the Texas Highway Killer video (179); or his notion that corporations "take you and shape in nearly nothing flat, twist and swivel you" (282). Further, one may interpret in Jameson that such immersion in a culture of simulacra has also triggered a colonisation of what Peter Knight calls the "last spaces of resistance to the voracious logic of the market"—"realms of art, the unconscious, and even primitive nature itself" (2008: 35). Therefore, the notion that "reality is shallow and weak and fleeting" (*UW* 387) seems almost infinitely applicable. Emblematic of the notion that such colonisation is seemingly boundless in *Underworld* is Klara Sax: a central character depicted in the role of world famous artist. Sax conceives of a "postpainterly" age where artistic culture centres on taking a range of objects that already exist and creating a pastiche work out of them (*UW* 393). In other words, artistic creation is, for Sax, based upon that which explicitly cannibalises the work of the past and represents it in a different form instead of aiming for a new kind of expression. Moreover, even if Sax were to aim for a 'new' or 'real' expression, her work would inevitably be classified as representative simulacra, much like that of her friend, Acey Greene: "Her stuff is all show . . . It's all surface. She's catering, she's pandering to white ideas about scary blacks" (*UW* 479).

⁷ For further discussion see Anthony Giddens' *Consequences of Modernity* (1990).

To be sure, I do not disagree with the postmodern notion that a colonisation of space—even that belonging to art or the unconscious—by the global market (or media culture) exists in the text. The point I want to argue, however, is that it is difficult to locate precisely how the media culture reflected in postmodern thought could create such a totalising vision of mediation in *Underworld*.

The postmodern conceptions of mediated culture that have been outlined above in relation to Baudrillard and Jameson pre-date widespread use of the Internet, thus subjecting the positions to earlier means through which to interpret media culture's mediating affects. These earlier means have been widely criticised: Leonard Wilcox, for example, suggests that while Baudrillard delineates a world where nothing is "outside the play of simulations, no real in which a radical critique of the simulational society might be grounded" (1991: 346), he fails to acknowledge precisely how exactly all firm structures and finalities have been abolished by simulated culture. Similar criticisms have been leveled at Jameson's contention that postmodernity is able to form "the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American . . . economic domination throughout the world" (Duvall 4) given the technology available to it.⁸ I would now like to follow this line of criticism related to the slippage between postmodern theory and technological context, by briefly reviewing the functionality and limitations of arguably the most important device in terms shaping the postmodern arguments of Jameson and Baudrillard that have been outlined above: television.

⁸ For further discussion see Stacey Olster's "White Noise", and Philip Nel's "DeLillo and Modernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (2008).

Television was the most prominent form of mass media spectacle when Jameson and Baudrillard produced their seminal postmodern works.⁹ The advent of cable television in the 1980s was largely responsible for the beginning of a “democratization of technology” and an awareness of alternate cultures (Friedman 61). Further, the technology of cable television helped to resolve the Cold War and unite a global culture through its capacity to spread information on a large scale (Friedman 62). However, television’s effects paled in comparison with those of the Internet; a point evidenced in Friedman’s analysis of how difficult it was to conduct multinational business up until the information revolution of the 1990s. Until the Internet age, finance was still governed by “traditional institutions” and “slow-moving executives and decision-making committees, who were risk-averse and not particularly swift at responding to changes in the marketplace” (Friedman 53). Naturally, these institutions were largely bound to a securitised system that conducted business in a local market, rather than opening themselves up to a plethora of international investors and mutual funds (Friedman 57). Therefore, multinational or free-market capitalism, although it could be said to have been “in the air” (Friedman 161), was still only on the developmental horizon in the late 1980s.¹⁰ In real terms then, the effects of television upon the creation of a consumer-driven globalised economy could be viewed as relatively underwhelming when considered in comparison with the Internet. However, Jameson conceived of all-encompassing multinational capitalism in an era before

⁹ For further discussion see Elizabeth Klaver’s “Postmodernism and the Intersection of Television and Contemporary Drama” (1994).

¹⁰ For further discussion on data related to divided market structure up until the information revolution of the post-Cold War see Friedman’s *Lexus* pp. 63-71.

the Internet (an era that television was at the core of), even though the technology that contextualised his work did not seem to add up to support such claims.¹¹

Even if we are to accept that the media culture surrounding the production of Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991)¹² could sustain a sense that everything is mediated and thus connected to capitalist systems, the type of context this theory could support is far removed from what we find in *Underworld*. More specifically, it might produce the televisual culture of earlier DeLillo novels—*White Noise*, for example. In *White Noise*, we find characters so completely colonised by the media that they “randomly spout gobbets from television” (Knight 2008: 32). Further, characters dream of the brand names and slogans that they have absorbed via television: while watching his daughter sleep, protagonist Jack Gladney hears her mutter the words “Toyota Celica” (WN 114). Many similar examples appear in the novel, each indicating that culture has been evacuated of reality by a series of “Hollywood version[s]” (Knight 2008: 30). However, the most pertinent example of DeLillo's creation of what Adam Kelly calls a “spatial phantasmagoria” of media-saturated culture comes in the novel's most iconic scene (395).

‘The most photographed barn in America’ scene appears as a metaphor for the media saturation of *White Noise*. As Murray Jay Siskind puts it in the text, “it becomes impossible to see the barn” because it is impossible to “get outside the

¹¹ Further problematising Jameson's conception of the immersive culture of multinational capitalism is the fact that he (paradoxically) steers away from the notion that technology is “the ultimately determining instance” (37) of this phase of modernity, rather claiming that modern information technologies represent a network of power that is “difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp” (38); thus begging the question, if technology is not the determining instance of multinational capitalism but rather a network that we still only loosely grasp, then what is the determining factor?

¹² Hereon *Postmodernism*.

aura” of representations (12-13). This “aura” is “the irrecoverable substitution of the fake for the real” that sustains *White Noise*’s characters within a “collective perception” of identity (Knight 2008: 31); a perception determined according to “pop images and simulacra” (Jameson 25). But although such a collective perception of identity deriving from a culture of pop images may be visible in *White Noise*, contained as it is within the aura of the “ephemeral televisual screen of the moment” (Evans 105); it is more difficult to apply a similar reading to the vast nature of *Underworld*. Rather, *Underworld*’s containment of characters within an “aura” that mediates existence draws upon a technological framework far more sophisticated than the one at work in *White Noise*. *Underworld* is, after all, a novel that deals with instantaneous capitalism and relations between “dozens of characters and identities, scattered across the temporal and geographical terrain of America” (O’Donnell 109); and thus must be theoretically approached using a framework capable of grasping how relations work to create a coordinated modern network.

My contention here is that postmodern theory is technologically inadequate for classifying the intricate and vast connections between capitalist systems and *Underworld*. As such, while ‘the most photographed barn in America’ from *White Noise* may intrinsically be linked to postmodern theory in that it invokes the core promise of simulated culture—that everything is mediated by televisual media imagery. If the same barn were situated in *Underworld*, perceptions of it would be co-opted not just by media culture, but also by the ways that “contemporary experience [is] colonized and coordinated by ‘Das Kapital’” (Annesley 87): through money and information that “forms waves and codes. A higher kind of intelligence. Travels at the speed of light” (*UW* 386). Knight has perhaps best capitulated what I

am referring to here, arguing that *Underworld* is an “attempt to map the impossible complex of interactions in the age of globalization between individuals and larger social and economic forms” (1999: 830). And as I will argue in the following section of this chapter, the optimal way to understand DeLillo’s attempt to map and integrate complex global interactions, and therefore mediate existence, is by applying a theoretical basis located firmly in the cyber-technology age of the post-Cold War.

A Liquid Turn

What I have aimed to establish to this point is that although the effects of mediated culture in *Underworld* may resemble those in *White Noise*, the means for creating these effects presents a disjunction with the postmodern. *Underworld’s* vast networks of connections represent the complexities of globalisation’s cyber-culture, rather than reflecting those networks conceived in accord with inferior technologies. Thus interpreting the text requires a theoretical departure from postmodernity. Indeed, applying postmodern theory—such as that of Zygmunt Bauman—to *Underworld’s* globalisation networks and the cyber technologies that support them, may amount to a “hypothetization” and “hypergeneralization” moving around an already unstable theory (Kellner 79). However, if we are to look beyond Bauman’s postmodern musings to his liquid modern theory, we may find not only the emergence of a clear attempt to work through the logic of contemporary social systems (Ray 66), but an adequate framework for grasping endless connections between characters and capitalist systems in *Underworld*.

The 'liquid' metaphor is the best way to grasp the contemporary phase of modernity, according to Bauman (2). Liquids are constantly prone to changing shape, and rather than being contained in specific dimensions (like solids) they are "diffuse, all-permeating, all-penetrating, all-saturating" prospects (*Bauman talks with Peter Beilharz* 339). Liquids therefore capture a modern technologically driven era where the social labyrinth is "no longer cut in rock or molded in concrete, but cast out of electronically conducted information" (ibid). By "electronically conducted information" Bauman is referring to the contemporary dominance of new information systems and the concurrent rise of multinational conglomerates; what he calls "software capitalism" (*LM* 116). Once software capitalism became a reality, the era of heavy modernity had ended and the era of liquid modernity had begun:¹³

Once distances were able to be spanned with the velocity of electronic signals, all references to time appear, as Jacques Derrida would put, 'sous rature'... The near-instantaneity of software time augurs the devaluation of space (Bauman 117).

What this devaluation of space meant for Bauman was an "all-permeating, all-penetrating" era of software driven liquid modernity; an era where power had become "extraterritorial" due to its dependence upon technology that subverted

¹³ The heavy period of modernity was essentially a "bulky", "immobile", and territorially "rooted" phase (Bauman 57). Above all else it was regulated by solidity and an 'inside/outside' dynamic built upon the Weberian-Marxist conceptions of modernity (Bauman 3). The result of such 'heavy' modernisation, according to David Evans, was an economic and spatial landscape "populated by giants—monstrous machines, huge factories, monopolistic corporations" (106). Moreover, a global landscape characterised by economic and social division, and the strict defense of boundaries that threatened to integrate ideologies (Bauman 115).

limits of distance and time (Bauman 11). This extraterritorialism oversaw a demolition of borders and boundaries that had previously “stopped the flow of new, fluid global powers”, thereby imparting a newly opened and yet connected global landscape (Bauman 12).

Throughout *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman is able to locate a sense of the global market’s liquefied yet connected nature in the rise of software capitalism, thus linking with *Underworld*’s core principle that connections occur based on post-Cold War capitalism’s ability to draw everything into an integrated mode of existence (McClure 86). However, I do not want to simply put the argument now that Bauman’s conception of a software-driven liquid modern culture provides a sound way of theorising connectivity in *Underworld*. Because Bauman only implicitly bases the transition into Liquid Modernity on the ubiquity of software capitalism, he does not specifically locate the driving mechanisms behind this change.¹⁴ As Larry Ray avers, *Liquid Modernity* provides a vision of a post-Fordist, globalised, fluid, post-bureaucratic society hinged upon the advent of software capitalism, but its claims are too theoretical (65-66). Keith Tester furthers this argument by asserting that Bauman is an imaginative not systemic sociologist, and as such, his work is unlikely to provide statistics or ‘facts’ to support an argument, but is more likely to refer to literature (81-83). It therefore seems imperative to introduce a second theorist in order to more firmly contextualise liquid modernity, and thus provide better rationale for applying it to *Underworld*.

Thomas Friedman’s globalisation theory provides a more systemic framework than Bauman’s, while at the same time echoing the core theses provided in *Liquid Modernity*. *Lexus* is Friedman’s definitive compendium on what

¹⁴ For further discussion see *Liquid Modernity* pp. 9; 14; 112; 116.

he calls globalisation “Round II” (17). The first round of globalisation ran between the mid-1800s and the 1920s, but it was split apart by successive World Wars. In terms of trade volumes, capital flows, and the flow of labour across borders when compared with relative GNP’s and populations, the period of globalisation preceding World War I was similar to the one we are living through today, according to Friedman (xvi).

What separates the two eras, however, is that while globalisation “Round I” was founded upon falling transportation costs, largely due to the invention of the railroad, steamship and automobile, which enabled movement and trade between territories to be much cheaper and faster than before (xvi-xvii); globalisation “Round II” was instigated by falling telecommunication costs owing to the development of microchips, satellites, fibre optics and, of course, the Internet in the late 1980s-early 90s (xviii).¹⁵ Such developments meant the potential quickening (to the point of instantaneity) of trade capacity and foreign investment; and also that the availability of telecommunications moved from esoteric to relatively homogenous in the space of a few years. Friedman calls this transition a “democratization of technology” (47) owing largely to innovations involving computerisation, miniaturisation, compression technology, and digitisation.

It is through exposition of the “democratization of technology” that Friedman provides a more grounded view of Bauman’s “software capitalism”. Where Bauman uses metaphor—power that is “no longer bound” (11), the “mind-boggling speed of circulation” (14)—Friedman uses concrete examples of how the development and subsequent ubiquity of information technologies has led to a new globalised

¹⁵ For further discussion see Friedman’s *Lexus* pp. 61-63, wherein he analyses the gradual development of information technologies that led to a widespread “democratisation of technology”.

era in the post-Cold War world.

According to Friedman, Tim Berners-Lee's innovation in Internet technology in 1990—the creation of the 'world wide web'—meant that the Internet was, after years of development, ready to be used as a “mass tool for research, commerce and communication” (Friedman 66); and in the early 90s, this “mass tool” is precisely what it became.¹⁶ The Internet was the main catalyst for an information revolution that triggered an inexorable integration of markets, nation-states, individuals and technologies to a degree never witnessed before (Friedman 9). The ultimate result of this transformation was the dissolution of those systems that had operated on a monopolising basis during the Cold War (Friedman 66). In effect, what the information revolution meant was that individuals, corporations and governments alike (by and large) could no longer be confined within borders, because widely available technology enabled them to see, and to capitalise upon, what was going on around the world (Friedman 86).

The information revolution therefore implied that governments were forced to open their systems to a globalised model because they could no longer control the spread of information. However, it was not simply that countries were forced into globalisation; they were also coerced into it because this new system ultimately provided greater profit margins, and therefore higher standards of living than any of the alternatives (Friedman 104).¹⁷ Globalising technologies

¹⁶ In 1990 Berners-Lee made it possible to locate information across a global network at a virtually cost-free rate, subsequently popularising the internet as a result (Friedman 65). For further discussion see Friedman's *Lexus* pp. 62-65. For more comprehensive discussion on the Internet's evolution between 1969-1990 see Stephen Segaller's *Nerds 2.0.1: A Brief History of the Internet* (1999).

¹⁷ For further discussion on how globalisation and its free-market capitalist model fosters more economic growth and higher average incomes through higher volumes of trade, foreign investment, privatisation, and “more efficient

enabled governments to buy and sell anything, anywhere, at any time, and this transnational ability to move capital between markets meant unprecedented potential for generating income (Friedman 133).

Friedman asks that we consider other systems—communism, socialism, fascism—in the discussion at this point, and although his analysis concedes that these models may be able to distribute and divide income more equitably, he argues that they are unable to compete when it comes to generating wealth (133). As such, the economic model of globalisation is largely desirable compared to the alternatives; as well as being inevitable on the basis of an information revolution (Friedman 74). This combination of desirability and inevitability signified the end of the Cold War, according to Friedman; and as former Korean Prime Minister Lee Hong Koo put it, “a victory for market forces over politics”.¹⁸

All that was left for governments to do if they sought economic prosperity after the Cold War was to fully embrace the market-led revolution by donning what Friedman calls “the Golden Straitjacket” (104). For Friedman, the Golden Straitjacket is the defining political-economic garment of the post-Cold War era, and putting it on signals an acceptance of free-market principles (ibid). It is, in short, a removal of all foreign investment restrictions, widespread privatisation of enterprises, and an elimination of subsidies for state-owned firms (Friedman 105; Eichengreen 120). In other words, the Golden Straitjacket signifies a general deregulation that removes control of the economic sector away from governments, and places it with global market forces. Putting on the Straitjacket is a step that virtually every country has been willing to take, resulting in a sharply defined

use of resources under the pressure of global competition”, see Friedman’s *Lexus* p. 106.

¹⁸ Quoted in Friedman p. 107.

contrast between the Cold War and post-Cold War worlds (Friedman 152).

Whereas the Cold War world had been characterised by division, the post-Cold War world is characterised by an integration of global markets (Friedman 8). Walls and boundaries that had previously divided countries have effectively come down, and a market-led globally interwoven system has stepped in to replace them; a system governed by technology that enabled capital to be, in Bauman's terms, "extraterritorial".

Friedman recognises the dominant economic and structural trend of the post-Cold War world here (Eichengreen 118). Further, his conception of globalisation is markedly similar to Bauman's liquid modern theory. For instance, Bauman's notion that the advent of "software capitalism"—which enabled space and time to in principle be transgressed—is the defining catalyst for a transition into liquid modernity (116). Friedman saw the same reason for change: a democratisation of Internet technology that triggered free-market capitalism on a global scale (47). Moreover, both theorists agree on the conditions of this new phase of modernity: where Bauman finds that the increasing liquedisation of borders and boundaries at the hands of "software capitalism" has led to an epoch dominated by instantaneity and extraterritorialism, Friedman finds the modern capacity for speed, mobility, connection and co-option has led to the inexorable integration of global markets, individuals, corporations and systems of government. As such, I suggest that the congruous relationship between the two theories lends them to conflation under the term liquid globalisation.

Most importantly though, I posit that the above exposition of liquid globalisation theory provides the best way of apprehending *Underworld's* mediations that may be defined in terms of convergence between characters and

“global markets” (UW 785). *Underworld* is a novel built upon the economic and technological conditions outlined in the two theories above: it interprets the world as an “increasingly interwoven place” due to the prominence of instantaneous technological movement across spaces no longer confined within borders (Annesley 90); or as Bauman might put it, extraterritorialism is made manifest by software capitalism. Therefore, in the same way that a globalisation network has required virtually all countries to don a ‘golden straitjacket’ and adopt the “same basic hardware” of free-market capitalism in Friedman’s terms, so too does DeLillo’s novel conceivably don a golden straitjacket of its own, thus connecting characters to, and mediating existence via, a globalised strata. Perhaps this concept is never more apparent in the text than in Shay’s submission to a metaphorical representation of global markets in the form of a Lexus that he drives through the desert. However, representations of coordinated spatial environments in the text also work alongside such instances to affirm that a liquid globalisation framework of integration is at work in the novel.

New Space

A spatial transformation and restructuring is crucial under liquid globalisation, for the modern world is now propelled by transgression of space on the basis of information technologies (Bauman 9).¹⁹ Space is therefore made “mutable and dynamic, not preordained and stagnant” (Bauman 112). In other words, liquid globalisation proffers a spatial whole rather than divided spatial regions; or as

¹⁹ For further discussion on space in reference to globalisation see also, Anthony Giddens’ *The Consequences of Modernity* p. 14.

Roland Robertson puts it, globalisation “refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (8). DeLillo recognises this formation of integrated space by drawing seemingly disparate contexts and characters into a tight network of connection. Through his creation of integrated space, DeLillo is therefore able to lend credence to the “coordinating forces of the global market” that liquefy the resistance of space and draw nearly all elements into an integrated mass (Bauman 14; Annesley 89); or a “blended whole” as Stacey Olster puts it (83).

Consider, for example, DeLillo’s positioning of protagonist, Nick Shay, toward the end of the novel: Shay is in a Russian night-club on the “forty second floor of a new office tower filled with brokerage houses, software firms, import companies and foreign banks” (786). This structure, along with Shay’s location within it, underscores the notion that traditional boundaries between politics, culture, technology and finance are disappearing in the era of liquid globalisation (Friedman 20). And instead, a relational dynamic between space, culture, individual and capital has emerged to signify a newly coordinated era. Moreover, consider DeLillo’s repeated allusions to being contained by elements pertaining to “the regimented typeface on [a] map” (*UW* 803). A sense of “order and command” (*UW* 806) emanates from the map’s typeface in the novel, enveloping characters like Shay in a sense of comfort and organisation—his life rarely strays from the “trammeled jogging paths” (*UW* 809) of contemporary life, that, according to James Annesley, represent the significance of coordinated environments in the novel (93).

Shay’s repeated submission to the “regimented typeface” of contemporary life also reinforces the idea that DeLillo sees the dominant spatial paradigm of

contemporary life as an integrated whole: Shay is a dominant character—he is an economically prosperous, highly functional member of society; Bauman and Friedman might suggest that he is an exemplar of liquid-global consciousness (119-120;199). Shay’s integration with modern space should, therefore, not be viewed as an anomaly, but as DeLillo’s conception of the everyday citizen (Wegner 63; Olster 83); one that is, in Bauman’s terms, determined according to encompassing systems of technology and their “mass produced and merchandized” effects (84).

If one is looking for elements beyond the spatially integrated whole in *Underworld*, one must look not at Shay, but into the “white areas on the map” (404). One must look to those spaces where streets are named for old Indian tribes, and where landfill is located (803); where radioactive waste is held (106); where the deluded, psychotic, parasitic bodies of society roam (242). Or, perhaps most importantly, one must examine the subterranean plot line of Eisenstein’s imaginary art-house film as rendered by DeLillo (445). It is only through the ‘underworld’ aspects of such a film that DeLillo is able to contextualise the antithetical trajectory of a model touched upon in allusions to landfill, radioactive waste and psychotic bodies.²⁰

The dominant integrative spatial culture in *Underworld* contributes to a gradual breakdown of all notions of division and separation, culminating in what Grausem calls the fusion of a “techno-religious fantasy of cyberspace” at the end of

²⁰ This trajectory is one characterised by waste and dysfunctionality. Further, it aims to undermine the integrative principles of globalisation. However, meaningful analysis of this parallel framework cannot be undertaken here due to space restrictions, though I acknowledge those who have done so elsewhere: see for instance Evans’ “Taking out the Trash: Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*, Liquid Modernity, and the end of Garbage” (2006).

the novel (318). This is a fusion in which all spatial elements are intimately connected, thus making spatial separation impossible. To be sure, this conclusion is indeed a “fantasy” as it connotes a sense of what Bauman calls “weightlessness”(121)—a vision of Sister Edgar’s soul laid bare in cyberspace, entirely integrated with the Internet technology that governs the world (824-827). And DeLillo acknowledges that such “weightlessness”—the dissolution of all spatial boundaries—is not possible, by alluding to the as yet “unwebbed” objects that still linger in the final pages of the text (Naydan 196). Thus, *Underworld* remains in keeping with the Baumanian conception that the infinite flexibility of space has not yet been achieved due to a continuing dependence upon certain physical forms (119). However, by creating a narrative of gradually tightening connections and cooptions that culminate in a fantasy of “weightlessness”, DeLillo is able to finally conceptualise what he sees on the horizon of modernity: an entirely integrated account of space in coming times based upon the “unconstrained futurity at the heart of the capital markets” (Grausem 313).

In rendering space, character and global markets as part of an almost entirely integrated whole, the final pages of *Underworld* affirm the logic of applying a liquid globalisation framework to the text. Moreover, by attributing this sense of globalised integration throughout the novel to the effects of post-Cold War technologies and concomitant socio-economic shifts, DeLillo not only aligns with Friedman and Bauman’s concepts that are rooted in the 1990s condition, but also creates separation between *Underworld* and postmodern theories that fail to grasp how global markets work to mediate existence in the context of *Underworld*’s vast “array of systems” (UW 241). Thus far, however, I have only touched upon how a liquid globalisation framework may be applied to the novel’s organisation of space,

and to the integrated relationship between characters and capital in the text. In the following chapter I will examine how *Underworld's* obsession with recycling further draws upon the integrative, or connective, liquid globalisation theory outlined above, while in-turn creating a greater separation from postmodernity.

Chapter Two:

The Recycling Effect

While looking at the enormous 'Fresh Kills' landfill and the twin towers of the World Trade Center in the distance, Brian Glassic, a waste management executive in *Underworld*, finds a sense of "poetic balance" between the two ideas (*UW* 184). On the one hand, the towers represent modern capitalism—they are key monuments to a system that is "constantly striving to convert private space into a common market" (Evans 109), thus functioning as indicators of capitalism's attempt to penetrate the "the most minute textures of life" (Wegner 56). Landfill, by contrast, resides at the other end of the spectrum. It is the waste of our lives—"the particular, the singular, the unemployable" (Evans 110); or as Liliana M. Naydan puts it, late-twentieth century waste is the end-point of "post-capitalist reproduction, simulation, and mass consumption" (189). What therefore lies at the heart of Glassic's "poetic" vision is a dichotomy, in that, one side represents the endless cycles of capitalism (Naydan 180), while the other demonstrates the final destination of these supposedly endless cycles.

However, it is not an invariably balanced relationship between waste and capitalism that Glassic senses here. Rather, this balance is made problematic by the threat of waste's "mass metabolism" coming to "overwhelm us" (*UW* 184); or in other words, the potential for waste's permeation of all levels of society due to intensification in the consumption/commodification rate (Evans 109). In recognising the potentially damning threat posed by material waste, Glassic finds

the challenge that he had been craving in his vision of landfill: a chance to counteract waste by recycling it, and thus re-incorporating it into capitalist cycles (*UW* 185).

In this chapter, I will argue that counteracting waste's threat to capitalism through recycling is not only at the heart of the above scene, but of *Underworld* in general. Further, I will suggest that by positioning it as such, Don DeLillo works to connect the narrative with a "slimming trend" that is inherent to the prosperity of a liquid globalisation model. In order to make these claims, I will first establish that the dichotomous relationship between material waste and capital is central to the novel in literal rather than metaphorical terms. Second, I will compare the deployment of material waste in *White Noise* and *Underworld* in order to suggest that the former depends upon a postmodern sense of containment, while *Underworld* intently focuses on recycling, and thus demonstrates a further departure from the postmodern. Finally, I will argue that DeLillo's casting of central characters as recycling agents further demonstrates deeply embedded connections between the text and a liquid globalisation framework.

Waste Works

Molly Wallace is correct in arguing that much of *Underworld* is "about the underside of history, the abjected "wastes" of consumer society" (369). These "wastes", as the character Viktor Maltsev points out, act as "the mystical twin of the other" (*UW* 791). As much as the novel is filled with the liquefied elements of free-market capitalism—as has been pointed out in chapter one—so too is the text filled by its "devil twin" (*ibid*) in the form of material waste; thus demonstrating

how Glassic's conception of a "poetic" balance works at a fundamental level in the text. Consider, for instance, repeated motifs regarding an 'underworld' bursting at the seams with material waste: "the landfill across the road is closed now, jammed to capacity, but gas keeps rising from the great earthen bern" (809).²¹ The point of these repeated motifs is to reinforce the "overpowering odour of garbage" (Evans 110) in the text. I would also agree with David Evans's contention that DeLillo focuses on the "overpowering" material quality of waste as a byproduct of consumer-driven culture, rather than on waste's capacity for metaphor (117).

Many critics have been tempted to read *Underworld's* visions of waste as sign or symbol of something greater. Amy Hungerford, for example, argues that material waste seems less connected to "concrete meanings in the world" (2006: 350) than to the waning sense of spiritual belief following the twentieth century's nuclear moment. John Duvall finds a relatively similar connection in his argument that waste, in *Underworld*, is representative of "spiritually wasted lives" (5).²² Perhaps the most prominent interpretation, however, is that DeLillo uses material waste as an allegorical jeremiad for the failure of consumer-driven culture in the late twentieth century, and that he embellishes the impact of waste as a result (Wegner 57; Kavadlo 385; Osteen 18). Such an argument may appropriately be applied to, say, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), which sees capitalist culture in a state of entropy, and thus uses material waste to underscore the cracks in the dominant social order (Fedirka 613). Pynchon uses the "residue of [the] lives" (COL 5) of his characters—"coupons promising savings of 5 or 10c, trading stamps, pink flyers. . . butts, tooth-shy combs" (ibid)—to "point to a history

²¹ For further discussion see *Underworld* pp. 88; 106; 806.

²² For further discussion see Mark Osteen's *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (2000).

of missed opportunities and unfulfilled hopes” (Evans 116); or in other words, to tell the story of capitalism’s failure to realise a state of prosperity for all involved.

In *Underworld*, however, it would be a misinterpretation to read the role of material waste as following Pynchon’s allegorical path. Rather, DeLillo plunges into “the material immediacy, the concrete and sensuous, oleaginous and viscid substance of garbage itself” (Evans 117) to highlight the notion that material waste is a modern reality, and the logical byproduct of consumerism. He therefore moves “garbage stacked in black bags” on the streets of New York (*UW* 376); landfills that are the size of mountains (*UW* 184); and the ever-deepening entombment of contaminated waste (*UW* 88), to the centre of his focus because of material waste’s sheer inescapable presence in the modern world. The characters are “surrounded by it,” says Patrick O’Donnell; “vast waste dumps occupy the periphery of [the novel’s] cities” (110), and ultimately present “omnivorous movie terror[s]” (*UW* 185) threatening to overwhelm the social order.

Rather than metaphor, *Underworld*’s conception of the role of waste echoes what Garbology theorists have pointed out.²³ Edward Humes, for example, notes that “across a lifetime. . .we are each on track to generate 102 tons of trash. . . Each of our bodies may occupy only one cemetery plot when we’re done with this world, but a single person’s 102 ton trash legacy will require the equivalent of 1,100 graves” (4). Further, Adam Minter observes that yearly loads of America’s garbage trucks would “fill a line of trucks stretching halfway to the moon” (7).

But it is not just *Underworld* that presents material waste as the manifest outcome of consumer culture in terms of DeLillo’s oeuvre. Certainly, *White Noise*

²³ For further discussion see Raymond Benton Jr’s “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle . . . and Refuse” (2014).

presents a similar picture. For example, we find the “oozing cube[s] of mangled cans, clothes hangers, animal bones and other refuse” (*WN* 259) in an attempt to portray the “ruinous end-point of all material things” (Naydan 187). In a text defined by the “commodification of objects and humans alike” (Olster 80), stockpiles of waste are therefore representative of the concomitant outcome; or the natural “underside of consumer consciousness” (*WN* 259). O’Donnell makes an interesting argument in terms of analysing waste in *White Noise*, claiming that this “underside” of waste represents “the spoor of our mortality, the map of our progress toward death, individual and collective” (110).²⁴ It does so because waste is a “breakdown of material order” much like death (O’Donnell 111). Therefore, in light of what is arguably *White Noise*’s core dictum—a centering on the “collapse of the real and the flow of signifiers emanating from an information society” (Wilcox 2002: 146)—it becomes necessary to view the “underside” qualities of waste and death alike, as threatening possibilities. After all, the quality of “life-always-becoming-death” (O’Donnell 114) seems at once to be a vehicle that threatens to destabilise, perhaps even derail, the veneer of a culture that holds a Baudrillardian “loss of the real” (Wilcox 1991: 347) at its core. As Douglas Keesey argues, death and the “wasted life” (32) both fall outside of simulated postmodern cycles, in that they represent the fragmented or idiosyncratic event (Wegner 56; Evans 109). Therefore, rather than linking with consumer-commodification culture, both the idiosyncratic death and waste product are “the other[s] of the contemporary world, the real specter[s] that returns to haunt the floating zones of desire of postmodern culture” (Wilcox 2002: 124).

²⁴ For further discussion see Mark Osteen’s *American Magic and Dread* p. 216-223.

Death and material waste are contained to a degree in *White Noise* through what Fredric Jameson would call a “free-floating and impersonal feeling” (16), a feeling that “tends to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria” (ibid). This “euphoria” is driven by the consumer-commodification culture that I touched on in chapter one; a culture that has penetrated all enclaves, including “nature and the unconscious” and crafted individuals in a postmodern mould (Olster 80). As Jameson puts: “[n]o longer the old monadic subject but rather that of some degraded collective ‘objective spirit’” (25). As a result of this postmodern mould, characters like central protagonist Jack Gladney are, for the most part, shielded from waste (and death) by a context that is almost entirely mediated by media representations (Boxall 45; Olster 88). In moments when waste cannot be contained by postmodern culture, however, what erupts is a “kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment”.²⁵ Effectively, the novel’s “sense of well-being, the security and contentment” (*WN* 20) is disturbed and threatened by the detritus that lies on the ‘outside’. But the best that characters in *White Noise* can do is to try and shield themselves from death rather than attempting to counteract it. For example, Gladney’s wife, Babette, uses a drug called ‘Dylar’, which is meant to stave off the fear of death (Wilcox 1991: 353). Babette’s approach here is indicative of the novel’s consistent attempts to contain death (or waste) at all levels. Further, the failure of ‘Dylar’ to abate the fear of death is ultimately significant too, because it marks a failure of the containment project, and, in turn, the perpetual resonance of a material waste threat (Evans 120).

²⁵ For reference see “Matters of Fact and Fiction,” a Don DeLillo interview with Anthony DeCurtis in *Rolling Stone* p. 120 (November 17, 1988).

Ultimately, then, a perennial struggle unfolds between consumer-commodification culture and its ever-threatening “underside” in *White Noise*.

Critics have often described *Underworld* as similarly working toward a project of waste containment.²⁶ However, there is a glaring element to the novel that demonstrates something more than simply a will to strike a sustainable balance between capitalist culture and waste. If we refer back to the section of the novel where Glassic senses a challenge in the site of landfill, for example, what DeLillo demonstrates here is the reinvigoration of the complacent, threatened spirit that we might ascribe to Jack Gladney in *White Noise*—a character utterly subjected to consumer culture, floating along with it and unable, despite his best attempts, to establish a sense of “interiority” within its inescapable postmodern framework (Olster 91). It is not necessarily that Glassic has escaped a framework of subjection, but rather that he is given a sense of purpose within such a framework that further triggers the novel’s recognition of a new social order beyond that of the postmodern. As a waste manager, Glassic’s primary role is not to contain or ignore waste but to transform and absorb it into something useful (*UW* 102); or as Evans points out, to re-integrate “garbage back into the productive-consumptive system” (120). Thus, when Glassic looks across the landfill he does not simply want to contain what he sees, or to accept it as a frightening yet inevitable part of American culture; instead, he wants to “penetrate [the] secret” (*UW* 185) and reinvigorate waste so that it does not escape “the framing logic of capitalistic systems” (Temko 495).

²⁶ For further discussion see Mark Osteen *American Magic and Dread*; and Philip Wegner’s *Periodizing the Cold War in Don DeLillo’s Underworld* p. 57 (2001); and Patrick O’Donnell’s “Underworld” in the *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* p. 114 (2008).

Evans attributes this shift in *Underworld* beyond the postmodern cycle of mass-consumerism to mass-waste, to a new economic paradigm's influence over DeLillo. This new paradigm aspires to a sense of weightlessness, whereby what counts is "the rapidity with which participants can recycle assets, and mutate [them] into new forms" (Evans 108). James Annesley makes similar claims, finding Naomi Klein's globalisation theory particular useful in grasping the novel's desire for weightlessness (91). This desire, according to Klein, stems from the contemporary speed of circulation and the capacity for instantaneous access on a global scale through modern technologies (146). The result of this circulation is a divestment of a need for "things" and a mass-gravitation toward a need for brands, because branding as opposed to production, provides the most ubiquitous presence and therefore the highest value (Klein 4; 148; 195). As such, what was an American landscape dominated by the seductions of shiny consumer objects, has become one dominated by free-floating, weightless brands (Klein 143; 196).

Both Zygmunt Bauman and Thomas Friedman acknowledge a similar shift to Klein in their respective discussions of the global desire to engage in a "slimming trend" (Bauman 123), and a process of getting "rid of paper" (Friedman 97). For both theorists, such a shift is attributed to the fact that the Internet now defines commerce, education, and communication, thus making connectivity one's greatest asset (Eichengreen 119).²⁷ As a result of this shift toward intangible assets like brands, the bulky prospect of material waste becomes something more than that which needed to simply be contained as it does in the postmodern context (Rifkin12). Rather, it is anathema to the perpetuation of social order: a

²⁷ For further discussion see Friedman's *Lexus* p. 199; and Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* p. 14.

“loathsomely corporeal” (Klein 196) prospect that must be transformed and recycled back into a system that ultimately aspires to a waste-free destiny (Wegner 57).

As the recycling movement plays an increasingly crucial role in a real-world context, so too does it play such a role in *Underworld*. I have touched upon this briefly by looking at Glassic’s response to landfill, but I now want extend this discussion by examining how DeLillo casts central characters as agents of recycling, and thus locates the recycling movement at the core of *Underworld*’s concerns.

The Recycling Agents

During *Underworld*’s early Cold War years, J. Edgar Hoover is crafted as “deeply embroiled in the intrigue and espionage of cold-war politics” (Wilcox 2002: 121); a man “whose own sequestered heart holds every festering secret in the Western world” (*UW* 51). Liliana M. Naydan puts it best, observing that Hoover functions as “an all-powerful gatekeeper of dark secrets and mysteries” (188). During this time Hoover was, essentially, the American embodiment of a defensive front-line against the threat of nuclear annihilation, and DeLillo depicts him as such. However, by the time *Underworld* arrives into the 1980s and early 90s—where “well-founded categories began to seem irrelevant. . .and a certain fluid movement became possible” (*UW* 571)—Hoover’s role has become relatively outmoded by a set of defense principles that revolve around counteracting material waste (McGowan 123).

In Hoover's place rises Nick Shay, a waste management "executive emeritus" (*UW* 804) who, like his colleague, Brian Glassic, also sees himself as a member of an "esoteric order"; a "Church Father of waste" (*UW* 102). Shay is able to see himself in this way because he is the inheritor of the dubious legacy of upholding America's Cold War supremacy and prosperity, through his role as a waste manager (Wilcox 2002: 123). Leonard Wilcox's contention here reinforces the notion taken from garbology theory that recycling, or waste management, provides a path toward a sustainable global community and marketplace (Minter 5). But more than that, Wilcox underscores a central paradigm shift in the text—what was a fixation on the bomb's capacity for annihilation has evolved into a fixation on responding to the threat of waste (Knight 1999: 818). As such, the supplanting of Hoover for Shay in terms of status functions as metaphorical representation of the Cold War's progression toward its conclusion, and the concurrent rise of global economic, spatial and social formations that brought with them the goal of weightlessness. In chapter three, I will examine how the nuclear threat evolves into a globalised framework via *Underworld's* historical overview of the late twentieth century. For now, though, I want to argue that this paradigm shift is marked through Shay's role as a reinterpretation of the Hooverian G-man.

Consider, for instance, Shay being led through "hallway mazes fitted with electronic gates that Sims open[s] by inserting a keycard in a lockset" (303); and the fact that he is granted "the feeling of some power source accessible to those of us with coded keys" (*ibid*). He is granted such access and power because waste assumes almost religious proportions in the novel (McGowan 124), as outlined above; and it must therefore be treated with a sense of "reverence and dread" (*UW* 88). In other words, material waste inhabits a similar status to that of the nuclear

bomb at the height of the Cold War: that which holds the potential to reap “a landscape of visionary havoc and ruin” (*UW* 41). And as such, only the most powerful means necessary are deployed to deal with it. During the Cold War such a role was assigned to men like Hoover, the director of the FBI and arguably the most powerful man in America—“[e]very official secret . . . had its blood-birth in Edgar’s own soul” (*UW* 573). In the post-Cold War era, however, the role of defending America against the new preeminent threat—material waste—has been assigned to those like Shay, a man of “religious conviction” with regard to waste management (*UW* 88). As O’Donnell puts it, Shay sees “waste management [as] part of a global system of design and control that has both sacred and secular implications” (111). Such a claim adds up when we read Shay’s description of recycling processes toward the end of the novel:

Assembly lines of garbage, sorted, compressed and baled, transformed in the end to square-edged units, products again, wire-bound and smartly stacked and ready to be marketed. Sunny loves this place and so do the other kids who come with their parents or teachers to stand on the catwalk and visit the exhibits (809).

There is certainly a sense of reverence for recycling in this excerpt taken from one of Shay’s (apparently) regular visits to a facility outside of Phoenix. He conflates the fashion runway and the museum—“stand on the catwalk and visit the exhibits”—with the recycling plant, thus demonstrating how, in his view, two of the highest forums of cultural reverie may now be equated with the act of recycling. Further, he seems to exult in the transformation of garbage into “square-edged units, products again”, by later describing products that alight anew “with a

kind of brave ageing” (809). But it is not simply in his professional life that we find Shay’s reverence for recycling on display: as Evans argues, “Nick is equally as obsessed with eliminating waste at a personal level” (120). Take the following, for instance:

At home we removed the wax paper from cereal boxes.
We had a recycling closet with separate bins for
newspapers, cans and jars. We rinsed out the used cans
and empty bottles and put them in their proper bins
(102).

Shay and his family thus go to great lengths to separate their garbage into categories that will assist recycling procedures.²⁸ Significantly, on the following page we may notice how Shay barely discusses what happens to organic waste: “We did the yard waste. We bundled the newspapers but did not tie them in twine” (103). What these conflicting examples indicate is, on the one hand, Shay’s desire to transform garbage into simply “a moment in an endless process of transformation and circulation” (Evans 120); and on the other, his distaste for the unrecyclable wastes of consumer culture. For Shay, the difference between the two kinds of waste is that unrecyclable waste lacks any redemptive qualities; or as Evans argues, it displays “a common resistance to utility” (122). Recyclable waste, by contrast, can be re-packaged and transformed into a “square-edged unit”, therefore avoiding landfill to alight anew into economic cycles. As such, we find Shay’s reverence for recycling again and again in the text; and when it comes to that which is unrecyclable we find him wanting to “conceptualise and package it”

²⁸ For further discussion see *Underworld* pp. 121; 116.

and thus reduce its “irreducible thingness” (Evans 122) to the state of a homogenised product.

In terms of Shay’s “religious” devotion to recycling, there is something also to be said about the fact that his life in Phoenix seems a repeated or recycled set of events from one day to the next. He consistently returns to the repeated motif, be it references to watching Jackie Gleason on TV with his mother;²⁹ or to the shimmering “bronze tower” that is his workplace;³⁰ or to ruminations about his father smoking Lucky Strikes, and then leaving one day and never returning.³¹ DeLillo makes sure to keep the details virtually identical with each repetition, and the effect upon the reader is a form of hypnosis due to Shay’s obsessive treatment of the recycled details of his life.

I suggest that when taken together, the above examples are indicative of Shay’s embeddedness within a “self-replicating world, a space enclosed by the tightening ring of coordination” (Annesley 89). In other words, Shay is a recycler by virtue of the dominant social forces in *Underworld’s* modern context. During the Cold War, dominant political and social forces crafted agents like Hoover: those who were paranoid due to the nuclear threat constantly looming overhead (Knight 1999: 811). In the post-Cold War era, however, what crafts society is the speed of transnational software capitalism; and thus, a Baumanian sense that value is determined according to one’s ability to act in a fluid and instantaneous manner (132). The characterisation of Shay as an agent of recycling reinforces these core principles of a liquid globalisation model, therefore symbolising a paradigm shift in

²⁹ See *Underworld* pp. 103; 105; 121.

³⁰ See *Underworld* pp. 85; 87; 104; 119; 803; 806.

³¹ See *Underworld* pp. 87; 90; 102; 105; 118; 805; 808.

the text: one that has led away from Hoover, and toward the recycling agent that embodies the integrative principles of contemporary social systems.

But if Shay is a clear-cut agent of recycling, it is not so apparent how Klara Sax, the novel's other protagonist, plays a similar role. Discerning her involvement in this regard is important, given that—as I argue—recycling, and thus, liquid globalisation principles lie at the core of the novel. What has been problematic for critics, in terms of reading Sax as a recycler, is the fact that she is an artist. Evans, for instance, argues that Sax resists the role of a recycler through the prime motivations of her desert art project (*UW* 77), which he claims, aims to disassemble decommissioned warplanes and thus interrupt the “cycle of consumption-reprocessing-and-reconsumption” (122). Further, Evans claims that “in this sense, *Underworld* suggests that the making of art is the ultimate act of irresponsibility” (ibid). Evans falls in step with archetypal clichés related to ‘the artist’ here; clichés that would render Sax as a liberated, individualistic figure operating outside of, or against, the dominant cultural paradigm. The philosopher of modernity, Jürgen Habermas, for example, would perhaps make a similar claim given his regard for the monadic artist “who seeks to maintain the promise of liberalism and humanistic ideologies of equality, civil rights, and humanitarianism over and above those ideals to be realised in the development of capitalism itself”.³² And while it is true that Sax does uphold a sense of the reflexive life that forms a social critique through art and lifestyle, it is only that: a sense of individualism as compared to real abstraction from capitalist cycles. Though it is often difficult to distinguish between a sense of individuality and ‘real’

³² Quoted in Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* pp. 58-59 (1991).

individuality in relation to Sax, it is necessary to do so in order to situate her as a recycling agent and therefore contributor toward the perpetuation of a liquid-global framework.

Sax is depicted as a world-famous artist of the late-twentieth-century for her works that incorporate a range of castaway objects, earning her the title 'the Bag Lady' (*UW* 70). I would agree with David Cowart's argument that such work sees her role as a recycler "extend even to some hundreds of decommissioned B-52's" (59). These planes were set for the "cutter's torch" (*UW* 70); in other words, they were set to be scrapped and sent to landfill (Helyer 1000). But instead, Sax works to reinvigorate the planes by turning them into artworks. Of course, Evans would contend that Sax conducts "irresponsible" acts through art that contribute to the rubbish heap. To be sure, her work "does not ring with the clamour of the marketplace" (Boxall 44) in the same way that, say, Shay's recycling work might. Further, much of the rhetoric surrounding Sax makes it seem counterintuitive to argue for her role as a recycler. For instance, she talks about disassembling the homogenous qualities of the humanless factory line for a return to the unique "felt life" (*UW* 77), thus indicating that she moves more toward Habermas's modernist conception of the heterogeneous approach rather than the homogenising assertions of liquid globalisation (Bauman 101).

However, what critics such as Evans overlook in relation to Sax, are the hypothetical economics related to her desert installation. Consider, for example, Shay taking his wife to see the installation from a candy-striped hot-air balloon (124-125). While Shay is floating overhead and pondering whether the enormous installation is visible from space (126), we may arrive at an understanding as to why Sax received "foundation grants. . .congressional approval, all sorts of permits"

to construct the work (69): because it stands to fulfill an economic purpose. As tens of thousands of people flock monthly to see a public exhibition such as 'The Bean' in Chicago,³³ so too could we reasonably assume that many would visit a gargantuan installation in the desert by a world famous artist, thus generating an economic basis for the work. Sax's artwork therefore knowingly represents re-monetisation and, in turn, the recycling of discarded products back to economic cycles; thus separating the work from what some claim to be a vehicle for substituting one form of waste for another (Osteen 216).

Although DeLillo concedes a separate sense of individuality between Shay and Sax, the outcomes of their work as recyclers are markedly similar, as the above analysis has shown. Furthermore, it is not simply a whimsical engagement with recycling that each of these characters display. Rather, they both demonstrate commitment to their roles as recyclers; and moreover, it is a commitment that has forged the basis of their professions, and in Shay's case, also resonates clearly in his personal life. As such, both characters aid the transition into what Jeremy Rifkin calls, a "new cultural and economic dispensation" (12) that strives for weightlessness. They do so through a collective refusal to let material waste be the useless stuff of landfill, instead asserting that waste must be re-incorporated into the global economy in some way (Benton Jr. 4). Both characters thus signify a fundamentally altered approach to the waste dynamic inherent under postmodernity: an acceptance that commodification to waste cycles are a *fait accompli*. Indeed, *Underworld* refuses to accept this delicate balance, but rather

³³ For further discussion see the City of Chicago website at: http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dca/supp_info/millennium_park.html

seeks to recycle and thus abide by the Baumanian “slimming trend” that is an inherent characteristic of the liquid globalisation model.

What this chapter has aimed to make clear is that by acting as recycling agents, Shay and Sax further demonstrate *Underworld's* enculturation within a liquid globalisation framework at the expense of a postmodern one. However, it should be noted that, in the novel, Sax and Shay did not always exist within such an integrative system. In the chapters set during the 1950s, for example, we find a young Shay living in the “quick of his skin” (*UW* 810), and driven for the most part by instinct. Indeed, Evans is correct in arguing that in the 50s, we find Shay more concerned with “the unpredictable . . . elements of ordinary life” (129), than with “thinking in systems” (*ibid*). As such, we may be more inclined to read Shay as aligned with idiosyncratic material waste than systemic recycling at this point in the text. So what shifts in the novel to later embed Shay within a culture that he initially seems so at odds with? In chapter three, I will argue that DeLillo gradually constructs Shay and others as liquid globalisation agents on the basis of technologically homogenising networks that extend outwards from a nuclear moment in 1951. In conducting this analysis, I want to show how *Underworld* works as a historical novel, and is thus further separated from a postmodern frame that would advocate the inefficacy of historicity.

Chapter Three:

All Technology Refers to the Bomb

Underworld begins with the recreation of a famous American sporting moment: the 1951 pennant game (baseball) between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Giants where Bobby Thomson strikes the winning homerun.³⁴ This strike, which came to be known as ‘the shot heard ‘round the world’, has indeed endured in the memory of sports fans, but it is not simply the gravitas of the homerun that drew Don DeLillo toward its re-creation here. Rather, October third, 1951, also marked the day that the Soviet Union would conduct its second successful nuclear test in Siberia; a moment, according to Philip Wegner, that acted as the truly significant ‘shot heard ‘round the world’: “one that inaugurates a new historical period and a new relationship between . . . powers” (59).

Certainly, DeLillo’s fictionalised J. Edgar Hoover sees a similar significance to Wegner in this nuclear moment: “Edgar fixes today’s date in his mind. October 3, 1951. He registers the date. He stamps the date” (23). He perhaps does so because DeLillo is signifying that the Soviet Union’s achievement of nuclear capability marked a beginning of Hooverian “paranoid speculation that [would] be a hallmark of the Cold War period” (Wegner 59). However, the ways in which a history of American Cold War paranoia extends from this moment in *Underworld* will not be analysed in detail here, though I acknowledge that such analysis has occurred

³⁴ For further discussion see Kenneth Shouler’s “The Men at the Mike: Recalling the days of sportscasting’s legends” (1996).

elsewhere.³⁵ Rather, I want to undertake another kind of historical reading of the nuclear moment and the text that unfolds from it. To wit, I want to argue that DeLillo uses the nuclear moment outlined above as the catalyst for the evolution of a new age of technological systems that culminate in the era of post-Cold War liquid globalisation.

In order to establish such a position, this chapter will do several things. First, it will establish how the nuclear moment unleashes DeLillo's history of late twentieth-century technology. Second, I will suggest that a technological history unfolds from this point that is indicative of the gradual evolution toward liquid globalisation—an argument I will develop by analysing the evolution of the condom metaphor in the text. And finally, I will show that *Underworld* not only charts the evolution of liquid globalisation networks, but also that it counteracts the postmodern sense of a waning of historicity.

Bomb Time, Go Time

The news of the second Soviet blast encourages DeLillo's Hoover to realise that the Soviets "are moving ever closer, catching up, taking over" (*UW* 23-24).³⁶ This

³⁵ For further discussion see Peter Knight's "Everything is Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia" (1999).

³⁶ Upon receiving the news of the second atomic explosion inside the Soviet Union (*UW* 50), Hoover clearly indicates that he believes that such a test marks the beginning of a new historical period. He holds this belief because it is only upon the second occurrence of an event that the beginning of a historical series, and therefore something new, is marked, according to Slavoj Žižek: "Only through a repetition is [the] event recognized in its symbolic necessity—it finds its place in the symbolic network; it is realised in the symbolic order (61). Moreover, Philip Wegner effectively paraphrases Žižek's point in arguing that it was "only in the repetition of this inaugural event did it become clear to the

feeling “works into him, changes him physically as he stands there, drawing the skin tighter across his face, sealing his gaze” (24). As well as interpreting the emergence of Cold War paranoia in these lines, I suggest that we may also gauge a sense of competition in Hoover that relates to the concept of the Soviets “taking over” the United States in terms of nuclear capabilities. I want to argue that this is not an arbitrary sense of competition but rather one that would largely craft the struggle between two superpowers for nuclear supremacy; a struggle that lay at the heart of the Cold War (Knight 1999: 820). In doing so, I will thus foreground the role of the bomb in crafting late twentieth century technological history.

In 1951, the nuclear bomb was so powerful that it “out-imagined the mind” (UW 76), as Klara Sax puts it—it was “too big or evil or outside your experience” (77). The bomb was so far beyond comprehension because it represented such a massive spectre of death (Knight 1999: 814). Perhaps Hoover puts it best when he reflects on the potential effects of the nuclear threat, remarking that it represents “the sun’s own heat that swallows cities” (24). Further, he equates the nuclear fallout potential to a rendering of panoramic death and conflagration by Flemish master Artist, Pieter Bruegel, called *The Triumph of Death*: “[t]he meatblood colours and massed bodies, this is a census-taking of awful ways to die . . . Terror universal . . . [A]nd he thinks of a lonely tower standing on the Kazakh Test Site” (50). Hoover clearly sees the potential destruction that the bomb represents reaching “Armageddon” proportions here (McGowan 123).³⁷ Leonard Wilcox perhaps best surmises Hoover’s sentiment, equating the bomb to “Godly”

people of the United States, and indeed the world, that the Soviet Union had developed a nuclear weapons capacity” (60).

³⁷ For further discussion on how the nuclear threat reached apocalyptic proportions see Knight’s “Everything is Connected: *Underworld’s* Secret History of Paranoia”.

capabilities, and suggesting that its threat resembled “a judgment and punishment from an absent or remote father on high” (2002: 126). Further, it is not just Hoover who acknowledges the almost divine threat that nuclear weapons represent in the text: conspiracy theorist Marvin Lundy interprets the Cold War as dependent upon the two great powers’ ability to “hang a threat over the planet” (*UW* 182); and Sister Edgar depicts the role of God as having been filled by “radioactivity” (*UW* 251).

What these textual examples indicate is that the bomb conceivably possessed the power to inflict total annihilation, the likes of which had previously been reserved for divine powers alone—making it “the most destructive force of the twentieth century” (McCormick 105). But more than that, these examples underscore the notion that to hold nuclear supremacy meant that one asserted themselves at the global epicentre of power. After all, “[t]he bombs are a kind of God” (*End Zone* 80), as DeLillo put it in an earlier novel, and to control God-like power to an un-rivaled extent is surely to control the world (Naydan 183). Therefore, what ensues in *Underworld* from 1951 is a “cold-war (oedipal) narrative of mastery” (Wilcox 2002: 126) alluded to initially in the way that Hoover “seal[s] his gaze” against the Soviets. This is a narrative that holds “the history of America and American culture between its covers”, according to Hungerford (2008: 375). I will return to *Underworld*’s status as historical novel later in the chapter, but for now I want focus briefly on the unfurling of a competition for nuclear supremacy that resonates in the text.

In *Underworld*, maintaining supremacy (or at least a fine balance of power) over the “enemy [who] lives in long coats and fur caps, speaking that old weighted language of theirs, liturgical and grave” (*UW* 50), comes down to the consistent

development of nuclear technologies. Viktor Maltsev, for example, remarks to his colleague, Nick Shay, that early nuclear bombs were primitive compared to modern versions: the bombs themselves were incredibly large—all “bulk and mass”—and relatively impractical in terms of missile range (790). Shay adopts this idea in conversation with Brian Glassic, claiming that the early design of mating male elements with female elements to cause a chain reaction was quickly outmoded by technological progress (791). This progress was initially defined by the American neutron bomb, according to Maltsev—“[m]any buzzing neutrons, very little blast. The perfect capitalist tool. Kill people, spare property” (790). And from this point nuclear technology became increasingly more advanced, and more controllable from remote locations like the bunker in the Nevada desert where Matt Shay works (189). The bombs therefore emerge in “perverted [re]births” throughout the twentieth century in the text, thus highlighting that the development of nuclear warfare capabilities was crucial in the struggle for Cold War power (Naydan 189).

But it was not only competition for supreme nuclear technologies that defined the cultural mood of the late twentieth century in *Underworld*. As DeLillo himself said in an interview, “the vast technology of war . . . characterised the book’s themes” (108). In other words, the bomb’s power to ‘out-imagine’ the mind, coupled with its “sheathed but omnipresent” force (Sante 7), also inspired other technological competition. This notion is evidenced in Hoover’s response to the bomb which, I might add, functions as further example of *Underworld* imitating life (or history to be more precise): Hoover alludes to having increased “the F.B.I.’s range of responsibilities by developing systems of surveillance that persecuted innocent individuals for purportedly leaning too far to the political left” (Naydan

188).³⁸ But Hoover is not alone in having sought out new technologies, or systems, following the realisation of the nuclear threat. For example, Sister Edgar ponders how a system might best be created to instill nuclear fear in the masses (776); and Albert Bronzini longs to understand how the bomb can “carry so much information and contain such shattering implications” (735). More than just considering how systems that mirror the vastness of nuclear technology work or could work, car companies like Lexus create intricate and homogenous machines—“the eerie weave of chromium alloys carried in interlocking arcs . . . soaring ornaments of coachwork fitted and merged” (63). But superseding the Lexus in the text is, of course, the Internet. According to Casey J. McCormick, the Internet in *Underworld* “represents a sublime . . . space of fluidity, individual agency, and global community” (97). It is the culmination of ultimate connectivity that has built throughout DeLillo’s technological history beginning in 1951. But exactly how did the bomb inspire new technologies—and ways of thinking about technology—that would lead to the post-Cold War Internet age?

McCormick has argued that DeLillo equates the bomb with the divine because it presents the “spiritual possibility” of access to “unlimited information” (105). She thus seems to heed *Underworld’s* contention that the bomb is a work of “genius” in terms of its “physics of particles and rays” that form an array of “bundled links” between ostensibly disparate sources (*UW* 51). But in more specific terms, what makes the bomb the source of potentially endless information; what makes it god-like, is the fact that it echoes a globalisation thesis of complete connection. As James Annesley argues, the bomb is the source of a “dense network

³⁸ Naydan’s quotation is in reference to Hoover’s remarks between pp. 559-578 of *Underworld*.

of narrative linkages” (86) that form the context of globalisation; and it is so because the bomb unifies a world under threat of nuclear annihilation. As Daniel Grausem puts it, the bomb’s capacity for “mass and instantaneous death . . . created a structure of feeling that shaped people’s way of being in the world by adding a certain form of urgency to private lives lived with a foreshortened horizon of futurity” (310). The bomb therefore worked as a globalising force in much the same way that the Internet has; or as Wilcox argues, “the atom becomes the perfect product of capitalism” (2002: 123). It does so because, like the capitalism of the post-Cold War era, the bomb draws elements into a similar mode of globalised existence where seemingly everything is connected under the spectre of its technology.

I have alluded to the above textual examples—Hooverian surveillance, Sister Edgar, Bronzini, Lexus, Internet—because they all demonstrate the emergence of technologies and systems that draw upon the bomb. In other words, all of these examples display a will to omnipotence; a will to create an increasingly interwoven, and thus connected, technological platform that can coordinate a vast array of systems. Eventually the technological drive toward globalisation in *Underworld* culminates in the Internet (McCormick 109). But the point I have aimed to make here is that one cannot ignore how bomb technology—with its vast and complex arrays that are intrinsically cyber in nature (Knight 1999: 825; Evans 126; Friedman 63)—provides a platform for shaping the “deep completion” (*UW* 51) sensed in the text’s arrival into the era of post-Cold War liquid globalisation. As such, “all technology refers to the bomb” (*UW* 467) may be retained as the central principle of DeLillo’s technological history in *Underworld*.

Condomisation

One way of interpreting precisely how technology refers to the bomb in *Underworld* is by tracking recurring references to the condom in the text. I suggest that the condom functions as metaphor in *Underworld* for a world made increasingly homogenous by technology; a world increasingly mediated by technology to the point where everything is seemingly connected in the novel's post-Cold War liquid global context. The condom therefore functions as representative of a technological history born in the text's 1951 nuclear moment, and extending outwards from there to increasingly encompass the world in an integrated network; or as Annesley calls it, a world where "[individuals], science, economics, and mysticism intersect" (92).

The condom first appears when Klara Sax casts her mind back to 1937 and the memory of witnessing her friend Rochelle having sex in the back seat of a parked car (399). Beforehand, Rochelle asks the boy whether he has a condom, but when he pulls his penis out and declares that he does not have one, sex goes ahead anyway. The condom is thus not imperative at this point, it is suggested but it has not yet taken the place of that which is "hot and real, independently alive" (ibid). We may therefore interpret a sense of independence or individuality, in this moment, in that, the "hot and real" quality of the boy's penis has not been sterilised, covered up, and held within a network of homogenising effects. Essentially, the "independently alive" quality of the penis in this scene counter-balances the notion that in a globalised context there is only one ideological path—"one road. Different speeds. But one road" (Friedman 104).

Of course, Zygmunt Bauman would expect to find that which is

“independently alive” to be prominent in a “heavy” phase of modernity—an era of division and individuality (31).³⁹ After ‘the shot heard ‘round the world’ moment in 1951, however, it is less feasible to view things as independent or “heavy” in a Baumanian sense, according to David Evans (106). Rather, modernity had shifted, albeit gradually, into a phase of “lightness” due to the globalising networks that the bomb imparted (ibid). The altered condom dynamics between pre and post 1951 appearances supports Evans’ argument here.

Consider, for example, when DeLillo’s fictionalised version of comedian Lenny Bruce is trying to fit a condom over his tongue during a stand-up set in 1962. Upon licking, rubbing, twirling and snapping the condom, Bruce remarks, “I just realised. This is what the twentieth century feels like” (584). What Bruce offers here is quite a contrast from the “hot and real” moment above, in that, his sense of the twentieth century—which he has only “just realised”—is that it resembles a condom. And what are the characteristics of a condom? It is basically sterilised plastic; but figuratively speaking, it may be viewed as a sheath that contains that which is independent or idiosyncratic (Wilcox 2002: 130). The condom, its feel and taste, therefore encourage Bruce to realise that the twentieth century feels as though a generic sheath has come down to cover up that which is “independently alive”. But what is it about the latter stages of the twentieth century that so closely mirror a homogenising layer for Bruce? I would suggest that it is no coincidence that the line immediately following Bruce’s above remark is, “*We’re all gonna die!*”

³⁹ In claiming that “heavy modernity” was the era of the individual, one must be cognisant of the fact that Bauman claims that it felt this way to social bodies in many respects, thus reinforcing the nature of the modern project. However, in reality it was actually a period of mass coercion into Fordist structures of order that negated pluralism, and resulted in disastrous outcomes. For further discussion see *Liquid Modernity* pp. 53-61. See also Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989).

(*UW* 584); no coincidence because one line feeds directly into the other. First, Bruce claims that the homogenising layer that is the condom, feels like the twentieth century. He then follows with a line that captures the hysteria surrounding the homogenous and imminent threat of nuclear annihilation. Both lines thus treat the same subject: what “feels” most like the twentieth century is a homogenous, sterilising layer that has come down to cover American culture.

It could be argued that Bruce’s realisation outlined above is relatively prophetic, because it is only as the text moves through the years that ‘condomisation’—thus a move toward a liquid global context—becomes overwhelmingly apparent. However, there are others like Bruce who also acknowledge a new sense of condomised context in the early stages of the Cold War. Take the Demming family, for example:

Nothing shrouded or secret except for young Eric, who sat in his room, behind drawn fiberglass curtains, jerking off into a condom. He liked using a condom because it had a sleek metallic shimmer, like his favourite weapons system . . . (*UW* 514).

In this excerpt we find a young Eric Demming, presumably twelve or thirteen years old in 1957. Twenty years later, Eric works alongside Matt Shay at a top-secret weapons testing facility in the Nevada desert, and given the insight we have into his early years, it seems no coincidence that he goes on to such a profession. In 1957, Eric likes the condom because of its “sleek metallic shimmer”, and because it is “rubbery dumb and disaffecting” (515). Other ‘condomised’ elements that appeal to Eric include “the masking waxes, liners, glosses and creams” that cover Jayne Mansfield’s face in a photograph (*ibid*); or the generic quality of televised

newscasts, ball games, and comedy hours of which he could anticipate the dialogue “nearly seamlessly” (519). These examples are emblematic of mass-produced effects; but more than that, they demonstrate a sense of shielding the subject from what Wilcox calls “the real”—a disturbance in an otherwise mediated, symbolic world (2002: 121). Therefore, these examples may be deemed condomised in that they correlate with the homogenising effects of the condom itself.⁴⁰ Further, these examples underscore Eric’s condomised relational dynamic with the world because they appeal to him so much.

A character who would certainly agree that Eric’s relationship to the world around him is condomised is his mother, Erica, whom the above excerpt is focalised through. Erica feels that she has “to put gloves on just to talk to [Eric]” because it is the only way to relate to him (*UW* 521). For Erica, her son stands diametrically opposed to the traditional values she holds dear, which include fulfilling the role of the archetypal 1950s housewife—preparing a week’s supply of Jell-O recipes before fitting the moulds neatly into the refrigerator (514); dressing in a swirly blue skirt and buttercup blouse “that happened to match the colors of their Fairlane” (516). Erica’s reference to the family (Ford) Fairlane seems apt here, because it a Fordist model of heavy modernity—a “heavy”, “bulky”, “immobile” phase (Bauman 57)—that most accurately characterises her. For example, she subscribes to notions of artisanship and bulk, reminiscent of heavy modern ideals of embodied labour and the production of hardware (Bauman 121), in that, she follows recipes passed down by her grandmother; and she stockpiles many different types of Jell-O in the refrigerator (514). Moreover, in accordance

⁴⁰ For further discussion on how media cycles shield the subject from the “Lacanian real” see Wilcox’s “Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* and the Return of the Real” pp. 120-137 (2002).

with the conceptions of modernist individuality that ran parallel with heavy modernity (Bauman 31), Erica also responds to words like “breezeway” which seem to evoke individualism: “it spoke. . .of having something others did not” (516); thus situating her in opposition to the integrative political forces of globalisation that pull toward a homogenised middle (Friedman 107).⁴¹

A critical example of how Erica is situated in opposition to her son’s condomised approach to the world lies in her regard for the Sputnik satellite that was put into orbit by the Soviet Union on October 4th, 1957. The satellite represents an ominous and shadowy presence to Erica (518). And it does so because Sputnik was one of the mid-twentieth century’s greatest emblems of technological progress, in that, it complemented the bomb in “set[ting] in motion the cyberspace age” (Friedman 63). Erica views this development as an entirely negative one that stands to destabilise traditional American culture (518). Eric, on the other hand, takes a “scientific” interest in Sputnik (ibid); and I suggest that we may read Eric’s “scientific” interest as a marker that indicates his later migration into the field of weapons technology. Sputnik represented progress toward a cyber age, and those Americans who sensed this fact and took a “scientific” interest in it, would often serve to contribute to America’s technological buttressing against a symbolic foe (Wilcox 2002: 126); thus contributing to the movement toward ever-more globalising technologies.

Beyond the 1957 example of the Demming family, it becomes increasingly apparent that condomisation effects are increasingly resonant, and thus increasingly inescapable. In 1978, for instance, Marvin Lundy and his wife are in a

⁴¹ For further discussion see Bauman’s discussion regarding “inside” and “outside” dynamics in *Liquid Modernity* pp. 58-67.

nostalgia shop going through old magazines cased in acetate folders—“like condoms for reading matter” (320). This scene underscores the notion that technology increasingly penetrates all enclaves given that the nostalgia shop is the harbinger of that which is “dust-veneered” (ibid) and mostly useless. In the same year, Shay takes his family to see an ancient ruin in the desert, but in looking at the ruin Shay finds that he is “more interested in the protective canopy than [he is] in the ancient structure” (343). Similar to the encasement of magazines in condom-like folders, this example indicates that society has fundamentally altered in an attempt to encase all effects in a homogenous layer. Therefore, what was still a struggle between heavy and liquid ideologies in 1957 (Eric and Erica Demming), has transmogrified into a system that has encased and homogenised nearly all effects.

Obviously the most drastic developments in terms of condomisation have been reserved for the novel’s most contemporary context. As expounded in chapters one and two, nearly everything in *Underworld’s* 1990s frame is drawn down under a canopy whereby only the globalised will survive.⁴² Perhaps Nick Shay best summarises the nineties condomised approach when he is in a megastore called ‘Condomology’ and remarks, “[n]ow there are rubbers called barebacks, electronically tested for sheerness and sensitivity” (110). Shay uses the metaphor of the “bareback” condom here to capture the structure of the post-Cold War world with acuity: like the “bareback”, the post-Cold War network is one electronically tested and measured so as to produce the most efficient system (Friedman 11-12; 79). This globalised system is still homogenising, in the sense

⁴² For discussion on how only the globalised will survive see Joseph A. Schumpeter “Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy” (1942).

that it encases the “independently alive” aspect, while at the same time managing to maintain the notion of sensitivity; or as Friedman put it, the sense of an “olive tree” within the network of the “Lexus”.⁴³ The fact that the globalised system is able to maintain a sense of the uniquely “felt life” while at the same time paradoxically encasing it, perhaps demonstrates the sophistication of the electronic tests and measurements by this point in the text, and simultaneously in the bell curve of liquid globalisation evolution. In other words, liquid globalisation has arguably become so sophisticated by the time *Underworld* reaches its post-Cold War context that the “chain” riveting agents of globalisation to their “working places” has indeed become invisible (Bauman 58).

To conclude this chapter, I would now like to put the argument that although condomisation deriving from the nuclear moment in 1951 seems to demonstrate a mediation of conditions of the real by technology—a central premise of postmodernity (Jameson 16); it differs in the sense that it represents a technological history analogous to American history. DeLillo’s technological history thus separates *Underworld* from the postmodern notion of a waning of historicity, and locates the text more firmly in a liquid global frame, which considers history to be paramount in shaping the present.

History Emerges

⁴³ Friedman sees the ‘Olive Tree’ as representative of unique and individual prospects. He also sees the ‘Olive Tree’ largely consumed by the ‘Lexus’ in the period of globalisation. ‘Lexus’ represents “anonymous, transnational, homogenizing, standardizing market forces and technologies that make up today’s globalizing economic system” (33). For further discussion see Friedman’s *Lexus* pp. 31-37.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, new readings of classic postmodern texts such as *The Crying of Lot 49* and *White Noise* began to emerge. Rather than interpreting these novels as exemplary postmodern works, critics began to take on a “determinedly revisionist and historicist perspective” (Kelly 391). The role of Mexico in Pynchon’s work, for example, became less peripheral, and instead began to be offered up as historically situating the text (ibid). Of course, de-historicising readings of these texts still circulate, indicating that the postmodern spectre has far from disappeared. Peter Knight, for example, argues that history functions only as an “aura” in *White Noise*, it has no real bearing because media saturated culture transforms history into an endless program of simulations (34).⁴⁴ However, the point I want to make is that such readings are increasingly being supplanted: Amy Hungerford remarks upon this changing approach, noting that the critical practice of historicising creative works “seems less a critical movement than a simple assumption about literary-critical work”—“the water we all swim in” (2008: 416).

Perhaps what inspired this revisionist critical perspective was a wave of fiction that was decidedly less postmodern than, say, *White Noise* or *The Crying of Lot 49*. By less postmodern, I mean texts that gravitated away from the most recognisable trait of the postmodern: an emphasis on “space over time—the contemporary loss of history and emergence of an endless present—in the totally administered and technophilic postmodern society” (Kelly 394).⁴⁵ Rather than “[forgetting] how to think historically” (Jameson ix), then, these new novelists

⁴⁴ See also Stacey Olster’s “White Noise” in the *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* pp. 79-93 (2008).

⁴⁵ Postmodernity stands for de-historicisation because postmodern social systems, based in media and consumer culture, have begun to lose the capacity to retain their own past—think of how quickly the media exhausts news stories, for example. For further discussion see Jameson’s *Postmodernism* p. 25 (1991).

counteracted a media-saturated, simulation driven society, with a deep sense of “historical focus” on how these conditions emerged (Kelly 393). “Hybrid fiction” (Grassian), “American literary globalism” (Adams), “post-postmodernism” (Burn): all of these titles have been applied to this recent literary movement. However, I suggest that none is accurate in terms of classifying what has surely been one of the seminal works in crafting a movement beyond postmodernism. Instead, what separates *Underworld* from the postmodern is a sense of historicisation born of a liquid globalisation context.

Jeremy Green suggests that DeLillo is the “representative postmodern novelist for the end of the century” (4). In *Underworld*, however, such a claim is acutely problematised by the textual motivations detailed in previous chapters. But never is this problematisation more apparent than in *Underworld’s* contradictory relationship with the waning sense of historicity that lies at the heart of postmodern thought. John Duvall argues that *Underworld* (alongside other DeLillo works such as *Libra* and *Mao II*) demonstrates that DeLillo has a “rare gift for historicizing our present” which derives from his ability to capture how the contemporary world bears the residue of crucial historical events (2). This argument is certainly applicable to the evolution of the condom in *Underworld* and how it mirrors historical events. For example, the condom’s analogous relationship with the Sputnik satellite demonstrates how the world in the novel’s 1957 context bore the weight of technological history. The launch of Sputnik brought with it a further step toward a cyber future, according to Friedman (63).⁴⁶ It was a satellite the size of a basketball that was sent into orbit by the Soviets so that it might

⁴⁶ I say a ‘further’ step here because as Merriman Smith noted, nuclear technologies represented the initial step toward cyber culture. For further discussion see Friedman’s *Lexus* pp. 63-69.

broadcast radio signals on an unprecedented global scale (Maher 529). The response to Sputnik by the Americans in many ways mirrored Hoover's competitive response to Soviet nuclear tests as outlined earlier in the chapter: President Dwight D. Eisenhower felt compelled to launch a counter-effort, resulting in two organisations that were instrumental in shaping an increasingly globalised landscape—NASA and ARPA.⁴⁷ ARPA was responsible for developing computer science and information processing research, the preeminent result of which was the development of the first Internet prototype, and therefore, further “foundations for what is now the age of networks” (Friedman 63).

What therefore began as competition for nuclear technology, evolved into the competition related to satellite technology evidenced in the American response to Sputnik. Concurrent with these technological developments was the rise of ever-more globalising networks,⁴⁸ and it is this fact that I argue DeLillo recognises through his increasing condomisation of context in *Underworld*. With ‘the shot heard ‘round the world’ moment in 1951, for example, we find Hoover’s prophesying—“[a]ll these people . . . have never had anything in common so much as this, that they are sitting in the furrow of destruction” (28)—however, there is little else to signal condomisation because the unifying nuclear moment has only just occurred. By 1957, however, we find Eric Demming explicitly condomised, while his mother still responds to a relatively unmediated mode of existence. Together, mother and son symbolise that condomisation has evolved in accord with the spread of globalised networks—first with the deepening manifestations of nuclear culture, and then with the launch of Sputnik. By the time the text reaches

⁴⁷ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Advanced Research Projects Agency.

⁴⁸ For further discussion see Friedman’s *Lexus* pp. 63-67.

the late 1970s-early 80s, we find a condomised relational dynamic has penetrated nearly all enclaves—even ancient ruins that no-one knows the purpose of (343), and magazines that represent nothing more than a “pornography of nostalgia” (320). I argue then that this era in *Underworld* is further representative of an increasing spread of globalising networks, historically speaking; as Friedman avers, by the time the 1980s arrived, developed countries were democratising their capital markets—“opening them to any foreign traders who wanted to play”—thus, preparation for post-Cold War era globalisation was in full swing (59). The post-Cold War era marked the culmination of globalising technologies in the form of the Internet and the concomitant software capitalism, as detailed in chapter one in relation to Bauman and Friedman’s theories. DeLillo equally marks this spread of homogenising technologies: indeed we may perceive his narrative as firmly held within the “grip of systems” (*UW* 825) by this point. And this notion is illuminated in Nick Shay’s trip to a store named ‘Condomology’, where condoms pliable to every mode of existence are available, thus symbolising a comprehensive network of effects that is able to capture almost everything within a homogenising frame.

For Wegner, *Underworld* attempts to unify hosts of realities to create a “monumental historical overview” of Cold War and post-Cold culture (52). I agree, but rather than stating that this function simply situates the text away from postmodern works, I want to conclude by suggesting that *Underworld’s* technological history also more concretely establishes it in a liquid globalisation mould. For as we may gleam from Friedman’s text in particular, liquid globalisation has been an evolving process of technological convergence over a number of years; certainly this process culminated with the information revolution

that triggered the end of the Cold War, but it was an evolving process that amounted to reaching this stage nonetheless. As I have argued in this chapter, DeLillo not only marks the arrival into a liquid globalisation era through *Underworld*, but also charts how and why such a context evolved from a technological standpoint.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have argued that connectivity is a dominant theme in *Underworld*; a theme that is based upon seemingly endless narrative intersections between plot, character and post-Cold War capitalist systems. However, although we may now read *Underworld* as offering a narrative path that is “coordinated and systematized” (Annesley 87) in certain ways, I want to suggest that the imprinting of liquid globalisation schemas on *Underworld* is not a totalising process. Further, if one were to seek to connect *Underworld*’s entire structure to integrative technological and economic conditions, such a reading would encounter insurmountable obstacles. I suggest that these obstacles arise because *Underworld*’s strongest suit is, as David Evans suggests, its “restoration of access to the real” (104).

The ‘real’ includes, to a large extent, the conditions summarised by Thomas Friedman as the “inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before” (9). As such, we find *Underworld*’s dominant narrative trajectory maintaining at its core a sense of integration, whereby nuance is sacrificed at the hands of converging global markets. We also find the narrative’s central characters to be held “in the grip of systems” (*UW* 825) to such an extent that it is difficult to see them as anything but agents in the perpetuation of a globalisation spectre. The previous chapters have indicated how this somewhat elusive framework may be theorised according to the designs and controls of the

post-Cold War world. And yet, elements still remain to suggest that the novel resists a model of total coordination.

These elements that are problematic to totalising readings of *Underworld* also contain a semblance of the 'real'. As Leonard Wilcox reminds us, even in an environment where integration with global markets is the measure of success, we "are still left with excess, a remainder that is unassimilable" (2002: 121). Don DeLillo thus offers what might best be termed 'underworld' aspects in the novel—a series of fragments that are unclassifiable according to the measurements that define social order. These elements exist in the "white area on the map" (*UW* 404): in the contaminated nuclear waste dumps that are entombed in remote mountains (*UW* 804); in the psychotic bodies that roam backstreets (242); and in the vacant lots of the Bronx that are surely incomprehensible to coordinated systems (*UW* 249). Taken together, what we find in the milieu of 'underworlds' that the author elucidates is an antithetical path to the 'over-world' systems outlined throughout this thesis. In fact, a liquid globalisation framework could not quantify these 'underworld' effects even if afforded endless amounts of space to do so, because such effects are located outside of the current scope by virtue of being dysfunctional, or non-contributory toward economic cycles. One might even characterise these effects as "unwebbed" or "unique" (Evans 126), thus prompting the following question: how does DeLillo retain the effects of modernism within a modernity that is thoroughly embedded in integrative capitalism? Or, what do "unique" or dysfunctional elements in the text indicate regarding the state of modernist expression in the contemporary world?

By conducting analysis of both 'over' and 'underworld' aspects of late-twentieth-century culture, DeLillo is able to allude to the prominent hermeneutic

cycles of liquid-global culture, while also retaining the 'real' sense of that which exists outside of these cycles. *Underworld* is thus the work of a writer who "contains multitudes" (Wegner 60); one who refuses to accept totalising systems but rather embraces culture in all its multifarious incarnations. This thesis has sought to interpret the dominant cultural strain of connectivity that runs through DeLillo's masterwork, thus adding a dimension to the corpus of readings that situate the novel amid the post-Cold War globalisation landscape. I acknowledge, however, that such an interpretation provides only a means for placing a framework around those textual elements that fall within connected capitalist cycles; and that what is left on the outside are those rhythms and idiosyncratic beats of life that also resonate in the text. It thus seems pertinent to conclude by noting that although one may plausibly interpret *Underworld's* narrative as connected to the 'real' integrative cycles of the late-twentieth-century world, its status as a 'real' text also ultimately affirms that not everything will connect in the end.

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