

**THE LOGIC OF THE CORPOREAL: READING THE ENTANGLED BODY
IN SELECT NOVELS OF THOMAS PYNCHON AND DON DELILLO**

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CONCLUSION

“You want to ask, so ask,” Angela says.

“Are you real?” William asks.

“Well, if you can’t tell,” Angela says, “does it matter?”

(*Westworld*, “Chestnut”)

There’s messages in every game. Like Pac-man. D’you know what PAC stands for? P A C. Program and control. He’s program and control man. The whole thing’s a metaphor. He thinks he’s got free will, but really, he’s trapped in a maze, in a system. All he can do is consume, he’s pursued by demons that are probably just in his own head. And even if he does manage to escape by slipping out one side of the maze, what happens? He comes right back in the other side. People think it’s a happy game, it’s not a happy game, it’s a fucking nightmare world and the worst thing is, it’s real and we live in it. It’s all code, if you listen closely, you can hear the numbers. (*Black Mirror*, “Bandersnatch”)

In its exploration of the entangled body, this thesis dwells on the possibilities offered by the fictional frame as a medium of representation. It begins with a text that appeared in 1973 when the Pentagon was only beginning to assemble the ARPAnet, a year significant in the American history of scientific explorations for it saw, among other things, the launch of Skylab. The dissertation ends by looking at a novel published in 2013, about thirteen years after the dot-com boom appeared to have settled down. The 2010s are a time of increasing internalisation of ambient technologies highlighting America’s information-driven late capitalist culture. Increasingly, the Internet took over as an integral thoroughfare for global cultural traffic. Both these novels are separated by forty years. These years mark significant shifts in the political and cultural climate of the time.

The thesis intervenes in this by exploring episodes of biomedicalization, electronic interconnectedness and planetary interdependencies in three novels published during those intermediate years. In so doing, the thesis built on the mutable and malleable nature of the subject against the singular and bounded notions premised on the dualist philosophies. To this end, this dissertation revisits the implicit Cartesianism of Western thought in extending its conceptual framework of corporeal entanglement. Throughout

this work, the plasticity of the body has been foregrounded as a means to question the hermetically sealed categories. Such an engagement shows the ways in which the thesis responds to the dominant ideologies that enable corporeal and cultural control.

For Pynchon, fiction and facticity are co-constitutive of each other. He touches upon this, for instance, by incorporating into his novel the strategies of cinematic shape-shifting that blurs the borderline between different classifications of knowledge. His textual incorporation of the slapstick mode to depict the body doubling suggests corporeal instabilities. The landscape in the novel is replete with images that execute their fundamentally mimetic function by reducing the materiality of the human to an extent where the sense of the self is fostered solely by a series of simulacra. Such episodes show the ways in which Pynchon presents, and predicts, the increasing internalization of technology. The hyperreal complicates the borderline between actual and the virtual. In this, the text anticipates the cultural logic of contemporary cyber societies. The images are palimpsestic where everything including human emotions can be reified and replicated. Such cultural formations engender locations where the authentic (corporeal/bodily) and the inauthentic (machine induced production) are endlessly entangled. In several passages in the novel, the narrative reduces the feeling human into an order of automatism. In so doing, the text illustrates a transgression of the notional binaries of organic intelligence (knowledge/intuition) and artificial inorganic intelligence (information/analytical load) as individuals are perpetually embedded in a network of digital transmissions.

The text also chooses to communicate the entangled epistemologies by shifting focus to the nonhuman. In dramatizing the quest for the German V2, the narrative underscores entanglements of human lives with planetary forces and phenomena. It persuades us to recognise the embeddedness of the human species in the atmospheric temporality and to rethink the human in terms of its creatureliness. Such situations are inscribed in a dialectical play between sovereignty (global agent) and vulnerability (planetary subject). This is a crucial point that illustrates the convergence of socially situated selves and ecologically conditioned organisms. In so doing, *Gravity's Rainbow* intervenes in the emergent epistemes of the Anthropocene. As the thesis argues, Pynchon's novel incorporates an ontology of waste to reflect on cultures of consumption and their anthropogenic trails. In this, the novel compares well with DeLillo's *White Noise*. Both texts decentralise the human organicity by demonstrating corporeal finitude

that binds the bodies to elementary instabilities. Pynchon's text takes this to its logical end as it pushes us to rethink the questions concerning animality. The episodes around animals convey the ways in which specific traits of a species may promote an amplification of 'biovalue'. These are closely connected with the laboratory aesthetics that repurpose bodies and identities. Such episodes highlight the embeddedness of life within the systems of bioscience and global economic exchanges. To this end, the novel is reflective of trans-species entanglements that reject and revisit the idea of human exceptionalism.

Questions of the laboratory are followed up by the idea of clinical reordering of the body, that is, re-ordering the body into the ecology of the techno-sphere. The current culture is hinged on pharmaceutical interventions and therapeutic remodelling. Pynchon's novel offers significant pointers to examine this condition. The chemical interventions into the cognitive schema destabilise the feeling individual. Such acts remodel the visceral biomechanisms in terms of the culturally qualified notions of the subject. The dissertation takes this as an entry point to investigate DeLillo's *White Noise*. It begins by drawing attention to the lived body's experientiality. The novel highlights the emotive world of the individual by drawing attention to the convergence between the human and more-than-human. At a fundamental level, the novel directs a medical gaze at the body that reconfigures the corporeal into a set of clinically observable data, often with keys to patterns of information (this is a narrative thread that connects the novel with *Cosmopolis*). In this novel, DeLillo reflects on the human body as a programmable category which can be modified and augmented at a cellular level. It demonstrates the plasticity of the corporeal by allowing us to see instances of psychopharmaceutical interventions. In this, the text advocates the end of a hermetically sealed subjectivity and presages the emergence of a 'neurochemical self'. The textual logic behind this phenomenon is premised on the convergence of the visceral biomechanisms of the body and the clinically manufactured substances that reconfigure the organic order of thought and experience. At this point, the biological body emerges as a site where the schism between subjective and objective claims of understanding are problematized.

The novel also extends a window to engage with the poetics of the Anthropocene. It does so by foregrounding the entangled body that undercuts the cultural forms and planetary futures. This is clearly evident if we look at episodes where forms of bodily vulnerability conflate with ecological vulnerabilities. On one hand, the text chooses to

position this coming together in the global capitalist production and consumption architectures. On the other hand, it heightens the sense of ecological instabilities introduced by industrial innovations. In particular, the text highlights events of toxicity and radiation sickness that destabilise the body. It situates itself in the interstices of the contemporary cultural condition and material residues it produces and prohibits. The toxic waste emerges as a material index of anthropogenic extremity in the novel. In the episodes of exposure, the body becomes a site of inevitable corporeal interplay—hence, entanglements—with extra-human matter. These episodes are suggestive of ‘bioaccumulation’ and toxic embodiment that affect the ‘host’ body’s biochemical stability. The text situates the human element as incidental to such ecologically determined corporeal conditions, for their affect elide the possibility of individual intervention. Radiation travels across bodies and environments. The toxified landscapes simultaneously demonstrate—one, a compromised state of the planet—two, a grim future for the human. Such settings complicate the demarcation between habitable and uninhabitable geographies. Thus, the spatial indeterminacies in the novel emerge as a pointer to entangled frames of corporeality.

Such events appear to challenge the alleged human primacy in favour of a landscape of entanglements. DeLillo’s preoccupation with media and information technology serves to communicate this point further. The narrative is interspersed with disembodied voices that mediate the ways in which characters navigate the immediate landscapes. In such settings, the cognitive mechanism of the sentient individuals forms a close correspondence with electronic flow of data. It so happens that the epidermic inputs of the subject are subsumed under a ceaseless interplay with algorithmic information. At this juncture, human cognition is reified by a set of virtual discourse. The text reflects an interstitial space between embodiment and appropriation by allowing us to see the extent to which human beings increasingly internalise the mechanisms of intuitive machines. DeLillo conveys a comment on the contemporary where the individual cognitive repository is endlessly entangled with digitized interfaces. By locating the ‘feeling’ individual at the crossroads where cybernetic networks operate in tandem with nervous nodes, he presages the problematic placement of the current cultures. In fact, the consumption of data and disembodied information appears to unsettle the biologically and existentially grounded subject. Clearly there are layered entanglements of the biotic

and the abiotic, both in terms of ontologies and the epistemes that surround them. From here, the dissertation moves to the discussion of *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis*.

In *The Body Artist*, DeLillo projects an informatized environment in which subjects mutate endlessly. The novel combines human speech with a pixelated cyber vocabulary where characters exchange in bits and pieces and conversations happen as if in an encrypted binary transmission. As such, the narrative seems to be composed of a self-reflexive language that is devoid of any inferential logic. Throughout the novel, the uniquely individuated identities are rendered untenable by their metatextual affinities with a cybernetic discourse. It shows that human corporeality is regularly reconfigured by ambient technologies. The subject's 'intimacy' with electronic appliances invokes a co-constituting, co-evolving architecture of memory and experientiality. Such appliances permeate the domestic spaces of the household and perform as 'mimetic' machines traversing the contours of quotidian time and corporeal space. The narrative meditates on this by dramatizing a Beckettian play of taped voices that manufacture a virtual presence against a bodily absence. It is to this end that the text adopts an affective vocabulary and conveys the interplay between embodied emotions and disembodied data. In such situations, the human cognitive schema is endlessly entangled with machines that manufacture sensory information. This is a crucial point in the text that captures the current landscape of postmodern AI technologies that combine cyborg intelligence and organic interiorities.

In many ways, DeLillo's novel offers significant portents of a posthuman convergence where the body becomes a site of fetishised claims. The episodes in the novel shows how the corporeal is not only saturated with 'biovalue' and medical interests, but it also morphs into a consumable commodity in the contemporary capitalist culture. The lived body's affective relationality with advanced humanoid artifacts and ambient technologies transforms the value and meaning of the human as a biomedical category. This is pushed to extremes in *Cosmopolis*. The novel invites attention to an augmented cityscape in which individuals perceive a sense of the self through the conduit of cybernetic technologies. It does so by depicting a weld between the realm of sensors and sentience. For a person inhabiting the posturban space, the body has been constantly formed and de-formed into different nodes of virtuality. The computerised information about the body unsettles the demarcation between inside and outside, the visceral and the virtual. Such information is crucial insofar as the contemporary medical interventions

into the body are concerned. These events codify the corporeal in the sense that the internal body-image reflected on screen translates the body into a discursive virtual phenomenon. In other words, these instances signal the onset of 'biomediated' bodies.

DeLillo's text accommodates an essentially posthuman landscape in which the biological and cybernetic are endlessly entangled. This entanglement is germane to the contemporary cultures of prosthetic enhancement where consciousness that makes a sense of the self possible, however residually, does not emerge from the biological body. Instead, what is at work is an intimate loop where the neurons act in tandem with electronic transmission. At times, the novel takes these events further by imagining practices which appear to transcend the bodily foundations of the self with a consciousness that is aided and augmented by its interplay with the virtual topography. In this, the text predates the cultures of social media that offer forms of digital afterlife and 'posthumous' personhood. Steeped in a radical speculative frame of transhumanist worldview, DeLillo's novel appears to embrace the idea of accommodating identities into a disembodied digital memory. In this, the text portrays a dystopic imaginary which is both futuristic and contemporary at once. With Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, this sense is powerfully extended to its logical extremes. This is a text that stages the entanglement between materiality and discursivity to highlight the coding and decoding practices that go into the epistemology of quotidian experience.

The novel communicates how cultural fantasies and territorializing tendencies define the political climate of the United States post-9/11. This is evidenced in the production and perpetuation of extended surveillance and censorship mechanisms which reduces the individual into the orders of dematerialisation. In this, the body is transformed into a set of numbers or algorithms. The deep web rhetoric of the novel interpellates identities and emotions into the orders of automatism. What appears to be a privileging of immaterial information over the material human suggests a structural shift in the mapping of the corporeal condition. In adopting a technological vocabulary that depicts—and substitutes—human experience, the novel blurs the borderline between mechanically manufactured affect and organically felt emotions. The text heightens this convergence by projecting episodes in which virtual technology either interrupts or takes over the organic orders of memory. Here, the putative interplay between memory and materiality is problematised by the virtual simulacra. In these episodes, the encoding and retrieval of the remembering process are unsettled as the schism between ontological

absence and presence is problematised by their simulated alternatives. In this, the text registers a dislocation of an event from a fixed frame of temporality. The narrative challenges and reorders the logic of the corporeal that dominates the information and image-based late capitalist culture.

Such a correspondence is informed by the language and logic of financial capital. The industrial reorganisation of the environment (in the form of crops, humans, animals) has the individual controlling the corporate networks, but is challenged by a depleting geophysical habitat. To this end, the novel informs the coming together of the aesthetic priorities of a culture that privileges material reconfigurations and the ecological forms of the planet to an extent that repurpose the lived body's inherent organicity. Pynchon's text intervenes in this by depicting the entanglement between climatic and consumerist conditions. While the capitalist modes of production amplify the economic and geopolitical interconnectedness through electronic/digital transmissions, they do so by risking the planetary logic of the corporeal. The novel depicts the coming together of technology and capital to overdetermine the planetary by allowing us to examine the ontology of waste. If waste/trash exemplifies the inherent porosity of the commodity culture, its accumulation in the form of discarded material residues and chemical biproducts leads to a landscape of anthropogenic extremities. By way of participating in the discursive domain of the Anthropocene, Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* connects with texts such as DeLillo's *White Noise*. The novels not only dramatize the production and prohibition of matter, but also represent palimpsestic entanglements in what appears to be a decadent consumerist order. This is premised on a dialectic of relationality that cuts across entangled orders of life and nonlife.

This dissertation shows that Pynchon and DeLillo support a significant perspective on the body. Their work encourages us to revisit the dualist legacy of epistemological enquiry by foregrounding episodes of entanglements. This position unpacks the existential and philosophical implications of corporeal entanglements around us. It does so by (a) scrutinizing the physically and the materially grounded body, (b) examining the ways in which it is embedded in and extended into various network of encounters, and (c) exploring how such a relationality simultaneously forms, re-forms and de-forms the subject. Pynchon and DeLillo repeatedly point to the paradox behind what is seen as the demise of hermetically sealed ontologies in postmodernist thought and praxis.

In the works of Pynchon and DeLillo, we see how insights of posthumanism are already prescient. These are writers deeply aware of the cultural climate of their time. Their works not only illustrate a continually evolving dialogue between an embodied individual and the socially situated/culturally qualified subject, but extend the dialogue to multiple frames of representations. These representations highlight the convergence between cognitive/affective and the computational/digital signifiers. In addition, their works develop into entangled narratives of the corporeal and climatic, visceral and virtual landscapes. As a result of this, we see the discourse around the body breaking away from the dominant modes of signification. This, in effect, conveys the writers' preoccupation with epistemic enquires that inform the dialectical relationship between embodied emotions and affective spaces. The thesis tries to show that discursive practices and prevailing ideologies that condition such crossovers are materially constructed. This position problematises both essentialist modes and exceptionalist frames of reference that define the contemporary American landscape and the worlds created by it.

Fiction, whether postmodernist or otherwise, seeks to question the divide between essentialist and existentialist positions. For the 'human' to make sense, positions of either kind are framed in contexts that are both 'real' and 'imagined'. The body's awareness of itself is not only conditioned by users and usages but also by the order of re-purposing. To attribute such re-purposing to either 'materialist' or 'metaphoric' epistemologies leaves the story incomplete. In this sense, Pynchon and DeLillo begin and end in the 'middle,' where the new and old orders repurpose each other. Here, rather than being seen as an extension of the monstrous (modern), the machinic/technological is best seen as that which opens up affective cartographies to corporeal entanglements. Pynchon and DeLillo allow these thoughts to operate as affective entanglements, foregrounding a case of 'enabling' with a planetary consciousness.