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Critics of DeLillo, such as Tom LeClair, have tended to gloss over the extent to which DeLillo's second novel, End Zone (1972), is concerned with the ontological nature and status of the mind.¹ Like many of DeLillo's novels, End Zone examines the relationship between various epistemologies or modes of consciousness and the different forms of subjectivity to which they give rise. The way that End Zone does this, however, is distinctive. It presents a model of the mind with the capacity for both self-limitation and profound self-transformation. Specifically, the protagonist of the text, Gary Harkness, feels unable to trust the reality of his perception, with the result that he experiences what he calls a sense of 'exile' from the 'center' of his own experience (End Zone 31). Don DeLillo's previous novel, Americana (1971), similarly, emphasises that the efforts of the protagonist, David Bell, to create a recognisable subjectivity are hindered, in part, by a firm conviction that his mental experience is unreliable. In particular, David expresses the view that media technologies have overcome and co-opted consciousness to the point where 'We're all on tape' and his mind is denied access to the real by a sophisticated set of illusions (Americana 371). End Zone (1972), published only one year later, isolates and elaborates upon this concern with the reality of consciousness. In this text, DeLillo presents a college footballer who, like David Bell, pursues solitude and asceticism, but whose most pressing difficulties are to be found in the relation between language and the mind. This particular footballer, Gary Harkness, appears to harbour a disabling suspicion that consciousness may be ontologically dependent upon language. In the course of End Zone, DeLillo shows that this belief leads him to effectively relegate the

mind to secondary status and to regard the mutability of language as evidence that consciousness is unstable and unreliable, or even wholly factitious.

Critics, such as Tom LeClair, have focused upon Gary's emphasis on signifier and referent as evidence that he is engaged in a metaphysical 'search for origins' and DeLillo is offering a critique of his protagonist's 'unrecognised acceptance of logocentric values' (In the Loop 80). However, in the course of the novel, DeLillo shows that Gary recognises the irrationality of his linguistic anxiety and that, consequently, he seeks to embrace what Mark Osteen calls 'silence and oblivion' (Osteen 31). Osteen argues that, rather than fetishising the written and spoken word, Gary actively seeks muteness and that he only apprehends the metaphysical in the absence of language. Indeed, Osteen believes that this retreat from the word and what he calls the 'pseudo- ascetic strategies' of the characters constitute attempts to 'pare away complexities of choice and rediscover transcendence' (31). What these, and most other readings of End Zone, have in common is the belief that Gary is motivated largely by metaphysical concerns. Robert Nadeau, for example, believes that the novel treats football 'as exemplar of all closed systems used in the construction of human reality' and therefore that Gary's real concern is the attempt to form a belief in such 'closed systems' (Nadeau 165). However, although Gary uses the idea of 'transcendence' as a tool to persuade himself of the ontological status of consciousness, there is little evidence in this novel of genuine metaphysical conviction, or of a sustained wish to achieve it. In general, DeLillo shows that the quest for silence forms part of a less glamorous and more pragmatic quest to acquire the realist belief that consciousness truly exists, even in the absence of language.²

This realist view of consciousness is in close accord with that of the philosopher Thomas Nagel. In Mortal Questions, Nagel expresses concern at what he sees as a general and disturbing tendency among post-modern theorists of consciousness to reduce the mental to the physical and then to proceed as if the subjective 'phenomenological features' of consciousness do not exist (Nagel 171). This is achieved, according to Nagel, by stating that 'mental states are states of the body;

mental events are physical events', rather than attending to the mental and physical aspects of mental states (176). He suggests, therefore, that these thinkers manage to produce specious solutions of the mind-body problem by simply leaving out 'consciousness', which is, he argues, what makes the problem 'really intractable' (165-6). In particular, Nagel suggests that 'consciousness' is 'left out' because of the lack of a vocabulary suitable for its representation. In order to overcome this difficulty, Nagel appeals to a philosophical realism that allows one to recognise the reality of facts and experiences that cannot be articulated or even conceptualised. By exploring beyond the limits of language, Nagel disagrees radically with the early Wittgenstein, who argues that the ineffable ought to be disregarded, since 'If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it' (Wittgenstein 149). Nagel declares that 'My realism about the subjective domain in all its forms implies a belief in the existence of facts beyond human concepts'. From this, he goes on to conclude that, in this same 'subjective domain', 'there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in human language' (Nagel 171).

Gary Harkness demonstrates a similar scepticism about consciousness to the thinkers that Nagel criticises. He often appears willing to omit it from serious consideration, merely because he considers it impossible to represent, or because the mutability of language causes him to question its stability and reality (End Zone 242). Gary struggles with this question throughout the text, though he continues to employ ascetic strategies, including self-starvation, all of which he hopes will help him to confront the simple reality of the mind. This prolonged act of fasting comes on the very last page of the text and results in Gary's admission to intensive care. When commenting on this incident, it is striking that DeLillo makes clear that what Gary confronts cannot be articulated. He suggests that what Gary is 'trying to face' is 'Something nameless' and reiterates that, while writing the novel, 'I couldn't give a name to it' (Anything Can Happen 83).³ This 'Something nameless', I suggest, is the ineffable reality of consciousness, with which Gary struggles throughout the novel. Consequently, Gary eventually gives

serious consideration to a recognisably Nagelian position on the mind, finding especially persuasive the fact that death, particularly the sublime of mass nuclear destruction, with which he becomes preoccupied, is both real and impossible to represent, and that, therefore, the same principle may safely be applied to the ontological status of his consciousness.

Although the title of End Zone is itself a piece of football jargon and its narrator a college player who, at one point, claims that ‘My life meant nothing without football’ (End Zone 22), most critics have accepted DeLillo’s own conclusion that End Zone ‘wasn’t about football’ (Outsider 57). In the same interview, DeLillo emphasises the importance of consciousness to End Zone, when he asserts that the novel ‘seems to me to be about extreme places and extreme states of mind’ (57). Nevertheless, in spite of its secondary status in the text, football performs a number of crucial thematic functions. In particular, it acts as one of several experiences that provide Gary with what DeLillo calls the ‘illusion that order is possible’ (End Zone 112), all of which ultimately assist Gary in quietening his anxieties and creating a less extreme ‘state of mind’ (Outsider 57). According to DeLillo, football guards against disturbing thoughts of chaos, by providing a model of society ‘that is rat free and without harm to the unborn’ and ‘organised so that everyone follows precisely the same rules’ (End Zone 112). It is also a sport in which, as Douglas Keeseey points out, language and naming play a crucial role. Keeseey remarks that, since one of the overriding themes of End Zone is ‘language itself’, football is a highly appropriate sport for its protagonist (Keeseey 34). As DeLillo puts it, ‘It is the one sport guided by language, by the word signal, the snap number, the color code, the play name’ (End Zone 112). The apparent fit between signifier and referent in football parallels Gary’s remarkably intent search for such correspondences in his personal life. As Gary puts it, with approbation, ‘Each play must have a name’ and ‘No play begins until its name is called’ (118).

Early critics of the novel also emphasised what David Cowart calls ‘the parallels between the violence of war and the violence of football’, subjects to which

DeLillo allots roughly equal prominence in End Zone (Cowart 20). Throughout the novel, Gary oscillates between his passion for football and a preoccupation with nuclear holocaust that sometimes appears nihilistic, but which ultimately offers him what, in describing post war US reaction to the bomb, Margot A. Henriksen has called ‘catharsis and awakening’ (Henriksen xxiii). In The Fate of the Earth, Jonathan Schell, like DeLillo, and many other authors on the subject, indicates the potential for the sublime in the contemplation of nuclear weapons, when he describes ‘The huge-the monstrous-disproportion’ between the bomb and ‘the merely terrestrial creatures in its shadow’ (Schell 11). Certain critics have seen the role of the nuclear sublime in End Zone as wholly destructive. Mark Osteen, for example, remarks that it unfortunately ‘voids possibilities of meaning’ (Osteen 31). Yet, its value for Gary is precisely the sublime difficulty of representing it, its capacity to empty meaning, which persuades him that his mind, though resistant to representation, may yet retain a similarly powerful existence. In a central scene in the desert, under the influence of the nuclear sublime, Gary partially accepts the reality and autonomy of his mind, when he asserts the existence of a wordless ‘void’ in which the ‘mind remakes itself’ (End Zone 89).

In spite of the significant role that nuclear weapons play in the text, since the early reception of the novel, critics have often been content to accept that DeLillo maintains a clear separation between football and nuclear warfare. On this point, many have been swayed, understandably, by the outright denial of any comparison that is issued by Gary’s colleague, Alan Zapalac. Zapalac maintains that any analogy between football and warfare as fallacious because, as he puts it, ‘Warfare is warfare. We don’t need substitutes because we’ve got the real thing’. Indeed, DeLillo himself, in an authorial intervention, during which he addresses the reader ironically as the ‘spectator’, appears to dismiss ‘commentators’ who are ‘willing to risk death by analogy in their public discussions of the resemblance between football and war’ (111). However, more recently, critics have begun to re-examine the parallels between sport and warfare in the text, which, as Cowart rightly insists, are readily detectable. Mark Osteen,

for instance, makes the comparison between the ‘impenetrable argot’ of ‘signals’ in football and the equally recondite ‘jargon of nuclear strategy’ (Osteen 82). Although Cowart omits to mention the fact, it is significant that Gary tends to discover parallels between the two subjects that assist him in believing what DeLillo calls ‘the illusion that order is possible’ and relieve him of anxieties that world and consciousness are chaotic and unreal (End Zone 112). For instance, he quotes the claim of his teacher, Major Staley, that a nuclear war would be like a sports game, in the sense that ‘There’d be all sorts of controls. You’d practically have a referee and a timekeeper’ (82). Obversely, Gary relates that his Coach eulogises the harmonious nature of the warlike violence in football, which, the Coach believes, offers ‘a sense of order even at the end of a running play with bodies strewn everywhere’ (199).

Gary’s need to believe in some form of order, however inhumane, arises from the difficulty that he confronts throughout the text in accepting the reality of his mind. As in all of his first three novels, DeLillo heightens this emphasis on internal experience by choosing narrate End Zone in the first person. Gary’s tone is often darkly ironical, indeed, at times, relentlessly so, to the point where humour is difficult to distinguish from more sincere statements. It is difficult, for example, to divine how seriously to take Gary’s assertion that his problems will dissolve, if only he ‘walk in circles’, particularly when he then proceeds to do so (42). This ambiguity in tone sometimes arouses concern over the true extent of the narrator’s anxieties and evasions. However, although Gary makes quite clear to the reader that he feels dislocated from his own mind and identity, his subjectivity is far from being as severely embattled as that of David Bell in Americana, a first-person narrator who makes clear that he has no recognisable sense of self whatever. Gary, on the other hand, reports a sense of separation or ‘exile’ from something that is, nevertheless, unambiguously existent, what he calls ‘whatever is left of the center of one’s own history’, a description that seems most applicable to memory or mind (31). This ‘exile’ is exacerbated by the objectivist, sometimes contemptuous, view of consciousness that prevails in ‘Logos College’, Texas,

where Gary enrolls as a student (2). With regard to this, DeLillo has remarked of End Zone that its characters display a ‘fragmented self-consciousness’, with a distinctly ‘mechanical element’ (ACH 81). In part, this is an aesthetic strategy that is designed to foreground the fictional status of his characters. As DeLillo points out, their ‘made-up nature’ draws attention to the fact that ‘The characters are words on paper’ (81). However, this mechanistic and fragmented consciousness also serves to indicate that some of these characters appear to experience themselves as fictional, precisely because they cannot trust their ‘fragmented’ consciousness and relegate it to the status of a mechanism. DeLillo shows that Gary is particularly sensitive to the reduction of mind to machine, indeed, that he had difficulty finding a congenial University because he rejected the emphasis that the coach at Penn State placed on team work, which Gary believes reduces the human subject to a mindless automaton. When the coach claimed to promote unity or ‘Oneness’, Gary retorted that by this he really meant ‘elevenness’ or ‘twenty-twoness’ and dismissed his attitude as an example of the ‘human xerography’ that plagues America and which he believes to be ‘spiritually disastrous’ (End Zone 19). Like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in The Dialectic of Enlightenment, he sees in American capitalism a mechanised culture that ‘now impresses the same stamp on everything’ and cultivates a ‘single mental state’ that ‘is not nuanced or extended in any way’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 120-127).

Although Gary attempts to resist such reductive, mechanistic views of consciousness, he nonetheless weakens, when confronted with the cynicism that, in spite of the metaphysical, even theological, name of ‘Logos College’ prevails on the subject among his teachers and peer group (End Zone 2). Although it is apparently in fun, the football instructor, Coach Creed, explicitly compares mind with machine, by referring to the team as ‘substandard, industrial robots’, and Gary quickly follows suit, by referring to his team-mate Hobbs as a ‘retarded computer’ (35-36). As DeLillo points out, this mechanistic quality also manifests in characters that engage in ‘wars of jargon’ with each other, in which quasi-

scientific language is used in order to undermine the ontological status of mind. A particularly telling example occurs when Tim Flanders grandiosely describes the way in which his grandfather's 'whole identity was dominated by some tremendous vision'. By the use of technical language, his friend Buddy Shock seeks to deny the validity of this experience, replying pedantically that 'Identity' is 'An equality satisfied by all possible values of the variables for which the standardized expressions involved in the equality are quantitatively determined' (57). Similarly, Gary's fellow student, Bing Jackmin, casually trivialises consciousness by attributing its properties to a clearly inanimate football. With amusing portentousness, he reveals to Gary that 'it was too wild, too unbelievable' but 'I sensed knowledge in the football.' Indeed, unsettlingly for Gary, according to Bing's comical account, the football is considerably more comfortable with its supposed mind and subjectivity than the novel's protagonist. In contrast to Gary's declared exile from the 'center of one's own history' (31), Bing believes the football 'knew it was the center of the game. It was aware of its own footballness' (37). Gary's denial of the internal experience of consciousness at times gives rise to a bizarre, even surreal, form of behaviourist analysis, which, in Laurence D. Smith's definition, is a psychology that offers a 'purely descriptive', third-person centred approach to the mind (Smith 270). For example, when singing drunkenly with fellow players Gary claims to be 'unsure' 'whether I was singing at all or just listening to Gus sing' and believes that only the objective evidence of hearing his 'own voice' could possibly decide the question. hilariously, and disturbingly, he claims that 'I thought I could hear my own voice but I wasn't sure and so I stood there with Gus, not wanting to leave if I was still singing'. Gary finds nothing to enjoy in such alienation from his mind and body. He describes the experience as 'disgusting' and 'ridiculous', an unremittingly 'horrible night' (End Zone 100).

In Gary's roommate, Anatole Bloomberg, DeLillo provides a robust counter force to the growing suspicion of consciousness that might otherwise overcome Gary. Bloomberg is conspicuous for his almost fanatical faith in the existence and

strength of his mind and attempts to persuade Gary of his views. When, for example, Gary earnestly expounds his arid theory of history, which excludes all mind and emotion and suggests that 'History is the angle at which realities meet', Bloomberg extols the power of subjective thought and feeling (46) and speaks repeatedly of his effort to 'forge a new consciousness' (186). He advises Gary to 'transform your mind into a ruthless instrument. You simply teach yourself to reject certain categories of thought' (46-47). Significantly, Bloomberg's determined advocacy of the mind's power persuades Gary to consider his roommate's selfhood far healthier than his own. Not only is he the 'opposite of death', according to Gary, but deserves the attribution of a fully human ontology, when Gary remains uncertain whether his own might be merely animal, or even inanimate (49). For example, his description of the content of Bloomberg's room includes the terse observations 'Bloomberg himself. Harkness himself or itself' (44).

DeLillo suggests that Gary perceives the mutability of mind to be a clear sign of its unreliability. In particular, Gary has difficulty accepting the modernist paradox that consciousness, although in perpetual flux, is also a continuous stream of thought that relates to a constant sense of self. The psychologist and philosopher, William James, famously asserted that although 'Thought is always changing', 'Within each personal consciousness, thought is sensibly continuous' (James 220-31). DeLillo often draws attention to the fact that Gary finds this Jamesian certainty of the ontological status and stability of consciousness elusive and has his protagonist report on the eccentric range of strategies that he employs to attain it, including, as we have seen, fasting and circular perambulation. In this context, it is notable that DeLillo takes care to suggest that Gary does eventually achieve this apparently elusive epistemological goal. When complaining of the similarity of succeeding days, Gary muses that 'I had not yet learned to appreciate the slowly gliding drift of identical things' (End Zone 18). The phrase, 'the gliding drift of identical things', is striking in that it implies precisely that Jamesian paradox of movement and fundamental stasis that disorients Gary. DeLillo

implies that, by the time Gary narrates the text, he has developed greater faith in the continuity of his consciousness and is better able to appreciate this ambiguity.

Whatever his later development, however, throughout much of End Zone, Gary takes the shifting meaning of words to undermine the stability and reality of mind. He experienced the beginnings of this anxiety, when gazing at a sign that bore the words 'WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH THE TOUGH GET GOING' and discovering that the words lost all meaning (17). This voiding of sense strikes Gary as both enchanting and terrifying. First, he observed a 'beauty' that 'flew from the words themselves', which, in an attempt to capture the dynamic motion that he perceives within his mind as he reads, he calls 'a semi-self-recreation from line to line'. However, in spite of the 'beauty' of meaningless cogitation, the fluctuations of this 'semi-self-recreation' are so unsettling to him that he calls it 'a sinister thing to discover at such an age, that words can escape their meanings'. His ambivalent reaction is partly traceable to the fact that Gary's sternly patriarchal father bought this sign for him as a disciplinary measure, a man Gary associates with the 'eternal work cycle, the blood-hunt for bear and deer' (17). It is plausible, therefore, that, by voiding meaning, Gary seeks to injure what Lacan calls the 'Symbolic function', 'identified' with the 'name of the father' and, simultaneously, attack the intimidating 'figure of the law' that he represents (Lacan41). Gary's anxiety at this senselessness is therefore terror at the prospect of punishment from this father, as well the disintegration of the stable reality of consciousness that the patriarch guarantees. Similarly, with reference to his teammate Bobby Luke, who gives voice to the cliched oath of loyalty that he would 'go through a brick wall' for the coach, Gary empathises with what he takes to be Bobby's horror at the instability of language. Gary acknowledges that 'The words were old and true, full of reassurance, comfort, consolation' and admits that it might even be 'easier to die than admit that words might lose their meanings' (End Zone 54). Although he recognises the instability of language, Gary finds it impossible to be comfortable with James' dictum that 'Thought is always changing'. Consequently, as we will see, he often fetishises the signifier and looks

for what Saul Kripke calls, in Naming and Necessity, the 'rigid designator', or a name that 'designates the same object' 'in every possible world' (Kripke 48).

Because he distrusts motility, Gary seeks 'simplicity' and stability of mind and the rigorous discipline of football training is one method of achieving this. Consequently, 'the daily punishments on the field' become a 'pleasure' because, Gary reports, 'I felt that I was better for it, reduced in complexity, a warrior' (End Zone 31). Exercise even reconciles him temporarily to the mutable nature of mind and world. During squat-jumps, he reports that, momentarily, 'The indifferent drift of time and all things filled me with affection for the universe' (56). To achieve 'simplicity', Gary adopts spiritual practices that lay special emphasis on the mind. In his daily routine, he begins to include 'some time in meditation' and, in this way, pursues 'solitude, starkness, discipline upon discipline' (30), forms of repetition that he can oppose to 'human xerography' (19). These practices have sometimes been dismissed as deviant and unhealthy- David Cowart refers to Gary's 'pathological asceticism' (Cowart 32) - yet mental self-examination gradually convinces him there is some stability in consciousness. As he puts it, 'There were profits here, things that could be used to make me stronger' (End Zone30).

It is open to the reader to conclude, as have some critics, that Gary's quest to 'achieve, indeed, establish some lowly form of American sainthood' may be only a despairing wish to withdraw from an unstable world (20). Since DeLillo never definitively resolves this issue, the reader has, to some degree, to confront a similar uncertainty and insecurity to the one Gary endures. However, it is significant that Gary's references to religion often come in response to reductive approaches to the mind, a fact which suggests that spirituality strikes him as the transcendental signifier that might secure the ontological status of consciousness. While attending 'Penn State', Gary frames his opposition to the coach's notion of 'Oneness', which Gary dismisses as 'human xerography', with the reproach that 'Oneness' ought to mean 'oneness with God or the universe or some equally redoubtable super-phenomenon' (19). The absurdity of such circumlocutory

references to divinity has caused Tom LeClair to suggest that DeLillo is satirising Gary's spiritual views, or religion itself (In the Loop 70). Although DeLillo does emphasise the ludicrous side of Gary's practices, such as his decision to 'walk in circles' because it 'is demanded by the mythology of all deserts and wasted places', the humour here arises largely from Gary's obvious lack of genuine belief (End Zone 42). The fact that his religious phase vanishes completely as his anxieties begin to diminish also tends to confirm that these behaviours act mainly as techniques to palliate his anxiety.

Spirituality may also serve another purpose for Gary, that of ameliorating his terror of death. It is certainly noticeable that when discussing death his compulsive desire for effective representation is particularly marked. By discovering words to represent death, he hopes to expunge his fear and stabilise the relation between mind and world. For example, when seeking a vocabulary in which to inscribe the horror of nuclear holocaust, he laments the fact that the 'words don't explain, they don't clarify, they don't express, they're painkillers' (85). Similarly, at a colleague's funeral, he bemoans the mourners' inability to uncover suitable signifiers, complaining that 'Death is the best soil for cliché', 'The trite saying is never more comforting, more restful, as in times of mourning' (69). Since words fail, he seeks to represent death by corporeal means, in the form of a 'simple-minded' game named 'Bang you're dead', which involve one player representing gunfire, by either gesture or sound, before 'The other person clutches a vital area of his body and then falls, simulating death' (31-32). Gary admits that it functions to ameliorate death-anxiety, by enabling them 'to pretend that death could be a tender experience' (34). Most notably, however, this is the one game in the novel where signifier and referent must not fit, representation must not take place, or an actual death will occur. It is also Gary's first excursion into the difficult area of representing death, a nebulous subject, which, as he says, involves 'the most perplexing of dreams' (32). In the process, he learns the valuable lesson, to which he will profitably return, that death may be simulated for a spectator, but never represented as an experience (32).

Nevertheless, individual and mass death functions in End Zone as a source of catharsis, as well as terror. In one of several breaks between colleges, the Vietnam War precipitates a considerable shift in Gary's consciousness. On seeing the word 'MILITARIZE' appear 'all over town' (20), he is terror-stricken, but later reflects that 'It represented some form of apotheosis.' 'The air was thick with it' (171). Although, at this stage, DeLillo does not make it explicit, before Gary learns to appreciate 'identical things', his use of the term 'repetition' still implies sterile 'human xerography', while 'simplicity' refers to his search for a more stable relation between mind and world (19). The shift is therefore a significant one and the fact that it is brought about by death-anxiety is one indication that, in End Zone, DeLillo begins to present confrontation with death as productive of transformative, even liberating, experience. Indeed, the disquieting and comical rapidity with which DeLillo portrays Gary's involvement in several 'destructive episodes', before he attends 'Logos', suggests that DeLillo's protagonist requires a great deal of the catharsis that confrontation with mortality offers (32). First, after 'the draft board began to get interested' for real, he timorously applies to 'Michigan State'. Then, while at Michigan, he is 'one of three players' who 'converge' on a 'safetyman' and cause his death. Although initially unable to cope with the trauma, he retreats to his bedroom for 'seven weeks' (22), after which he feels prepared for Logos College, where he finds exactly the 'simplicity' he seeks, indeed, what he calls 'a passion for simplicity, for the true old things' (4).

But Gary's most sustained meditation on death is his morbid interest in nuclear weaponry. DeLillo shows that his reading on the subject is a source of serious disorientation that causes Gary to question his sanity, but also a sublime cathartic experience that eases his death-anxiety. The mental strain that Gary suffers over the bomb is congruent with what Margot A. Henriksen asserts was an observable decline in US mental health during the Cold War. Henriksen notes that fear forced Americans to 'live a double life' (Henriksen 86), the results of which 'psychological torment', she continues, are 'documented in the statistics on mental health during that era' (113). Gary is himself deeply disturbed by the

pleasure he derives from reading about the atomic bomb. After admitting baldly that 'I liked reading about the deaths of tens of millions of people', he reports that he became 'seriously depressed' and even wonders, 'Had I gone mad?' (End Zone 20-21). Henriksen suggests that the spectre of the atom bomb produced a 'schizoid' (Henriksen 85) culture that was exemplified by Stanley Kubrick's creation, *Dr Strangelove*, whose 'mixture of nihilism and good spirits' 'matched the destructive and creative potential of atomic chaos' (xxv). This characterisation of the Cold War American mind as radically split is strikingly apt for the mixture of terror and manic irony that Gary's narration often betrays. For example, after a grim, sustained attempt to imagine 'firestorms' and 'millions dead' in Milwaukee, the success of which is forestalled by the fact that he 'had no idea what the city looked like' and 'could not imagine it in flames', Gary emerges from his bedroom to declare, in mock-heroic fashion, 'Milwaukee is spared' (End Zone 43-44).

M. Keith Booker argues that it was the combination of rapid technological change and the terrifying power of the bomb that caused a significant increase in pathological mental states during this period (Booker 24). Notably, Booker selects the same form of mental illness as Henriksen to typify the American post war malady, when he cites what he calls a 'schizophrenic' sense of discontinuity in the minds of Americans. Of special relevance to Gary is the particular emphasis that Booker places on the 'vertiginous pace of change' in technology and its effect on the human subject's 'perception of continuity of selfhood over time'. Booker believes that this sense of personal discontinuity led to a 'larger loss of any sense of historical continuity' and gave Americans the impression that they 'they were living in unprecedented situations to which the experience of the past was irrelevant' (24). Similarly, Gary prefaces his nervous enquiry about his own sanity with the awe-struck observation that the books he read were 'whispering shyly of cycles of destruction so great that the language of past world wars became laughable, the wars themselves somewhat naïve' (End Zone 21). Booker and DeLillo apparently agree that technological change was disturbing to Americans' sense of the stability and reality of consciousness. If Booker is right, in

Gary, DeLillo portrays a character that typifies the bewildered American response to the destructive possibilities of the Cold War.

In End Zone, the atom bomb appears as a sublime object, comparable to death and the Lacanian Real in its perplexing combination of stern reality and resistance to representation. As David E. Nye points out, 'The specific advantage of the sublime is that it is beyond words' (Nye xiv). Nye takes the bomb to be an exemplar of the 'technological sublime', whose invention formed 'the ultimate dead end of any attempted representation of the technological 'thing in itself'' (290). Major Stanley, one of Gary's professors, agrees and even draws a comparison with the ineffability of the divine, referring to the 'theology of fear' that surrounds the subject (End Zone 81). After nuclear weapons, Stanley declares, 'god is the force of nature itself, the fusion of teuterium and deuterium' (80). Indeed, much of the atom bomb's immense influence in the novel arises from its association with religion, a link that anticipates the analogy DeLillo pursues in the later novel, Underworld (1997), between the mushroom cloud and the mystical 'cloud of unknowing', which promises salvation. Gary's attraction to the spiritual as a source of mental constancy means that the religious connotations of the bomb only reinforce its impact on him. Nye's reporting of early atomic tests would suggest that the spiritual response of Gary and the major replicates that of real life witnesses. Nye conveys the view of one such that 'Religious feelings and quotations welled up in most of the witnesses. One felt as if he had been present at the moment of creation when God said 'Let there be light'' (Nye 228). Late in End Zone, DeLillo makes the bomb's religious connotations more explicit, when Bloomberg adopts the persona of an 'anguished physicist', who claims to 'have a human side' and 'love the classics' (End Zone 214). In a passage that reads like an allegory of the atomic bomb, Bloomberg speaks of a hypothetical project to 'steer our technology toward the metaphysical, toward the creation of some unimaginable weapon able to pierce spiritual barriers, to maim or kill whatever dark presence inhabits the world' (215).

Paradoxically, Gary demands that this nuclear sublime exercise the cathartic power to free him from his atomic obsession and banish 'all sense of global holocaust' (43). In a highly significant scene in the Texan desert, DeLillo suggests that, like the idea of death, the atomic bomb's ineffable but indisputable existence may help to expunge Gary's compulsive behaviour, by persuading him that his mind has a similarly redoubtable, if unutterable, ontology. Gary begins the scene, more anxious than ever, yearning for Kripke's 'rigid designator' (Kripke 48) or, as Gary puts it, 'something that could be defined in one sense only, something not probable or variable, a thing unalterably itself' (End Zone 88). This is Gary wishing once again to join signifier and referent in order to believe his mind stable or, in James' words, 'sensibly continuous' (James 231). Oddly, the intensification of Gary's disquiet over language leads, temporarily, to a lull in his fears. An unexpected consummation of his desperate need for representational realism persuades him, in conjunction with consideration of the nuclear sublime, to consider a philosophically realist perspective on consciousness. First, Gary decides that a pile of 'simple shit, nothing more' is the site of a perfect meeting of word and thing, or 'the one thing that did not betray its definition' (End Zone 88). To Gary, this delusional episode is an existential epiphany, since he takes such supposedly accurate denotation as a guarantee that consciousness is reliably reporting worldly phenomena, and, thus, a train of associations is stimulated that proves revolutionary for his assessment of mind (88). He is inspired to meditate on this remarkable excrement as both waste and fertile matter, 'shit in life cycle' 'shit as history', which musings, in turn, lead to consideration of the nuclear sublime as similarly contradictory in its creative and destructive potential. 'I thought of men embedded in the ground', he writes, 'all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails, man-planet, a fresh intelligence revolving through the system' (89).

The steady accumulation of connected ideas in this passage creates a sense of crescendo and the expectation of a profound realisation or revelation to come. It arrives, but only when these multiple, perverse images of regeneration cause Gary

to reflect on equally dynamic, tectonic shifts within the mind. Suddenly, having been buoyed by the representational comfort of his excremental epiphany and the insights of the nuclear sublime, Gary drops any neurotic need for linguistic correspondence to convince him of the mind's reality. Indeed, he limns a model of mind that bespeaks at least partial autonomy and a capability for profound self-transformation, even without the assistance of language. Gary reflects that 'in some form of void, freed from consciousness, the mind remakes itself' and concludes from this that 'What we must know must be learned from blanked-out pages. To begin to reword the overflowing world' (89). Notably, the notion of 'learning from blanked-out pages' is one that is actually practised at Logos in a module on the 'untellable', for which, comically, Gary's colleague Howard Lowry is asked to read and memorise Rilke in German, 'a language he did not understand' (64). This promotion of the ineffable, which, in the context of the novel's concern with the issue, seems only half-ironic, serves to remind the reader that the 'simplicity' of Logos College assists Gary in his wish to appreciate mental phenomena that are not 'expressible in human language' (Nagel 171). In similar vein, the 'blanked-out pages' from which Gary now wishes to learn may provide another reason for his powerful attraction to football, whose coaches are effectively able to 'reword' or name their world. As Gary says, 'each team uses an entirely different system of naming' and 'Coaches stay up well into the night to name plays. They heat and reheat coffee on an old burner' (End Zone 118).

Gary continues to show signs of anxiety for the remainder of the text, but DeLillo provides crucial indications that the nuclear sublime has had lasting cathartic effects on Gary. If it does not banish 'all sense of global holocaust', as he had hoped, his interest in nuclear war diminishes noticeably (43). Whereas, he had previously been 'the best student in the class' in the 'Aspects of Modern War' tutorial, Gary now admits that during war games with the major he 'was not feeling very involved. In fact I considered the scenario somewhat boring despite all the frenzy and tension' (223). Moreover, the final chapters are notable for a proliferation of references to the contingency of relationships between signifier

and referent. Gary makes few of these, but their accumulation and Gary's apparent acquiescence in them suggests a progressive retreat from his neurotic linguistic concerns. For instance, Gary congratulates Anatole Bloomberg on his 'fabulous name', only for Bloomberg to reply dismissively that 'It's a means of identification. It has no significance beyond that' (187). Similarly, when Gary's team-mate Taft Robinson forgets the name of the 'black stone of Abraham' at Mecca, he is quick to downplay its importance. 'A name's a name' he tells Gary, 'A place could just as easily be another place' (241). DeLillo also provides a dark allegory of Gary's compulsive relation to language with the inclusion of a story by the fictional Tudev Nemkhu. The story functions as a sly and comical morality tale, which comments archly on Gary's predicament and has the effect of reaffirming his rejection of word fetishism, which, in Nemkhu's story, proves fatal to its adherents. Nemkhu portrays creatures named Nautiloids, who achieve the fusion of signifier and referent for which Gary has aimed, by producing 'likenesses' of objects, transforming them into words, and feeding them 'into its own circuitry' (169-170). The Nautiloids gradually become the 'monadonom' or 'the thing that's everything' and thereby fulfil Gary's own fantasy of cancelling the exigencies of the mind-world relation. In a clear parallel to the narrator's Gary's realisation that he must 'learn from blanked-out pages', 'monadonom' is called upon confront a lack of language, when the 'word just erased itself. It no longer exists'. However, because the Nautiloids have succeeded where Gary failed and managed to weld their ontology entirely to the signifier they end unhappily and perish with the erased word (170).

Though Gary's neuroses appear to diminish, DeLillo refuses to offer a harmonious or comfortable ending in which his difficulties are entirely resolved. Indeed, the novel ends rather suddenly, after Gary has starved himself to the point where 'High fevers burned a thin straight channel through my brain' and he must be fed 'through plastic tubes' (242). Although Gary's self-starvation is an alarming note on which to end, it is also possible to view his physical disintegration as another form of catharsis, an approach to psychological difficulty

with which he has previously achieved some success. In particular, the simultaneously physical and mental nature of the illness may symbolise a tentative reduction of death-anxiety and acceptance of the mind-body unity that, we learn in the final pages, coach Creed has long recommended to his recruits (237). Mark Osteen has argued that DeLillo's refusal to offer his reader traditional closure indicates an authorial rejection of the narrator's 'attraction to apocalypse' (Osteen 32). Although the peremptory conclusion to the text may imply rejection of Gary's former pursuit of catastrophe, Osteen's view disregards the paradoxical fact that, under the guidance of the nuclear sublime, Gary's fascination with holocaust began steadily to fade. In spite of their unsettling violence, verbal and actual, the concluding pages of the novel mark the inception of a potentially fruitful new alliance for Gary, which, in time, may help to diminish his anxieties further. This friendship is formed with fellow football player, Taft Robinson, who shares Gary's interest in 'Atrocities in general' (241). After long discussion of 'the teeth, the lampshades, the soap', with which Taft is preoccupied, Gary suggests to Taft, with apparent sincerity, that 'There must be something we can do' (240-41). In this purposeful context, Gary's malnourished body may represent the latest in a series of plans he has adopted in order to counter suffering with suffering and purify the mind through self-mortification. Therefore, although the disturbing image of a starving patient leaves one the option of believing that Gary remains enmeshed in terminal crisis, it is at least equally plausible that his fast is merely one more apocalyptic strategy with which to counter his fear of the 'nameless' and ineffable (ACH 83).

Endnotes

¹ Tom LeClair, In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel (Urbana: University of IL Press, 1987). Further references to this edition will be parenthetical.

²This constitutes the central difference between my reading of End Zone and that of other critics. Most commentators have argued that Gary's ultimate goal is metaphysical reassurance and release. As will become clear, I contend that Gary wishes merely to assure himself of the reality of his mind.

³Hereafter, ACH.

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First Response

This essay probes at the way in which the post-modernist characteristics of DeLillo's early writings are, in *End Zone*, hybridly and productively set in dialogue with an exploration of some more-or-less contemporary philosophical

debates concerning philosophical realism, as promoted by Thomas Nagel, the ‘first person ontology’ of consciousness promulgated by John R. Searle, and objectivism (understood not as objectivity but as those methodologies excluding subjective experience from consideration). This occurs via the representation of Gary Harkness, the first-person narrator, and his intellectual sojourn at the instructively named Logos College and subsequently on a journey into the Texan desert near-environs of the Nevada atom bomb test sites. The essay observes that in the process Gary is often satirised (particularly in terms of his religiosity) and so is rendered somewhat unreliable, but perhaps it can be argued this unreliability is established more fundamentally than this essay allows – destabilising the philosophical dialogue’s bias otherwise towards seeking out a sustainable confirmation of the relationship between the mind and the world — which even Gary himself comes to see as a questionable search. Perhaps then the novel is after all rather more post-modernist than much of this essay’s discussion (at least implicitly) allows.