

# *Libra*'s Merging Vectors—Plot and Form “In New Orleans” (Part Two)

Frank E. OSTERHAUS

## I Introduction

In Harold Bloom's collection of essays on DeLillo's work, Frank Lentricchia describes *Libra*'s “double narrative”<sup>1</sup> as plotted “with relentless inevitability” on the conspiracy side; however, on the Oswald side it “is so utterly episodic in character [that] it certainly doesn't deserve to be called a ‘plot’ in DeLillo's senses of the word” (FL 75). Rather, Lentricchia calls it “a plotless tale of an aimless life without coherent form.” Lentricchia has indeed caught the dual plot nature of the novel: DeLillo has provided two different plot vectors that alternate from chapter to chapter. However, DeLillo has an even greater sense of plot than Lentricchia gives him credit for. DeLillo provides each of the two plot lines with differing approaches to form, yet both are well-conceived and executed form(s) nonetheless. In so doing, he invests them with connecting information including images, themes, and the repetition of scenes from differing perspectives, in order to create a singular yet more complex plot for the novel.

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<sup>1</sup> Lentricchia, Frank, “*Libra* as Postmodern Critique.” In “Critical Views on *Libra*: Frank Lentricchia on the Novel's Double Narrative,” pp. 74-76, in *Bloom's Major Novelists: Don DeLillo*, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, Broomall, PA, 2003. First printed in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (Spring 1990) pp. 438-441.

The first plot vector is focused on the life of Lee Harvey Oswald and starts with him in his early teen years in New York (i.e. “In the Bronx”). Each chapter that is titled according to a place, like the Bronx, or New Orleans, or Atsugi, etc., is focused on an important stage in the development of Lee—especially in terms of his psychological background that leads him to assassinate President Kennedy. This paper will refer to these chapters as components of the Oswald place vector.

The chapters that are titled with a particular date in time are all focused on the development of a conspiracy (that morphs into the Kennedy assassination plot) to bring about the invasion of Cuba and the overthrow of Castro by American military forces. In *Libra*, DeLillo presents April 17, 1963<sup>2</sup> as the starting point of this conspiracy. It is a conspiracy by rogue CIA agents both active as well as semi-retired that felt betrayed by the president’s refusal to provide full American military support—especially air support—that ultimately led to the debacle at the Bay of Pigs. These date chapters will carry the label of the conspiracy time vector.

The two vectors cover two differing stretches of time that finally overlap and weave together. The first vector (the Oswald place vector) covers a little over ten years, and the various chapters move chronologically through his life from when he was about thirteen years old<sup>3</sup> until his burial in Dallas on November 25, 1963 at the age of 24. The second vector (the conspiracy time vector) covers only about seven and a half months from April 17, 1963 to November 25, 1963. Because both of these vectors end at the same time as well as place—Oswald’s burial plot—this discrepancy in time causes the vectors to slowly approach each other until they finally converge when

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<sup>2</sup> This date marks the second anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion on 4/17/61.

<sup>3</sup> Lee and his mother moved to New York City during the summer of 1952 (Lee would have been 12 at that time since he was born on October 18, 1939), and then moved back to New Orleans, the place of Lee’s birth, in January 1954 when Lee was 14.

Oswald commits himself to a shooter's role in the conspiracy. DeLillo's weaving of these plot threads into the final "plot" creates a powerful and effective dynamic within the novel that serves to manipulate Oswald to join the conspiracy as well as to manipulate the reader to understand and thence naturally accept the idea that conspiracy concerning the Kennedy assassination best fits the culture of the times and the "plot" of the novel.

Unfortunately, Lentricchia misses the very carefully constructed, tight interconnectedness of the double vector plot and thus loses a large part of the powerful dynamic that drives this novel. He also misses DeLillo's authorial manipulation of not only the double-headed plot but also of the reader's understanding of that important historical event. Peter Boxall comes much closer when he takes up the double-headed plot and labels it as "a bidirectional novel."<sup>4</sup> By this he means that he sees it as "a novel which rolls moment upon moment towards the becoming of history, the becoming of the author, whilst also rolling backwards, away from the point of entry into history, ...which refuses to enter into the narrative stream." (PB 133) From this opposing<sup>5</sup> movement the "whirl" image springs forth.

That insight by Boxall is useful; however, it still doesn't offer a fully integrated look into the workings of that double-narrative plot. This paper will explore how DeLillo sets his dynamic up and then how he uses it to move the overall plot forward as the story unfolds, particularly how it relates to "In New Orleans" in Part Two with a focus on the early sections within that

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<sup>4</sup> Boxall, Peter, *Don DeLillo—The possibility of fiction*. Routledge, New York 2006, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> "Rolling backwards" and thus opposing doesn't precisely describe the movement that DeLillo is setting in motion here because both vectors are essentially moving in the same direction; however, one vector (the Oswald place vector) is moving at a faster pace because it has more time and space to cover. The motion arises from finally catching up with and then "passing" the time covered in the previous chapter in the conspiracy time vector, thereby effectively merging the two vectors into a "whirl."

chapter where the plot begins to come together. Here, Oswald is not “stumbling into the future”<sup>6</sup> as Lentricchia claims; rather, Oswald, though vulnerable, is always working with a focus and a purpose that are rather easily co-opted by forces that feed on his desire to enter the powerful flow of history like his hero Leon Trotsky.<sup>7</sup> Oswald is actively looking for his entry path into history, but he simply misreads where history is actually heading, as do the conspirators who co-opt him—after all, the purpose behind the conspiracy ultimately fails, though history is indeed made in a dramatic way.

The turning point for Oswald occurs during the chapters when the two vectors close and finally merge to form the consolidated assassination vector that moves pointedly towards the conjoined time and place—the “whirl,” to use the Boxall/DeLillo term—for the Kennedy assassination and aftermath. This convergence comes powerfully close in Part Two in the Oswald-place-vector chapter entitled “In New Orleans” because this is the chapter in which Oswald starts to become actively seduced by elements of the conspiracy to join in. This is the critical period when the two disparate vectors finally approach each other in both time and space, in order to begin to form a single

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<sup>6</sup> Lentricchia further describes the Oswald narrative as the “narrative of an amorphous existence haphazardly stumbling into the future where a plot awaits to confer upon it the identity of a role fraught with form and purpose” (75).

<sup>7</sup> Trotsky was introduced in the first “In New Orleans” chapter in Part One—though DeLillo did not at that point use Trotsky’s first name; instead, DeLillo much later used the name “Leon” as the lone identifier for the conspiracy shooter trainee in Part Two’s “6 September” chapter, saving the identification of the pseudonym as pertaining to Lee and then by association to Trotsky in a step-by-step slow reveal of a possible personal and ideological connection for the reader to put together from the evidence. This fracturing of identifiers is a technique DeLillo uses throughout the text to force the reader to make the connections as the information slowly accrues through the two different vectors: one being the broad conspiracy vector, with the other being the more specifically personal Oswald place vector dealing with the psychological development of Lee/Leon. The more familiar the reader is with history, the more quickly that reader will make the proper connection.

time-line that all but freezes the moment of the assassination—the six point nine seconds of heat and light—expanded over more than five pages focusing on Lee Harvey Oswald's personal perspective within the conspiracy-time-vector chapter entitled "22 November," thereby causing the combination of personal place and time to be a minute study contained in a multi-faceted, conjoined, and thus highly focused vector aimed at the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Clearly, DeLillo has chosen to structure and develop this novel to fit his purposes. Kenneth Burke takes up the concept of authorial purpose in his essay "Psychology and Form" where he defines form as "the psychology of the audience."<sup>8</sup> With *Libra*, DeLillo is very much concerned with the "psychology of the audience" as he develops his history-based fiction on a multi-level track that includes both the manipulation of Oswald as well as the manipulation of the audience/reader in order to bring about DeLillo's desired result: a believable simulacrum of a conspiracy that sucks in Oswald (an inveterate, though dyslexic, reader); while simultaneously, DeLillo leads and manipulates the mind of the reader of the novel, thereby turning the reader into a "believer" and making him/her an active participant in the discovery of what "really" happened in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963.

Therefore, it is quite useful to employ the lens of Burkean "form" as a way to inspect the issue of *Libra's* unorthodox structuring principle as exemplified in the chapter labeled "In New Orleans" (in Part Two) where the two vectors start to converge and weave together to form a complex yet

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<sup>8</sup> More fully: "[Form is] the psychology of the audience. Or seen from another angle, form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite...If, in a work of art, the poet says something, let us say, about a meeting, writes it in such a way that we desire to observe that meeting, and then, if he places that meeting before us—that is form. While obviously that is also the psychology of the audience..."

Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement*. U of California P, 1931, CA printing 1968, p. 105.

singular plot line. This is the chapter where Oswald is made aware of the conspiracy and his prospective role in it. This is also the chapter where the verbal clues that DeLillo has been adroitly planting in the mind of the reader as connecting elements will bind both vectors tightly together for the reader as evidence of the psychology behind both the conspiracy and behind Oswald's participation in it, thereby fully investing the reader in the evidence for the "truth" of conspiracy and the psychologically appealing truth of the novel.

The distance between the two vectors starts very wide in terms of both time and place, as indicated in the first two chapters of *Libra*—"In the Bronx" and "17 April." The first chapter opens with an introduction to the adolescent Lee Oswald<sup>9</sup> living in the Bronx (New York City in about 1952) a bit more than ten years before the introduction of the conspiracy's first conception and early formulation in the second chapter "17 April" (1963, near Dallas, Texas) by Win Everett with his two former CIA colleagues, Larry Parmenter and T. J. Mackey.<sup>10</sup>

However, as DeLillo develops his novel from these two disparate points in time and space, and as each pair of chapters unfolds, the trajectories of their respective vectors inexorably move towards each other. The conspiracy time vector moves by month or week, while the Oswald place vector moves from city to city, jumping through increments of time that decrease from years to months to weeks and days until they finally converge towards the end of this critical chapter in Part Two—the second "In New Orleans" chapter. In so doing, this chapter is anomalous in that it marks the first time

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<sup>9</sup> Lee was about 13 years old since it was around 1952 when he was in the 7th grade. The school year in the US starts in September. Lee was born on October 18, 1939 (and was shot by Jack Ruby on November 24, 1963).

<sup>10</sup> These three men initially came up with a vague concept of a shocking scare rather than an outright presidential assassination. The three also developed a general sketch of the type of person they would need to play the part of the fall guy in the "plot."

that the Oswald place vector actually catches up with and then goes beyond the “present time” of the previous conspiracy-time-vector chapter. Thus, the following chapter, “25 September,” marks a general stabilization of the passage of time.

With the chapter “In New Orleans,” DeLillo describes Lee as being in the process of filling out a personal history (obviously entailing elements of his experiences compiled in the previous Oswald-place-vector chapters) that matches the sketched out needs of the conspiracy so eloquently described by Everett as “Pocket litter.”<sup>11</sup> DeLillo has Oswald himself point toward this convergence when he writes in Part One “In Atsugi”: “History means to merge...to climb out of your own skin. He knew what Trotsky had written, that revolution leads us out of the dark night of the isolated self.” (L 101) This is form in the psychological sense both within the novel with Lee having a psychological desire for a self-aware and active place in the onward rush of history (history’s “plot”) and specifically in this chapter with him realizing his place in the conspiracy plot (though with some ambivalence), as well as outside the novel with the reading audience being prepared to also accept Lee’s place in the “plot”—conspiracy plot/novel plot.

Naturally, DeLillo can assume his reading audience is well aware of the historical fact<sup>12</sup> that Lee Harvey Oswald shot and killed President Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. DeLillo can also assume that the question of

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<sup>11</sup> These two words open the fourth chapter in Part One, the conspiracy-time-vector chapter “26 April.” Everett uses his “sentence” or expression as a succinct summary of what he will use to create a cardboard cutout of the type of shooter they needed to effectively pin the assassination attempt on.

<sup>12</sup> Of course in DeLillo’s version, Oswald hits Kennedy, but the final head-shot is taken from a parking area near the grassy knoll by Raymo who is one of the Cuban Bay of Pigs refugees who are part of the plot and sent in to ensure the job is done completely (L 396). Oswald is/was always meant to be the “lone” fall-guy acting on his pro-communist, pro-Castro sympathies.

whether Oswald was a “lone gunman” or part of a greater conspiracy was a part of the public conversation and remains so to this day. The knowledge that this complicating factor was already well established in the public psyche provides DeLillo fertile soil to develop and bolster his own plot by providing “evidence” within a structure that neatly dovetails into the facts and folklore that already permeate popular culture—especially in terms of a general psychological flexibility concerning the conspiracy question.<sup>13</sup>

Part Two’s Oswald-place-vector chapter “In New Orleans” (echoing the first “In New Orleans” chapter which is the second Oswald-place-vector chapter in Part One) closes the gap between the two vectors considerably. This chapter picks up the thread left off at the end of the previous “In Dallas” Oswald-place-vector chapter and covers his stay in New Orleans from when he fled Dallas after his attempted assassination of Walker on April 10, 1963, to just before he sets out on his journey in late September to Mexico City<sup>14</sup> in an attempt to flee to Cuba. Lee arrived in New Orleans a couple weeks after the attempt on Walker. Marina stayed behind with family friends in Texas for a few days while Lee looked for a house and job. However, throughout most of this particular chapter, he is living with Marina and the baby. The only exceptions might be the visit to the grave of his father in the very first section of the chapter, and then at the end when he sends the family off while he stays with Ferrie just before his trip to Mexico City to attempt to escape the conspiracy and flee to Cuba.

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<sup>13</sup> As David Courtwright states, “DeLillo has never claimed that *Libra* is an argument for what really happened, only an exploration of one plausible variation.” P. 89. This very psychologically compelling act of creating plausibility through building interconnected networks of language, images, characters, and motives defines the plot of the novel for both Oswald and the reader. It brings belief to fiction. Also see interview with Rolling Stone, accessed 9.8.2016: <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/matters-of-fact-and-fiction-19881117>

<sup>14</sup> Ironically, Mexico City was the place where Leon Trotsky was killed.

This chapter marks an intensification of the ironic illusion of the possibility of escape<sup>15</sup> from an American society riddled with rampant racism and economic inequality that Oswald finds himself being trapped in. This chapter also clearly lays out in detail the life of Oswald and behind the initially anonymous "Leon" who was introduced in the preceding chapter "6 September"—a man marked as an element being trained for possible front line participation in the covert assassination conspiracy.

Note the inverted time play.<sup>16</sup> This maneuver uses the jarring time difference within the double-narrative structure as a tool for manipulating the psychology of the reader to join in the construction of the conspiracy plot to make a personal discovery of and connection to Lee/Leon's "Libra" nature. Moreover, as the chapter develops, DeLillo pulls both the reader and Oswald deeper into their respective plots by describing how Lee's own double-nature is deliberately noted and manipulated by Ferrie in order to serve as evidence to Oswald for his placement at the center of the conspiracy. As the double image of Lee Harvey Oswald nears convergence and focus, DeLillo reveals him to be flawed but rational, and the perfect stooge for the part chosen for him in the plot—"Pocket litter" realized.

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Lentricchia lost the interconnectedness of the overall plot because DeLillo was so successful in disguising the tight inner connections of the plot from the Oswald place vector.

<sup>16</sup> As the two plot vectors begin to converge here, the differing time tracks can be psychologically unsettling as the action in the previous conspiracy-time-vector chapter, "6 September," occurs sometime after the action in the early part of this chapter. This causes the reading audience to pause, re-order, and put the action together. The fact that DeLillo initially withholds the information about the identity of "Leon" in that earlier chapter (which takes place after the early action in this chapter during which Lee has not quite yet become "Leon") effectively forces the reader to place Lee into the conspiracy without an overt statement by the author. This is indicative of DeLillo's reader-oriented psychological approach by manipulating time and perspective, as well as information flow.

## II Binding Elements of Part Two's "In New Orleans"—Overall

"In New Orleans" is a long chapter—second longest<sup>17</sup> in the novel at 34 pages, and it is broken into 26 sections. Some of the sections are relatively short, less than half a page, while a few are long, up to four or five pages. This chapter covers the entirety of Lee's sojourn in New Orleans upon fleeing the Dallas-Fort Worth area after his attempt on the life of General Walker. Therefore, Oswald's arrival and final departure serve as the container for this crucial stage in the plot (both DeLillo's as well as the conspirators') and in Lee's life when everything begins to come together.

For our purposes here, we will consider some of the techniques in language, structure, and narrative development that DeLillo employs to further his purposes in providing a psychologically compelling multi-level "plot" that makes the reader self-convinced and thus complicit. Of the twenty-six sections in this chapter, this paper will focus on the first five, which effectively draw Oswald into the initial stages of the conspiracy plot before full commitment and provides the reader as well as Oswald with a rationale for moving forward.

Within this convergence of vectors of both time and place, there are four main interconnected threads in Oswald's life in New Orleans that DeLillo uses to bind his overall plot together in the 26 sections: (1) Lee's family life—including past and present, (2) Lee's basic employment—a complex factor because he has a normal job with a coffee company and he supposedly has an undercover job with the FBI, with these two jobs providing him with the means to support his family as well as support his politics, (3) Lee's complex relationship with David Ferrie that has its roots back in his teenage years,<sup>18</sup> and (4) Lee's political efforts on behalf of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

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<sup>17</sup> "In Atsugi" consists of about 36 pages.

<sup>18</sup> A period covered in the first "In New Orleans" chapter back in Part One of *Libra*.

All four of these threads come together in this chapter to effectively bind Oswald into the "plot." The connecting agents for this merging action are primarily Ferrie, Banister, and, unknowingly, Agent Bateman. Central to Lee's work (his regular job, his covert work, and his political efforts) and central to his relationship with Ferrie is the fact that Lee's office for the covert FBI work and the Cuban political effort is located in the same building as that of Guy Banister who is an associate of Ferrie. Both Banister and Ferrie are connected to the developing assassination plot of the renegade CIA-related group of Everett, Parmenter, and Mackey—a plot that is finally hijacked<sup>19</sup> by Mackey who morphs it into its more deadly form.

These are the threads that DeLillo weaves in order to draw Lee into the net of the conspiracy as well as to shape the psychology of the reading audience into not only accepting the idea of Oswald's involvement in a greater conspiracy, but also manipulating the reader into drawing that conclusion based on the reader's own "detective work." This approach effectively creates a multi-level "plot" revolving around the manipulation of the psychology of the audience—both Lee within the novel and, in the strict Burkean sense, the outside reader of the novel.

Lee's personal life in this chapter is connected both to the CIA and to the FBI. Since the CIA is concerned with intelligence gathering outside the U.S., it has a file on Oswald (from the Oswald place vector) in that he defected at one time to the Soviet Union and shared what he knew about the U-2 program as his means of being nominally accepted there. He also married a Russian

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<sup>19</sup> This "plot hijacking" develops an ironic echo when it becomes a complex and loaded image in relationship to the hijacking image that comes up early (the second section) in the chapter when Lee and Marina have their midnight conversation. And, of course, in terms of what DeLillo is doing to the reader's mind with these developments in his plot.

national, Marina,<sup>20</sup> which indicated a deeply personal acceptance of Soviet life. Because of that, the State Department and thus the CIA were aware of him and kept that file. However, once Oswald returned to the U.S., the FBI began watching over Oswald because they had responsibility for domestic intelligence and counter-intelligence issues and considered him to be a possible Russian agent.

Due to the “fortuitous” presence of intelligence elements from both vectors coming together and recognizing overlapping interests, it is in this chapter set in the city of New Orleans—where Oswald was born and spent his earliest years, where he and his mother returned after their stay in New York, and where he has now fled after his attempted assassination of General Walker in Fort Worth—that the various threads and the two vectors begin to merge and bind. Even though Lee had tried to separate himself from the authorities by quickly moving to New Orleans, the FBI kept track of him, and their usage of him would provide the link back to the possibility of his usage by the CIA (through George de Mohrenschildt<sup>21</sup> and David Ferrie) in the

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<sup>20</sup> Since Lee married Marina and returned to the States with her, his fundamental allegiance was considered problematical. The FBI agents Freitag and Mooney contacted Oswald when he lived in Fort Worth because of this ambiguity in his political loyalties, especially considering that this period of time was at the height of the Cold War, and Lee—through his wife—had become immersed in the Russian expatriate group that may or may not contain Communist sympathizers or possible agents.

<sup>21</sup> George had CIA connections due to his work facilitating their operations in South and Central America as well as in Cuba as “an oil geologist or engineer” (L 234). He belonged to the same social network of Eastern European ex-patriots in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that Marina and Lee gravitated towards, and so George befriended them. Lee then alluded to that attempted assassination in conversation and subsequently sent a photograph (with note from Marina attached) to George who logged it in his mind thereby making it possible for him to share it with the rogue CIA conspiracy group. The photo is a fact, but, of course, whether George de Mohrenschildt shared the information with and in a former CIA-driven greater

developing conspiracy.

Now in New Orleans, Lee's employment has a double nature. His normal, public job is at a coffee company; however, since the move to New Orleans had broken his connection to his original FBI contacts (Agents Freitag and Mooney), it now allows a more creative thinking agent like Bateman to find a way to put him to work covertly. Bateman helps to place Lee in that small office in the same building as Banister, and pays Lee a stipend to watch Banister for signs of a covert operation. Lee's new office is used for his newly established branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a pro-Castro "group"<sup>22</sup>—making this a complex ambiguity indeed.

Ferrie, who is connected to the CIA splinter group that is running the conspiracy operation, plays a dual role both as a "father" figure,<sup>23</sup> and as a guide to New Orleans. He is the primary force that draws Oswald into the Kennedy assassination conspiracy plot. He is also a friend of Guy Banister—a man that works in an office in that same building that houses Lee's political action activities and who thus becomes the object of Lee's work for Agent Freitag of the FBI. Banister also used to work for the FBI, but he has since retired and now operates his own private detective agency.

Banister is also connected to elements in the rogue CIA operation. The FBI is currently watching Banister with interest because they suspect him of working with anti-Castro elements that are trying to effect a regime change

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conspiracy is a conjecture on DeLillo's part that ties the narrative thread together.

<sup>22</sup> Quotation marks are being used here to indicate irony because the committee or group consists of one person only: Lee Harvey Oswald, though he does use several aliases.

<sup>23</sup> Ferrie knew Lee when Lee was a teenager and a member of Captain Ferrie's Civil Air Patrol (he also sold Lee an unworkable rifle when he was 15 years old). Both events were described in Part One's "In New Orleans" chapter and so reverberate here. Ferrie here is a "bad-father" in the sense that he sells a flawed weapon and is also a seducer of "his boys." (Also see footnote 39).

in Cuba. President Kennedy has ordered those operations to cease, but still there are indications that rogue elements in the FBI and CIA might be fomenting a bloody regime change. These diametrically opposed splits within each of the two main intelligence agencies create an ambiguity of intent that is difficult if not impossible to resolve without conflict.

While operating within these conflicting elements, Lee takes on roles that are diametrically opposed. When the forces that want to use him overtly manipulate this aspect, it is ascribed to him as a natural manifestation of his Libra nature. These opposing elements within and about him are what create the intensifying internal dynamic that sporadically erupts in acts of frustration and violence—usually against his wife, but also in hidden moments of extreme violence, like in the case of Walker and ultimately Kennedy. These societally contradictory elements are being forced into him while his life is being compressed and thence directed by others in order to suit their own covert purposes. They are manipulating his psychology in order to get him to accept the role that they want him to play in their “plot.”

### **III “In New Orleans”—First Two Sections: Family Ties both Dead and Alive**

“In New Orleans” opens with the solitary figure of a man arriving in that city and taking a bus to visit his father’s<sup>24</sup> grave. Just as DeLillo started the novel with an unnamed figure,<sup>25</sup> he starts this chapter with the simple

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<sup>24</sup> Lee’s father died just before Lee was born, and since his mother had to work long hours at low wages in order to provide food and shelter, Lee was set adrift in a poverty-ridden social milieu in which he had little adult supervision or protection—the essence of a broken family.

<sup>25</sup> DeLillo starts and sometimes ends several chapters with unnamed figures—a pattern that teaches the reader to suspend judgment on who these people are and how they finally connect together until more evidence is provided. DeLillo opens the novel with that powerful image of an unnamed boy riding the subway. A page later

pronoun reference of "he." Ambiguous pronoun play is a technique that DeLillo employs throughout the novel to control the flow of information and to delay understanding in order to heighten and personalize (for the reader) the final resolution of that understanding with a fuller appreciation of the rationale behind the decisions taken. This is especially effective here in this chapter in which Oswald will be asked to join the fatal conspiracy. In so doing, it has the added effect of tightening the psychological connection between the "everyman" character and the reader.

Since the previous chapter had just ended (in September—months in the future to the spring setting during this early part of this chapter) with Mackey as the last male referent, grammatical structure would seem to call for Lee's name to be used here in order to make the shift in subject clear. However, DeLillo has already established that structural pattern of broken continuities that forces the reader's brain to fill in the gaps and make the proper connections through context and images on his/her own. DeLillo, in effect, has been employing this strategy of psychological manipulation throughout the novel—both from chapter to chapter, using those jarring time switches, especially with the main character, Lee Harvey Oswald, alternating between and developing along two different paths<sup>26</sup> that converge and

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in the next section, he introduces an unnamed mother and son. In the fourth tence of that section, DeLillo links the still anonymous boy from the subway as the son of the woman. It isn't until the sixth sentence in that section that DeLillo provides her name, Marguerite, and it isn't until the third paragraph of that second section that he finally names Lee—after naming nearly everyone else in Lee's immediate family, including the long-deceased father. This cascade of tangential information is a technique that creates greater context thereby adding power and substance to the final reveal.

<sup>26</sup> Excepting the vague term "pocket litter," Lee does not enter the conspiracy time vector until George de Mohrenschildt describes him without naming him during a meeting with Larry Parmenter in "26 April" (L 55-57). But at that time, Lee had disappeared from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, thereby breaking contact. Nicholas

compress. This strategy turns the reader into a detective that has to learn to psychologically understand, appreciate, and accept in continuing shocks of discovery/revelation what leads to and then occurs during that fateful “six point nine seconds of heat and light” and its chaotic aftermath. It isn’t until the fourth paragraph of this section that DeLillo provides the reader with the name that the trained reader has already assumed.

The first paragraph opens with the image of death and a grave—every person’s final destination, of course, but specifically it prefigures the ultimate destination in the novel for the conspiracy: the deaths of Kennedy and Oswald (and an ironic “awakening” or enlightenment for the reader as the conspiracy falls into place). The third sentence in that opening paragraph when Oswald is standing before the stone marking his father’s grave elicits the imagery of the assassination event first iterated by Nicholas Branch in “17 April” (“Six point nine seconds of *heat and light*” L 15): “He stood there in the *heat and light*, searching for a way to feel” (L 305). New Orleans will mark the place where Oswald’s search will unite him with the conspiracy time vector of history that will ultimately send him to his own grave in a very public way thereby stripping him forever of that anonymity that he “escaped” to New Orleans to cloak himself in after the Walker incident.

Furthermore, Lee’s father was an anonymous gentleman—“a man in a

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Branch then names him directly in his section on page 57 in his list of the dead. Lee re-appears in the conspiracy time vector in “20 May”—the day he walks into Banister’s office in New Orleans and nearly re-unites with Ferrie. By “19 June” Oswald is with Banister and Ferrie and is training under the alias of Leon with the shooting element of the conspiracy. In “2 July” Lee H. Oswald has been well-researched by Win Everett, and he has more than enough “pocket litter” to fit him to the plot. In fact, for Win, “It was no longer possible to hide from the fact that Lee Oswald existed independent of the plot.” (L 178) This background development throughout the earlier chapters in the conspiracy time vector sets up the complex connectivity of this powerfully developing convergence into the isolated person of Lee Harvey Oswald in Part Two’s “In New Orleans.”

gray suit who tips his hat to women" (L 305). In terms of language identifiers, Oswald stays anonymous here until the fourth paragraph. Nevertheless, he is filled with positive memories of his very early life in New Orleans before the collapse of family life caused him and his mother to struggle to find a place in the world and before the plot of the novel began with the fatherless young teenager in the Bronx.

From there, Lee takes up his life and begins looking for a job. Ironically his job search is based on deceptions on his application forms about past addresses and job-related matters. He creates false personas for his professional life. DeLillo ends this initial section with an ironic reference that re-conjures up the image of Lee's gentleman-like father: "An interviewer [of Lee for a job opening] noted on a card: *Suit. Tie. Polite.*" (L 306) Oswald, too, had the appearance of a nondescript polite man without a distinctive personality—a mannequin; however, in his case, it is ironic and superficial since it has been created out of falsehoods to cover a core of suppressed wrongs on both personal and societal levels. The jarring inequities and Libra-like contradictions buried within smolder with a violent desire for exposure, release, and rectification. A release that readers are already acutely aware flashed out world-wide in "six point nine seconds of heat and light" and that continues to reverberate around the world to this day.

The second section of this chapter deals with Lee H. Oswald's nuclear family life, broaches into Lee's political philosophy that is more appropriate for a communist system as in Russia or Cuba, and then finishes with a brief sketch of his job. DeLillo presents the Oswalds' situation through a deliciously complex conversation between Lee and Marina that is loaded with ambiguity and irony that deftly expose the paradox<sup>27</sup> at the heart of Lee's life that he cannot escape since it emanates from within. It is his very nature, his

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<sup>27</sup> The Libra/*Libra* element, if you will.

psychology that draws him to the conspiracy and then in.

The scene opens near midnight—a time between days—and Marina is holding her husband's soft drink while sitting on a porch chair watching and waiting for Lee to return from dumping their trash in other people's garbage cans.<sup>28</sup> He returns and an ambiguous conversation ensues. DeLillo creates the ambiguity by ascribing the conversation to anonymous "TV voices," thereby giving the impression that these might not be Lee and Marina's words, but rather could be words overheard from a late night TV program—perhaps a movie. This image naturally links backward to other TV references, as in the John Wayne (live and movie) experiences of Ozzie, as well as forward to the movies he watches on TV during the lead up to the assassination that are used by Ferrie (and Lee, himself, in his imagination) as evidence of Lee's appropriateness for the role of primary shooter. Finally, it also links to those historic moments of death—both Kennedy's and his—that TV replays endlessly thereby lifting them to starring roles.

DeLillo never resolves the ambiguity of whether the initial voices are "actually" TV voices or whether they are Marina and Lee using TV-like voices to disguise the seriousness of the ensuing conversation. Nevertheless, they do indeed broach upon the difficult choices they have to make concerning the path they are currently on and the choices they must make about their future direction as a family and as individuals. Both Marina and Lee speak to each other as if Lee were a third person not present. Or, indeed the voices are merely an overheard TV conversation that they naturally segue into. DeLillo is continuing with his pattern of forcing the reader to connect the dots, which makes the reader psychologically complicit in plot development.

DeLillo sets the reader up for this ambiguity with his description of Lee's

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<sup>28</sup> An echo of living "pocket litter" perhaps.

return: "He came onto the porch and took the glass from her hand. TV voices traveled across the backyards and driveways." (L 306) These two sentences come at the end of the third paragraph in the second section. DeLillo uses them to describe Marina handing Lee the "half-finished glass of Dr. Pepper" on his return from dumping the garbage. It is notable that DeLillo uses descriptive narrative here rather than dialogue. It is late at night when old classic movies are being aired for the adults who look to relax in these safely packaged heroic tales developed in Hollywood. Since it is a spring<sup>29</sup> night in New Orleans, the temperature is sultry and makes sleep difficult—even Lee is shirtless and wearing only a pair of basketball shorts. Windows are open and sound travels easily through the quiet night air. It might be normal for "TV voices" to be often heard emanating randomly from any or several of the residences in the close-packed neighborhood.

After that statement, DeLillo then moves smoothly into actual dialogue that might easily be construed as the aforementioned "TV voices." There are no recriminations, raised voices, or flares of temper. The voices are indistinguishable from voices from a TV drama: "I am sitting here thinking he doesn't love me anymore" (L 306). Note the usage of "he"—if Marina were talking directly to her husband, Lee, then the normal pronoun usage would be "you" as in the direct address of "I am sitting here thinking you don't love me anymore." If Marina has made this statement, she has in essence objectified him, turned Lee into a dissociated person that can be discussed objectively.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Mid to late spring considering that "20 May" is the conspiracy-time-vector chapter that describes Lee H. Oswald's first appearance at Banister's office. This dialogue here happens prior to that as the reader learns later. In this way, this chapter begins to tie together all appearances by Lee/Leon that are mentioned in each of the previous conspiracy-time-vector chapters.

<sup>30</sup> An echo that also reverberates forward to Lee's death and final "transfiguration" skyward into a TV binary star of killer and killed that will live forever on an infinite double-assassination loop.

The discussion has been initiated in an impersonal, detached way. This indirect approach might also indicate the fragility or even volatility of Lee's psyche. Or, it could actually be a random line of dialogue overheard as Lee returned in the quiet of the night. That is what the natural progression of the text would suggest: TV voices equals voices from an actual TV. However, as the "conversation" continues the usage slowly shifts and reveals that it could indeed be part of a live conversation between the couple. Nevertheless, the reader is caught short and quickly learns he/she must suspend judgment until more data is acquired.

This "TV voice" is followed by a natural response: "Papa loves his wife and child." (L 306) Due to the indentation, it has to be spoken by a voice other than the previous voice. This voice uses the third person reference, "Papa," instead of the natural "I," and in so doing it performs two functions. First, it maintains the objectification and dissociation of the "he," thus allowing a calm, objective discussion about the "he" character who has been described by the first speaker as lacking love for that speaker. The second speaker thus calmly posits a counter argument that the "he" character not only loves his wife but also loves his child. This leads to the second function in that it provides additional information that does not yet directly contradict the possibility of this being a TV dialogue, but it does enhance the possibility that this discussion might be about and probably by the Oswalds themselves because their family consists of the wife ("I"—Marina, the possible instigator of the discussion), their daughter (June), and Lee (he, as well as "Papa"). In terms of content, with that six-word sentence the speaker emphasizes the core purity of the family bond.

The next three exchanges in the dialogue, still occurring without any names attributed, continue with the objectification of the "he" character; however, the particular characteristics that are being ascribed to him make it seem progressively more likely Lee as they become a compelling fit. The first

attribute of the "I" character, the perception of being a binding factor ("rope or chain") is a common trope of a wife. This is so general as to have little value in determining whether the speaker is a mere TV voice or actually an identifiable human, i.e., Marina Oswald; however, the voice's complaint about "[him having] the high-flying world of his ideas" (L 306) does indeed suggest (though not in a definitive way) an idealist like Lee who has throughout the novel so far been defined by DeLillo in terms of his commitment to his ideals, to the point where he abandoned his country to live an ideologically "purer" life in the Soviet Union. It is also his primary topic of conversation and his motivation for action. It is what he studies. It is the essence of his psychology. He is so committed to his concept of social equality that he attempted to kill General Walker.

Note the usage of "high-flying"—the speaker is using the idiomatic expression to indicate the "he" character is not living in the real, "down-to-earth" world that normal human beings struggle and live in; rather, "he" is living in a rarified and even snobbish world of exceptionalism that causes a distance or separation from reality. This expression is often used to mean something is not well-grounded and thus disconnected from reality.

"High-flying" is an interesting image for another reason, as well: it rather glibly connects to the literal meaning of flight that elicits further connection with the U-2 flights that were central to Ozzie's stint with the Marines in Atsugi and with the powerful image of the downing of Francis Gary Powers during his U-2 spy flight over the Soviet Union that bookend "In Atsugi." Especially considering the downing and subsequent capturing of the "high-flying" Powers in his U-2, this image is very suggestive and carries considerable narrative weight since it links with a complex of elements both figurative and real that are furthered layered with irony. These include Oswald's experiences at Atsugi where the U-2 flights over Russia emanated from. They also include Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union for ideological

reasons (“high-flying” ideas) and his usage of his rather limited (mostly speculation based on overheard third-person conversations) knowledge of the top-secret intelligence gathering U-2 operation. The experiences at both places led to his incarceration where his every movement and word was closely monitored, evaluated, and controlled. Ironic outcomes for a man dedicated to breaking social bonds in order to move to a better and greater society. When he was in Moscow, Lee was allowed to see and evaluate Francis Gary Powers—a connection with the U-2 pilot shot down from so high in the sky.

This image also could be viewed as anticipating “Captain” Ferrie (of CAP or Civil Air Patrol) who might be considered distantly linked to this image since he will be the one who will supposedly fly Oswald away in his “flight” to safety after the assassination has been completed. The number of other possible connections throughout the text only grows larger.

DeLillo has chosen these words to put in the mouth of Marina Oswald for a reason. He wants to construct a framework of images and “evidence” that connects the entire narrative into a unified whole that reverberates both backwards and forward through the novel and even into what is in the historical record in order to allow the reader to trace and subliminally make the connections on their own until they come to that “Aha!” moment where with shocked surprise they understand exactly what (they think or were carefully prepared by DeLillo to accept) happened. The image also anticipates Oswald’s death when he sees himself joining the select few who become TV stars as he soars into the sky to join the stars above—perhaps being realized as the star-shot Libra that he is.

More immediately, though, these two sentences, “He has the high-flying world of his ideas. If only he didn’t have a wife to hold him back, how perfect everything would be,” are setting up an “innocent” play on the plane hijacking plan he puts forward within the same conversation. This is DeLillo the

craftsman carefully constructing a layered and interconnected scene that is emotionally complex as well as laced with black humor. Also, remember that this stint in New Orleans is positioned between the two September chapters ("6 September" and "25 September") yet covers action that is antecedent to both, though it will include the first and reach just before the second, marking the point where the vectors form a unified movement into the main flow of history that will have all but completely swept up Lee Harvey Oswald into that powerful and inescapable flow.

However, since no names have yet been used either by the author or by the participants, the conversation at this point is still ambiguous in terms of whether it is TV generated or whether it is, indeed, the Oswald couple—though the topic is starting to become identifiably particular. Especially so if the reader is aware of the particulars of Oswald's stay in New Orleans.

The same speaker continues in the next sentence, "If only he didn't have a wife to hold him back, how perfect everything would be." (L 306) This creates another slight wrinkle of ambiguity because this is "she" speaking, and is "she" speaking about herself as the "wife"? This would be a continuation of emotional distancing by referring to the self as a generalized other. This is a remarkable element whereby the speaker (if it is indeed Marina) develops an emotional buffer zone in order to address a difficult and emotionally wrought topic. It is a strategy of establishing ironic distance in order to discuss something at the very heart of a relationship that could bring about the death of the relationship that they have supposedly built their life around. It could also be a strategy to bring up a difficult topic while avoiding the arousal of emotions that could lead to domestic abuse. Psychologically complex, indeed. Or, this entire conversation is just TV dialogue being overheard. This last possibility is quickly becoming more remote as the discussion begins to zero in on identifiable elements.

The man—still unidentified—responds: "We're here to start over," he

said." (L 306) This is a statement that begins the process of breaking down the separation created by the objectification of the participants and begins to connect them as well as identify them to the audience in at least two ways.

First, and most important, he uses the pronoun "we" very tightly linked with the verb as "We're." Objectification and separation are both dramatically and grammatically ended with the first word. "He" and "she"—"we"—are now a couple, according to the man. Second, the couple is given purpose by the man in that they, as a unit, are a couple that is starting fresh at this point in time (midnight, the witching hour—the transition point between two days), and they are at that specific place for that purpose.

The woman resists the easy simplification by maintaining a semblance of emotional distance and objectivity. Important decisions like the one she now suggests are in the offing should be made with a clear head and should be made so that there will be no misunderstanding: "I am thinking he wants me to go back to Russia. This is what he means by starting over." (L 306) Her personal thinking about the other's intent is stated aloud, without recriminations or direct address, and with pertinent details. This line all but certainly removes the possibility of this being a TV conversation. Russia is too specific a place, and it tightly fits the dramatic situation that the couple find themselves in after the attempt on Walker, the escape to New Orleans, the nationality of Marina, and the political leanings of Lee. However, the detached tone of voice still causes it to sound like a TV drama conversation,<sup>31</sup> and there

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<sup>31</sup> This TV identification/melding phenomenon that DeLillo is employing here anticipates the TV melding that Lee Harvey Oswald will experience before the assassination when he is trying to figure out what he is doing as the nature of the conspiracy and his role in it become clear. It also prefigures Oswald's experience while dying on the stretcher after being shot by Jack Ruby. Moreover, this phenomenon develops from the earlier TV experiences he had when younger—especially with his John Wayne experience. It is very much a part of Oswald's entire development.

are still no clear identifying names expressed nor authorially provided to indicate the identities of the two people having this discussion.

The structure of these two sentences that the woman speaks is interesting in that it provides clear definition and an objective space for discussion. The entire discussion began with a simile for confinement and control—loss of freedom on his part, and now it specifically voices the woman's concern that he wants her to return to her native Russia. The second sentence in her statement about the situation links this return on her part to be his definition of "starting over." This is indeed a possibility. It would also imply a split—if indeed they are Marina and Lee Oswald as the text has come to imply, because for them, going back to beginnings and "starting over" could be defined as Lee staying in New Orleans where he was born and where his father is buried, and Marina returning to Russia where her roots are. The logic as presented here by the woman is a reasonable, objective appraisal and possible understanding of the situation. She lays it out clearly, calmly and objectively. And she fears abandonment.

The man answers the woman's concern by continuing with the same clear and direct type of response that he initiated just before. With the problem openly laid out and defined, he responds clearly and directly to her concern: "Russia is one idea. I've also been working on the idea I could hijack a plane and go to Cuba and then you'll come with June to live there." (L 306)

Before this point, none of this conversation had been identified as having been said by any particular person. No identifying names had been used at all. Mostly the conversation had been objectified with the usage of the pronoun "he" in the place of the man's name. Neither of the principle speakers has yet used even the more common pronoun to be in a conversation between two people, "you," to indicate immediate direct address. Here, however, the man not only addresses the woman as "you" but also adds the name "June" as someone else who will join them. With the inclusion of their daughter

(identified by her name June), DeLillo has finally clarified the participants in the now clearly “live” discussion. “Live” is, of course, ironic because the historical record and narrative choice by DeLillo places the action in this chapter before the previous chapter “6 September” and leading just up to the day described in the next chapter “25 September.”

Lee (as the reader can now safely assume) brushes off the idea by accepting its possibility in a brief four words, and then immediately developing a different idea that has more detail and that apparently includes his family since he states that after he makes the move, “you’ll come with June to live there” (L 306), too. This is his dream and it seems to be almost within reach; after all, New Orleans is not that far from Cuba. It also supposedly has a purer, more idealistic form of Communism under Castro than the Soviet Union has because its revolution was the more recent so its ideology is still closer to the ideal that formed the driving force for the revolution.

Ironically, if he had actually accomplished either move—to Russia or to Cuba, perhaps that would have removed his “starring” role in history. On a more immediate level of irony within the dialogue, Lee describes his plan as if it were simple and easy: “I could hijack a plane and go to Cuba and then [you’ll come and we’ll all live together happily ever after].” (L 306) It’s a fairy tale that Marina immediately exposes for its disjunction from the realities of the situation: they are already on the run due to Lee’s attempted murder of General Walker.

Lee is composed of opposites—his ideals are far removed from the grounded realities. Marina lives in the practical world that is not driven by extreme ideologies, and she immediately begins to bring important facts into the discussion that must be considered and dealt with: “First you shoot at a man.” (L 306) This is the reason they had to move (escape) to New Orleans in the first place. Moreover, this implies that it was Lee’s thoughtless

commitment to ideology rather than to familial wellbeing that brought them to this desperate need to hide in New Orleans, and now he is suggesting something even wilder.

Lee responds with, "We may not be finished with him" (L 306). Which means that repercussions from the Walker incident could still find them in New Orleans<sup>32</sup> because there would be an ongoing investigation and there were ways that Oswald's part in the murder attempt could be exposed, mainly through his partner in crime, Dupard, who could point authorities in his direction, as well as George de Mohrenschildt, who could do the same thing because of the envelope with the photo enclosed. A further irony about this statement would strike Marina though not necessarily Lee. After Lee enclosed the photo of himself posing with his gun "inscribed *To my friend George from Lee Oswald,*" Marina added her little quip about Lee as a "*Hunter of fascists—ha ha ha!!!*" (L 290) Because of this, Marina would be very aware that her little quip could easily expose Lee as the shooter and make him the target of the police investigation. So, Lee's statement of the possibility of not being securely free from discovery and arrest—inadvertent on his part—touched upon the possibility of Marina's responsibility for the collapse of the family should her comment to George be the cause of Lee's arrest. This is a very complex psychology of character, indeed, that draws the reader in.

This statement of Lee's is ironic on another level in that George did note it and instead of him getting the police involved in order to arrest Lee, George filed the information away in his head and then passed it on to the original group of conspirators who were looking at that very time<sup>33</sup> for a person to be the fall guy in the faux assassination plot. In this way, even in

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<sup>32</sup> Which ironically they do, just not for the punishment they fear, but rather to put psychological pressure on him to "convince" him to join the conspiracy.

<sup>33</sup> See "25 April," especially concerning George de Mohrenschildt (L 54-57).

the earliest planning stages of the plot, unbeknownst to himself, Oswald had been targeted to be a participant and then take the fall. It was as if he had no real say in the event, he was simply the perfect fit regardless of personal choice—he was imbedded in it from the beginning by the author(s) of the plot (both of the novel and within the novel). The pieces fit, the narrative was set.

The dialogue between the two continues, still without any names being used either by the participants to each other or by the author for the sake of clarification for the reader. The wife (Marina) simply states that she is “finished with him” (i.e., Walker) (L 307), and then she states that “you [Lee] are finished with him” (L 307). Meanwhile, Lee intersperses her statements with statements about the necessity of hijacking because travel there is banned, and with a statement of Cuba’s need for “trained soldiers and advisors” (L 307) due to the obvious and aggressive antipathy of their neighboring behemoth—the USA. Lee’s logic is based on military considerations in a continuing ideological conflict, while Marina’s logical foundation is concerned with preservation of the family.

The conversation has become disjointed until she unites it with an emotional connection followed by a statement of the fundamental illegality of the act that he is considering, and the logical unfeasibility: “Scaring me to death. Now you want to steal an airplane. Who will fly it?” (L 307) This brings the reader to the central issue of this midnight conversation about future plans. He springs the idea of a violent takeover of an airplane that will threaten the lives of Lee, the father in the family and so the integrity of the family itself, as well as the pilot, crew, and passengers on board the airplane. It is an extreme act that goes far beyond the hidden sniping of a solitary rightwing extremist in the dark of night from cover. Marina strikes at the heart of Lee’s proposal by pointing out the absurdity of the proposal with a sharp question, “Who will fly it?” (L 307)

This leads to the climactic exchange between the two. He (Lee): “Stupid.

The pilot. I kidnap it, I hijack it. It's a flight to Miami and I take my revolver and go in the flight cabin. It's called the flight cabin." (L 307) He starts with an insult. He is calling either her stupid or her question stupid. Stupid in the sense that she doesn't seem to understand the standard procedure of an airplane hijacking if it's the first case, and stupid in the sense that the answer is obvious if it's the second. The plane and its passengers become hostage to the threat of his gun, thereby forcing the pilot to obey the hijacker's orders and change direction and go wherever the hijacker chooses to go—in this case Cuba. The idea is straightforward, and he uses short, simple sentences, with repetition to emphasize the simplicity while explaining it. He talks to her as if she were a child or simpleton who did not understand how "easy" the concept was.

She counters with the simple but pointed rhetorical questions: "Who is stupid? Which one of us?" (L 307) Both of these questions expose the stupidity inherent in undertaking such a simplistic but dangerous mission that has at its core the threat of imminent death. Even if the hijacking is successful, imprisonment is still a likely outcome. Therefore, though the process might be so "simple" that even a stupid person should be able to understand it, the ramifications are such that only a stupid person would undertake it.

The logic of the opposing views clarifies the respective positions in the woman's favor. Lee understands and turns the seriousness of this midnight discussion into a joke about his "snub-nose revolver...his two-inch Commando," and at the start of the next, much longer paragraph that contains no dialogue but rather simple narrative description, "They both laughed." (L 307) It is in this paragraph that the woman is finally identified as Marina (as had already become clear given the mounting evidence within the dialogue).

This paragraph also describes the couple's assault with a "cheap spray" (L 307) on the roaches infesting their home. This killing spree is followed by an outing the next day after which "[t]hey made love on the small bed in the

closed room.” (L 307) Opposites and ironies abound, but the important point here is that another possible avenue of escape from the newly hatching assassination plot—a magnitude larger than a simple hijacking—has been closed, ironically by his wife, Marina, who was trying to keep him from doing a stupid and dangerous thing. Without Lee knowing it, the conspiracy box was inexorably closing about him; however, the reader is acutely aware because the reader knows where everything is leading because the history of the fatal connection between Oswald and Kennedy is already indelibly engraved in the public mind; however, DeLillo’s carefully plotted plot is slowly being infused within that framework to give it greater psychological reason and power.

#### **IV Sections Three and Four—The Nested Ironies of Work and Politics**

If that second section of “In New Orleans” is concerned with decisions within Oswald’s family life and the comically ironic closing of a dangerous escape route from the plot that was being put together around the same period of time, then the third section describes the equally ironic opening of Lee’s path into the conspiracy. In a further irony it is an agent of the FBI, Bateman, that inadvertently steers him towards it due to the FBI’s interest in a former agent, Banister, who appears to be connected to former disaffected CIA agents that would like to promote a more active and militaristic stance towards Cuba under Castro. This section and others that follow this line are ambiguous and convoluted in their approach to effecting their goals. They are also psychologically manipulative in terms of luring Oswald into the conspiracy plot and luring the reader into accepting DeLillo’s conspiracy plot (or one like it) in *Libra*. The sections describe the actions of Federal agents that include disaffected rogue CIA agents, using Oswald as a seeming puppet for communist Cuba to assassinate President Kennedy and thus cause the

full-scale invasion of Cuba<sup>34</sup>—all this being the central factor behind the plot of the novel.

As section three begins, DeLillo again withholds the identity of the character whose movements are being described. Even the place—a library building—is no longer in the remembered spot. The person in search of the library is simply noted with “he” (L 308). Again, DeLillo is forcing the reader to look for evidence and use logic to figure out what is going on. The library had been located at Lee Circle.<sup>35</sup> So, the combination of name co-incidence and mention of the memory of a place visited long before, also allows the reader to remember that Lee had lived in New Orleans as a youth (and was an inveterate reader) which further connects to the beginning of this chapter where Lee was described as visiting the grave of his father—evidence of his life there well before the chapter that opened the novel “In the Bronx.” This creates a tentative web of connection. As the paragraph develops, DeLillo further describes the man finding the library and then starting a one-man pro-Cuba demonstration in front of it by handing out pamphlets from the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The reader would be justified in surmising that the man responsible for handing out the pamphlets is probably none other than Lee Harvey Oswald. DeLillo is training the reader to see the evidence and connect the dots of the overall plot—both narrative and conspiracy.

However, names have still not been provided. It isn't until well after the “Feebees” (the FBI, L 308) arrive on scene, that the conversational evidence again accumulates enough for certain identification. Bateman is the new

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the fact that the successful assassination of Kennedy did not bring about the invasion of Cuba as the conspirators hoped does undermine the central motive behind the case for conspiracy.

<sup>35</sup> It is named after the famous Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, whose statue dominates that area and depicts him facing north so as to be always facing his enemies.

contact for Lee, taking over from Freitag in Fort Worth. The evidence DeLillo offers for identification starts with the previously mentioned pro-Cuba materials “he” is handing out, then the interruption by Agent Bateman, who is not there “to arrest or harass” (this would alleviate any of Lee and Marina’s concern about Lee being identified as the shooter in the Walker incident), but rather just to sit down and talk. The evidence of identity starts to amass rather quickly with the appearance of Bateman who mentions that he has his (i.e., Lee’s) files in New Orleans now. He mentions the defection, Lee (still unnamed) mentions Freitag, Bateman notes the move from Fort Worth to New Orleans and that the latter is his territory, Lee mentions Russia, and then on the next page, finally, DeLillo provides the name the reader has already figured out long before, thereby providing a psychologically pleasing reward for the attentive reader, when he underscores the power of Lee’s question by adding the specific confirmation of the speaker’s identity: “What do you want?” *Lee* said.” A question the reader might well echo.

DeLillo lightens the mood and heightens the psychological connection by having Bateman turn the question into a joke: “Right now? A grilled cheese sandwich with crisp bacon, which is impossible to get because they grill everything together and the cheese gets done before the bacon. It’s a law of physics. So you get pale bubbly bacon...” (L 309), but then ending with a threat about what he could do: “I could spend about four hours a day making your life miserable” (L 309), that is, interfering both in Lee’s job and in his family life—opposite in direction but similar in technique to the way DeLillo lightened the very serious conversation in section two between Lee and Marina that also carried a threat behind it.

In the short one-sentence (eight-word) paragraph that follows: “Lee still had the placard around his neck” (L 309), DeLillo underscores the threat as well as the way Lee is caught. The placard being the same one mentioned in the first paragraph opening this third section and described in the second

paragraph on the previous page: "*Viva Fidel.*" This is also ironic because by boxing Lee in, the Feebees here are unknowingly helping to set in motion the plot that will bring about the killing of an American president. Moreover, the readers know that Fidel Castro will survive the long-term purpose and machinations of the plot and indeed lead a long life.

Lee knows he is caught in an exposed position in terms of overt anti-American politics and in terms of the possible discovery of his recent criminal activities if Bateman were to dig a little deeper into the reasons behind his move from Dallas—after all, he did leave that clear evidence of his murderous intent in the hands of others. So, Lee stops resisting and cedes overt control to Bateman by asking him what he wants. Because of Lee's previous relationship with Agent Freitag, Lee believes that he has been listed "as a cooperating Marxist, ha ha, or part-time political informer" (L 309). Lee has become a cypher that fits an outside observer's expectations and uses. He is enveloped in ambiguity, and by allowing everyone—especially authority figures—to make of him what they will, he, in effect becomes a tool available for use because his inner desires—his ideals—are always beyond his personal reach.

With this, another ironic twist secures Lee in his already weak and hidden position: Bateman wants him to spy on the anti-Castro movement in New Orleans that is being run by a former FBI agent by the name of Guy Banister. In effect, the FBI wants the pro-Castro person (Lee) to spy on the anti-Castro movement that is operating out of the offices of a former FBI agent. It is quite a turnabout for the active agents of the FBI to be running an operation to keep tabs on and perhaps inhibit or even interdict the anti-communist operations of super-patriotic former FBI agents.

Lee's personal history is filled with ambiguity that makes him an ideal fit for the role: he was a Marine who lived by the manual and yet who defected to the Soviet Union. However, at this point in his life Lee also trades on the

question of whether he was part of the false-defector program. When in Russia, Lee tried to allay their doubts about his commitment because of this possibility. But it was an ambiguity that Lee also played up to his advantage when he wanted to return to the US and re-assimilate into the culture:

“There are gray areas in ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence]. I’m one of those areas.” [Lee]

Bateman seemed to appreciate the remark. He said, “That’s only fitting because in this city at this particular time, black is white is black. In other words people are playing havoc with the categories.” (L 310)

Ironically, it is this extreme malleability of character—the Libra in him as Ferrie (or DeLillo) would describe it—that makes him the perfect tool for a covert operation. A tool, enclosed in the darkness of secrecy, ready to be deployed at the most appropriate time for the machinations of a plot (and, of course, he is central (to the point of being titular) to DeLillo’s plot as well).

Bateman explains: “Normally speaking we are on the same side. We trade information with Banister all the time. But sometimes there is the necessity of, we turn around, we turn about. I want to get inside Guy Banister Associates. I need a little opening, a crack in the wall.” (L 309)

Lee allows himself to be considered as a false defector, which makes him a false false-defector in essence, as the Bateman-Lee discussion develops:

Bateman: “You walk into Banister’s office...You tell them you’re an ex-Marine and you mention contacts with the Bureau in the state of Texas...[As a Castro hater] Tell them you want to pose as a leftist, to infiltrate local organizations...You tell Banister you will...gather names and addresses. Banister loves a good list.”

“It goes round and round.” (Lee)

"You seem to pretend." (Bateman)

"But I'm not pretending." (Lee)

"But you are pretending." (Bateman) (L 311)

In this way Bateman hires Lee to be a pseudo informant and undertake communist political activities on behalf of the FBI that he would normally be investigated and harassed for, and/but which he is already going about with his placard. The problem is, Lee is losing operational control of them and becoming entangled in a maze of plots within and between governmental agencies. His business, his beliefs, and his very life are in the process of being co-opted by secret movers with secret motives that were gathering force within layers of secret plots. This section marks the entry passage into the maze of plots, at the heart of which is the deadly Kennedy assassination. It is a door that Lee is being pushed ever so gently through with both rationale and easy money. But it is a maze from which he will never escape, try as he might and only sink deeper into, until his moment of power arrives with Kennedy in his sights.

DeLillo ends this particular section with Lee taking a bus to Guy Banister's Camp Street address that Bateman had provided him with. Banister's office building is conveniently near Lee's own place of work thereby offering a convenient place where Lee could expeditiously further his strangely contradictory purposes: promoting Cuban interests and also working for the FBI. In so doing, Lee will also unwittingly be planting himself in the center of the conspiracy plot because he happens to be the perfect fit for the role ("pocket litter") the conspirators have in mind, and he also happens to be the person that they had identified through that tip from George de Mohrenschildt but had lost track of after Lee had escaped to New Orleans from Dallas.

When Lee arrives in the neighborhood, DeLillo describes the area in

terms of wins and the felt threat of the derelict and deranged. DeLillo sums up this initial description in a one-sentence paragraph: “Trotsky is the pure form.” (L 312) This is naturally a reference to the idealist in the Russian Communist revolution, Leon Trotsky, that Lee admired so much because of Trotsky’s commitment to the ideal.

The penultimate paragraph launches into a graphic description of the abandoned refuse, both in people and in commodities. As Lee surveys this area cluttered with trash and filled with the homeless—so many sick and wounded, abandoned and encrusted with dirt and vomit—he can see the true reason and need for the ideas and solutions that Trotsky represented. In the final paragraph of that section, in a powerful and direct connection, DeLillo writes as if Lee has assumed the identity of Trotsky himself: “Trotsky [i.e., Lee] brushing roaches off the page, reading economic theory in a hovel in eastern Siberia, exiled with his wife and baby girl.” (L 312). DeLillo’s method of making this connection by using the ambiguity of identification works because he has been preparing the reader’s brain to accept the psychological connection between the two both in a metaphorical sense (or personification) and in Oswald’s actual self-identification—i.e., Lee takes on the alias as well as the mindset or ideology of the person he is using as his model. This identification of Lee as Trotsky here was/will be underscored when he takes on the alias of “Leon” when he is doing his guerilla training in the bayous outside New Orleans. Since DeLillo has already introduced the Leon alias for Lee in the just previous conspiracy-time-vector chapter “6 September,” the connection has already been planted in the reader’s mind thereby strengthening and deepening the correspondence. “Pocket litter,” indeed.

Section four notes Oswald actively taking up Bateman’s offer and going to the address for Guy Banister to get an application form. He also takes up the Fair Play for Cuba Committee cause by printing “a thousand handbills” (*Hands Off Cuba!*) under an alias. He uses two other aliases for application

forms and membership cards as well as for forged documents for the "Central Committee, Communist Party U.S.A." DeLillo finishes this section showing Lee making another midnight run to dump garbage (litter) "in other people's cans."

## V Doorway to the Conspiracy

Section five marks the important first contact with the edge of the budding faux/real<sup>36</sup> Kennedy assassination conspiracy. This marks Lee's first physical entry into that group. In an appropriate irony, Lee is bringing a filled-out application for a job there. The man at the entrance is none other than the familiar Captain Ferrie—the man he first met as a teenager when he had been part of the CAP and had also gone to Ferrie's hotel room with his friend Robert in order to buy a damaged .22 gun.<sup>37</sup> DeLillo underscores that Lee remembered Ferrie because he "kept mice in a cage" (L 313—L 43-44) in his room—an appropriate image for what Lee was walking into. Though DeLillo doesn't offer it as a direct metaphor, the image does fit the form or psychology of the reader who has been given perspective into the psychology of Oswald and the looming cage he is being invited to enter. Readers, too, are on the maze-like path of conspiracy.

DeLillo's depiction of the ensuing conversation between them is loaded with irony, and it also provides an image that foreshadows the ultimate moment when the conspiracy plot will reach its climax. The foreshadowing element contains sexual innuendo that is also intentionally literal since the novel has already suggested that Ferrie has a continuing interest in homosexual relationships, especially with "his boys," and Lee continues to be a target of his affection:

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<sup>36</sup> It originated as faux under Everett but morphs into real as Mackey takes it over and cuts communication with the originators.

<sup>37</sup> DeLillo presented this event in the first "In New Orleans" chapter in Part One.

Ferrie seemed to be expecting him[, and said:]

"You were in the office yesterday or day before. Am I right?"

"I was applying for a job part-time." [Lee]

"*Undercover work*. I heard your voice. I said to myself I know that voice. Another *lost cadet* come back to Cap'n Dave." [Ferrie]

*They laughed, standing in the entranceway. A car stopped suddenly and pigeons fired up from the square across the street.*

"Isn't life fantastic?" Ferrie said. (L 313—italics added)

This obviates the connection back to the third chapter—the second Oswald place chapter and first of the two "In New Orleans" chapters. Ferrie has met Lee before, back when he was fifteen and living in New Orleans. He had been a member of a youth program (CAP) under Ferrie, but had his closest encounter with Ferrie when he had gone to his hotel room to buy that broken .22. Robert left before Lee and so had left them alone together where they had talked and forged a semblance of a bond. Ferrie recognized Lee's voice from the previous day's visit where he picked up the application forms after his meeting with Agent Bateman. With the repetition of Lee's statement that he was seeking "undercover work," Ferrie, by his very nature, adds the sexual double entendre, but on another level, he misses the irony that Lee is actually working for the FBI as part of an investigation into Banister's (and thus Ferrie's) involvement in the rogue anti-Castro element. DeLillo loads the comment about the returning "lost cadet" for the reader as well. "Cap'n Dave" sounds so innocent, so wholesome and friendly, but it belies the fact that Ferrie has his eyes on Oswald both for sexual gratification<sup>38</sup> and for the

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<sup>38</sup> A former Catholic seminarian that had studied to be a priest, David Ferrie had a history of run-ins with the law concerning immoral and illicit behavior with young men generally between the ages of 15-18. He lost his regular job with the Civil Air Patrol for this reason. DeLillo hints at this possible relationship with Oswald, but

purpose of seducing him into the conspiracy.

"They laughed, standing in the entranceway." Ironic indeed, as Ferrie jovially enjoys the moment with Lee at the literal and figurative entrance to the office from which the training program for the conspiracy will be run—a conspiracy that will lead to the horror of assassination and death as well as universal opprobrium. This awful result is underscored by the next sentence about the suddenly stopping car, the pigeons taking to air ("fired up"), and the square: all prefiguring the moment in Dallas when those shots are fired. And then DeLillo adds the final irony with Ferrie's summation: "Isn't life fantastic?" So it all commences. Both Oswald and the reader have been drawn into the realm of DeLillo's conspiracy theory plot.

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doesn't make it explicit until Lee is an adult and being fully drawn into the conspiracy. Thus, this is being used as a symbol for Lee's passive acceptance of the role. For more information about Ferrie, see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Ferrie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Ferrie) Also there is a book about him by Judyth Vary Baker, a section of which can be found at: <http://dave-ferrie.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Pages-from-DavidFerriePRINTA.pdf>

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