Essais inédits – Unpublished essays
Écran Total – Total Scren
Exposition et symposium – Exhibition and symposium
Montreal, 2021 – www.ecrantotal.uqam.ca

"A Denseness That Was Also a Transparency":

Fourth Order Simulacra and DeLillo's White Noise in the Age of Pandemic

By Alex Wade, Senior Research Fellow at Birmingham City University

Abstract

Given the concatenation between the fiction-theory of writers such as DeLillo and the theory-fiction of Baudrillard and its intersection with some of Baudrillard's most fascinating, but under-employed concepts, especially of the radial, fractal or viral stage of simulacra, this paper looks to revisit Don DeLillo's White Noise through fourth order simulacra. An author who is seen as the most Baudrillardian of fiction writers, to the point where the 'double spiral' wraps around both authors' work, White Noise is perhaps DeLillo's most Baudrillardian novel, chiefly due to the explicit use of simulation, the position of science in determining knowledge and information and humanity's relationship with nature and technology. In revising the position of both authors' writing in light of fourth order simulacra and White Noise, the paper examines the properties of the virus and prophylaxis that are evident in the novel and which are core to the theoretical position of The Transparency of Evil, arguably Baudrillard's most important, but often overlooked work. Given the sudden relevance and prescience of the viral stage of the precession of simulacra to our contemporary situation and in the form of the global reaction to COVID-19, this paper seeks to show how lived experience alongside a globalised virus is prefigured in DeLillo's own deployment of some of the under-realised elements of Baudrillard's work in White Noise such as virulence, prophylaxis, potlatch and disappearance, concluding that in its pathology, the virus is a prophylaxis operating as a gift at the viral and radial stage of value.

Keywords

Baudrillard; DeLillo; Fourth Order Simulacra; White Noise; COVID-19; Virus; Transparency of Evil

Introduction

In common with the writing of Philip K. Dick and JG Ballard, the trajectory of Don DeLillo's writing is wrapped in the 'double spiral' (Gane, 103) of Jean Baudrillard's work. As Wilcox notes, White Noise, widely regarded as DeLillo's breakthrough novel, articulates a view of contemporary America that is 'uncannily similar' (Wilcox, 97) to that of Baudrillard, a position echoed in analysis of the novel which encompasses disciplines including literature (Noys), social theory and philosophy (Bishop), the consumer society (Schuster) and even international relations (Devetak). Given the 1984 date of publication of White Noise, broadly coterminous with Baudrillard's – possibly most influential and widely known – text Simulacra and Simulations becoming available in English (1983), these analyses somewhat inevitably centrifuge on the role of the precession of simulacra, and specifically the third order of simulation itself. Simulation, broadly used by Baudrillard from the early 1970s onwards to mean a model without an original, uses codes and signs to predict future spaces and times while emptying human interaction of novel and symbolic and content. Given its primacy in the calculus of the Cold War, it is a significant conceit of Baudrillard's work, is familiar to anyone who has read, watched, listened to or updated a weather report and wondered why it is still raining outside and through its deployment in DeLillo's own writing, informs many readings of White Noise.

The precession of the simulacra in Baudrillard's bower is assured. Making daily life predictable in ways that Lefebvre, Barthes and Bourdieu could never have predicted, an integral reality of simulations generates a quotidian environment which is total - and totalised – artificiality. Many of these simulations take place through the screen.

Videogames, socialising, dating, films, news, consumption, surveillance, finance, forecasting are entwined into a network which has also – for those lucky enough in many ways – seen production collapse into it. Entire industries have Zoomed into MS Teams and Skype as the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the bearing of work relationships towards a slight return to the cottage industries of the pre-industrial revolution era, while relying on the post-industrial distribution revolution to ensure that all essential (and non-essential) goods and services are delivered in a day, without delay. While goods and services become frictionless at the point of purchase and delivery, so does the rest of society. It has taken a virus that is apparently original, but in truth a variation on other viruses, a disease that is subject to extensive, exhaustive simulations and predictions to orientate society away from contact with the other 'dirty little germs of mankind' towards an existence 'where we remain, bereft of everything yet overprotected, doomed to artificial immunity, continual transfusions and, at the slightest contact with the outside world, instant death' (Transparency of Evil, 61).

This could be the description of life under lockdown for so many in 2020, where exposure to air outside of the immediate confines of property and hospitalisation (and shopping) results in the potential death of an individual somewhere in the viral kill-chain. Instead, this is the ascription Baudrillard gives to the society of the fourth order of simulacra, which at the radial, viral stage has 'no point of reference at all and value radiates in all directions' (Transparency, 15). Explicitly introduced by Baudrillard in The Transparency of Evil, Noys (2008) locates its initial conceptual use in the deployment of autoimmune disorders in Baudrillard's earlier work from as far back as 1981's Simulations. There was further development of the idea in the use of the cellular in the 'Figures of the Transpolitical' in 1983's Fatal Strategies, with transpolitics, transaesthethics and transeconomics given their own chapters in Transparency of Evil. Given this genealogy in Baudrillard's corpus, the use – or lack of use –of the fourth order simulacra in exegesis is, like the vehicles and people on the streets of our major cities, marked by its absence. For instance, Kellner's (2009) commemoration of Baudrillard's lifework places The Transparency of Evil, at the extremities of metaphysical speculation,

yet the subtitle Essays in Extreme Phenomena provides clear – admittedly somewhat unusually for Baudrillard - instruction to the content, which is grounded in examination of politics, economics, social policy and the cessation of the Cold War. In the same collection, Ryan Bishop and John Philips identify with the 'three orders of simulacra' (32), but omit discussion of fourth order simulacra. This is in spite of other commentators, especially Mike Gane, who is perhaps the pre-eminent writer on Baudrillard in the Anglophone world, acclaiming The Transparency of Evil to be Baudrillard's greatest work (O'Mahoney).

Given the concatenation between the fiction-theory of writers such as DeLillo and the theory-fiction of Baudrillard and the intersection of some of Baudrillard's most fascinating, but under-employed concepts, this paper looks to revisit DeLillo's White Noise through fourth order simulacra. In doing this, it examines the properties of the virus and prophylaxis that are evident in the novel and which are core to the theoretical position of The Transparency of Evil. Given the sudden relevance and prescience of the viral stage of the precession of simulacra to our contemporary situation and everyday life in the form of COVID-19 and the global reaction to it, this paper seeks to show how the lived experience of life alongside a globalised virus is prefigured in DeLillo's own deployment of some of the under-realised elements of Baudrillard's work in White Noise such as virulence, prophylaxis, potlatch and disappearance.

Weathering the Storm

A Lydian Stone of DeLillo's writing is his use of visual descriptions, especially the artificial environment generated by the relationship between humanity and technology. For instance, End Zone (1972) examines the conflation of the games of sport and war to the point where the characters become inhuman, even post-human. Libra (1988) is as much an analysis of the differences and similarities of the economic, political and media models of communism and capitalism as the tale of the conspiracy to kill JFK, while Mao II (1991) offers an extended discourse on the significance of the World Trade Centre as 'the end of every original reference' (Symbolic Exchange and Death, 69) before

Baudrillard himself develops the doubling in DeLillo's discussion of Warhol and the Twin Towers in The Spirit of Terrorism. At a purely practical level this makes DeLillo and specifically White Noise an ideal text for this special issue of MAST and its focus on the image and Baudrillard's work. Thematically, the power of the image is an ongoing concern of Baudrillard from his PhD thesis (published as The System of Objects) through to The Intelligence of Evil and its commentary on a world whose values are radiating at the viral stage where conventional delineations and definitions no longer apply. Scientifically and historically, this can be traced to the invention of nuclear weapons and the desire to replicate the heat and light of the sun on Earth. For DeLillo, these awesome and extraordinary technologies, so powerful that their non-use is guaranteed in a Baudrillardian pact of 'impossible exchange' alters the sun itself, which looks to compete with humanity's most destructive technologies '(People say the sunsets around here were not nearly so stunning thirty or forty years ago)' (White Noise, 25): every day in the town of Blacksmith sunsets are splashed across the sky in a form resplendent of a nuclear winter, best viewed from the expressway that cuts across and through the town.

For individuals and households experiencing the simultaneous machinations of working from home, home schooling children and being allowed out of the home for exercise at specific times, sunsets became the literal and metaphorical highlight of the day. For those in the UK, for the first two and half months of lockdown, nature observed a decorum rarely seen in a nation where, prior to pandemic, (and perhaps BREXIT) one of the most unpredictable occurrences was the weather. April, often feted for its four-seasons-in-one-day fickleness, was going viral, subject to a 'a lessening of the temperature difference between winter and summer – to a promiscuity, so to speak of the seasons' (Transparency, 65) bringing warm, cloudless skies which families marvelled at on rediscovered bicycles and legs. The cool breeze-buffeted nights brought relief for sleeping. Bored weather-forecasters transmitted information about the weather, slightly irked at the seasons being a simulation within themselves as the days repeated themselves over and over: there was no anticipated change in the forecast. If a nation

could wish for climes to help it through sitting in back yards and gardens quaffing ‘quarantinis’ then the weather was acquiescing. The transparency of the atmosphere was seen in its disappearance. The disappearance of clouds, of people from beauty spots and honeypots, the disappearance of commuters from train and metro platforms, the disappearance of all but the most essential workers from workplaces. There was density to this transparency. The image of the sunset quarantined by people gazing towards the heavens in their individual bubbles, cells of people locked down, connected by screens under a vast open sky. At the time of writing in August 2020 it is open to debate if this weather was a prophylaxis against more deaths in a nation which has been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This unveils one of the great unknowns of the virus and how it will function in colder, more humid weather and its potential for proliferation as condensation drips from windows and trees in the wet autumn of the northern hemisphere. As the narrator Gladney presciently observes, ‘weather was very much the point, although I didn’t know it at first’ (White Noise, 127).

At the apex of nature and technology, the artificial world of White Noise pulsates with threat. Labour-saving devices designed to make life easier take on a threatening state which humanity lacks the language to relate to and the behaviour to adapt to. The supermarket hums with the static of ‘a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside human apprehension’ (43); refrigerators ‘throb massively’ and the waste disposal unit makes Gladney ‘retreat two paces’ (120), while his own unreliable thoughts, which outside of his academic discipline are drawn from inferred and received knowledge are subconsciously intruded by consumer goods and the means by which to purchase them ‘Mastercard, Visa, American Express’ (119), while his daughter’s unconscious is driven by adverts for consumer goods (100) as she recites the marques and models of cars in her sleep.

As Schuster (21) notes, the hyperreality of consumption is an act of complicity which everyone is able to buy into. Construction of individual identities are measured by the ideal found in television and radio advertising and, in the case of Gladney’s daughter,

adverts ensconced in the dream state. In the contemporary world, the democratisation found in the 'referendum mode' (Symbolic Exchange, 62) of social media permits transmission of similar ideals, through similar channels, at once increasing individuality and paradoxically the likelihood of meeting someone of likeminded interest. This is the hell of the same that traps thought in an 'electronic cerebrospinal bubble from which any animal or metaphysical reflex has been expunged' (Transparency, 61), a filter bubble that leads to variants on the same: echo chambers, groupthink and safe spaces.

For Gladney, like so many, creating an identity is contingent both on being a consumer of objects and services and a producer of knowledge and information. On assumption of the head of Hitler Studies at the College-on-the-Hill, Jack Gladney becomes 'J.A.K. Gladney' a 'tag I wore like a borrowed suit' (White Noise 19). An upgraded version of Gladney's previous self, he is required to jack into grids and networks of high-energy food consumption to take on 'an air of unhealthy excess of padding and exaggeration' (19). Later in the novel, facing death by slow poisoning from the Airborne Toxic Event (ATE, the past participle of 'eat' perhaps indicating the core conflation of want and need in a society of excess), Gladney appeals to Dr Chakravarty's emotions in the face of all metric indicators to the contrary that he is healthy and drinking tapwater will add years to his life (320). Most instructive is Gladney's observation that when 'times are bad, people feel compelled to overeat' (16).

The present situation where thousands of people in the UK have gained weight during the pandemic is a response to bad times, people finding solace in comfort food. For Baudrillard though, obesity is a mode of disappearance (Fatal Strategies, 47) phenomena especially apparent in the viral society of 2020. The increased density of the body is in distinction to the closure of fitness centres and the entire functioning of the leisure industry. As Baudrillard infers, it may even be a return to the modern phenomenon of lack (50), prior to the point when too much was not enough. So, the disappearance of eggs, pasta and rice on shop shelves due to stockpiling coupled with the limiting of purchases 'so there's enough for everyone' recalls not the neoliberal

austerity of the 2010s when people couldn't afford to buy necessities, but the rationing of the 1940s and 1950s, where there wasn't enough to go around and even prohibition, where restrictions were in place for purchasing the 'essential' (in 2020 at any rate) goods of alcohol. Even the disappearance of toilet roll from supermarkets reveals the bodily need to be rid of calorific content, to disappear, to make transparent what has been acquired in the salt, sugar and fat dense foods of succour. That Boris Johnson, the UK Prime Minister was hospitalised with severe COVID-19 symptoms in early April also brought the risk factors associated with obesity and the pandemic into sharp silhouette. The Prime Minister demonstrates the transpolitics of body mass, by at once shedding weight from his sufficiently well-fed frame and then pledging a public health campaign to remove the advertising of sugar and fat rich foods, showing how 'Everything is political. Everything is aesthetic. All at once. Everything has acquired political meaning.' (Transparency, 9). One of the most interesting and least remarked coincidences of the Sunday that the Prime Minister was admitted to hospital was a televised address by Queen Elizabeth II to the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The timing of the speech, by accident or design, seemed to infer an awareness that the state of the nation was tied to the health of its Prime Minister. For a monarch, whose adage is 'never complain, never explain', to be brought directly into contact with the health of a Prime Minister shows how the virus became as much to be identified by its telegenic characteristics, to be able to occupy all spaces, as it is portrayed as a programme of public health, whether in opposition to COVID-19 or obesity.

Special Effects

The Airborne Toxic Event sits at the centre of White Noise. It is the longest chapter and is eponymously one part of a three-part book. Ostensibly the narrative describes Gladney's attempts to escape from the spillage of 'Nyodene Derivative' from the cargo of a train. The accident creates a toxic cloud that threatens his family and the entire community of Blacksmith. In practice, the ATE is discourse on knowledge and communication. By turns, it is described on subsequent pages as 'a terrible thing to see, so close so low, packed with chlorines, benzines, phenols hydrocarbons' (148), then 'The

whole thing was amazing. They seemed to be spotlighting the cloud for us as if it were part of a sound and light show' (149). Both describe the artificiality of the event while Gladney's response is incredulous that something so terrifying should originate in nature and therefore cannot belong to the spectrum of human invention 'Our helplessness did not seem compatible with the idea of a man-made event' (149). The disbelief sowed by the dread is framed by the impenetrability of the cloud and the disaster itself, which, in its catastrophic wonder belongs on TV to make it transparent and comprehensible to the human senses 'This is not your everyday cirrus' a SIMUVAC employee says to Gladney, 'This is a high definition event. It is packed with dense concentrations of byproduct' (161), which makes the need to understand the contents of the cloud and its ramifications ever more urgent, especially as Gladney realises that he has been exposed to it. For reasons unknown however, the pre-eminent media of television has overlooked the ATE 'There's nothing on network. Not a word. Not a picture' (188).

The lack of televisual media coverage is mirrored by the acute lack of knowledge Gladney and his family has of the ATE. Coverage of the event must prefigure the event itself. Yet the journey into the cloud and subsequent sheltering in refuges does not avail the family to new or valuable information about the disaster. This causes Heinrich, Gladney's son, to question the organs of the senses and especially the eyes' and the ears' position in the acquisition of knowledge (184), highlighting DeLillo's and Baudrillard's paradox that lies at the heart of media: the greater the saturation, the less that bodily senses are trusted and therefore the less that is known. In the state of emergency, awareness and communication becomes fractal as actual and fabricated news 'fragments are gathered by individuals and families as they try to grasp the nature of the ATE, but the event remains elusive' (Devetak, 801). This shows the viral form of ambient information where 'excess knowledge is dispersed in every direction on the surface, but communication is the only process to which it is subject'. In a manifestly Virillian observation, Baudrillard remarks that 'for it to be good information it must take place fast' (Transparency, 12). Ultimately, it transpires that there is a prophylaxis to the ATE. This is – coincidentally or not - based on a microbe that can eat its way through

the cloud, obviating the simulation that has failed to reveal itself either through the media, the medical assessment of Gladney's exposure or the SIMUVAC officers at Ground Zero. This riles Babette, Gladney's wife, to remark that 'all the amazement that is left in the world is microscopic' (White Noise 187), so that the virus at the infinitesimal level can be defeated by more of the same microbiology layered on top of itself in increasing density, as Baudrillard notes 'He who lives by the same shall die by the same' (Transparency, 65). As seen below, this is key to the puzzle at the centre of viral societies.

Given the fractal, radial form of communication in a fully globalised and connected world, the sequence leading to a worldwide response to COVID-19 'lockdown' followed a similar iteration seen in White Noise and theoretically informed by Transparency. The first and most virulent virus was information. Images from around the world, such as the BBC production Wuhan: Life Under Lockdown, broadcast in the UK ten days prior to the UK's own lockdown, showed ghostly disappearance, an emptiness only usually achieved through special effects. The absence of the image of a natural or technological disaster on the scale of a nuclear accident or tsunami, the absence of people and vehicles on the streets, the families locked into their tenement buildings behind steel frames all show how the 'accumulation of effects goes hand in hand with the disappearance of causes' (Transparency, 31) in the society of the fourth order simulacra. In the documentary, interaction is replaced by communication: a seriously ill nurse lies in bed at home and communicates with her husband via smartphone. The same husband drives other nurses around the desolate concrete valleys of the city in the back of his car, the masks they wear draining awareness or recognition of who is in the automobile. As the virus emanated through the radiating networks and waves of the media, the image of effects without evident cause became starker. Whitewashed low-rise buildings in Lombardy, Italy contrasted with black hearses delivering dead bodies to overflowing morgues: while these were deaths with no apparent cause, commentary and fear appeared on networks from Reddit to Telegram to Al-Jazeera.

If COVID-19 can be seen as the pre-eminent disease of globalisation, then it shows how 'death adapts, like a viral agent' (White Noise, 175). Adapting to the grids of mass transit and mass media, the virus becomes a mass effect without cause that the masses can only resist by disappearing behind the transparency of screens. Firstly, behind the screens in the windows of homes, then screens of communication and entertainment, of Netflix and PlayStation and then, as restrictions are eased, everywhere: screens in shops, on public transport, on faces, cutting off any vague notion, even memory, of symbolic exchange. In a shining example of the radial character of viral societies, Virilio's maxim that 'airports have the tragic character of the extermination camp' (97), becomes apparent simultaneously at the global level and of everyday experience. The transparency of airports, purely functional and unambiguous in their direction of processes, of arrival and departure, of synchronised time and space become globalised with the spread of the virus and their own emptying out. These cathedrals of globalisation, divested of passengers and traffic transfer their signs to high streets and shopping centres, instructing people to keep their distance, sanitise hands, put masks into place and wait in orderly queues before being permitted to cross the threshold. The saturation of communication is confounding: it is the density, an excess of 'viral load' at the microscopic level that has mutated behaviours at the everyday level.

All germs, all points of contact between humans become hot zones. Physical cash is not a virus within itself, but like the World Trade Centre and terrorism, substitutes for the virus. Contactless payment is normed and actively encouraged as payment limits are raised. Mobile phones are used for payment, their payment applications allowing tracking of individual spending and specified advertising, encircling the consumer in the binaries of the referendum mode. Concurrently, ATMs are removed from the walls of banks, the sides of supermarkets and the kiosks of fuel stations. The explicit reason given for their elimination is to decrease the likelihood of transmission between queues of people. Meanwhile, signs warn against using cash, bringing a whole new dimension to the idea of 'dirty cash' or 'filthy lucre'. This is an erasure of money from the economy on a massive, but transparent (contactless) scale. Its signs are everywhere. From the

removal of ATMs and checkouts at the everyday level it radiates into all areas of the economy. In order to counter the economic effects of the pandemic, the concept of negative interest rates (following the negative welfare state) is floated in economic discourse. Modern Monetary Theory advocates removing savings both from banks and from wider society. This is achieved through the phasing out of high denomination banknotes so that individual savers can no longer practically keep money under their beds and are charged for depositing money in savings accounts (The Economist, 16). The net result is that banks effectively don't have deposits to lend against and removes the profit motive, an outcome seen in the twin towers of the WTC 'which are a visible sign of the closure of a system in the vertigo of doubling' (Symbolic, 70). The disappearance of entire structures, signs and symbols of exchange is the sphere of transeconomics achieved as the 'locus of special effects, of unforeseeable events, of an irrational interplay of forces' (Transparency, 34) that is the brand of the virus: death without disaster and, in the after-effects, an economy without money.

Death and Religion

As with much of Baudrillard's work, death and dying is a central theme in White Noise. By turns, Gladney visits graveyards and discusses death with a fellow evacuee from the ATE, his colleague, Murray, a nun in a hospital and his wife Babette. Gladney searches for meaning and surety in death and the afterlife, but even following exposure to the toxic cloud, when he is feted to die, the prediction given to him by professionals is vague and ambiguous. Relying on computers the SIMUVAC officer says that the exposure 'doesn't mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that' (165). For school pupils in the United Kingdom whose examination results were decided by what Prime Minister Johnson called 'a mutant algorithm' (even when the UK government sanctioned its use), the data that reduced their marks based on previous results by other pupils was the inescapable data of a virus that spread from the natural world via the medium of an equation to infect the future vector of their lives. For Gladney, who ambivalently cannot be given a prognosis, but flails around in a cloud of

data nevertheless, it as much the fear of dying that is as important – and debilitating – to the narrator as death itself. The revelation that Babette is taking a secret experimental drug, Dylar, to act as a prophylaxis against the fear of death leads to Gladney's exploration of the drug and to Babette's motivations for taking it. Primary among these is an affair with Willie Mink, who, although described as an 'organisational genius' (344), as a project manager of a pharmaceutical company is effectively a drug dealer who detaches himself from the clinical trials of the drug and continues to illicitly supply Dylar to Babette in exchange for 'American sex' (355) and learning how to speak English.

At the conclusion of the book, Gladney goes to the motel in Germantown where Willie Mink is staying. The industrial names and the area are a clear nod to the modernist and academic interests of Gladney, repeating the trope of living and dying by the same that runs through the novel. At one level, the crescendo to the story is familiar to anyone who has read Conrad's Heart of Darkness, or seen Coppola's Apocalypse Now. Mink is a solitary, isolated figure whose existence is propped-up by eating the Dylar tablets like candy 'throwing them at his face, sucking them like sweets' (354) and waiting for the next fear-of-death addict to turn up and score from him. Unlike the book and film above though, Mink is not a Western dilletante who finds their true calling in primeval, agricultural, 'natural' societies, but instead, in a classic Baudrillardian twist, reverses this role. Mink, of unknown origin 'was he Melanesian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Nepalese, Surinamese, Dutch-Chinese? Was he a composite?' (352) is a human from outside the artificial technological landscape of the West. Instead, given he hails from the culture of potlatch, Mink has gone native in the US. Even as the reader strains to parse whether this situation is happening to Gladney or it is his fantasy or dream, the interaction between Mink and Gladney is one of the few instances of symbolic exchange in the novel. Gladney plans to take Mink's life, ostensibly for sleeping with his wife, but practically to acquire his stash of Dylar as a prophylaxis against death, while Mink will be relieved of his madness. In spite of shooting Mink three times, the murderous plot is unsuccessful and Gladney takes Mink to a nearby hospital where he is treated for his

wounds by nuns whose close relationship to the miracles of medicine have made them unbelievers in the God that they serve and pray to everyday, with Sister Hermanne Marie conceding that religious belief is best seen in others 'The nonbelievers need the believers. They are desperate to have someone believe' (365). Reliance on the perceptive senses, of eyes and ears is key to fomenting this belief which she has never witnessed or experienced in her vocational calling.

For the world in 2020, science and medicine appears to offer the best, in some ways the final, hope of alleviating nations of the restrictions and interruption to everyday life put in place by lockdown and quarantine. Russia apart, whose president Vladimir Putin insists has developed a vaccine which is safe enough to be tested on his daughter, the rest of the world appears to be some way away from prophylaxis against COVID-19. The result is that lockdown measures continue to be imposed on a national and international level, preventing the orbiting of the human-made globalisation, the satellites of 'loan, finance the technosphere, communications' (Transparency, 31) on the same scale as before. Grounded aircraft, bereft cruise liners and homeless oil tankers become the images humans identify with as the virus infects and affects all objects and subjects, living and dead, animate and inanimate.

With Baudrillard's position on the plinth of Cold War theory assured, especially in books where his concepts are extensively used, but not acknowledged (e.g. Wald; Krastev and Holmes), the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on all spheres, all arenas of society place his work as a theorist of the pandemic generation too, thirty, even forty years before the fact. Similarly, within White Noise, explicitly placed as DeLillo's most Baudrillardian work and possibly the most Baudrillardian novel ever written, the virus of contagion radiates throughout the work, the narrative infected by nature and technology fusing together and creating unknown and unbelievable, extreme phenomena 'Random Access Memory. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Mutually Assured Destruction.' (348).

Conclusion

Given that science generates artificial technological landscapes that are difficult to comprehend and practically impossible to escape, the key chapter in Transparency of Evil, 'Prophylaxis and Virulence' indicates that medicine is 'part of the system of overprotection, and contributes to the fanatical protective and preventive measures lavished upon the body . . . it is because a circuit or network has thus become a virtual being, a non-body, a virtual machine that viruses are taking it over' (62-63). This attack, following total prophylaxis is not only targeted on the natural body, but the social body so that when a 'certain saturation point is reached . . . systems tend to self-destruct. Their very transparency becomes a threat to them' (62). This threat comes to bear within these systems, so that the virus, in this case COVID-19, indicates 'a vital resistance to the spread of flows, circuits and networks' (66). The lockdown and the subsequent emptying out of the density of the social meant that individuals, even in their cells of their homes, their families, their phones, their screens were redirected from a world of acceleration and saturation of consumption and communication. In a passage of speech which could have appeared in any part of The Transparency of Evil, Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, acknowledged how COVID-19

> lays bare all our prepackaged ideas and forgetfulness of what nourishes our people's souls; all those attempts that anesthetize us with ways of thinking and acting that supposedly "save" us': but instead prove incapable of putting us in touch with our roots and keeping alive the memory of those who have gone before us. We deprive ourselves of the antibodies we need to confront adversity.
>
> (Pope Francis, 'Urbi Et Orbi')

Both Pope Francis and Baudrillard identify that the advance of the technological has been at the dereliction of the social. The conclusion to White Noise as Gladney's

youngest son wanders across a freeway without his parents' knowledge is illustrative of this lack of care of towards youth - to paraphrase the recently deceased Bernard Stiegler – and lack of balance in wider society. The cure to this malaise, if there is one, lies within the pathology of the virus itself. To engender antibodies as a defensive mechanism requires exactly what the virus gave to the world, even amidst the death and distraction: A gift pausing, however temporarily, the white noise of the society of fourth order simulacra.

Works Cited

Baudrillard, Jean. The Transparency of Evil, Verso, 1993, London.
Baudrillard, Jean. Symbolic Exchange and Death, Sage, 2006, London.
Baudrillard, Jean. Fatal Strategies, Semiotext(e), 2008, Los Angeles.
Kellner, Doug. "Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007): A Critical Overview", Baudrillard Now, Edited by Ryan Bishop, pp 17-27, Polity Press, 2009, Cambridge.
Bishop, Ryan and Phillips, John. "Baudrillard and the Evil Genius" Baudrillard Now, Edited by Ryan Bishop, pp 28-46 Polity Press, 2009, Cambridge.
Devetak, Richard. "After the event: Don DeLillo's White Noise and September 11 narratives" Review of International Studies, pp 795-815 2009: 35.
Gane, Mike. Jean Baudrillard : In Radical Uncertainty, Pluto Press, 2000, London.
Krastev, Ivan and Holmes, Stephen. The Light that Failed: A reckoning, Allen Lane, 2019, London.
Noys, Benjamin. "Crimes of the Near Future: Baudrillard/Ballard" International Journal of Baudrillard Studies, 5(1), unpaginated, 2008 available at https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/crimes-of-the-near-future-baudrillard-ballard/#back1 accessed 7th August 2020.
O'Mahoney, Paul. "An Interview with Mike Gane: Sociology, Politics, Academia" " International Journal of Baudrillard Studies, 5(1), unpaginated, 2014 available at https://baudrillardstudies.ubishops.ca/an-interview-with-mike-gane-sociology-politics-and-academia/ accessed 7th August 2020.
Pope Francis 'Urbi Et Orbi' March 27th 2020, Transcript available at https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing.html accessed 2nd September 2020.
Schuster, Mark. Don DeLillio, Jean Baudrillard and the Consumer Conundrum, Cambria Press, 2008, Youngstown, New York.
The Economist. "A New Era of Economics" July 25th 2020, pp 13 -16 Vol 436 Number 9204.
Virlio, Paul. Negative Horizon, Continuum, London, 2008.
Wald, Priscilla. Contagious: Cultures, carriers and the outbreak narrative, Duke University Press, 2008, Durham.

Wilcox, Leonard. “Baudrillard, DeLillo’s White Noise, and the End of Heroic Narrative” Don DeLillo’s White Noise pp 97 – 115 Edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2003, Philadelphia

---

Alex Wade is Senior Research Fellow at Birmingham City University. He attained his PhD in Sociology from Loughborough University in 2009. Using space and time as concepts for exploring different topics he has written widely on the histories of videogames, celebrity studies, young people and technology, social theory and science fiction. His second book, *The Pac-Man Principle: A User’s Guide to Capitalism* was published by Zero Books in 2018.