Università
Ca'Foscari
Venezia

Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

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White Voices through the Nowhere of Time
Don DeLillo's The Body Artist

Relatore
Prof.ssa Francesca Bisutti

Correlatori
Prof.ssa Pia Masiero
Prof. Thomas J. Ferraro

Laureanda
Chiara Patrizi
Matricola 837205

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Chiara Patrizi

Vorrei parlarti di molte cose
cose di tutti i giorni
quotidiane
cose pensate
cose intuite
cose piccole eppure enormi...
Sai che è egualmente difficile
raggiungere l'infinitamente piccolo
che l'infinitamente grande.

Manuel

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Introduction: Inner landscapes.

Published at the beginning of 2001, after the novel that consecrated Don DeLillo as one of the masters of the "American paranoia"(*Underworld,* 1997), *The Body Artist* may appear shockingly different from what DeLillo got us used to. The year 2001 is tragically significant for DeLillo's country: it may be considered the most sorrowful year for the United States, being the year of the attack to the Twin Towers. It is a coincidence, of course, but it is not unlikely that a novel of this kind may have something to say to people who are overwhelmed by weakness, paranoia, and terror.

When the worst possible event happens and the fragments of your inner-self are scattered all around, there is no use in running away or desperately looking for a reason to blame. Instead, you must let time drive you inside your own pain, walk through the most vulnerable areas of your mind and allow them to re-shape the way your body walks through the outside world.

Elaborate plots, numerous characters, diversified settings, all these features might have been considered the author's landmark, until the present book was published. In fact, from the very beginning, it casts itself as completely "new" in DeLillo's production: minimalist, lyric, spare and intimate, it is a work that finds its breathing space inside the walls of an anonymous house by the sea, inside the boundaries of just one person's soul.

The body artist of the title, Lauren Hartke, finds herself suddenly thrown into an unexpected and devastating universe of pain the day her husband, the movie director Rey Robles, commits suicide. From that moment on, she will start a journey through the wilderness of time and self that will lead her to gain a new awareness of these categories in order to cope with the difficult process of grieving.

The novel begins with normality: DeLillo shares with us a morning breakfast between the married couple in a first chapter filled with gestures, words, and thoughts of an everyday life that is coming to its end. After Rey decides to die, Lauren decides to alienate herself in the house by the sea they rented few months before, apparently for no precise reason if not that of staying away from her old life for a while. When the figure of Mr. Tuttle appears, her loneliness becomes something different but also deeper. One day, in fact, Lauren finds this strange, phantom-like creature sitting on a bed upstairs. Is he a real person or is he just a projection of Lauren's mind? In any case, he will help her in the difficult task of re-shaping her displaced self.

She knows nothing about him but what she hears and see. Clearly unable to interact the way people generally do, Mr. Tuttle turns out to act like a "human tape-recorder" whose sentences are made of other people's words and articulated with their tone of voice. He lives

in an area of time where past, present and future have no definite borders and thus he is not subjected to the spatiotemporal laws that regulate our world. Even his language does not follow these laws, as it is more similar to a stream of consciousness which he utters, in turn, with either Lauren's or Rey's voice.

Thus, day by day, the relationship between Lauren and her "host" (who is hosting who, after all?) evolves through gibberish talks and rituals and it becomes fundamental in her plan "to organize time until she could live again" (*The Body Artist,* 36). Later on, she will put together all these elements to create the piece she will perform in public with the title of *Body Time*.

Body and time: the entire book, in fact, represents a meditation on these two elements. It explores the way we perceive time and, consequently, perceive our lives inside it. Death may throws us in despair and it forces us to deal with what we cannot explain, what we can never grasp completely, even in the moment we are experiencing it. It is a novel about the living and not about the remembering of the dead, about the effort to find a new language for a new self in the same time, in the same body.

It is so easy to get lost in a book like this: what we can learn by means of our privilege, as readers, of re-reading is never enough to make us able to understand fully what the woman is going through. We are in a favored position, yet we must acknowledge the fact that we remain mere spectators: the mourning process always takes place somewhere else, even when Lauren stands right in front of us.

In order to try a different perspective on the tangled labyrinth of voices and movements of the novel, I chose to isolate six main elements and tie them together in a story. Consequently, I wrote six short stories, in Italian, from the point of view of an external character, with the adding of several pictures that, in my opinion, could represent some atmospheres and images evoked from of DeLillo's novel.

My character is an involuntary intruder who finds himself accidentally thrown inside Lauren's place and tries to get close to her, to comprehend what is happening inside this house, which seems completely out of time and space. Very carefully, he looks around and listens to every noise, hoping to find some sign that could help him understand, but there is always something missing, an area he is prevented from entering.

Words and pictures have been combined then for the purpose of giving an idea of what it means to be in front of a sorrow that is so deep and personal that we cannot empathize with it, even if we want to. It is not a matter of getting to know "how it feels like" to be Lauren: unless either we already have experienced in our life or we are experiencing now the same pain, we cannot know how it feels, we will never know.

Even art fails when it comes to describe an event so devastating, and the only way left, DeLillo seems to declare, is to record its flow: a bare existence apparently emptied of

everything, a woman who will slowly discover to have been lost instead (is there anything more human?), and even more slowly will learn to move again.

Therefore, with the present work, my aim is to show how DeLillo managed to proceed by negation in picturing such an extreme state: no dead souls to talk to, no questions to be answered, only a human body plunged into time.

The frequency of repetitions, the plain style, — free from any attempt to provide complicated descriptions of feelings and thoughts — and the care regarding small objects, noises, smells, all these features work together in measuring Lauren's inner clock. Time has not stopped, it has become slower, so slow that sometimes it seems to go backwards and encounter the future, unexpectedly.

Mr. Tuttle, with his mysterious way of speaking, embodies this clock which eases out, stops, jumps ahead; he carries all of us into this suspended dimension. His existence is framed inside the house walls, surrounded by the events that have brought him there, next to Lauren. The structure of the book itself seems to emphasize such state: three section at the beginning to "prepare" his entrance and three at the end to let him disappear. In the middle, there is the limbo where two bodies, two phantoms, a woman and a man, share an un-shareable communication, a play we attend without having the possibility to participate actively.

Like a tightrope walker, Lauren measures her steps, faces her fears and establishes a deeper connection with her inner time: suspended between life and time, she lets her own self behind and walks on to meet it again. Similarly, like the spectators of a tightrope performance, we cannot know what does it means to be there, to be her, but we are allowed to watch what is happening, we are in front of a life which reveals itself for what it is, completely bare, our senses detecting that there is a place somewhere we cannot reach, up there where time either passes differently or just *seems to pass*.

Thus, in each chapter I examined separately all those features that represented the most significant aspects of this life and, subsequently, of the novel as a whole. I started giving Lauren a color, white, as the color of her present condition. White as the color related to death in some Eastern cultures, as the hair of the Japanese woman in the second chapter, as her own hair, chopped and bleached for the final performance. White as a symbol of catharsis and rebirth: when everything seems to disappear, it takes a blank slate to start writing again. Such whiteness both surrounds and inhabits Lauren's existence, in a world where the time of the outside is measured by the clock of the video from Kotka, Finland she watches every day while the time of the inside passes by means of bodywork, daily rituals and puzzling conversations. I proceeded then looking close to the other characters of the novel, the small group of ghost-like figures that all convey in being representations of Lauren's fragmented self. It is a chorus of voices for one dancer only: the same way Mr. Tuttle had "recorded" Rey's voice and her own, Lauren carefully collects birds voices,

human gestures and images in order to place them later in her piece, *Body Time*.

After the performance, Lauren feels the need to come back to the house again, as she had not planned to do, as Mr. Tuttle had told her she would have done. Everything started there, everything finished there, that morning after the breakfast with Rey. For this reason, I took into consideration the first chapter last, because *that* breakfast is the time and space Lauren has lost herself in, and we must go back there to find where she really is, just like she had to go back there to finally learn who she is now.

I. Becoming White.

«Ora rivoglio bianche tutte le mie lettere,
inaudito il mio nome, la mia grazia richiusa;
ch'io mi distenda sul quadrante dei giorni,
riconduca la vita a mezzanotte.
E la mia valle rosata dagli uliveti
E la città intricata dei miei amori
Siano richiuse come breve palmo,
il mio palmo segnato da tutte le mie morti».

Cristina Campo, Passo d'addio

(Woodman, Francesca. *Untitled.*)

È così che l'ho trovata la prima volta che ci siamo incontrati: non abbandonata distesa sul pavimento, uno dei tanti ritratti della disperazione, ma inginocchiata con la schiena dritta, compostamente, come durante una cerimonia sacra, come in preghiera silenziosa.
Mi dava le spalle, a piedi scalzi e nuda, mentre una colata di quella che sembrava vernice bianca arrivata da chissà dove scendeva piano lungo le vertebre della colonna: da lontano, sembrava indossasse un candido mantello che le percorreva il corpo per poi spargersi informe a terra.
Si sarebbe alzata prima o poi, ed i piedi nudi avrebbero tracciato forme e percorsi per tutta la stanza almeno, forse addirittura per tutta la casa. Ogni passo sarebbe stato esattamente al posto giusto, non avrebbe lasciato impronte casuali, tracce non volute: ogni singolo movimento nella persona di Lauren, persino l'atto stesso di respirare, era entrato a far parte del rituale che lei e la sua solitudine stavano mettendo in scena.
Non si è mai girata per guardarmi, non una volta, probabilmente non si era nemmeno accorta della mia presenza, non importa: conoscevo il suo volto per averlo visto un giorno attraverso una delle finestre che danno sulla via, quella della cucina credo, facevo due passi e l'occhiata distratta che avevo lanciato in quella direzione si era immediatamente trasformata nel bisogno di fermarsi per lasciarsi ipnotizzare.

La fronte era appena poggiata sulla mano, una stanchezza lieve della testa, che non voleva gravare sul corpo, il braccio sottile la incorniciava dal basso, facendola emergere pallida e quasi luminosa dal buio totale dentro.
Per un attimo avevo pensato fosse una maschera esposta sul davanzale, tanto era immobile, la riproduzione di una qualche musa di Brancusi con la pelle levigata e le palpebre abbassate. Soltanto abbassate però, non chiuse: tra le due file di ciglia passava luce a sufficienza da lasciar intravedere lo sguardo cavo, perso in un dolore che una statua non avrebbe potuto avere mai. Non riuscivo a smettere di guardarla, cercavo un segno, un gesto, un movimento qualsiasi che significasse una richiesta d'aiuto ma non ve n'erano, questo era evidente anche da lontano, anche attraverso lo schermo del vetro appena appannato. Un respiro visibile è una traccia di vita, forse *(maybe)*.
Questa donna sembrava non abitare il proprio corpo per intero ma soltanto quello spazio nascosto tra le palpebre. Mi sbagliavo?

Eccomi, a distanza di pochi giorni, in piedi in una casa non mia, unico spettatore del suo farsi lentamente statua, diventare tabula rasa. Per terra ciocche di capelli giacevano in scie disordinate, segno di una violenza a cui non avevo assistito.

Perché bianco? A rifletterci adesso, forse è stata la donna giapponese con quei suoi capelli come neve, con quella sua eleganza nei movimenti; dubito che Lauren le abbia mai rivolto la parola ed io stesso non le ho mai viste passarsi vicino per strada come due persone che si conoscessero ma la donna potrebbe comunque averle raccontato delle storie, in qualche modo *(somehow)*. Lauren è un'osservatrice ed un'ascoltatrice, come tutte le statue che di marmo hanno solo il mantello che ne avvolge la pelle.

Il bianco è, tradizionalmente, il colore del lutto in Giappone.

Non ci pensavo in quei giorni, non pensavo a nulla, tutte le mie energie erano impegnate nel non smettere di seguirla: la guardavo sbiadire, perdere colore, mentre quello che accadeva era l'esatto contrario ma non era importante che io capissi, non era per me.

> *There is a kind of white which is more than white and this was that kind of white. There is a kind of white that repels everything that is inferior to it and that is almost everything. This was that kind of white. There is a kind of white which is not made by bleach, but which itself is bleach. This was that kind of white. This white was aggressively white. It did its work on everything around it, and nothing escaped.*[1]

Rinascere proprio non è possibile, forse *(maybe)* ma una tela bianca porta con sé tutti i colori, la si può ancora dipingere (dipingere di nuovo?), macchiare, la si può ancora sporcare. Nel bianco puoi scegliere, è immacolato perché inodore ed vuoto di parole.
Come il cielo e la terra quando il sole non tramonta per mesi d'estate e la luce non sembra più luce davvero, non sembra più naturale ma costruita con precisione e metodo. Allora da Kotka in Finlandia (possibile che la televisione fosse sempre sintonizzata su quel canale?) potresti prendere una macchina e guidare verso nord per capire come faccia il sole ad aspettare, a non cercare riposo. Il giorno deve pur finire da qualche parte quando il silenzio diventa troppo accecante.
Nel frattempo non riesci mai a chiudere veramente le palpebre, sono le pupille stesse ad impedirlo: sempre aperte, anche quando ormai non possono dilatarsi oltre, costringono a vedere ogni cosa.

Il bianco è, tradizionalmente, il colore del lutto in Giappone.

Hanno capito bene forse, in Oriente, che si muore nel bianco, lentamente raccogliendo verso l'interno un colore dopo l'altro, a cominciare dall'aria nei polmoni. Poi il rosso

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1 Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia.* London: Reaktion Books, 2002. 10.

nelle labbra, poi l'azzurro nelle vene. Quel colore che ci appare come l'assenza di tutti gli altri li contiene invece dentro di sé, può ricoprirli completamente e nasconderli ma non li cancella. Li protegge in qualche modo, non senza fatica, preservando la possibilità per qualcosa di nuovo.

Lauren, in quei giorni, non stava morendo, stava ascoltando meglio.

(Brandt, Bill. *Nude*.)

1.1 A blank page to begin with.

The first strong image which could represent DeLillo's novel is probably the one concerning the ostensible absence of colors other than white: while reading, the sensation is that of entering a story where everything around slowly disappears into white, as when one enters a clean room. This is the reason why "white" seems a good point to start from in order to try to understand such an elaborate work.

The book opens with Rey and Lauren having breakfast together and continues with the obituary telling how the director Rey Robles committed suicide (the same day, after that breakfast), but Lauren's story without Rey begins from chapter 2, on "a hazy white day" (29), one of the so-called "first days back" (30).

At this point, readers know that Lauren is back from Rey's funeral, from New York, from her old life and since I have focused my interest on where and what she is back to instead, I believe it is important to explore these days and their features first. Therefore, I started from the position occupied, throughout the course of the novel, by white both as a color and as a condition, and I examined its being a symbolic color for concepts such as death, rebirth and purification.

When the day is done
Down to earth then sinks the sun
Along with everything that was lost and won.

(Nick Drake - Day is Done)

1.2 A kind of white not created by bleach.

> She rubbed her hands dry on her jeans, feeling a sense somewhere of the color blue, runny and wan.
> (DeLillo, Don. *The Body Artist.*)

All the colors seem to have been washed off from Lauren Hartke's world, to have been hidden somewhere they cannot be reached with the eyes anymore. They have not disappeared though, only we must use the other senses to perceive them: we can still hear like we hear the birds' voices, touch as when touching the blueberries we are preparing for breakfast, taste as when founding a hair in our mouth, and smell like we smell cigarettes' smoke in a room. Most importantly, we can feel them all around, hidden below the pale veil of whiteness that has fallen upon them.
It is like walking in a Winter landscape where Spring is far from arriving, yet every inch of life, every shade of red and yellow and green is still there, waiting for the right moment to show itself again.

This blankness is so absolute and complete that DeLillo does not even need to avoid mentioning colors here and there in the course of the book to make it stronger: Wintertime has started in Lauren's life and nothing can stop it. It will take its way without asking permission, it already occupies each single corner around her person, as the most natural event possible after the most unnatural loss she could undergo.
An entire cycle of Lauren's existence has ended under "a sense somewhere of the color blue" and the new story of her life begins in white:

> It's a hazy white day and the highway lifts to a drained sky. (29)

The earth has completed the revolution, the storm has just passed, now it is time for the body artist to learn how to know more surely who she is, and it takes a blank page to do so. Visually, blankness is the key of the quest that is about to start or perhaps has already started.

> Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky-way? Or is it that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color; and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons and there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape full of snows – a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? (Melville, Herman. "The Whiteness of the Whale." *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale.* 212).

No whales on the horizon in DeLillo's novel, Lauren is not heading towards the

immensities of the ocean but much further: she is going deep inside the wilderness of her inner self and in order to do so she must put a layer of white above everything that remains outside, above everything that is connected with the idea of past, even her own body. It is the only way so that everything can be discovered again, in its new form.
The Japanese woman seems to have been placed on Lauren's path exactly to fulfill this purpose, as if DeLillo (Rey?) was suggesting her a point from where to start thinking about her next performance.

Almost everybody knows the fact that in many Eastern cultures white is the color traditionally associated with death and funerals.[2] By picturing a white-haired Japanese woman as "a beautiful and problematic thing" (35), DeLillo is probably focusing the attention on the somehow beautiful and problematic thing that building yourself a new life after a loss is; you must shape your sufferings into a story you have not asked for, feeling both the need and the effort of trying to tell it out. In the first days back (30), DeLillo raises the curtain on the unique, once-off, performance that Lauren's mourning represents.
The hair of the Japanese woman is white because of age while Lauren chooses deliberately to whiten her own hair, her own body, her whole self. DeLillo's character pretends to erase herself, to become less than human in order to find how much of Lauren is left after her personal, devastating storm.

The process through which the woman transforms herself is explained as a need to wipe her body from the dirt that covers it, but each step is painful and almost brutal, the purification ceremony she sets up has the form of self-harm, the extreme struggle to make her physical appearance represents somehow that huge abyss called absence that has grown inside her: "She wanted it to hurt."(89)

It is not likely that this effort will ever produce a satisfying and complete result: this white cannot be recreated neither by bleaching or by adding color somewhat forcedly, "However, it can be conceived of as an idea (of absence)" (Op De Beeck, Hans, Nicolas de Oliveira, and Nicola Oxley. "White." *The Wilderness Inside: Location (6)*. 47-51). Moreover, this white is quite different from the anti-phenomenological white representing a metaphor that cannot be experienced. Being the portrait of Lauren's inner condition, it can be said that it is the blankness from which only us (the readers), and not Lauren, shrink. She experiences everything, painfully and methodically, while we are the spectators.

Between chapters 6 and 7, in the form of a newspaper article ("Body Art in Extremis: Slow, Spare and Painful." *The Body Artist,* 109-116), a review of the performance resulting from the artist's two months' "exile" is provided: the brief description of the piece presents a Japanese woman silently welcoming us into a slow space, where we learn that there are some stories that cannot be told with the help of the narrative parameters we are used to;

2 In many Chinese, Indian and Japanese funeral worships, for instance, the participants are dressed in white and white is the color of flowers and decorations.

> Hatke's piece begins with an ancient Japanese woman on a bare stage, gesturing in the stylized manner of the Noh drama, and it ends seventy-five minutes later with a naked man, emaciated and aphasic, trying desperately to tell us something. […]
> Through much of the piece there is sound accompaniment, the annoying robot voice of a telephone answering machine delivering a standard announcement. This is played relentlessly and begins to weave itself into the visual texture of the performance.
> The voice infiltrates the middle section in particular. Here is a woman in executive attire, carrying a briefcase, who checks the time on her wristwatch and tries to hail a taxi. She glides rather formally (perhaps inspired by the elderly Japanese) from one action to the other. She does this many times, countless times. Then she does it again, half-pirouetting in very slow motion.
> […] about the video that runs through the piece, projected onto the back wall. It simply shows a two-lane highway, with sparse traffic. A car goes one way, a car goes the other. There's a slot with a digital display that records the time. (111-113)

The live-streaming program showing the two-lane road in Kotka, Finland, that she used to watch when she was in the house is on the background during the performance piece, projected on the black wall of the theater scene.

> It emptied her mind and made her feel the deep silence of other places, the mystery of seeing over the world to a place stripped of everything but a road that approaches and recedes. (38)

It is so reassuring to recognize an emptiness as yours: your inner self is just right there where you can watch it the way you watch a documentary, that empty road going through a land of Winter, a wide open space offering only two possible, opposite directions.

The whole video cannot be watched continuously, for twenty-four hours a day, like Lauren used to do: nobody wants to disclose their subconscious entirely, too much of white could blind the spectators and there is still a lot they will not completely understand that they have not seen yet.

The more we look at it, the more we realize that the black-and-white dressed piece does not really reveal its Author's intentions because probably Lauren does not really know yet what her intentions are: she has just started to write on the white slate she has created.

The show is still going on, she comes back to the house for a brief time and looks again at the road in Kotka, as if just to check that everything is still there as before, as always; the Japanese woman is still in town, she finds her outside the store with the hands inside the sleeves of the jacket, against chill, another image of absence she could have inserted in the piece. Or an image she could insert in her next piece, a figure with no hands and white hair. Who knows when the time will come for a person like this to find a way to intervene on their personal white landscape?

The subject in Rey Robles' works, "[…] is people in landscape of estrangement. He found a spiritual knife-edge in the poetry of alien places, where extreme situations become inevitable and characters are forced toward life-defining moments" (27). This description could easily represent the situation Lauren is undergoing in the novel, as if she

had become part of one of her husband's movies. She is experiencing on her skin that sense of estrangement while trying to re-define her life and turning even her own body into what looks like a living alien place.

Interviewed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Lauren still looks like an albino woman. Her hair chopped aggressively, she looks wasted but she is not. She is in the middle of the Winter of her life, colors will sprout up when the season will be ready. In the meantime, there are still fields and fields of absence to explore. As "white noise" is the name for the noise of all the frequencies of sound combined and it is used to cover up unwanted noise, thus it can be said that white as color, being obviously the one containing all the frequencies of light, enables to cover up unwanted views around us: "Don't touch it. I'll clean it up later".

II. nowhere now here.

Un'altra volta era magrissima ed appesa al bordo della porta chiusa del salone, il dorso delle mani rivolto verso l'esterno, come se si sostenesse con la sola forza delle falangi, appuntando le unghie sul legno: una postura innaturale, impossibile.

Poche cose sono impossibili quando è soltanto il tuo corpo ad essere qui ora.

Senza peso, ondeggiava lieve al minimo soffio di vento, l'ultima foglia dell'autunno, mentre il sole non le scaldava la pelle ma disegnava ombre sempre diverse ai suoi piedi. Niente di umano.
Sulla sedia di legno massiccio giaceva una camicia spiegazzata che sembrava la copia fedele di quell'unico indumento che Lauren stava indossando: il posto di qualcuno ma non il mio.
C'è tanta luce questa volta eppure i contorni del suo corpo mi appaiono meno definiti: lei è davanti a me non più come una statua levigata ma come un'immagine prossima a svanire a partire dalle gambe, nascosta al mondo da quel braccio che pochi giorni prima me l'aveva svelata, come un ricordo sbiadito.
La mano sinistra ha un piccolo cerchio all'anulare.

A woman left lonely.

Sembra dormire, forse farei meglio a lasciar perdere per oggi, ad andare via, basta che non si faccia male, solo questo.
"Lauren? Va tutto bene? Hai bisogno di aiuto?" E la mia voce suona così fuori posto e la sua risposta, un sussurro, sembra giungere da lontanissimo.
"Grazie ma sto aspettando che torni Rey, atterrerà tra non molto. Va bene così."
Quante altre cose vorrei poter chiedere… E' tardi adesso, il momento è passato.
Chi è Rey? Dove sei Lauren? Posso raggiungerti?
Non potevo, questo era evidente, agli spettatori non è concesso accedere alle quinte mentre lo spettacolo è ancora in esecuzione, non sarebbe giusto. Dopo, forse, alla fine, c'è un modo.

Quando arriva la fine?
Completamente smarrito, se almeno sapessi dov'è l'inizio, se solo potessi domandare ancora, di più. Il tempo però non sembra far parte delle sue giornate in questa casa, è stato messo da parte fino all'arrivo di Rey, credo.

Ecco i piedi e le gambe oscillare di nuovo, quasi impercettibilmente, per una brezza sottile

che non è nella stanza, il resto del corpo sempre immobile, una marionetta di carta velina due volte inchiodata nel legno. Mi aggrappo a questo movimento come all'unica possibilità che ho di sapermi all'interno del tempo che conosco, che può essere scandito dal ritmo di un pendolo. Comincio a contare.

Passano i minuti senza che io sappia cosa fare o dire poi, finalmente, passano le ore senza che me ne accorga.

Smetto di guardare la stanza sperando di vedere: il tavolino la presa di corrente la sedia la camicia le mattonelle il quadro alla parete e le sue braccia la testa girata di lato la gambe le ombre sopra e sotto la stoffa, le sue mani, le sue mani...

(Woodman, Francesca. *Untitled*.)

Quando c'è troppo da vedere
Quando un'immagine è troppo piena
o quando le immagini sono troppe,
non si vede più niente.
Dal troppo si passa
molto presto
al nulla.

Ora che anch'io sono uscito dalla stanza mi sento insieme carico di stanchezza e svuotato di ogni fatica; cado seduto in terra ad occhi chiusi e subito me ne pento: non posso permettermi di venire meno al mio ruolo, qualunque esso sia.
Alzo la testa, lei è ancora lì, dietro, sulla destra, appuntato sulla porta c'è un foglietto tanto insignificante da essere passato inosservato alla mia ansia di registrare tutto. Vorrei afferrarlo e portarlo con me, una prova, ma così non sarebbe giusto. Metto a fuoco tre parole mentre cerco di farlo con il minimo sforzo possibile da quella distanza, mentre mi sembra di svenire.

nowhere now here

(Di Croce, Nicola. *Templehof.)*

Niente maiuscole, niente punto. Mi risveglio su una panchina davanti all'aeroporto abbandonato, poco fuori città, la testa mi gira e mentre metto le mani in tasca per scaldarmi un poco percepisco la ruvida presenza di un pezzetto di carta piegato in quattro che decido di non aprire.

2.1 Time and Space as we do not know them.

Having assigned Lauren the color white to identify her condition in this particular phase of her life, it is now time to have a look around and try to describe where she is, spatially and temporally.

The author tells us that she and Rey had rented a house for six months in a town by the sea called Little Moon, not far from New York City. After Rey's death, Lauren decides to remain there until the end of the contract, probably in order to avoid staying in New York, seeing people and feeling somehow forced to do things she does not want to think about at the moment. Two months can flow either as fast as one day only or as slow as an entire life and, in this case, the author manages to makes us feel both sensations at the same time.

What seems interesting to me is the fact that, even though Rey's death is the reason why the novel exists, everything in it is focused not on remembering his person but on picturing Lauren's condition instead. She is the center of the attention, with her torn-apart and displaced self, her firm decision to stay alone, out of time and out of place, until she finds a new self-knowledge.

The result of this period of isolation will be the piece previously mentioned, *Body Time*.

It's awfully considerate of you to think of me here
And I'm much obliged to you for making it clear
That I'm not here.

(Pink Floyd - Jugband Blues)

2.2 "How Long is Forever?"[3]

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
(Eliot, T.S. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*)

Don't touch it. I'll clean it up later.
(DeLillo, Don. *The Body Artist.*)

Time is the key, time is a distance not only temporal but also spatial in the complicate process that grief represents. Time, in fact, is the invisible but resistant wall that separates Lauren from the rest of the world. By means of the fact that Lauren's personal flow of time is somehow deviated from what its natural course should be, it is as if she were unreachable also physically.

She decided to stay in the house, where else? The house rented four months before is the personal nowhere where she can recognize the place where her new self is located. She cannot be in New York now because she is already too far. She is alone by the sea, which in America means alone by the ocean, that infinite nowhere which can take you everywhere. She is in Kotka, Finland, standing still on the road waiting for cars to come and go.

Other authors have written about death focusing more on the act of remembering: the American author Nic Kelman in his last novel introduces a character whose mind is full of "what if?" while recalling the moments of his life with the now dead wife:

> E se avessi potuto ricordare tutto? E se avessi potuto fare più attenzione? Cosa sarebbe potuto succedere allora? (Kelman, Nic. *Il Comportamento della Luce*. 24)

The man asks the readers to follow him in this path into the past, "Ricordate che facevamo tutto quello che fa chiunque. […] Voglio che ricordiate le cose normali." (Kelman 65): he wants us to identify ourselves with him in order to understand his sorrow.

DeLillo builds up a completely different work; this is not the "classic" nostalgic novel where a woman torn apart by her lover's suicide honors his memory by remembering all that was before that horrible moment.

The novel is not about Rey, it is about Lauren, it is not about remembering the one

3 Carrol, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland.*

who is gone but about what and who is left. Rey was, and he is not anymore, nor anywhere, only Lauren remains. And time.

It can be said, in fact, that time is the true main character of the novel: DeLillo plays with it, squeezes and stretches it, creating a flow that is not always constant but still is somehow continuous.

Rey and Lauren had rented a house for six months and, with Rey's death, there are still two months left that Lauren decides to spend alone in this place: the first days back after the funeral are "days that moved so slow they ached" (30) and they do, we as readers can feel the pain of their movements, even if they are narrated within few pages. What aches, DeLillo says, is being aware of the fact that the normal codes of communication are of no help when it comes to represent grief. The author himself seems to declare his own ineptitude to picture Lauren's state of mind by simply "telling her story": describing what she does in the first days back is clearly not enough. We see Lauren cleaning the kitchen and the pantry, polishing the porcelain and the tile, she cleans everything that can be cleaned and does everything she is supposed to do: she decides the things that will be important from that moment on, what to do with Rey's stuff and clothes, she feels him as an invisible but somehow consistent presence (she was not ready for his absence and she needs to get used to it), she tries and fails to cope with her everyday duties, she does not answer the phone, she nearly collapses while getting out of the car. Every sentence is a piece in the perfectly reasonable report of the daily routine of a person undergoing the loss of a loved one. Interestingly enough, the more every piece of information is detailed, the more it appears to be useless to the purpose.

Told this way, Lauren's experience apparently does not add anything neither to our understanding or to our perception of the long process of grieving. Actually, what the description of the first days back is doing is making us conscious that there are in life certain experiences that cannot be fully grasped by looking at them from the outside and, because of this reason, they cannot be explained by a linear narration either. DeLillo here is somehow placing himself close to us and, instead of trying to explain that it is not possible to describe Lauren's sorrow the way we normally register a significant event in someone's life, he makes us feel the dissatisfaction of not having a language suitable for such a state:

> I thought I could describe a *state*; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history, and if I don't stop writing that history at some quite arbitrary point, there's no reason why I should ever stop. (Lewis, C.S. *A Greif Observed*. 68)

There are stories that pertain to an area of time words fail to comprehend, stories that need either a different language or at least the effort to find one in order to have a "somewhere" where to place them.

It is a process lying not on the visible manifestations of the affliction but on

apparently insignificant details, like in a dream, tied together without worrying about the classic human conception of order that wants the present to be followed by the future and preceded by the past.

"Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments," (3) DeLillo warns us from the beginning: we are entering a wilderness of time, where the moments do not follow the conventional rhythm of seconds and minutes, hours and days but their way of existing in our minds depends on how the author, through Lauren, makes us perceive them. It is not either our or DeLillo's story, it will never be, it is Lauren's only: we are not here to understand fully at last but only to witness what we cannot experience.

The house by the sea thus becomes the artist's stage where to create her performance. This is not home but to Lauren "it felt like home, being here" (30): the author emphasizes the woman dislocated self by registering the events in the past tense but putting them in the here and now. Everything has already happened and yet everything still happens, it keeps happening over and over again. Everything happens in the close space of the house, in front of us but as if we were watching it from far away, on a tv screen, while Lauren perceives the 24-hour video of Kotka as if it was happening right out of her window. Together in the same place, author, protagonist and readers could never be more distant one from the other.

DeLillo succeeds in the difficult task of placing himself at the same time on the side of the protagonist and on that of the readers, while together managing to keep a formal distance by means of the prevalent usage of the third-person narrative. As noted by several scholars, even if DeLillo is one of the most important postmodernist writers in America, the book shows an interesting connection to the Modernist stream of consciousness (Cowart 202, Kavadlo 150) in the way it structures thoughts and approaches time, especially if we compare it to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (Cowart 202):

> I procedimenti retorici mediante i quali l'autore sacrifica la sua presenza consistono precisamente nel dissimulare l'artificio grazie alla verisimiglianza di una storia che sembra raccontarsi da sola e che lascia parlare la vita, che si indichi con questo nome la realtà sociale, il comportamento individuale o il flusso di coscienza. (Ricoeur, Paul. *Tempo e racconto. Il tempo raccontato.* 194.)

Thus, we are not looking for some evidence of the narrator's/author's reliability because such reliability lies on the story itself. When the author is unable to reproduce the woman's pain in the days after her husband's death, as a writer he is close to her, the body artist who is unable to use her main instrument of work, her body, as she used to before in order to express her new reality. And he is close to us, readers/spectators disoriented by an event that we come to see from the inside but without knowing, like in Lauren's performance, where all its voices and movements and images come from and when. Unlike

Lauren, we are trapped and we do not know where.

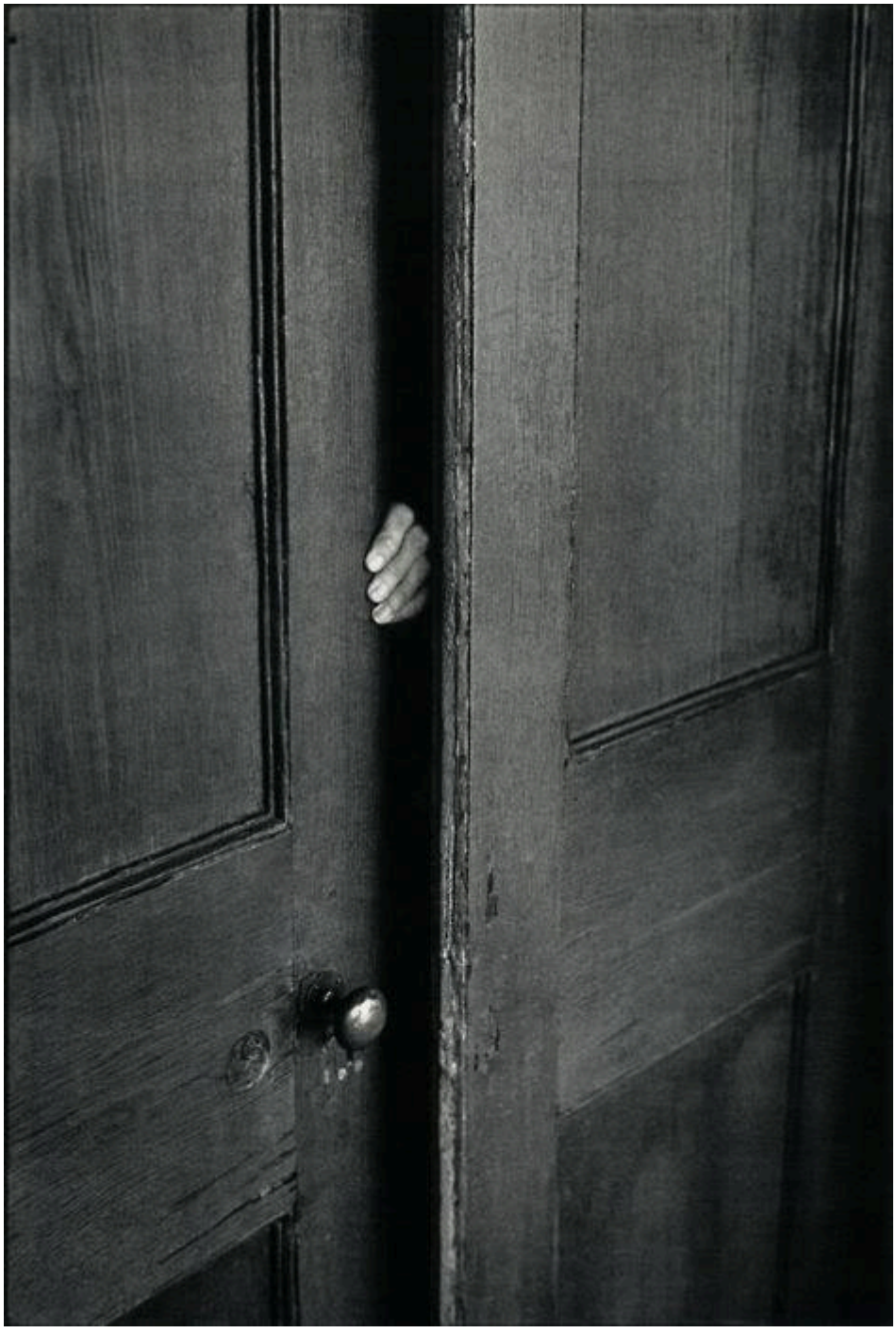
After *that* breakfast, the last breakfast which Lauren and Rey spent together before his death, we are carried away from the natural course of time and we follow, moment after moment, articulated by her daily routine and her bodywork exercises, the invisible thread moving inside Lauren's area of time, where a hair in the mouth can be reminiscent of an apparition not yet occurred and that "Don't touch it. I'll clean it up later" (86-90) sounds so familiar, as if it were an echo from a remote past, but instead, few pages on, it will turn out to have been an echo from the future (99-100), since Mr. Tuttle is, indeed, "a man who remembers the future" (107). This is not what Lauren thinks she wants, she is an artist who "wanted to create her future, not enter a state already shaped to her outline."(106) as she is used to doing with her art. Through Mr. Tuttle, this phantom unshaped by the language human beings need in order to give a consistency to their perception of past, present, and future, and place them in a "where" and "when", she learns "the rule of time". This rule is as obvious as it is hard to bear and declares that time "is the thing you know nothing about." (106). "Time is supposed to pass" (81), men have always needed to believe in such a truth to go on with their everyday lives, but not here, not now, not for him.

Here we are then, in front of a woman in the process of re-building her dislocated self, each instant becoming more aware of the fact that we are allowed to see only the result of such process, which is taking place somewhere else, in another time, maybe. The impression is that throughout the novel we come to know her very close, yet we cannot touch her. Lauren wanted to be alone, and indeed she is: DeLillo has no intention to disturb her mourning anyway by giving the readers the slightest possibility to believe they can access her inner world, empathize with her.

Like the spectators of Lauren's *Body Time*, what we are experiencing may seem uneventful: nothing happens in the novel except the woman's life going on, somehow. "Too slow and repetitious", this is how the performance may appear for all its hypnotic suspension; it makes the public wait for a conclusion of some kind, an explanation which does not arrive. "But it's probably too eventful. I put too much into it. It ought to be sparer, even slower than it is. It ought to be three fucking hours." (112, 113), because there is no story to tell that needs to be decorated by a succession of events and details and explanations, no meaning to convey except time itself. Slow, spare, hurtful, time's voice only requires a bare stage to be heard, and it does not stop with the end of the piece.

After having met Mr. Tuttle for the first time, after having heard him talk without understanding what was happening and how, Lauren feels the urgency to run away, to hide maybe, to find a place where she can hear her own thoughts. It is raining and she goes out, she sits in the car and waits for the images of Rey to take shape from the rain. "How much time is a long time? Could be this, could be that." (53)

III. GHOSTS.



(Erwitt, Elliott. *Jacksonville.*)

La mano. Con la coda dell'occhio, sono sicuro di averla intravista svanire rapida e silenziosa nella fessura tra i due legni della porta. Come una lucertola che scivoli via al sicuro dietro la crepa nell'intonaco di un muro, al riparo da occhi umani di cui poco sa se non che non può fidarsi.

Lauren però non batte ciglio ed io non oso voltarmi in cerca di conferma, per non perdere nemmeno un istante di lei: tendo solo l'orecchio un po' di più verso quell'impressione di un'immagine all'angolo della pupilla, in cerca di uno scricchiolio, un rumore che me la renda vera, vivente.
Nulla, i cardini non cigolano, le venature del legno non accennano a lamentarsi, non un filo di corrente che mi solletichi tra il collo e l'attaccatura dei capelli dietro la testa, niente più della certezza di avere uno sguardo addosso, costante, non pesante ma persistente come un ronzio indefinito. Quello stesso ronzio che alle volte mi sembra di sentire attraverso la carta da parati. Non proviene da fuori, penetra nella stanza dall'interno, per quanto possa sembrare inaccettabile, entra a far parte dell'aria stantia di questo luogo senza fatica, senza ingombrare ma occupando tutti gli spazi lasciati liberi tra un respiro e l'altro.
Se credessi ai fantasmi sarebbe tutto più facile.

La donna giapponese, ad esempio, l'avevo incontrata altre volte ma da quando c'è Lauren esiste solamente quando si incrociano per strada ed ogni volta sembra più pallida. I capelli, poi, a pensarci bene, non li ricordavo tanto bianchi; se la cosa non mi spaventasse direi addirittura che li ricordavo neri come inchiostro, che sono diventati bianchi da un giorno all'altro… Come se si fosse trasformata in spirito in fretta e furia, per una qualche urgenza inaspettata. Una comparsa.
Ma io non credo a "queste cose".

Ora c'è la mano però. La mano mi spaventa sul serio, inutile negarlo. Non perché tema che voglia farmi del male, ha tutto l'aspetto di una mano innocua, che non si leverebbe con intenzioni cattive su nessuno, mi spaventa questo suo appartenere profondamente ad un luogo in cui io invece sono l'ospite appena tollerato. La mano, nascondendosi a me solo, mi ha appena ricordato che quando mi autodefinisco "ospite" dovrei avere il coraggio di dichiararmi per quello che sono in realtà, l'intruso.
Il fantasma sono io.
Lauren continua a non parlare quasi mai e quando mi capita di sentirne la voce questa non è per me, le poche volte che riesco a coglierle in volto uno sguardo questo non è rivolto a me. Sono inconsistente, e lei mi attraversa senza fatica, tanto che mi domando se non sia io a non essere qui, se tutto questo piccolo universo così vuoto eppure così tangibile non sia che lo scenario di un sogno in cui sono capitato per caso o per errore, per aver sbattuto troppo le ciglia al momento giusto o sbagliato.
Chissà cosa vede Lauren, chissà per chi sono i suoi occhi mentre io non riesco a percepire che lei, come se il suo essere occupasse tutta la casa, fino nelle viscere delle pareti.
C'è qualcun altro, lo so, e non si cela dietro quella mano alla porta, c'è qualcuno che osserva

Lauren da vicino mentre credo scioccamente di essere io a farlo. Qualcuno che è troppo lontano ormai perché l'angolo più remoto della mia pupilla possa sperare di incontrarlo.

(Malmberg, Anna. *Madame Fragonard.)*

L'aria è stantia perché immersa in un residuo tenace di odore di sigarette. Camel. Sono assolutamente sicuro che Lauren non fumi. Metto una mano in tasca per tracciare il contorno del pacchetto di Gitanes che tengo al suo interno, come sempre.

3.1 Alone?

It is not easy to be completely alone, even when you think you really want to. Lauren learns it right from the beginning, a few days after Rey's funeral, looking around at people on the street and feeling the need to think about them as if they were the blurred characters of a play.

Most of all, she learns it when in a room on the third floor of the house she finds a strange and unexpected creature, a man she decides to name Mr. Tuttle and, from that moment on, he will become her travel companion in the journey she is about to take. His being so completely elusive and obscure, his gibberish talk, his apparent total detachment from reality, all of this makes him perfectly suitable for Lauren's needs.

Soon she will discover that his words are indeed taken from her conversations with Rey, that sometimes they seem to anticipate her own decisions and thoughts. After a moment of despair at the idea of living a preformed existence, she finally gets to learn how to think time, and therefore life, differently, which is probably the only way to cope with the devastating sorrow that has fallen on her.

At this point, it is evidently clear how unimportant is to know whether Mr. Tuttle is a real person or just a product of her imagination: he is there for a reason, and this is the only thing that truly matters.

Endless talking,
Life rebuilding,
Don't walk away.

Walk in silence,
Don't turn away, in silence.

(Joy Division – Atmosphere)

3.2 Ghosts.

The ghosts who haunt your life and the ghosts who take care of you. The ghosts who come from far away in your past and the ghosts that you are now. The word "ghost" addresses many entities that inhabit one's subconscious in the course of our existence. "The ghost comes from a possibility of oneself that has been crushed" (Atwood, George. *The Abyss of Madness.* 178). In Lauren's case, the crush is particularly intense because it is irreversible, nothing can be fixed up.

Everyone seems to be a ghost in DeLillo's novel: Mr. Tuttle, the white Japanese woman, and Lauren herself, of course. Time seems to pass, as in a fictitious representation of life, in a space crossed by blurred characters, men only apparently hollow playing their only apparently empty role.

T.S. Eliot has taught us that the world ends with a whimper, and not only is this true for the world intended as "society" but also for the smaller universe of Lauren's inner self. Nobody hears any bang when the woman's world ends, DeLillo carefully avoids any over-emphasis concerning Rey's death and the days that follow, yet the quick and the dead seem to be not discernible anymore from those days on. Life as Lauren used to know it has fallen into pieces, so many and so small that they cover also Lauren's body: somehow she fails to recognize herself, as if she were looking for a new shape to take but she cannot retrieve where all her body parts are and how they can work. Indeed, they keep working, differently, mysteriously sometimes, as though the woman's body were inhabited by some unknown entity she cannot control properly (Di Prete, Laura. *Don DeLillo's "The Body Artist": Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma.* 20).

Perhaps a projection of this alien body living inside Lauren's mind, Mr. Tuttle appears exactly after those first days back, and his entrance on stage marks the real beginning of Lauren's journey inside her new loneliness. Our first impression as readers may be that of being in front of a beckettian character: the apparently incoherent words he utters seem to work as a mirror for Lauren, being indeed parts of Rey's and her own words, carrying the woman throughout a succession of states of identification and states of estrangement, in a continuous flow from one side of the mirror to the other. (Calimani Dario. *Fuori dall'Eden*. 137-156.)

She finds him sitting on the edge of the bed, in his underwear (41): at first, he looks just like a child, a small body, new-born from inside the house walls, from that hair she felt in her mouth while having breakfast with Rey (7). She approaches him without fear, trying to speak calmly, to understand why he is there, since when, and who he is. She asks simple

questions, banal even, but every time he opens his mouth to utter some words, these cannot be defined as "answers": instead, he seems to reflect casual pieces of Lauren's questions, turning them into brief, obscure sentences. Talking, however, seems to be a great effort to him, clearly unable to follow the flow of a normal communication: sometimes huge silences dilate the distance between one sentence and another in his speech, and yet he does not seem unaware of everything around him, only *unconcern* (45).

This "Mr. Blank" is not the old man trying to cope with his forgotten past in Paul Auster's *Travels in the Scriptorium*:

> The old man sits on the edge of the narrow bed, palms spread out on his knees, heads down, staring at the floor. (Auster, Paul. *Travels in the Scriptorium.* 1)

Even though the two seem to share the way they both enter the scene, DeLillo's character has not a past lost somewhere he needs to look for, and it is more likely that he will not ever have one.

Exactly like a fetus inside his mother's womb, apparently he has experienced no life apart from that filtered by the actions of the two people who used to stay in the house, and he knows no words of his own, with the exception of those heard by those two people. He is about to come into being, this is the reason why he has no answers to give but only questions to echo from the blankness of his limbo. He is the unborn child of an unborn future, Lauren's future with Rey. Like a mother, Lauren gives him the name he seems unable to give to himself; like a mother, she stands by his door during the night listening to his breath in the sleep (56), a vulnerable indefinite body, as to be sure that he is safe; like a mother, she prepares him breakfast, she buys him clothes and tries to teach him how to speak to her. But he is not a child, his identity and his provenience are ambiguous, just like the reason to be where he is, alone with Lauren, is. The day she finds him in the bathtub, she washes him and touches him, as in trance, somehow moved sexually towards him, and it is clear that it is Rey she has in mind when acting so. It could not be otherwise, if we agree with the fact that we are not in front of a conventional ghost story where the spirit of the dead one haunts the life of the living, representing a denied past (like, for instance, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*). Therefore, we may prefer the word "phantom" to describe Mr. Tuttle. In fact, he appears not to be "a disembodied soul; *especially* **:** the soul of a dead person believed to be an inhabitant of the unseen world or to appear to the living in bodily likeness" nor a "spirit, demon" (*Ghost: 2.* Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2013), rather he seems to represent "something apparent to sense but with no substantial existence; something elusive or visionary; a representation of something abstract, ideal, or incorporeal" (*Phantom: 1, 3.* Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2013). In the way Laurens approaches him it is possible to recognize those elements typical of the phantom that Abraham underlines in his

essay *Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology*:

> It is a fact that the "phantom," whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living. Yes, an invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap that the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us. The phantom is, therefore, also a metapsychological fact. Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others. (Abraham, Nicolas. *Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology*; The Shell and the Kernel. 171-76.)

Thus, it is not important to decide whether he is a real human being or just a product of the woman's imagination: he is here and now, visible, tangible, audible, so that Lauren can learn how to understand that hole that Rey has left her to live with. Just like the day when Rey, in that same room, told her "I regain possession of myself through you [Lauren]."(65) so Lauren now slowly regains possession of herself through Mr. Tuttle

No wonder then, that the name *Alma* comes to Lauren's mind when he first disappears (84), in a moment when she no longer needs to "make him easier to see" (48) and it sounds a perfectly reasonable name for a man whose body seems to exist only to carry other people's breath and voice. And when he finally disappears, it is not like a ghost leaving the place he used to haunt, it is because Lauren's piece is ready to be performed.

The Japanese woman is not a ghost nor a phantom, she is a real person in the flesh and not an ethereal being, yet she seems more incorporeal than other characters in the story. It is because we see her white hair through the eyes of Lauren, and to Lauren, "things she saw seemed doubtful – not doubtful but ever changing, plunged into metamorphosis, something that is also something else, but what and what" (34). Also, this woman doing her everyday activities seems to hide "something else" that is there just for Lauren, as if she was unconcern of the world as it appears, as if she needed to think that even the mere fact of meeting someone watering a border of scarlet phlox has something essential to tell her that is invisible to the eye. When she meets the woman again, after the *Body Time* performance, hands made invisible, hidden inside the sleeves of the jacket, Lauren is so upset for not having had the possibility to catch that image before, "because it was fantastic, no hands, it was everything she needed to know about the woman and would have been perfect for the piece" (122). It is not a woman coming toward her that she is looking at, but a sort of white puppet she keeps arranging to make it more suitable for her story.

The Japanese woman, such as the people who keep calling Lauren to ask how she is, belongs to a world outside, where life keeps going on as always, as if nothing had happened. This world is not the place Lauren wants to walk in at the moment: she happens to be here but none of these people can really get close to her. Other times it is the opposite also, she thinks of being able to understand the ones she meets along the road in the city, and she ends up mistaking objects for people: she looks at them very carefully, thinks about them for few

minutes, presuming to have the power to understand something "more" about their lives before realizing the error, as in the case of the lazy man sitting on his porch who turns out to be simply a paint can on a board put between two chairs (74-75), so that what normally would have been nothing more than a trivial oversight becomes instead an effective image of how deep is the distance separating the woman from the surrounding world.
Without running away, without hiding from the view, she is already too far for anyone to reach her. Like a ghost.

The impression, again, is that DeLillo is driving us inside a story where he shows how the death of a loved person turns not him, Rey, but everyone else into a ghost, especially the woman that loved him more.

As noted before, Rey does not appear to Lauren as in a conventional ghost story, he does not talk to her the way we as readers could expect him to do. He does not come to visit her in her dreams, she has no pictures of him she talks to, she does not go searching for his movies to watch; in fact, she seems to be doing nothing in order to look for his presence somewhere. Instead, she slowly disappears: she gets thinner, and paler, lighter and slower in her movements. She is the character that more resembles a ghost throughout the novel: the objects and people from the living world speak to her as the distant memory of a past she is no more allowed to live in and the only one who seems to be "haunting" the house is, after all, her.

"A faint shadowy trace" (*Ghost: 4a.* Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2013), this is what is left of Lauren after Rey's death, and the more she stays in the house, talks to Mr. Tuttle, does her exercises, starves her body and feeds her mind, the more her whole self changes, imperceptibly but permanently:

> She looked at her face in the bathroom mirror and tried to understand why it looked different from the same face downstairs, in the full-length mirror in the front hall, although it shouldn't be hard to understand at all, she thought, because faces look different all the time and everywhere, based on a hundred daily variables, but then again, she thought, why do I look different? (67)

From that shadowy trace, she has begun to recreate herself. She still has her body after all, and her words, and Rey's. Starting from the ghost that she has become, floating in time's voice, she has to learn a new language in order to be able to recognize herself again as a whole.

"I am Lauren. But less and less" (123).

IV. Voices.

Ronzii, mormorii, bisbigli, cinguettii… La casa vive di suoni, piccoli rumori e parole mai più pronunciate ma ascoltate con attenzione ogni volta.

Il telefono squilla di tanto in tanto, Lauren si accinge a rispondere con l'espressione diligente di chi è pienamente consapevole della totale inutilità del compito che le è stato assegnato da svolgere. Non credevo fosse così efficiente. Quando poggia l'orecchio al ricevitore e parla, la voce esce col tono meccanico tipico di certe segreterie telefoniche ma questo non le impedisce di prendersi alcune libertà. A volte fredda, a volte rabbiosa, a volte indisponente, infastidita, qualunque sia il tono, continuo a pensare che serva una bella dose di gentilezza sincera per aver conservato la voglia (la forza?) di alzare la cornetta e mostrarsi così, senza il filtro delle buone maniere, senza recite prefabbricate, senza la protezione di una frase fatta, di un "grazie" di circostanza.

(Anonymous)

Quando non è il telefono sono le previsioni del tempo. Sembrano farle compagnia in qualche

modo, rassicurarla come se, in procinto di partire per un grande viaggio, stesse concentrando tutte le sue attenzioni sul selezionare il giorno meteorologicamente più adatto a muovere il primo passo. Non sembra avere fretta, comunque.

Il registratore sul mobile parla con una voce maschile che mi sembra di riconoscere ma… Qualcuno di famoso? Qualcuno che ho sentito parlare in televisione? Facile che mi stia confondendo, da quando è iniziata questa storia le mie capacità mentali, sembrano essersi abbandonate ad uno stato di equilibrio precario e di fragilità tali che mi riesce davvero faticoso affidarmi a loro.
Esco sul portico, ho bisogno di respirare: gli uccelli vanno e vengono, alcuni picchiettano appena un saluto sulle finestre della cucina, altri si fermano qualche secondo su un ramo, riprendono fiato prima di ricominciare le loro piccole evoluzioni aeree. Si chiamano a vicenda, oppure chiamano qualcun altro… Che razza di idea. È colpa di questo rumore sordo che avvolge le mura dall'interno e di tutto questo pensare ovattato di fantasmi, questo rumoroso silenzio finirà per farmi impazzire completamente se non trovo in fretta qualcosa a cui aggrapparmi per mantenere il controllo della situazione.

(Barber, Craig J. *Blue Birds.)*

Gli uccelli. Loro arrivano da fuori e con voci troppo leggere per rimanere intrappolate in questa gabbia piva di sbarre. Nel loro battere d'ali il tempo è scandito così come sono abituato a pensarlo. Basta un passo per raggiungere quel tempo che fuori continua a scorrere noncurante di ciò che accade dentro. Non c'è fretta.
Anche Lauren sente i loro richiami, ne sono certo, hanno tanto da dirle con voce sempre

uguale ma parole sempre diverse.
C’è un tempo di cui la natura non si cura, quello delle speranze a cui noi umani abbiamo bisogno di aggrapparci per immaginare un futuro: nelle sue melodie, è insita l’ineluttabile possibilità di ricominciare, identici ma nuovi come non mai, di riscrivere ogni nota con una grafia differente e rivestirla del suono dell’urgenza di un racconto.

(Stettnes, Louis. *Porch.)*

4.1 Sounds and Noise.

There is a specific melody that goes through the whole novel, a melody which does not interfere with the profound silence created by Lauren's mourning. It is made out of Mr. Tuttle's speech, with his ability to reproduce past conversations between Rey and Lauren, using either his or her voice, perfectly duplicating them, and out of the tape recorder, that was Rey's, that now Laurens carries around everywhere she goes in order to listen to it every time she feels she needs to. Then, there is the telephone, obsessively ringing, trying to call her back to a routine she is not interested in at the moment. Sometimes she answers, other times she does not. Finally, there are the birds: their singing is not direct specifically to her, they change nothing in their behavior which may lead to think they are calling her out but their very being seems to remind Lauren of the existence of an outside world, and this is enough to "help" her somehow.

It is a composition beginning with the *noise*, that mysterious sound which both Rey and Lauren have been hearing throughout the course of their stay in the house. It is a peculiar sound that cannot be explained as the ones that are typical in many old houses, it is something else. It is the noise that gives the start to all the other sounds and voices, it marks the time inside the house even when it is not perceptible, no matter whether Mr. Tuttle was its initial "author" or not, everything seems to come from it and it will go back into it again in the end.

Summer was gone and the heat died down
And Autumn reached for her golden crown
I looked behind as I heard a sigh
But this was the time of no reply.

(Nick Drake – Time of No Reply)

4.2 Your own Soundscape.

Rey lives in the smoke in the air now: this is the only "place" where Lauren is sure she can feel him but she will soon discover that there is a lot more in the air around her which belongs to her husband, something she must listen to very carefully.
In fact, since the moment she comes back, inside the house everything is in silence, even though nothing is soundless. Sounds and noises could be classified not only as "background voices" of the novel but also as real characters of the story.

As readers, we already know that Mr. Tuttle does not embody Rey as a phantom may do with a dead person, but rather he seems to symbolize the possibility to carry on and explore the dialogue between Lauren and Rey, which was interrupted some time before, that morning after breakfast, exactly in that house. We should not forget the fact that, as with the hair in Lauren's mouth, the "noise" (the anticipatory sign of Mr. Tuttle's existence) was already there, hidden somewhere upstairs, whispering its presence for months and then disappearing for a brief moment before Rey's suicide, while waiting for entering the story as an unexpected, demi-human apparition:

> "It was one noise. It was one noise," she said. "And it wasn't in the walls."
> "One noise. Okay. I haven't heard it lately. This is what I wanted to say. It's gone. Finished. End of conversation."
> "True. Except I heard it yesterday, I think."
> "Then it's not gone. Good. I'm happy for you."
> "It's an old house. There's always a noise. But this is different. Not those damn scampering animals we hear at night. Or the house settling. I don't know," she said, not wanting to sound concerned. "Like there's something."
> She read the paper, voice trailing off.
> "Good. I'm glad," he said. "You need the company." (16)

With Rey's death Lauren, losing her other half, has lost her privileged interlocutor also, and even if she never asks herself "why did you do it, Rey?", this does not means she has no questions to ask at all. Precisely, rather than knowing why, she wants to know *what* is happening, how much of the man is left on earth now that he is gone, and how much of herself is left too. She is looking for a new language in order to understand what is going on and to be able to tell this "new" story of hers.

It is important not to forget that Lauren is an artist, a body artist, and the tools and codes that she has always used before to express herself suddenly have become inadequate; this is a sign of a major crisis, not only personal. It is the time to call into question a whole set of beliefs that had shaped her identity as a person and an artist until that moment in order

to shape her new identity: she does not know exactly how to do it, but she will soon realize that Mr. Tuttle is there also to help her dealing with such a wearing task, and maybe this is the reason why he speaks with her voice, right after they have met each other:

> He talked. After a while she began to understand what she was hearing. It took many levels of perception. It took whole social histories of how people listen to what other people say. There was a peculiarity in his voice, a trait developing even as he spoke, that she was able to follow to its source.
> She watched him. He was the same hapless man she'd come upon earlier, without a visible sense of the effect he was having.
> It wasn't outright impersonation but she heard elements of her voice, the clipped delivery, the slight buzz deep in the throat, her pitch, her sound, and how difficult at first, unearthly almost, to detect her own voice coming from someone else, from him and then how deeply disturbing.
> She wasn't sure it was her voice. Then she was.
> By this time he wasn't talking about chairs, lamps or patterns in the carpet. He seemed to be assuming her part in a conversation with someone.
> She tried to understand what she was hearing.
> He gestured as he spoke, moving his hand to the words, and she began to realize she'd said these things to Rey, or things similar. They were routine remarks about a call she'd had from friends who wanted to visit. She remembered, she recalled dimly that she'd been standing at the foot of the stairs and that he'd been on the second floor, Rey had, walking up and down the hall, doing scriptwork. (51-52)

The shock is so big that she needs to go to the window at first, and then to go out of the house, in the rain, to sit inside the car and take a rest from all those words and memories. She needs to clarify the figure and identity of Mr. Tuttle, the reasons why he has been living there with them probably from the beginning but showed up just at that precise moment, and she ends up finding answers about herself instead. From that moment on, the constant dialogue with this evanescent presence helps her to rethink time differently: it is the first step on the path she is going to begin throughout the course of the book.

> Rey's tape recorder lay blinking in the middle of the table.
> She sat and began to speak, describing his appearance. Face and hair and so forth. Wakeful or not. Fairly neat or mostly unkempt. What else? Good, bad or indifferent night. (56)

The tape-recorder was Rey's and now she uses it to record her impressions on Mr. Tuttle and her conversations with him, to listen to them repeatedly, in a strenuous search for a code to decipher his obscure language (every time, at a certain point, he turns it off so she has to turn it on again, an echo of Rey's and her turning on and off the radio in the kitchen that morning during breakfast).

If she manages to communicate with him, to discover who he is, maybe she will manage also to cope with Rey's death and her life:

> "If there is another language you speak," she told him, "say some words."

> "Say some words."
> "Say some words. Doesn't matter if I can't understand."
> "Say some words to say some words."
> "All right. Be a Zen master, you little creep. How do you know what I said to my husband? Where were you? Were you here, somewhere, listening? My voice. It sounded word for word. Tell me about this." (57)

She tries to justify somehow rationally his ability to reproduce her voice and she deceives herself about having found a satisfactory "scientific explanation" but she will soon understand it is not what she needs. Scientific explanations are completely useless when it is Rey's voice she hears from Mr. Tuttle's mouth.

It happens one night, while she is reading him a book about the human body,

> […] and about forty minutes into the session, reading a passage about the embryo, half and inch long, afloat in body fluid, she realized he was talking to her.
> But it was Rey's voice she was hearing. The representation was close, the accent and dragged vowels, the intimate differences, the articulations produced in one vocal apparatus and not another, things she'd known in Rey's voice, and only Rey's, and she kept her head in the book, unable to look at him.
> […] This was not some communication with the dead. It was Rey alive in the course of a talk he'd had with her, in this room, not long after they' come here. (63-64)

In a place where time seems to have stopped, sounds and noises may or may not eternally repeat themselves and words and sentences do the same, such as Mr. Tuttle's apparent gibberish. Acting sometimes like a human-recorder, he has the ability to unfold the voices of the past in front of Lauren's ears and makes them contemporary to the present, because time is a sound, a voice, and not an image.

The phone that keeps ringing represents the world outside the house, that world she has momentarily left outside her life also. She does not pick up the phone at first, then gradually but more or less unwillingly she starts doing it, for no particular reason. That world is not part neither of her present or her future, this is the reason why its voices sound much annoying to Lauren: she does not want to answer because she has no answers to give to those people and she is not really interested in asking questions in that direction.

> She began to pick up the phone. She used a soft voice at first, not quite her own, a twisted tentative other's voice, to say hello, who is this, yes. Word had gotten around that she was here and the calls were from New York, where she lived, and from friends and colleagues in other cities. They called from the cities to tell her they didn't understand why she'd come back here. It was the last place ought to be, alone in a large house on an empty coast […]. (35)

Her friend Mariella, the writer, calls to tell her not to stay alone, "[…] you have to direct yourself out of this thing, not into it. Don't fold up" (39), and everybody knows that her words are so wrong, Lauren, DeLillo and the readers too. Then it is the turn of Isabel,

Rey's first wife, eager to tell Lauren all about her husband, to tell how much she knew him more than her, especially, "Because how long do I know this man and how long do you know him?" (62). The fact is, Lauren does not care about it, really.

These are not the conversations she wants to have, the answering machine seems to have much more to tell her than these people, they have nothing to say to persuade her not to fold up.

Discreet but constant, the birds are the only ones really able to "call" Lauren back to life. They come and go everyday, flying to her window to peck in the feeder she fills for them. She takes care of them, even if they do not do or ask anything special to attract her attention she feels the need to keep "open" some kind of contact with them anyway:

> There were five birds on the feeder and they all faced outward, away from the food and identically still. She watched them. They weren't looking or listening so much as feeling something, intent and sensing.
> All these words are wrong, she thought.
> This was the feeder that hung outside the sunporch and she stood in the mostly white room, by the broad window, waiting for Mr. Tuttle.
> She'd been putting up feeders since her return. This was the basic range of her worldly surround, the breadth of nature that bordered the house. But it feels like she's feeding the birds of Earth, a different seed for each receptacle, sometimes two seeds layered light and dark in a single feeder, and they come and peck, or don't, and the feeders are different as well, cages, ringed cylinders, hanging saucers, mounted trays, and maybe it's a hawk, she doesn't know, that keeps the birds away sometimes, or a jay that mimics a hawk, or they read a message in some event outside the visible spectrum. (55-56)

They represent Lauren's spontaneous connection with time of nature, the time of every living thing. Going with the wind, that natural element which can tell us who we are "on a strong bright day after a storm", they know the language and they know the message to bring: like birds keep flying back and forth, things keep going on, the world has not ended, even without Rey, even without her. Such reality may seem depressing at first but, contrary to what other people's worried and/or anxious phone calls do, these sparrows are simply carrying on their existence as always, and this is enough to prevent Lauren from forgetting that there is an entire outside dimension she must enter again when she will be ready.

In this sense, Mr. Tuttle's presence becomes also closer to the birds', in those moments when his gibberish takes the shape of a chant, able to bring an unknown ease to her body and to bring it outside and into something she cannot define yet, as in the mornings when they sit talking by the fire:

> Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left, am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment. […]
> Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. Leaving has come to me. We all, shall

> all, will all be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me. (78)

It is also because of this singing that Lauren will learn to sense time, her own time also, differently. She will learn both to leave the moment and to *live* the moment, to become transparent to the wind of time that will so blow easily through her body, telling her who she is.

V. Rituals.

Uno, due, tre passi
e sei in bagno.
Lentamente passa la spugna sul tuo corpo
poi sul suo.
Più piano! Potresti fargli male.

Quattro, cinque, sei
in cucina.
Prepara la colazione
il pranzo
la cena.
Tutti i pasti che non consumerai.
Guarda fuori dalla finestra: i passerotti aspettano solo te,
hanno fame.
Hai promesso di prendertene cura,
anche se non ricordi quando
anche se non sai bene come
perché,
né sai a chi tu l'abbia promesso.

Forse sei soltanto tu.

Sette, otto, nove
squilla il telefono,
rispondi.
Bene
Male
… Importa a qualcuno?
Controlla le previsioni.
Controlla che Kotka sia ancora al suo posto dentro lo schermo
ad aspettarti,
in qualche modo.

Fai una giravolta,
verso il registratore:
play
pausa
indietro veloce e play di nuovo.

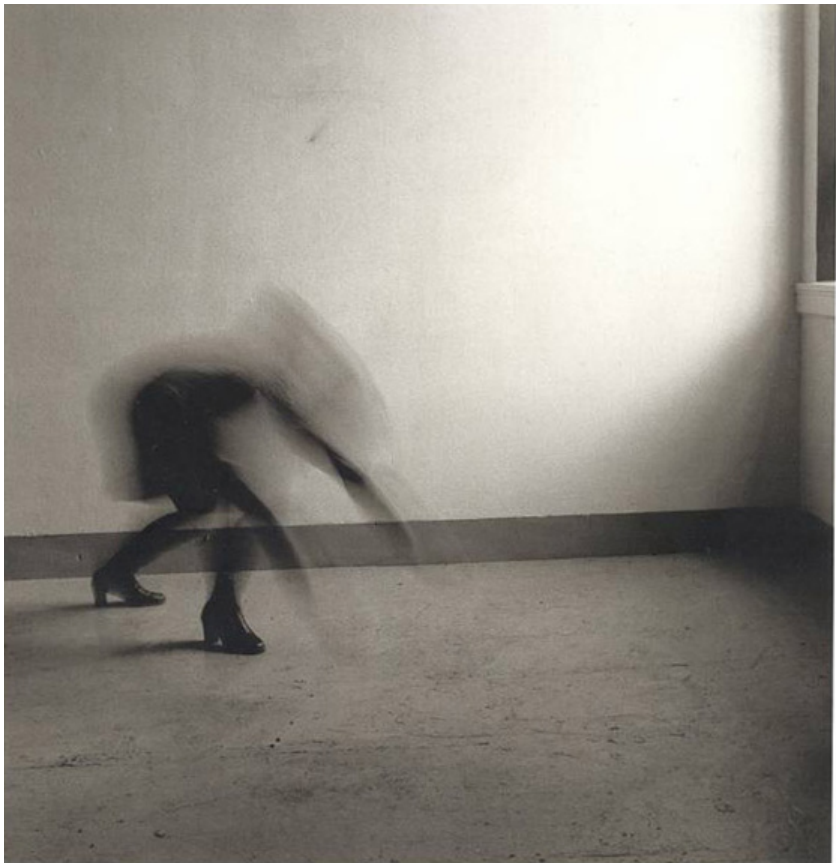
"I want to say something but what."
Parlami.
Parlami, per favore.

Dieci, undici
e sei sul pavimento.
Cadi ora –
piega il collo
guarda in alto poi in basso.
No, guarda dentro invece, più che puoi,
mira al plesso solare, attraverso quel piccolo osso sporgente che ti rende
simile ai passerotti.
È a forma di cerchio, come un anello.
Distendi il braccio, il destro prima
poi l'altro.
Alzati, che aspetti?
Devi cadere ancora
Devi cadere meglio.
Inarca la schiena.
Impara a volare senza staccarti da terra.
Rimani così, non muoverti più.
Ferma l'immagine.

Poi conta di nuovo
dall'inizio, dalla fine.
Ripeti con te.

Fino a che avrai dimenticato ogni significato
Fino a che sarai scomparsa a te stessa
Sarai solo movimento

oppure immobilità
Fino a che non potrai guardare più dentro di così.
Ripeti, finché il vuoto non sarà diventato uno spazio troppo angusto.



(Woodman, Francesca. *Space²*.)

Riempilo con un granello di sabbia
poi due
poi tre.

5.1 Bodywork.

"I want to highlight the position of the *body* – as locus of a "disintegrated" or dispersed self […]" (Jones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. 13). The first thing Lauren really wants to do is to regain posses of her own body, to find the fragments of her own self scattered all around and build something different out of them. Time seems to pass but it cannot be turned back, there is no use in asking why did Rey act so, no use in wondering whether she could have done something to prevent it or if now she can find him somewhere. He is gone, she must find a way to live again, this is the lesson to be learned.

Her body is the point from where to start. Day by day, the smallest gesture follows another and, together with the exercises she performs in the workout room, it takes the form of the simple but dense ritual that, later on, will be partly reproduced in her *Body Time* performance.

I've been out walking
I don't do that much talking these days
These days
These days I seem to think a lot
About the things that I forgot to do.

(Nico – These Days)

5.2 Like a tightrope walker.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

(*Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8*. The Holy Bible, ASV. 1901)

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.
(Eliot, T.S. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.* 1917)

Lauren is making her preparations to go on stage, "The plan was to organize time until she could live again" (36). Being alone is not only her will but above all a deep necessity: there is a lot of work to do on herself that cannot be done the way she used to do it before.

At first, "Her body felt different to her in ways she did not understand. Tight, framed, she didn't know exactly. Slightly foreign and unfamiliar. Different, thinner, didn't matter."(31)

After all in this house she is also reconstructing her identity as an artist: all the movements and exercises that constitute what she calls her "bodywork" and that were so familiar, essential parts of her daily life, are now to be performed like if it were the first time, carefully, slowly, in order to let them be faithful expressions of the self-knowledge she is painfully achieving.

The famous French tightrope walker Philippe Petit, in his book "Trattato di Funambolismo", speaks in this terms about the first time you try a walk on the wire, alone:

> Aggrappato con le mani alla passerella davanti a questo cavo orizzontale sul quale non osa posare il piede, si crederebbe che egli beva pigramente il sole al tramonto.
> Non è così. Egli sta prendendo tempo.
> Misura lo spazio, palpa il vuoto, soppesa le distanze, controlla lo stato degli attrezzi, li predispone. Assapora fremendo quella solitudine: sa che, se ce la fa, sarà funambolo. (Petit, Philippe, 73. *Solo sul filo*.)

In *Body Art. Performing the Subject*, Amelia Jones states that "Body art practices solicit rather than distance the spectator, drawing her or him into the work of art as an intersubjective exchange."(31) and this is also true of our experience as spectators when attending a performance of tightrope walking where, following Paul Auster words about Philippe Petit's work, "The art is the thing itself, a life in its most naked delineation" (*The Art of Hunger*. *Essays, Prefaces, Interviews and The Red Notebook*. 251). It is possible then to consider it a form of body art, an art which needs the same solitude and total commitment we can recognize in Lauren's state.

"Resta chi fa uno spettacolo che è simile ad un gioco / d'azzardo. / Chi è fiero della propria paura." (Petit, 31. *Definizioni*). Even if Lauren does not work physically suspended in space, metaphorically the tightrope walker may well represent her actual condition, as it becomes clear when, close to the end of the novel, she says "Why shouldn't the death of a person you love bring you into lurid ruin?" (122). No more than a few words to convey how much she is "proud" and conscious of the importance of her fear, of her total despair and vulnerability in front of a sorrow so incurable.

Like a tightrope walker, she works not to defeat death but side by side to it, because there is no other way to keep walking, no other way to tell her story. So she starts training:

> Over the days she worked her body hard. There were always states to reach that surpassed previous extremes. She could take a thing to an endurable extreme as measured by breath or strength or length of time or force of will and then resolve to extend the limit.
> I think you are making your own little totalitarian society, Rey told her once, where you are the dictator, absolutely, and also the oppressed people, he said, perhaps admiringly, one artist to another.
> Her bodywork made everything transparent. She saw and thought clearly, which might only mean there was little that needed seeing and not a lot to think about. But maybe it went deeper, the poses she assumed and held for prolonged periods, the gyrate exaggerations, the snake shapes and flower bends, the prayerful spans of systematic breathing, life lived irreducibly as sheer respiration. First breathe, then pant, then gasp. It made her go taut and saucer-eyed, arteries flaring in her neck, these hours of breathing so urgent and absurd that she came out the other end in a kind of pristine light, feeling what it means to be alive.
> She began to work naked in a cold room. She did her crossovers on the bare floor, and her pelvic stretches, which were mockingly erotic and erotic both, and her slow-motion repetitions of everyday gestures, checking the time on your wrist or turning to hail a cab, actions quoted by rote in another conceptual frame, many times over and now slower and over, with your mouth open in astonishment and your eyes shut tight against the intensity of passing awareness. (59-69)

A lot of what will become her next performance, *Body Time*, is already there, in Lauren's slow movements taken to the extreme, in the way she breathes, in the way she checks the time or pretends to hail a cab, such as the female character does repetitively during the piece, most of all in the way she lets herself to be dragged along by time. Yet, there is a lot more that is happening in the house that is an integral part of the performance but cannot be reproduced on stage, a leftover that cannot be discarded but cannot be performed

in front of an auditory either. There will always be a gap that cannot be filled up, again, as Amelia Jones asserts, "The self is inexorably embodied, Body art tells us. […] this does not mean that the performed body/self is ever completely legible or fixed in its effects. Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body/self (or the body-as-subject) and its inability to deliver itself fully (whether to the subject-in-performance herself or himself or to the one who engages with this body)" (Jones, 34).

Feeding the birds, driving to town, watching the video of Kotka, talking to Mr. Tuttle, taking care of him, watching him sleep, answering the phone or not, listening to the tape recorder, these elements are also part of her bodywork, in a slightly different way. The leftover that cannot be reproduced anyway, the story that cannot be told if not by living it, is made out of all these repetitive actions she performs everyday while carrying on with her life.

Lauren's dispersed self, torn apart and fragmented, challenges her body every moment in order to regain full control of it, to learn how to read the same message that the birds can feel in the air. All her movements are part of her awakening, different steps of the same dance, like at the beginning of Chapter 5:

> It was another slow morning, foggy and still, and the phone was ringing. She stood nude in the workout room, bent left, eyes shut, checking the time on her wrist.
> Or sat cross-legged, back straight, breathing dementedly. She blew through her nostrils and made echoey sounds in her throat, visualizing her body lifting and spinning, a rotation with every breath.
> Or went about on all fours, knees hip-distance apart, rump up, feeling the cat-length in her pose, doing the shoulder roll.
> She stood and swung slowly about, eternally checking the time, half her body wheeling with the arc of the left arm, the watch arm, or the body levered by the arm and the head cranking incrementally like the second hand on the missing watch, mouth open and eyes ever tight.
> She heard a plane cross the sky and then the light blinked off and on, the sunlight, the sunray, an event she assembled through closed lids, and she knew the fog had finally lifted. (77-78)

We are close to the end of the book: even though Lauren's eyes are still closed, the fog has finally lifted and, more important, now she can sense it even without looking.

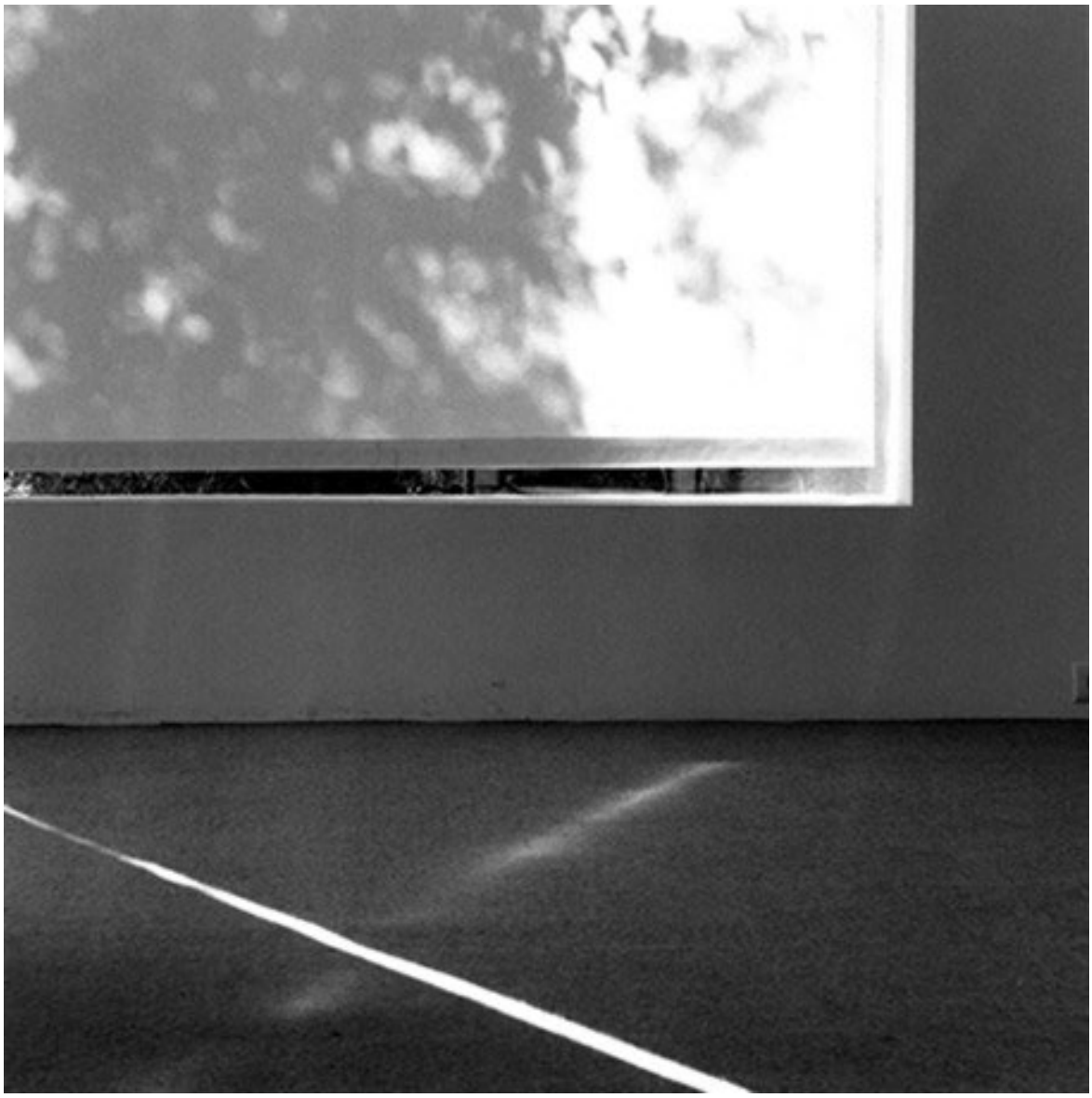
The result of all these careful efforts is *Body Time*, a piece of body art hard to take on: it is so slow, spare and together painful that some of the spectators walks out before the end. But this is what Lauren needed, a performance which approaches the passing of time in a visceral and aching way and nevertheless she is not satisfied yet. After all, she is her own dictator, the one who takes the things to an endurable extreme and, after having done so, wants to extend the limit. It will become slower, it will become sparer and longer, this is just the beginning, there is still a lot of work that can be done.

Again, we may think about the tightrope walker, this time ready to start his first blindfolded death walk, thinking to himself, "la mia ombra era fedele, mi ha portato fin qui, e se per caso il coraggio mi venisse a mancare, getterò alla rinfusa sul filo il cadavere dei

miei ricordi fino a trovarmi nel cuore d'un uragano, per meglio scalare ciò che mi riempie di terrore." (Petit, 83. *La camminata della morte con gli occhi bendati*). Lauren Hartke, contrary to what her friends has told her, has directed herself into her pain and from there she is walking somewhere out of it, taking sometimes a deep breath to rest a little bit. Slowly, carefully, painfully:

> Volevate sentire l'asse del filo. Sta per diventare la vostra spina dorsale. Ogni secondo raspa come una pietra per affilare. Un dolore senza fine si impadronisce del vostro corpo, lo contrae muscolo dopo muscolo. Se si resiste al limite dell'insopportabile, il supplizio si estende alle ossa, che sembrano sul punto di spezzarsi lungo il filo.
>
> Sarete uno scheletro in equilibrio su una lama. (Petit, 78. Il riposo del funambolo)

VI. “This final morning”.



(Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Texas Gallery.*)

In cucina non ero mai entrato prima. Oggi però Lauren non c’è, non nel modo in cui mi sono abituato a pensarla, non con la sua presente assenza: oggi Lauren non è fisicamente in casa ed è già passato troppo tempo perché possa continuare ad ingannare me stesso con il pensiero che sì, non c’è da preoccuparsi, forse è semplicemente uscita a fare la spesa in città. Cazzate, Lauren non esce mai da questa casa, nemmeno quando è fuori. È sparita, ed io sto iniziando a spazientirmi. Se n’è andata e non riesco a fare a meno di sentirmi ingannato.
Possibile che non abbia lasciato nulla per me?

Inizio a vagare per la casa, con un'invadenza che non mi appartiene, indiscreto e maldestro per il nervoso, apro cassetti ed ante di armadi alla ricerca di una cosa qualsiasi, qualcosa che possa assomigliare ad un messaggio destinato a me solo. Sono tentato di buttare all'aria cuscini e lenzuola n preda all'insofferenza ed alla frustrazione ma riesco a trattenermi, in qualche modo.
Io ti rispetto molto, Lauren.

Inasprito in viso da rabbia e tristezza, arrivo finalmente in cucina. Il mio posto è la prima sedia che mi capita a portata di mano.
Mi guardo intorno: in questa stanza sembra non essere entrato nessuno da mesi, la polvere, il disordine e lo stato della carta da parati parlano chiaro. Due cose sono stranamente pulite, il lavandino sotto la finestra che ho davanti ed uno specchio alla mia sinistra. L'altro specchio più piccolo sembra accecato da troppa luce, questo, al contrario, è limpido tanto che non sono nemmeno sicuro di riconoscervi la stanza che mi ospita, è come guardare una finestra affacciata su un'altra vita piuttosto. Da qualche altra parte.
Le foto attaccate tutt'intorno sono qui invece, autoritratti di specchi con persona. Perché non riesco a riconoscere i lineamenti della figura che li tiene tra le mani? Perché, dopo tanti sforzi, sono ancora così tante le storie che non so?
Dopo tutto questo tempo, ancora non riconosco niente come mio in questa casa, gli oggetti non mi parlano come vorrei ed ho le tasche piene di domande ma nessuna risposta.

Noi spettatori non impariamo mai ad accettare il nostro posto, sempre a pretendere quello che non possiamo avere, quello che non serve, quello che non ci è dato sapere.
Mi accendo una sigaretta, la rigiro tra l'indice ed il medio, tamburellando con le unghie sul tavolo mentre un raggio di luce sottilissimo mi trafigge la mano per andare a posarsi sul tavolo. Viene dalla porta che dà sul giardino: meccanicamente, lo seguo con gli occhi tra una boccata di fumo a l'altra, fino ad un'alta tazza per la colazione dentro la quale trovano spazio due tulipani freschi, come appena colti.
Lauren non avrebbe sprecato tempo a chiedersi perché.

(Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Tulip.*)

Sono di un colore giallo pallido, il primo vero colore che sono sicuro di riconoscere qui dentro, e sono intrecciati tra di loro. No, non è vero, la vista mi inganna, non sono affatto intrecciati: sono soltanto vicini, così vicini che i petali si sfiorano leggermente e l'illusione dell'intreccio è data dalle curvature dei lunghi gambi, armonicamente alternate l'un l'altra. Come se stessero provando a diventare una pianta sola.

Come se lo fossero stati, ed una mano delicata ma inopportuna avesse deliberatamente deciso di scioglierli ma avesse dimenticato di completare la brutale separazione. L'ombra della sera che avanza sulla parete inizia ad avvolgerli lentamente, senza oscurarli.

6.1 Last comes the first.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Merriam-Webster Online, 2013) reports the following pronunciation for the word "morning": \ ˈmɔːr-nɪŋ \. Interestingly enough, this is the same pronunciation reported for the word "mourning" also, thus immediately introducing the beginning of a process that cannot be possibly altered, the utmost sorrow that will arise after that precise moment. What we are about to read not only is the account of Rey's and Lauren's final breakfast together but it is also the story of an event impossible to reverse, a sorrow that cannot be healed anyway.

As Joseph Dewey writes,

> Nothing much happens – the couple takes turn switching on and off the radio, Rey smokes a cigarette with his coffee and newspaper, he spreads a fig on his toast, Lauren momentarily speculates why she uses a dented kettle despite having bought a new one, she studies the birds that gather at the feeder, Rey loses his keys. We share and ordinary breakfast on an ordinary Sunday morning, but one in which the two characters, both artists – one failed and inching toward suicide, the other at the top of her craft – struggle awkwardly against the heavy press of an unprocessed world that is so stubbornly ordinary. It is the morning after a heavy storm, the natural world rinsed clean and apparently primed to reveal itself. (133-134)

Here we are then, immersed in a non-ordinary day in disguise, helplessly collecting the hints of something terrible that is about to happen but incapable of doing anything to alert Lauren about it. Here comes the first chapter, the last day, the ultimate pain.

Trouble move away,
I have seen your face
And it's too much for me today.
(Cat Stevens – Trouble)

6.2 This final mo(u)rning.

> Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments, and you stop to glance at a spider pressed to its web. There is a quickness of light and a sense of things outlined precisely and streaks of running luster on the bay. You know more surely who you are on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. The wind makes a sound in the pines and the world comes into being, irreversibly, and the spider rides the wind-swayed web.
>
> It happened this final morning that they were here at the same time, in the kitchen, and they shambled past each other to get things out of cabinets and drawers and then waited one for the other by the sink or fridge, still a little puddle in dream melt, and she ran tap water over the blueberries bunched in her hand and closed her eyes to breath the savor rising. (3-4)

A novel opening with two beginnings: it is only the first page and yet there is something uncomfortable in what we are reading. We have the feeling that the two initial paragraphs should be read somehow simultaneously, a man's voice and a woman's maybe, neither of the two being dominant on the other, something that cannot be really done in our private experience of individual reading. We need someone else maybe but we also know we must stay alone: just let us walk on carrying this lack of completeness with us, this hole in our perception, and let us see where it will lead us.

After finishing reading the whole book, we may want to go back to this initial chapter and discover how past and present are coincident since the beginning: DeLillo already told us everything, before we could even realize it.

In the second paragraph, verbs are in the past while adjectives indicate some kind of bond with the present tense instead ("*this* final morning", "*here*"). Are the beginning and the end of the novel tied up together by means of these words also?

Following such a circular interpretation of time in the novel, we may suspect of being now watching not the "real" breakfast scene at the beginning of the novel, but Lauren, in Chapter 7, as she enters the house again after her performance in Boston, after having extended the lease, and as she recalls the events of that morning in that same place, months before, and later imagining to have the power to change the story somehow:

> Is reality too powerful for you?
> Take the risk. Believe what you see and hear. It's the pulse of every secret intimation you've ever felt around the edges of your life.
> There are two real bodies in a room. This is how she feels them, in the silvered heart of the half second it takes to edge around the doorpost, with hands that touch and rubs and mouths that open slowly. His cock is rising in her slack pink fist. Their mouths are ajar for tongues, nipples, fingers, whatever projection of flesh, and for whispers of was and is, and their eyes come open into the soul of the other.
> She stopped at the edge of the doorway, aware of the look on her face.
> They will already have slept and wakened and gone down to breakfast, where they muddle

> through their separate routines, pouring the milk and shaking the juice, a blue jay watching from the feeder, and she sniffs the granules in the soya box. It is the simplest thing in the world when she goes out to his car and takes his car keys and hides them, hammers them, beats them, eats them, buries them in the bone soil on a strong bright day in late summer, after a roaring storm.
> But before she stepped into the room, she could feel the look on her face. She knew this look, a frieze of false anticipation. (130-131)

Verbs follow one another, desperately, faster, helplessly trying to overcome time. There is nothing that can be done at this point, everything has already taken place in the first chapter and no matter how hard she tries, even if she does not open the bedroom door, everything will always be exactly the same.

There are two real bodies in the kitchen, Rey and Lauren, "at the same time", which does not happen very often and will happen no more. Their world is about to disappear abruptly, irreversibly, but never completely, as for the feeling of the color blue of Lauren's jeans, as when Roland Barthes talks about the concept of "fade-out" as related to a love-relationship, in his *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*:

> 1. In the text, the fade-out of voices is a good thing; the voices of the narrative come, go, disappear, overlap; we do not know who is speaking; the text speaks, that is all: no more image, nothing but language. But the other is not a text, the other is an image, single and coalescent; if the voice is lost, it is the entire image which vanishes (love is monologic, maniacal; the text is heterologic, perverse). The other's fade-out, when it occurs, makes me anxious because it seems without cause and without conclusion. Like a kind of melancholy mirage, the other withdraws into infinity and I wear myself out trying to get there.
> (When this garment was at the height of fashion, an American firm advertised the washed-out blue of its jeans by claiming: *"it fades and fades and fades."* The loved being, in the same way, endlessly withdraws and pales: a feeling of madness, purer than if this madness were violent.) (112)

And indeed Rey is slowly slipping away right this morning, the sound of his voice as the evidence of his fading more and more. His are the first directly spoken words of the novel, when he tells Lauren "I want to say something but what." (4). It is the end, I am going to blow my head off today, I'm going to die: you do not say such words to anybody, especially to the people you love, especially to your wife. But, again, everything is already here, because it will happen for sure, it cannot be prevented, it is so painfully clear when we look at Rey's words now:

> "Why shave at all? There must be a reason," he said. "I want God to see my face." (11)

And God will see it right that day, just the time to finish breakfast.

> "I was not blaming. Who turned it on, who turned it off [the radio]. Someone's a little edgy this morning. I'm the one, what do I say, who should be defensive. Not the young woman who eats and sleeps and lives forever."
> "What? Hey, Rey. Shut up."

> He bit off the stem and tossed it toward the sink. Then he split the fig open with his thumbnails and took the spoon out of her hand and licked it off and used it to scoop a measure of claret flesh out of the gaping fig skin. He dropped this stuff on his toast – the flesh, the mash, the pulp – and then spread it with the bottom of the spoon, blood-buttery swirls that popped with seedlife.
>
> "I'm the one to be touchy in the morning. I'm the one to moan. The terror of another ordinary day," he said slyly. "You don't know this yet."
>
> "Give us all a break," she told him.
>
> She leaned forward, he extended the bread. There were crows in the trees near the house, taking up a raucous call. (12)

The crows and Rey know it is a terror that will not last long: it is the last ordinary day of his life and, she will soon know too, of hers.

> "You said something, I don't know. The house"
> "It's not interesting. Forget it."
> "I don't want to forget it."
> "It's not interesting. Let me put it in another way. It's boring."
> "Tell me anyway."
> "It's too early. It's an effort. It's boring." (14)

Or else it is already too late. And it is boring to say because it would be a useless and depressing effort that would change nothing.

> She said, "The noise."
>
> He looked at her. He looked. Then he gave her the great smile, the gold teeth in the great olive-dark face. She hadn't seen this in a while, the amplified smile, Rey emergent, his eyes clear and lit, deep lines etched about his mouth.
>
> "The noises in the walls. Yes. You've read my mind."
>
> "It was one noise. It was one noise," she said, "And it wasn't in the walls."
>
> "One noise. Okay. I haven't heard it lately. This is what I wanted to say. It's gone. Finished. End of conversation."
>
> "True. Except I heard it yesterday, I think."
>
> "Then it's not gone. Good. I'm happy for you."
>
> "It's an old house. There's always a noise. But this is different. Not those damn scampering animals we hear at night. Or the house settling. I don't know," she said, not wanting to sound concerned. "Like there's something."
>
> She read the paper, voice trailing off.
>
> "Good. I'm glad," he said. "You need the company." (16)

It is like he is already gone, of course she needs every possible "company": she will be alone and she will not take care of her pain. And the great smile, what else? Such a relief that she has understood nothing.

Rey is going to commit suicide and everybody is aware of it, from the author to the readers, but Lauren is not.

Voices and thoughts are misleading, DeLillo seems to say, the true meaning is to be found in what is physical, corporeal, in the shape of words, in odors and tastes, in birds' movements, in sounds and noises, as when Lauren

> took a bit of cereal and forgot to taste it. She lost the taste somewhere between the time she put the food in her mouth and the regretful second she swallowed it.
> He put down the juice glass. He took the pack out of his shirt and lit up a cigarette, the cigarette he'd been smoking with his coffee since he was twelve years old, he'd told her, and he let the match burn down a bit before he shook it out in meditative slow motion and put it at the edge of his plate.
> It was agreeable to her, the smell of tobacco. It was part of her knowledge of his body. It was the aura of the man, a residue of smoke and unbroken habit, a dimension in the night, and she lapped it off the curled gray hairs on his chest and tasted it in his mouth. It was who he was in the dark, cigarettes and mumbled sleep and a hundred other things nameable or not. (17)

As Philip Nel notes, "DeLillo recognizes that these sharp words never quite tell us the truth, but he values their ability to stimulate the imagination, creating the illusion of authenticity." ("Return to Form: The Modernist Poetics of *The Body Artist*." 741). We may say then that *The Body Artist* takes on the difficult task of dealing with the "hundred of other things" which cannot be named, with a story which cannot be told with the words we commonly use, the same way those words cannot really reproduce reality when reality includes the traumatic time of mourning and loss.

The artist, represented by Lauren (and, indirectly, by DeLillo), fails in his/her belief that she/he has a sort of "special" ability to anticipate and detect the hidden meanings of the world and therefore to have the role to cast light on them, to cure the pain rather than to make it his/hers. Therefore, this can be one of the reasons why Lauren fails to recognize the calls of Rey's desperate decision: she is too busy taking care of what she defines her own "hyper-preparedness" about birds, odors, flavors, newspaper's stories. She keeps talking to the voice in her head and completely misses the true meaning of the signs all around her that morning.

Thus, the communication between the couple, defined by the continuous presence of "What", appears to be somehow disjointed from the start, like if the two were talking one to the other but in different spaces, in different times, their images just placed close together by chance, their lives already separated: Lauren stands still inside the house, while Rey gradually disappears, driving to New York, where his suicide will take place.

The knowledge she thinks to have of her husband has become useless now, even deceptive, and it does not allow her to interpret his words correctly. Therefore when he suddenly remembers what he wanted to say but does not utter it, she interprets his behavior as she had always done before that day:

> Now that he'd remembered what he meant to tell her, he seemed to lose interest. She didn't have to see his face to know this. It was in the air. It was in the pause that trailed from his remark of eight, ten, twelve seconds ago. Something insignificant. He would take it as a kind of self-diminishment, bringing up a matter so trivial. (6)

Wrong: there is nothing insignificant in the air, only something unbearable. Look at

him instead, look and you will see. Or not.

Being an artist is not enough to permit Lauren to share Rey's inner world, not this time, not anymore. Maybe even this interpretation is wrong, maybe Rey is really talking about the noise in the wall, maybe his remarks are really part of his normal way of speaking but when he says "About the house. This is what it is, […] Something I meant to tell you", when we re-read these words, there is an echo of hopelessness which seems to come directly from Mr. Tuttle mouth later on and seems to be speaking to us rather than to Lauren: "I know how much this house. Alone by the sea" (48).

It is part of the special privilege of the reader, to have the power to turn back time in order to get a deeper awareness, to unveil hidden symbols and use them to imagine new meanings for past actions and words: I'm going to leave you here, in this house, alone by the sea, Rey might have thought, again, or not. We are the spectators in this performance, we have the choice to decide whether all these words mean something else or not. The thin hair that puts past, present, and future on the same plane is struck in our mouth from the beginning, is part of our own body, even when we, together with Lauren, perceive it as something external and intrusive.

6.3 Something you meant to tell yourself.

The initial paragraphs of four of the nine sections of the novel are told by an external, or internal, narrative voice. Interestingly enough, such voice speaks only in the first two and in the last two chapters and they also seem somehow to speak to each other, the first to the second and the sixth to the seventh.

Chapter 1 and 2 introduce the passage from a "safe" self-awareness to a moment of obscured perception of the world. It could have not been differently, of course, considering that in the middle of the two chapters DeLillo offers us the obituary regarding Rey's suicide. Lauren's firm certainties about how she sees the things around her are gradually falling into pieces:

> 1. Time seems to pass. The world happens, unrolling into moments, and you stop to glance at a spider pressed to its web. There is a quickness of light and a sense of things outlined precisely and streaks of running luster on the bay. You know more surely who you are on a strong bright day after a storm when the smallest falling leaf is stabbed with self-awareness. The wind makes a sound in the pines and the world comes into being, irreversibly, and the spider rides the wind-swayed web. (3)

> 2. It's a hazy white day and the highway lifts to a drained sky. There are four northbound lanes and you are driving in the third lane and there are cars ahead and behind and to both sides, although not too many and not too close. When you reach the top of the incline, something happens and the cars begin to move unhurriedly now, seemingly self-propelled, coasting smoothly on the level surface. Everything is slow and hazy and drained and it all happens around the word *seem*. All the cars including yours seem to flow in dissociated motion, giving the impression of or presenting the appearance of, and the highway runs in a white hum.
>
> Then the mood passes. The noise and rush and blur are back and you slide into your life again, feeling the painful weight in your chest. (29)

Time seems to pass and the world happens but until the moment when everything happens "around the world *seem"*, until the fog comes down to cover your life as you used to know it, you can lighten your heart with the thought of a bright self-awareness. Yet this world comes into being irreversibly and the time will come when this "irreversibly" will identify the painful weight you must carry yourself.

At the end of Chapter 2 Lauren finds Mr. Tuttle sitting on the bed in a room upstairs, and he will disappear in Chapter 6.

When you drop something and you think you can get it back but it is not there, when you miss something and it is forever. It does not matter whether it is "something insignificant" or not: you thought you had some kind of control over it but you were wrong, your mind has deceived your senses:

> 6. You stand at the table shuffling papers and you drop something. Only you don't know it.

> It takes a second or two before you know it and even then you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body. But once you know you've dropped something, you hear hit the floor, belatedly. The sound makes its way through an immense web of distances. You hear the thing fall and know what it is at the same time, more or less, and it's a paperclip. You know this from the sound it makes when it hits the floor and from the retrieved memory of the drop itself, the thing falling from your hand or slipping off the edge of the page to which it was clipped. It slipped off the edge of the page. Now that you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, or sort of see it maybe, or something else. The paperclip hits the floor with and end-to-end bounce, faint and weightless, a sound for which there is no imitative word, the sound of a paperclip falling, but when you bend to pick it up, it isn't there. (95-96)

When Lauren comes back home from town she is sure to find Mr. Tuttle in the small bedroom upstairs, "But when he wasn't there she knew he wouldn't be, it that makes sense. A few strides before she reached the doorway she knew he wouldn't be and then he wasn't. She'd known it all along. She was left to wander the halls, missing him. He was gone so completely there was nothing left […]" (103). Like the paperclip you believed to have heard falling down, he "isn't there", maybe he was there, maybe he will be, maybe you must simply work out a way to live with the fact that you will probably never know it.

Something different happens when you mistake "something insignificant" for something terrible instead: even if you know that there is nothing bad you are going to face, you cannot help the feelings of "terror and pity" penetrating your whole body. The image of the decapitated squirrel, so unreal, keeps haunting your mind a little more:

> 7. The dead squirrel you see in the driveway, dead and decapitated, turns out to be a strip of curled burlap, but you look at it, you walk past it, even so, with a mixed tinge of terror and pity. (117)

These last words resound in our minds telling us that it could not be otherwise: Lauren is reaching the moment of catharsis of her personal tragedy and, as Aristotle taught us (Aristotele, *Poetica*, 1449b25-30), such moment can be accomplished only by means of pity and terror. The emotional release of these two feelings, in fact, is the only way to re-establish a new order inside yourself, based on a regained self-awareness.

"Take the risk. Believe what you see and hear" (130); the novel is coming to its end, but Lauren's new awareness has just started to fit in her body, to make it truly hers again: she sits in front of the large bedroom door, scared and miserable, but she manages to stand up. She is finally able to perform "something insignificant" like entering a room she already knows how it will look like to face emptiness and light as never before. Only now she can open the window and feel the sea tang on her face, and let time go.

Conclusions: Lost personae, empty spaces.

> La cripta: un'organizzazione topica in vista di conservare
> (di *conservare-nascosto*) un po' di morto-vivente.
>
> L'Io: guardiano di cimitero. La cripta è inclusa in lui stesso,
> ma alla stregua di un luogo estraneo, vietato, escluso.
> Di cui egli è, sì, il guardiano, ma non il proprietario.
>
> (Derrida, Jacques. *La scrittura e la differenza*)

Opening the window on the outside world, Lauren eventually comes to know who she is, and her "new" self includes the *crypt* she will carry inside from now on. At the beginning, she did not know what to do, the rational devices she had tried to enact immediately proved unsuccessful: "the world was lost inside her" (36). Then, as time goes by, she gradually learns that she will always be inhabited by a foreign body, a foreign place which belongs to her only but that she cannot own:

> Spazio allogeno incluso nel Soggetto, incorporato e non introiettato, vale a dire presente nell'Io ma sottratto al metabolismo dell'inconscio, inclusivo non tanto del rimosso quanto dei "resti" non assimilabili all'elaborazione inconscia (resti paragonabili alle pietre, ai calcoli, presenti nell'organismo somatico), la cripta si identifica, sostanzialmente, come un esterno, un'esteriorità (inassimilabile, irrepressibile), racchiusa in un'interiorità, nell'interiorità dell'Io, di cui costituisce, all'interno, lo spazio e il "resto" di un'eterogeneità che resterà sempre tale. Questo spazio rappresenta il luogo più fondo, più interno del Soggetto, su cui egli non ha più presa: *non solo a livello cosciente ma nemmeno a livello inconscio.* (Agosti, 57-58)

How can you communicate something that is located so much in depth inside your own self that you yourself cannot touch it? Yet, it is something you cannot do without either: it shapes the very essence of your being and so it tells you who you are. As Joseph Dewey writes: "Lauren is finally alone and at last alive – to borrow from her earlier diagnosis, she is Lauren, but now more and more" (138), but in her case being alive is not painless.

Such pain has left an indelible mark on her life, a mark that no piece of art will ever be able to reproduce or represent. Perhaps thinking that somehow she is in control of it, Lauren tries to convey the many-sided reality of her sorrow with the performance *Body Time,* but she fails. She is not satisfied with what she has done: time goes by too fast, there is always something missing, a metaphor which could have been improved, a detail which could have been even more bare. She has not obtained what she wanted from her work and she must accept the fact that she will probably never obtain it: her pain lives where the

utmost unnamable sufferings lie, there is nothing to convey to anyone unless one has already been there.

The novel has ended, but Lauren remains up there, far from reach. As readers, each effort we perform in the attempt to get close to her and empathize with her tragedy, each time we have the impression of having finally grasped "something", this immediately turns out to have been just an illusion, our strains frustrated over and over. We turn back the pages, we read and re-read, but the wall which separates Lauren from us still remains there, transparent but thick at the same time.

Thus, there is no need for being reassured by either religious or spiritual explanations, no need for ghosts to talk to for the wishful thinking of some place/moment in which our questions will be answered. DeLillo does not try to do what cannot be done, he is the first to acknowledge to have no appropriate words to place us readers close to her, there is no use in trying to fill up the chasm between Lauren and "the rest of the world". Instead, he works on that wall, he makes it even thicker, so thick that we can barely bear it: the repetitions, the slow passing of time, the apparently insignificant details.

The thicker the wall, the deeper the chasm, the more we feel that, on the other side, the word "alone" takes a meaning so absolute that it must not be altered anyway. It is at that point that we get the closest we are allowed to be to the woman's life: when we feel the unbearable lightness of the impossibility to share another person's sorrow fully, and it is so huge and devastating that just then we can realize how much heavier "being her" must be. No more an interference, her solitude fills that empty space born inside of her and brightens it by letting a little light enter from a window which to us remains closed.

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