SpectacularSpectacular!: *Underworld* and the Production of Terror

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Contents

The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of spectacle upon us.
—Jean Baudrillard

"In times of terror," Walter Benjamin writes in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," "everyone is something of a conspirator" (40). Implicit in this statement is a tension between the prevailing understanding of the terror act as singular event effected in and upon the public sphere-terror as something that is done *to* you/us-and the less common notion that terror is a recurring and collective cultural production: terror as something that we enact upon ourselves. The terror act can arguably exist without victims; it cannot, however, exist without spectators. To that end, Benjamin suggests, our very awareness of the terror act bespeaks a sort of complicity.

This nexus of pressures-the individual and the collective, the singular and the recurrent, the spectator and the spectacle-is omnipresent in Don DeLillo's *Underworld,* and is particularly exemplified by the juxtaposition of the (untelevised) Bobby Thomson home run and the (endlessly televised) terror act of the Texas Highway Killer. Although critics have commented on the role of violence and the terrorism in DeLillo's fiction, there has been comparatively little attention paid to the production and reification of spectacularized terror in *Underworld.* Glen Scott Allen has argued that terrorism, in DeLillo, "seems an integral component of the postmodern condition," noting that it "seems to have evolved beyond the need of human agency, to have seeped into the texture of contemporary life" (par. 2). Similarly, Margaret Scanlan asserts that terror "floats across the deceptively shiny surfaces of Don DeLillo's fiction, turning the reassuring rituals of even suburban life ... into desperate acts" (19). The ubiquity and banality of terror is a common motif (in both DeLillo and DeLillo criticism), and is typically counterposed with what Allen calls an "almost romantic return to the sovereign powers of the individual" (par. 2). Peter Baker, to that end, takes note of the "usual pairing [that] places terror in a conceptual binary with reason or enlightenment" (par. 20), and Jeremy Green writes that DeLillo's "image of a passive, victimized (collective) subject" only serves to "offer us the reassurance that the victim is someone else" (575). Common to each of these critiques is the assumption that the terror act is always at a sort of cultural and discursive distance, beyond "human agency," outside of "reason or enlightenment," brought about by and to "someone else."

While this may be true, it is also somewhat limited. Acts of terror, needless to say, are emphatically different from (for example) acts of murder. The means and ends of murder are, of course, murder. The means and ends of terror, however, are considerably more nebulous: terrorism, simply, exists to terrify. In this sense, Green is right to emphasize the "victimized (collective) subject." As such, the acme of the terror act is its spectacularization, enabling its transition from localized tragedy to a collectivized spectacle of victimization.[1] The very idea of spectacularized terror, though, raises a number of significant questions, to wit: How is the terror act implicated in the

[1] Mark Osteen's idea of "spectacular authorship" (borrowed from Jennifer Wicke [55–68] by way of P.T. Barnum) seems apposite here. It is, ho writes, "the power to use photographic or televised images

televisual image and the televisual image in the terror act? In what way does the spectacularization of the terror act alter its social and emotional consequence? Does the public production of the terror act negate or promote a sense of community? Finally, what is the association between the spectacularized terror act and the experience of being-in-history?

The act of terror functions like Benjamin's angel of history, signifying the past in the form of a singular catastrophe and propelling us unswervingly toward the future. And yet terror, DeLillo seems to suggest, is stripped of its very significance, its singularity, by its spectacularization and re-production as a televisual image; it is reconstructed as both farcical tragedy and tragic farce precisely *because* it becomes an act devoid of historical meaning. For DeLillo, then, both the terror act and the home run exist in a tenuous relationship with the historical moment. The home run, the novel indicates, is "preserved and unique" because it "happened decades ago when things were not replayed and worn out" (98), whereas the videotape of the killer is continually replayed and rewatched, becoming "deader and colder and more relentless" (160) with each viewing. In *The Society of the Spectacle,* Guy Debord writes that "[o]nce society has lost the community that myth was formerly able to ensure, it must inevitably lose all the reference points of a truly common language until such time as the divided character of an inactive community is superceded by the inauguration of a real historical community" (132). The spectacularization of the terror act, I will argue, has the paradoxical effect of *restoring* that "common language"; the endlessly televised moment of terror, with all its absence of singularity, in the end does not destroy, but rather recreates, the communitarian historical consciousness.

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The terms "terrorist" and "terrorism" are relatively recent. Walter Laqueur, in *A History of Terrorism,* writes that "terrorism" was first formally defined in a 1798 supplement to the Dictionnaire of the Académie Fran?aise as a "*systéme*" or *"régime de la terreur,"* although "the Jacobins had on occasion used the term when speaking and writing about themselves in a positive sense" nine years earlier (6). Around 1793–1794, "terrorism" was generally synonymous with "reign of terror," and did not take long to become exported to Britain, where Edmund Burke denounced the "thousands of those Hell hounds called Terrorists... let loose on the people" (qtd. in Cooper 9). Modem, or post-1960s terrorism, Laqueur writes, is roughly equivalent to "urban terrorism," and its practitioners generally make use of "left-wing phraseology in their appeals and manifestoes," voicing their opposition to "the 'system,' the 'establishment'" (176).[2]

to manufacture, as if by magic, spectacular events that profoundly shape public consciousness" (644). The conflation between the singular "consciousness" of the individual television viewer and the collective "public consciousness" constructed by the spectacle speaks, I think, to the aggregational qualities of the spectacularized terror act. For more, see also Ryan Simmons's article on *Mao II* and the Unabomber.

[2] For additional information on terrorism and the history of terror, see also David E. Long's *The Anatomy of Terrorism,* Laqueur's *The New Terrorism*, or Livingston's *The Terrorism Spectacle.*

These brief notes on terrorism, however limited, suggest at least two things about the construction of terror. First, terror must be systematized. (Hence *terrorism.)* It is inextricable from "*régimes*," from "*systéme*sterrorism is, in short, collectively produced. It must exist as a singular or interlocking series of events that combine to create a network of social meaning. The terror act, as such, is a floating signifier; it must be widely *interpreted* as terrorism in order to *function* as terrorism.

Second, terrorism has historically been understood to be a causative act, one that is either pro- or reactive. We assume it is intended to promote, as Laqueur writes, a "left-wing" ideology, or to protest against "the 'establishment.'" This is a line of thinking common to virtually all the literature on terrorism: terrorism is a response to injustice; it is a performance intended to *do* something. Acts of terror, however, are inseparable from acts of hermeneutics. That is to say, there is nothing inherent in any given act of terror to make it intrinsically pro- or reactive, left- or right-wing; to assume that the terror act necessarily means or will achieve something is to indulge what I call the causative fallacy. Sociopolitical denotation must be *assigned* to the terror act: and often, paradoxically, by both the terrorized and the terrorist, resulting in a negational or antagonymic definition. Ultimately, because of the epistemological slippage inherent to the terror act, to even view an act of terrorism is, by necessity, to think interpretatively. It is because of this that Steven Livingston can argue that "what is understood as terrorism ... [has] more to do with the geopolitical calculations of the moment and far less to do with any assiduously followed conceptualization of terrorism" (13). Terrorism, more so than other acts of politics or violence, is ambiguously bound to the historical moment; it is always in the process of definition and redefinition. The media, unsurprisingly, has increasingly come to be the preeminent definer and interpreter of terror, and yet this very act of definition and interpretation is, by extension, itself a sort of terrorism. Indeed, as Laqueur argues, "it is not the magnitude of the terrorist operation that counts but the publicity" (109). Or, put another way, the aura of publicity that surrounds any given act of terror in fact creates its magnitude. To that end, Herbert Gans writes that news "sources [e.g., terrorists], journalists, and audience coexist in a system" (in Gitlin 251). This "system," then, is a cultural production, a spectacle that, to return to Debord, is "both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something *added* to the real world ... it is the very heart of society's real unreality" (Debord 13).

The terror act, as such, seems to exist in a tenuous relationship with "society's real unreality." Slavoj Zizek, in his recent book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!,* elaborates on the relationship between the real, the semblance, and the terror act:

> [I]s not so-called fundamentalist terror also an expression of the passion for the Real? ... Is not its goal also to awaken us, Western citizens, from our numbness, from immersion to our everyday ideological universe? ... [This is] the fundamental paradox of the 'passion for the Real': it culminates in its apparent opposite, in a *theatrical spectacle*-from the Stalinist show trials

> to spectacular terrorist acts. If, then, the passion for the Real ends up in the pure semblance of the spectacular *effect of the Real,* then, in an exact inversion, the 'postmodern' passion for the semblance ends up in a violent return to the passion for the Real. (9–10)

Here, Zizek makes clear terrorism's impossibility of causation. If one reads the terror act as indicative of the *terrorists '* "passion for the Real," then one must also read it as a de facto failure, for it indeed culminates in a "theatrical spectacle." If, conversely, one assumes that the terror act will cause the *victims* to acquire a "passion for the Real," then the terror act is also necessarily a failure, for again, it only allows for the "effect of the Real." The terror act cannot properly *do* anything; indeed, to even attempt to designate it a 'success' or 'failure' is to fall prey to the causative fallacy.

DeLillo's figure of terror in *Underworld,* the Texas Highway Killer, serves to underscore this concept. He kills seemingly without interest or ideology, suggesting the arbitrariness and absence of causation inherent in all acts of terror: he is, then, terror for terror's sake. His *modus operandi* is to execute random strangers while driving, firing from his own car in an adjacent lane: simply put, "a man's driving along in his car, someone shoots him dead" (DeLillo 179). The precise number of his victims-either ten or eleven-is, the narrator notes, "uncertain because the police believe that one of the shootings may have been a copycat crime" (159). Given this, the immediate implications for our understandings of the terror act are twofold. First, there is the disruption of the mundane. Acts of terror must breach the comfort of the commonplace, and the Texas Highway Killer functions as a figure of terror precisely because he intrudes on the mundanity of cars and commutes and cupholders. If one were to subtract the automobile from this terrorist production (and substitute, say, boats or horses), one would not have terrorism, per se (although the moral violation would be unchanged), but something altogether different. The terror act, as such, requires the trappings of normality (and arguably urbanity) in order to perform as terrorism. Second, the emphasis on the "copycat crime" articulates the preeminence of the terror act itself, as opposed to the immediate effects of the act (in this instance, murder). That is to say, the family of the eleventh victim is presumably indifferent as to whether s/he was killed by the actual Highway Killer or a "copycat"; the authentic/copycat binary, of course, has no bearing on the localized consequences of the terror act: the victim, to be sure, is dead either way. But the emphasis on the genuine versus the "copycat" works to intensify the extent to which the terror act serves only to produce terror, not indoctrinate or victimize. The motive and ideology of the Texas Highway Killer are wholly irrelevant, and so also, significantly, is the outcome or aftermath of the terror act (as evinced by the ambiguity and relative disinterest in the victim count). Instead, what begins to matter is the aura of *terrorism itself,* an aura that is exponentially strengthened when the terror act becomes divorced from the real and re-presented as image.

In *Underworld,* the videotaped spectacle of a singular murder quickly comes to signify the terrorism of the Texas Highway Killer in its entirety. When the television

networks begin "running [the tape] again after an interval of not running it," it invariably means that "the shooter had shot someone else, someone new, and because there was no film or tape of the new shooting, they had to show the old tape, the only tape, and they would show it to the ends of the earth" (232–233). That is to say, the individual acts of murder are minimized, indeed destroyed, by the repetition and spectacle of the video. "Whatever power or energy the primary event has," writes Timothy L. Parrish, "is subsumed by the technology of the video: the manipulation of the event that the technology makes possible is itself a kind of serial killing" (710). In this sense it is appropriate that DeLillo chooses to narrate the viewing of the tape in second person; it implicates even the reader. We consumers, we victims of the spectacle: we are terrorists, all.

The videotape-captured accidentally by an anonymous girl dubbed the "Video Kid" idly filming through the rear window of her family's car-by virtue of recording a single, irreproducible event, makes "a channeled path through time, to give things a shape and a destiny" (DeLillo 157). Thus this mere semblance not only supplants, but seemingly improves upon, reality.[3] It "shapes" reality, gives it "a destiny." The viewer, accordingly, is unable to stop watching. (Hence the narrator's order to "keep on looking" [157].) The viewer looks, then, not only because it is terror, but because it is tape:

> There's something about the nature of the tape, the grain of the image, the sputtering black-and-white tones, the starkness-you think this is more real, truer-to-life than anything around you. The things around you have a rehearsed and layered and cosmetic look. The tape is superreal, or maybe underreal is the way you want to put it. It is what lies at the scraped bottom of all the layers you have added. And this is another reason why you keep on looking. The tape has a searing realness. (157)

The tape, it is implied, has a "searing realness" precisely because it is not real: it is, impossibly, "truer-to-life" than actual *life.* Not to put too fine a point on it, but the reproduction of the terror act-the semblance-is "more real," more authentic, than the original act. Why? Because the reproduction and spectacularization of the terror act is the very pinnacle of terrorism itself. Terror, under this logic, exists to terrorize, yes, but only *as spectacle.* After the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001,Zizek writes, "we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated *ad nauseam,* and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was *jouissance* at its purest" (12).

This "uncanny satisfaction" rightly suggests that the spectacle of terrorism occupies a peculiar place in our cultural imagination. It is an object of both revulsion and desire: like viewing a pornographic close-up, we are at once appalled and enthralled, unable to look away. Appropriately, DeLillo suggests, the desire to view and re-view the terror

[3] Frank Lentricchia has commented that film, in DeLillo, is the "culturally inevitable" model of our own self-consciousness (446).

spectacle becomes vaguely sadistic: "And maybe you're being a little aggressive here, practically forcing your wife to watch" (159). Given this, the end result of the experience of terror is, perversely, the desire to experience it again, the desire to experience it with others. Like a roller coaster or a haunted house, the pleasure lies in the horror and the repetition of the act. And this, DeLillo suggests, is enabled through the spectacularization of the terror act: "[t]aping-and-playing intensifies and compresses the event. It dangles a need to do it again. You sit there thinking that the serial murder has found its medium" (159). Television, then, is the medium of terrorism, and in this sense, the medium of television is itself terror.

Television, as such, enacts and enables terrorism, but, more broadly, enables our desire for the experience of terrorism. "The role of images," Jean Baudrillard writes in *The Spirit of Terrorism,* "is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage" (27). However, insofar as the televisual image is complicit in the production of terror, so is the television viewer similarly culpable, and not, Baudrillard cautions, simply for being a spectator:

> The fact that we have dreamt of this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt of it-because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree-is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience... At a pinch, we can say that they *did it,* but we *wished for* it. If this is not taken into account, the event loses any symbolic dimension. It becomes a pure accident, a purely arbitrary act... Without this deep-seated complicity, the event would not have had the resonance it has, and in their symbolic strategy the terrorists doubtless know that they can count on this unavowable complicity. (5–6)

Terrorism, as we have seen, is a collaborative production. But here Baudrillard suggests (his argument specifically refers to the September 11, 2001 attacks in America, but seems apropos to a larger discussion of terrorism) that our complicity lies not only in hermeneutical acts or media consumption, nor in our perverse desire to simply view the terror act, but rather in our desire for the act itself. This, needless to say, seems a tenuous proposition. However, when one considers the issue in terms of real and semblance, rather than terror and not-terror, it becomes slightly more persuasive. Because of the "traumatic/ excessive character" of the terror act, Zizek writes, "we are unable to integrate it into (what we experience as) our reality, and are therefore compelled to experience it as a nightmarish apparition... [T]he Real itself, in order to be sustained, has to be perceived as a nightmarish unreal spectre" (19). Under this logic, the desire for the terror act can be viewed as a desire to reestablish the reality of reality. In *Underworld,* the narrator notes that the "more you watch the tape, the deader and colder and more relentless it becomes" (160), suggesting that the spectacularized terror act becomes less real, more "apparition," with repeated viewing. However, the narrator concludes, the tape "sucks the air right out of your chest but you watch it

every time" (160). The horror of the terror spectacle thus has the paradoxical effect of returning you to reality-sucking the air from your lungs like a plunge into an icy swimming pool-precisely because it is so unreal. We are thus returned, DeLillo implies, to the very (un)reality of our own reality. The spectacle, counterintuitively, returns us to ourselves.

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Underworld's televised simulacrum of the Texas Highway Killer is thematically juxtaposed with the untelevised Bobby Thomson home run that begins the novel. DeLillo, in one sweeping, virtuoso chapter, recreates the October 3, 1951 meeting between the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, a game settled by Bobby Thomson's famed ninth-inning home run, "The Shot Heard Round the World." The game, in the text, is a singular event of togetherness, an unrepeatable event distinguished from the spectacle of the Texas Highway Killer in that it serves to encourage a physical collectivity and, more significantly, is unable to be co-opted or reproduced. The game, DeLillo suggests, is "another kind of history," something that joins the observers together as participants "in a rare way, that binds them to a memory with protective power" (59). The experience of togetherness surrounding the game, the text implies, is fundamentally different from the artificial experience of togetherness obtained by collectively viewing and re-viewing spectacles of violence such as, for example, the Texas Highway Killer tape or the Zapruder film (which for the purposes of this essay is analogous to the Highway Killer tape) of the Kennedy assassination. As Brian Glassic, one of *Underworld*'s protagonists, asserts:

> When JFK was shot, people went inside. We watched TV in dark rooms and talked on the phone with friends and relatives. We were all separate and alone. But when Thomson hit the homer, people rushed outside. People wanted to be together. Maybe it was the last time people spontaneously went out of their houses for something. Some wonder, some amazement. Like a footnote to the end of the war. (94)

The experience of spectacularized, televisual horror or terror-the Kennedy assassination, the Texas Highway Killer video-is here framed as an experience of isolation. To experience a singular event in an unsingular, endlessly recurrent form is to be alone, to be "inside," interacting at a physical and emotional distance, in the dark and "on the phone." One reassures oneself in the actuality of preexisting interpersonal contacts-calling "friends and relatives"-and does not interact with unfamiliar others. However, by contrast, to experience a singular event *in its singularity* is to be "outside," to "be together" with strangers, with the community. Accordingly, Jeremy Green notes that "a contrast may be drawn between the collective established around the spectacle of violence and that founded on unrepeatable proximity in space and time" (595). The

implication here, of course, is that we are clearly intended to value the latter collective over the former. Similarly, Peter Knight remarks that "[i]f the Thomson homer was an event experienced together in public, then the Kennedy assassination marked the emergence of the substitute and isolated community of a national (and global) television audience" (815). Given this, the nuanced, detailed baseball game becomes notable for its inability to be commodified or repeated. It is framed as a singular event situated in history, unlike the spectacle of the Texas Highway Killer or the Kennedy assassination, which, by virtue of being recorded, played and replayed, become random spectacles of violence, removed from history and circumstance. DeLillo's recreation of the game, Timothy L. Parrish writes, "attempts] to defamiliarize the familiar by historicizing it," while adding that the lone extant recording of "announcer Russ Hodges's call of this game transmits an empty, decontextualized American history" (700). For DeLillo, then, the game's significance arises from its power to situate itself and its observers in history.

But is this correct? An historical moment experienced purely as memory and not as document seems indistinguishable from nostalgia. Indeed, the power of the baseball game arises largely, though not entirely, because it *is* a singular, unrepeatable moment, subject to the revisionist whims of the nostalgic imagination.[4] There are, we are told, "people [who] claimed to have been present at the game who were not," because "the event had sufficient seeping power to make them think they had to be at the Polo Grounds that day or else how did they feel the thing so strongly in their skin" (DeLillo 94). As such, the "seeping power" of the real event, as we have seen, is sharply distinguished from the power of the spectacularized, televised event. The reproducible event, the text suggests, is subject to a certain kind of fallibility. For instance, although the "Video Kid" is merely an accidental, uninvolved witness to the Texas Highway Killer, "the camera," nonetheless, "puts her in the tale" (DeLillo 157). Similarly, Russ Hodges's broadcast-his verbal replica of reality-finds him "inventing ninety-nine percent of the action" (25), taking it "into the stands, inventing a kid chasing a foul ball" (26). Given this-that the reproduction or image is necessarily adjusted or falsified, that it cannot accurately represent reality-it should follow that, by contrast, the real (the *solid* terrorist, the *actual* baseball) would not fall victim to these same obstacles of representation. But this is not the case. The real, because of its singularity, its resistance to documentation, is in fact *more* subject to misrepresentation and distortion, as evinced by the many people who feel "so strongly in their skin" that they were at the game when, in fact, they were not.

The real and unreproducible, then, acquire a unique aura. The aura surrounding the game has the ability to warp the real, to change the memory of the public, precisely

[4] For more on the nature of nostalgia in DeLillo see Philip Nel. DeLillo can, Nel writes, "at times replicate the structures of power that [he] wants to oppose" (725). That is to say, the irony (in *Underworld)* of using the language of nostalgia in order to critique nostalgia should not be lost on anyone.

because it is real. And the ball-which of course becomes the McGuffin[5] that enables the narrative-thus begins to suggest a desire to recover the wholeness, the singularity, that the baseball game has come to signify in the cultural imagination. Given this, the opposition between the baseball game and the Texas Highway Killer tape seems to recall Walter Benjamin's conception of "aura" in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." The ostensible uniqueness of the game, under this logic, exists in a binary with the endless multiplicity of the tape. Or, to be reductive about it, the text seems to suggest that the singularity of the baseball game is good, the reproducibility of the tape, bad. "[Reproduction," Benjamin writes, "as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former" (223). What does this suggest about *Underworld*'s nexus of the image and the historical moment? In light of Benjamin, the "uniqueness and permanence" of the baseball game would seem to fulfill the text's implicit longing (voiced by Nick Shay) for "a single narrative sweep [of history], not ten thousand wisps of disinformation" (82). But of course it does not. Indeed, as we have seen, the game is actually *more* vulnerable to the slings and arrows of "disinformation" precisely because of its singularity. This, then, is the paradox of the image. The image at once artificializes and authenticates history, both imprisons and liberates. As Benjamin notes near the end of "The Work of Art," the advent of the photographic and filmic image "burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second," adding, "a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye" (236). This seems a crucial point: the image, by virtue of its ability to realize reality better than the "naked eye," actually does not, in the end, realize reality at all; nor, precisely, does it realize something completely different altogether. The image, instead, realizes something perhaps most concisely described as (with apologies to Homi Bhabha) not quite not-reality.

The filmed or televised historical moment, then, is not the remembered historical moment, but nor is it necessarily a fictionalized historical moment. Accordingly, in *Underworld,* it is only the oldest form of history-making-the oral story, not the televised, written, or recorded story-that provokes the cynical assertion that "history [has] turned to fiction" (459). Memory and undocumented history are indeed more susceptible to fictionalization. The untelevised, unrecorded past becomes, over time, increasingly divorced from reality, increasingly less 'true.' "The past brings out our patriotism," Klara Sax opines in *Underworld.* "We want to feel an allegiance. It's the one undivided allegiance to all those people and things" (73). This allegiance is of course presented as loyalty, as fidelity to an authentic history. Klara even asserts, incredibly, that "everything I've done since those years ... is vaguely-Wrai-fictitious" (73). The remembered, undocumented past thus becomes-in the revised, nostalgic imagination-the real, pre-

[5] This is Alfred Hitchcock's term for a 'plot enabling device.' For more on the history of the word, see Truffaut pp. 98–99.

cisely because it is so unreal. But because it is a subject-ive, undocumented history, everything else must by default begin to seem "fictitious."

The reproducible, spectacularized image, then, exists *outside* of binaries of past and present, fiction and non-fiction. The Zapruder film in *Underworld* is described as carrying "a kind of inner life, something unconnected to the things we call phenomena" (495). The filmic or televisual spectacle is thus not real, specifically, but rather *of* the real, in possession of its own "inner life." Technology, in this sense, exists in a tenuous relationship to reality, but reality, correspondingly, also seems to exist in a tenuous relationship to itself. "Reality doesn't happen until you analyze the dots," Marvin Lundy observes in the text (182), emphasizing the way in which not only history but also reality itself is always/already formed by a process of continuous interpretation. Reality, by this logic, is fluid, but just because it is not absolutely stable does not mean it is not at all stable. Rather, as Benjamin writes in "The Work of Art," the "adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception" (223). And technology, Benjamin ultimately argues, is fundamentally inextricable from this process of adjusting "reality to the masses." In this sense, technology enables, if not creates, the hermeneutical acts necessary to forge the real. *Underworld,* accordingly, places great emphasis not only on the subject of the filmic or photographic image, but also, significantly, on the image itself *as object.*

When Brian Glassic visits Marvin Lundy in an attempt to track the history of the baseball, the narrator accentuates the imagistic nature of reality itself. Reality, it is suggested, is composed of images, and those images in turn comprise a reality unto themselves:

> The house had become a booby hatch of looming images. The isolated grimace, the hair that juts from the mole on the old man's chin. Every image teeming with crystalized dots. A photograph is a universe of dots. The grain, the halide, the little silver things clumped in the emulsion. Once you get inside a dot, you gain access to hidden information, you slide inside the smallest event.
>
> This is what technology does. It peels back the shadows and redeems the dazed and rambling past. It makes reality come true. (177)

The "universe of dots" constituting a photograph, then, must be analyzed in order to fulfill, and even create, the real, to make it "come true." Reality, as such, is not represented in the image; rather, the image constructs reality. The image-and, more to the point, the spectacularized image-situates us in history. It creates a common, documented language.

How does this idea of a shared, documented (and documenting) language of images connect with the larger issue of terrorism? If the apex of terrorism is its re-presentation as image, as spectacle, then spectacularized terror also serves to create a common language, a shared historicity. To return again to Benjamin, the spectacularized terror

act recalls his notion of the "angel of history." This angel, writes Benjamin, is "turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" ("Theses" 257). The spectacle of terror, then, becomes that "single catastrophe," an experience that resituates us in history as a collective. The spectacularized terror act, because it is not a localized, singular episode, works to collapse disparate historical elements into one spectacle of terror. It unifies history and, more significantly, recontextualizes the historical moment *as history,* rather than memory or fiction. Witness the phenomenon of temporality: after September 11, 2001, the phrases "on 9/11, everything changed" or "September 11th changed everything" became nigh on ubiquitous in the American media. But did, in fact, "everything change" on September 11, 2001? Of course not. This is not to ignore or even minimize the immeasurable gravity of the thousands of lives lost, the families devastated, a collective consciousness wounded, a skyline scarred, and an economy severely damaged. But these are merely *some* things; they are not, to be sure, *everything.* The impulse to collectivize, and, more specifically, to establish that collectivity at a precise point in history ('on this date, at this time, everything everywhere changed irrevocably') is in fact the very consummation of the terror act, its only sure, inevitable outcome.

To that end, given that *Underworld* discounts the singular moment as a viable mode of historical valuation-surely, the putative uniqueness of the baseball game is largely predicated on the fallibility of the nostalgic imagination-what does it suggest about the historicity of the spectacularized terror act? The storm of progress, Benjamin writes, "irresistibly propels [the angel of history] into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward" ("Theses" 258). The terror act thus serves as a common cultural and historical marker. Spectacularized terrorism, we will see, fulfills the desire for presence and wholeness that the baseball game is ultimately unable to satisfy. The terror act thus not only returns us to ourselves, it also returns us to history, together.

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The narrator asserts on the first page of *Underworld* that "[l]onging on a large scale is what makes history" (11). And one of the many things for which the text expresses a longing is a lost stability of power. Which is to say that terrorism, as Douglas S. Derrer writes, is commonly and correctly understood as a "powerful tool for the powerless" (108). The terrorist is not, by definition, an entity of the state. Or, more specifically, if a soldier is not a terrorist-and of course, s/he is not-then a terrorist, by extension, cannot be a soldier. In this sense both "The War on Terrorism" as well as, arguably, "State-Sponsored Terrorism" are phrases that misunderstand the paradox of power implicit in the terror act. The terrorist exists in a liminal state between criminal and warrior, peasant and president. The potentially immense power of the terror act arises, ironically, from the terrorist's own significant lack of power.

Given this, *Underworld*'s apparent nostalgia for the solidity and stability of power that characterized the Cold War seems understandable. Klara Sax's observation that the "balance of power" has been altered suggests a longing for the simplicity of state-sponsored violence:

> Many things that were anchored to the balance of power and the balance of terror seem to be undone, unstuck. Things have no limits now. Money has no limits. I don't understand money anymore. Money is undone. Violence is undone, violence is easier now, it's uprooted, out of control, it has no measure anymore, it has no level of values. (76)

Klara here seems to use the word "terror" as a synonym for 'fear,' rather than to refer to terrorism specifically. Indeed, on the contrary, terrorism functions as the unspoken usurper that has expropriated the 'safe' terror of the Cold War and transformed it into a weapon. At a fundamental level, the text suggests, it is undeniably reassuring to exist in a Manichaean world. There is a safety, a comfort, in the knowledge that there are Good Guys and Bad Guys in the universe. Once one begins to believe in this type of polarity, then the question of whether or not one is, in fact, a Good Guy or a Bad Guy becomes all but irrelevant. The simple knowledge that things are, in Klara's formulation, "anchored to the balance of power" provides sufficient security and ample comfort. As a result, to long for this type of Cold War-era antagonism is also necessarily to long for a certain renouncement of individual autonomy. As Marvin Lundy tells Brian Classic, "every privilege in your life and every thought in your mind depends on the ability of the two great powers to hang a threat over the planet." And once this threat begins to fade, he observes, "[y]ou're the lost man of history" (182). This fairly clever allusion to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (a book about the end of the Cold War and the triumph of Western capitalism) rather poignantly captures the isolation intrinsic to a post-Cold War existence. More to the point, the era of the "lost man of history" and the era of terrorism are one and the same: the terror of isolation and the terror of terrorism are, it would seem, inextricable.

It is perhaps all the more significant, then, that the spectacle of terrorism prompts the urge to overcome this isolation. The tape of the Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld*, as we have seen, most strikingly provokes the urge to view the tape *with* someone. The tape first creates the need to experience the spectacle mutually, and only secondarily does it occasion a rationale for this need:

> And maybe you're being a little aggressive here, practically forcing your wife to watch. Why? What are you telling her? Are you making a little statement? Like I'm going to ruin your day out of ordinary spite. Or a big statement. Like this is the risk of existing. Either way you're rubbing her face in this tape and you don't know why. (159)

The implicit violence here-"rubbing her face in this tape"-would seem to contradict the assertion that spectacles of terror enable collectivity. However, the passive aggression suggested by "rubbing her face" is ultimately undercut by the central ambiguity of the passage. Of the eight sentences excerpted here, six are questions (three of those six are not punctuated as questions for stylistic reasons-"Or [are you making] a big statemcnt[?]"-but are clearly intended to be read as such). The remaining two declarative statements also emphasize ambiguity ("practically forcing"; "either way") and a fundamental uncertainty of motive. Given this, what becomes significant about this passage is not the motivation behind the urge to force "your wife to watch," but the larger desire to simply view the tape with "your wife" and not in isolation. Indeed, as the narrator observes, you "want your wife to see it because it is real this time, not fancy movie violence–the realness beneath the layers of cosmetic perception" (158). The reality of the spectacle ("it is real this time") is, in this sense, a shared, collective reality. The desire to experience the spectacle of terror becomes a desire to experience the spectacle with others, as a community.

It is appropriate, then, that the novel ties not only the perceived spectacle of terrorism-the perverse desire to *be* terrorized-to this sense of collectivity, but also the interpersonal immediacy of the terror act itself: that is, the desire to terrorize. Both, it is suggested, are inextricable from the urge to overcome isolation. At one point, the Texas Highway Killer, Richard Henry Gilkey, is considering the subtleties of his shooting technique, and concludes that: "He could probably talk to Bud about this and Bud might understand. But he would never understand how Richard had to take everything outside, share it with others, become part of the history of others, because this was the only way to escape, to get out from under the pissant details of who he was" (266). Gilkey's desire to "share it with others" by terrorizing them is analogously linked to the desire to watch the tape of the Highway Killer with "your wife." In both instances, the production of terror becomes conflated with the need to overcome social isolation and, most significantly, to overcome that isolation through mass media. As such, when Gilkey telephones the television station that is broadcasting the tape captured by the Video Kid and speaks with the announcer, Sue Ann (as well as, by extension, the entire viewing audience), the experience is, for Gilkey, one of transcendence and fellowship. The experience of collectivity, mediated through mass media, "made him feel real" (269):

> He made the call and turned on the TV, or vice versa, without the sound, his hand wound in a doubled hanky, and he never felt so easy talking to someone on the phone or face-to-face or man to woman as he felt that day talking to Sue Ann... He talked to her on the phone and made eye contact with the TV. This was the waking of the knowledge that he was real. (270)

The terror act, then, as produced and consumed through the televisual image, enables, in *Underworld,* an experience of collectivity. One might, perhaps, argue that it

is a false collectivity: it is, after all, one that is predicated on sadism and terror, its interpersonal connections are experienced in isolation, and watching television is, to be sure, a mere representation of the real. But DeLillo, I think, asks the reader to reconsider how we understand real and not-real, as well as, more significantly, how we understand collectivity. It is in this sense that *Underworld* emphasizes the collective cultural production of the spectacularized terror act; the terrorists and the terrorized both exist in a mutually-contrived system designed to overcome social isolation through the medium of television.

In "The Ecstasy of Communication," Jean Baudrillard argues that "what was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived out on earth as metaphor, as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into reality, without any metaphor at all, into an absolute space which is also that of simulation" (128). This provides a useful framework for understanding the spectacle of the (televisual) terror act, and, more importantly, the connection between the spectacle and the experience of collectivity. The Cold War can thus be construed as that which "used to be lived ... as metaphor," for the Cold War, as we have seen, is notable for its distance, its disconnection from the banalities of the day-to-day. In *Underworld,* of course, the ability of the "two great powers" to "hang a threat over the planet" (182) enables the illusion of security as well as the reality of a surrendered agency. However, it is crucial to note that these "two great powers" function, in the dynamic of the Cold War, as a metaphor-as a "metaphorical scene," in Baudrillard's formulation-that masks the real. That is to say, it is the perception of power, rather than its materiality, that enables the comfort and security for which Klara Sax yearns: "Power meant something thirty, forty years ago. It was stable, it was focused, it was a tangible thing ... it held us together" (76). Terrorism, conversely, does not automatically "mean something"; indeed, as I have argued, it does not necessarily mean *anything.* It provides none of the ideological and moral cohesion of Cold War-era politics, and as a result, none of the comfort and security. The terror act, as such, works to project the real /'«security underlying the Cold War-era perception of security and solidity (and manifested through metaphor) back-devoid of metaphor-into reality, into "an absolute space which is also that of simulation" (Baudrillard 128). The terror act thus returns us to the "absolute space" of the real, but this reality is also necessarily a simulation. This would seem to be a contradiction-a simulation of reality is not, after all, reality-but ultimately it is not, we will see, an especially consequential one.

"Advertising in its new dimension," Baudrillard writes, "invades everything, as public space ... disappears. It realizes, or, if one prefers, materializes in all its obscenity; it monopolizes public life in its exhibition" ("Ecstasy" 129). The traditional spaces of publicity-the market, the street, the park-are increasingly, Baudrillard suggests, disappearing. Supplanting them is what he calls advertising and communication, but I would like to expand these notions to encompass the televisual image and spectacles of terror. Public life-previously a realm of speech and physicality and interaction-has been supplanted, or "monopolized," by this new communication. To put it another

way, the experience of publicity is now the experience of the televisual. Perhaps, then, Baudrillard calls for new ways of understanding how we exist in a community. The spectacularized terror act-divorced from denotation and ideology-thus becomes one way that we gather together with others. The nexus of the televisual and the terror act, far from dissolving an intersubjective or communal reality, actually works to restore it. In this sense, the simulation of the real becomes an insignificant phenomenon: to meet in the market or to meet on the Internet is, under this logic, still to *meet,* to be not-isolated.

Ultimately, we must expand our understanding of the spectacle. Surely, the incessant broadcasting of the Texas Highway Killer tape is spectacle. But so also is it a sort of information; a commonly-experienced reproducible moment that, precisely because of its spectacularization, its lack of singularity, genuinely encourages the sort of communitarian consciousness the baseball game only nostalgically represents. Given this, it becomes irrelevant whether the Texas Highway Killer tape is a reproduction or simulation of the real. Indeed, to experience the terror act of the Texas Highway Killer in its singularity is to experience it in isolation. To apperceive it in its spectacularized form, however—as reproducible image, as information—is to enter into a collective experience: one nation, under a cathode ray. "Obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle," Baudrillard argues, "when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication. We are no longer a part of the drama of alienation; we live in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene" (130). This logic, I think, assumes a narrow and even outdated conception of the spectacle. The televisual image of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001-an image that was broadcast essentially nonstop all that day and for weeks thereafter-was surely spectacularized. The singularity of the terror attacks was almost immediately transfigured into an endlessly-reproducible theatrical spectacle. But the spectacularized terror act is still a type of information; indeed, it is an extensive, sweeping type of information. Spectacularized terror, then, transcends the local and becomes global. It is precisely because the September 11^ terrorist attacks became refigured as spectacle that the headlines in the French newspaper *Le Monde* were able to proclaim "Nous sommes tous les Americains." Because the event was mutable, was reproducible, it was therefore also able to be experienced by a magnitude that transcended the immediacy and singularity of the localized terror act. Spectacles of terror, as such, represent a type of imagistic communication that is indeed able to overcome Baudrillard's "drama of isolation."

In *Underworld*, as we have seen, the Texas Highway Killer tape is broadcast whenever there is a new shooting, because, of course, there exists no film of the new shooting. In this sense, the spectacle of terror arguably represents or substitutes for information, but also, more plausibly, is *itself* information. Given this, it is appropriate that *Underworld* ends with the apotheosis of technology. The longing for presence, for connection that is implicit in apparent nostalgia for the baseball game is, in the end, provided by technology. There is an uncertainty as to how "arrays of numbers and symbols might

enter nature," but a fundamental sense of comfort and reassurance that "[e]verything connected at some undisclosed point down the systems line" (408), that "everything connects in the end" (465). Spectacularized terror acts, as we have seen, are equally acts of media, technology, and localized violence: a core of authentic cruelty and terror configured for the largest possible reverberation. And it is technology, to be sure, that enables this reverberation. The desire for connection and interdependence unfulfilled by the baseball game is, in the end, satisfied by technology and spectacles of terror.

The terror act, finally, suggests a multiplicity of paradoxes. It is a singular act that reaches its apex when it is stripped of that singularity and re-presented as spectacle; it is an ostensibly divisive, isolating act that in fact enables the experience of collectivity; it is an event devoid of intrinsic historical meaning that serves to resituate its spectators in history. The terror act arguably loses its emotional gravity in its reconfiguration as spectacle but, as we have seen, exponentially gains the power to reconstruct the collectivist imagination. Each successive representation of the spectacularized terror act-spectacles upon spectacles-in fact expands the communitarian consciousness. Terrorism, then, is collectively produced, but it is also collectively consumed. In the end, it conjoins the historical moment with a disparate community of observers; it recreates the populace and the public sphere through its technological exposition, its configuration as spectacle. Ultimately, the spectacularization of the terror act serves to reconstruct the experiences of both collectivism and being-in-history, reestablishing and relocating our positionality within the community and the historical moment.

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