Chapter Title: Unseen and Unremarked On: Don DeLillo and the Failure of the Digital Humanities

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Unseen and Unremarked On: Don DeLillo and the Failure of the Digital Humanities

MARK L. SAMPLE

This professorship deals with events that almost took place, events that definitely took place but remained unseen and unremarked on . . . and events that probably took place but were definitely not chronicled. Potential events are often more important than real events.

—Morehouse Professor of Latent History, in *Great Jones Street*

Like Don DeLillo's professor of latent history, presented only half-mockingly in *Great Jones Street*, DeLillo's third novel—and perhaps his most Pynchonesque, a meditation upon language, celebrity, and paranoia—let us consider the unchronicled and potential events of DeLillo's own publishing history, the events that remain unseen and unremarked on. Unseen and unremarked on by literary scholars and humanists in general but, more to the point, unseen and unremarked on by the digital humanities.

That is, what have the digital humanities failed to notice about Don DeLillo?

Or, to broaden the question and absolve the humanities of any wrongdoing, in what ways has the digital age left behind scholars of DeLillo's work?

Or, to be more inclusive and hastening to interest even those uninterested in DeLillo's consistently prescient observations of the postmodern era, which editors in the past have assured me I must do in order to publish on DeLillo's lesser known short stories, many of which encapsulate in a few pages what DeLillo works out in hundreds in his novels, a feat academic publishers assume no other scholar would want to read about unless connected somehow to one of DeLillo's big ideas arrayed in his important novels—ideas such as terrorism and simulation—as I say, to interest even those uninterested in such minutia, let's rephrase the question this way (and adapt a passive voice as an extra measure, so as to avoid offending anyone): how have scholars of contemporary American literature been left behind by the rise of

digital tools and the methodologies afforded by those tools that have otherwise been a boon to literary scholars working on earlier eras of American literature?

Or, as I said, what have the digital humanities failed to notice about Don DeLillo?

I should clarify this question, though, lest it seem too specific. DeLillo is merely a convenient stand-in. We might just as easily substitute for his name any other towering figure of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American literature: Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, Dan Brown. The results will be the same. Unless one is willing to infringe on copyright, break a publisher's DRM, or wait approximately four generations when these authors' works will likely fall into the public domain, barring some as of yet unknown though predictable act of ~~corporate America~~ Congress, the kind of groundbreaking work being done on seventeenth-, eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and even twentieth-century literature simply will not happen for DeLillo and his contemporaries.[1] Digital editions, online archives, text mining, data visualizations—these are the bread and butter of scholars working on pre-twentieth-century literature within the digital humanities. As Andrew Jewell and Amy Earhart explain in their introduction to a recent collection called *The American Literature Scholar in the Digital Age*, "utilizing digitization and computational power makes possible new ways of seeing, collecting, editing, visualizing, and analyzing works of literature. These new methods are at the core of professional academic life, altering not only what we can read through unprecedented access to textual information but also how we articulate our scholarly response to materials" (Earhart and Jewell, 2). This is all true, but like most truths it is not true for all. It is not true for scholars of DeLillo's work, which stands apart from the dominant methodological and analytical advances of the digital humanities.

Although it's risky to generalize about the digital humanities, it is safe to say that the work of the digital humanities is ultimately premised upon a simple, practical fact: it requires a digital object, either a born-digital object or an analog object that has been somehow scanned, photographed, mapped, or modeled in a digital environment. In the context of literary studies, this usually means a large corpora of digitized texts, such as the complete works of Shakespeare, the multiple versions of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, or every single book published in England during the nineteenth century.

None of this is available in any substantive, legal way for DeLillo's work, nor will it be. There is no debate about that. It is indisputable.[2]

But what if I were wrong?

What if there was a world in which the digital humanities could lend its considerable institutional and collaborative weight to the study of DeLillo's fiction?

Let us imagine, then, several alternate histories of DeLillo's work. First, an official publication history, the seamless kind that every scholarly monograph on DeLillo reproduces, though my version will already begin to tug at loose threads. Then a second history, one we might think of as DeLillo's latent history, those events that remain "unseen and unremarked on," revealed only by archival research of largely

textual and certainly nondigital documents. And finally, let us take this notion of latent history to its logical conclusion, going beyond recovering what has been unseen and unremarked on to imagining the "potential events" of DeLillo's history, which would be "more important than real events," redefining DeLillo studies, not to mention our entire understanding of contemporary American literature.

Timeline I: Excerpt from DeLillo's Official Publication History

(This is not a Timeline. This is an Argument.)

1960

Don DeLillo, a young copywriter at the legendary Ogilvy and Mather Advertising Agency, publishes his first short story, "The River Jordan," in *Epoch*, a literary journal out of Cornell University. "The River Jordan" has never been republished. There is no electronic version of *Epoch*.

1968

DeLillo publishes "Baghdad Towers West," also in *Epoch*. By 1968, *Epoch* has published four out of five of DeLillo's earliest short stories. "Baghdad Towers West" has never been republished. There is no electronic version of *Epoch*.

1970

DeLillo publishes "The Uniforms," a rewriting of Godard's 1967 film *Weekend* (VHS available from Amazon.com for $94.95 new). "The Uniforms" appears in the *Carolina Quarterly*, digital copies of which exist for volumes 55 and on. "The Uniforms" was published in volume 22.

1972

Sports Illustrated publishes "Total Loss Weekend," DeLillo's story of a man whose wagers on dozens of college and pro sporting events on a single October weekend conclude with "misery, paranoia, bitterness, defeat" (100). Though no DeLillo scholar has ever recognized this curious fact, "Total Loss Weekend" is DeLillo's second appearance in *Sports Illustrated*. His first appearance was earlier the same year, when the first eight chapters of *End Zone* (1972) were published under the awkward title "Pop, Pop, Hit Those People." This was the April 17, 1972, issue, with a victorious Jack Nicklaus on the cover and the story itself interspersed with advertisements for Spalding golf balls, La Corona filter tips, and Puerto Rican rum. I can describe these ads because the full text and facsimiles of original pages of both "Total

Loss Weekend" and "Pop, Pop, Hit Those People" are available online in the *Sports Illustrated Vault*. These two texts are the only pieces of DeLillo's short fiction to be available digitally until "Midnight in Dostoevsky" appears on the *New Yorker* website thirty-seven years later.

These two stories were not, of course, available digitally that whole time; they went online only when Time Warner opened the *Sports Illustrated Vault* in 2008. Reading straight from the Web 2.0 playbook with nonsensical phrases that have been attached to new digital initiatives throughout the ages, Jeff Price, the president of *Sports Illustrated Digital* describes the *Sports Illustrated Vault*: "By combining SI archives with cutting-edge technology, web tools and sport functionality search capability [sic] we have created a destination that will grow through the active participation of site visitors and through search engine discovery" ("Sports Illustrated Vault Debuts").

1973

"The Uniforms" is reprinted in *Cutting Edges: Young American Fiction for the '70s*. "The Uniforms" is the only stand-alone story of DeLillo's ever to be republished. *Cutting Edges* is available in 198 libraries worldwide, none of them near you. In an appendix to *Cutting Edges*, DeLillo notes that he wrote "The Uniforms" as "a challenge to writers of radical intent" (533), who ought to experiment with the form of the novel. DeLillo explains,

> Fiction is trying to move outward into space, science, history and technology. It's even changing its typographical contours. Writers want their stories to be touched, petted, and, in some cases, sexually assaulted. In a cellar in Ludwigshafen, a ninety-four-year-old printer has been working for two decades on different mediums of type—malleable, multidimensional, pigmented. Type as paint. Dark colors for somber words. Books the size of refrigerators. ("Appendix to 'The Uniforms,'" 532)

It is entirely fitting that DeLillo imagines the future of the book in terms of the largest of kitchen appliances, the massive, humming refrigerator. Fitting, because as much as DeLillo has been an astute observer of the media age, meditating time and time again upon the meaning of technology in modern American lives, he himself has been personally resistant to digital technology, choosing to write on the same manual Olympia typewriter for the past forty years. No lightweight Kindles or sleek iPads figure in DeLillo's premonitions of the future of the book.

(DeLillo's most recent seven novels are available as downloadable Kindle e-books. DeLillo's eight novels prior to *White Noise* are not, despite Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's stated goal of making "any book, ever printed, in any language available in less than 60 seconds" [Jones]).

(n.b. Publish: From the Classical Latin *public re*, meaning to make public property, to place at the disposal of the community, to make public, to make generally known, to exhibit publicly [Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd Edition, September 2007]).

1985

White Noise, DeLilllo's breakthrough novel, is published. This is the first DeLillo novel to later become available digitally. The Kindle version of *White Noise* begins with this combination warning/plea:

> The scanning, uploading and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

1991

DeLillo publishes *Mao II*, widely seen as an extended meditation on the Rushdie Affair and the role of the writer in the age of terrorism.

2004

The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center (HRC) at the University of Texas at Austin acquires the Don DeLillo Papers, 125 boxes of DeLillo's manuscripts, notebooks, research clippings, and correspondence. The acquisition costs the HRC five hundred thousand dollars. Though the archive is open to the public, there are no plans to digitize any of the material in the collection, according to Richard Workman, an associate librarian at the Harry Ransom Center (Workman).

Timeline II: Excerpts from DeLillo's Latent History

(Unseen and unremarked on)

1962

DeLillo's short story "Buy Me Some Peanuts and Crackerjacks" is rejected from *Esquire*, in part because, as one editor noted, "The weltschmertz is not Chekovian, but Chayevskian" (Hills, 1). The story is never printed and no extant copy exists.

1966

A story called "The Meridians of Sleep" is rejected from the *New Yorker*. In the letter to DeLillo's agent, the magazine's legendary fiction editor Roger Angell kindly hopes that "Mr. DeLillo won't be too disappointed by this rejection, for he has a good deal to be optimistic about. I think he may have a considerable future as a writer" (Angell, 1).

Also in 1966, the *Kenyon Review* accepts the short story "Cinema" for publication, though the journal recommends that DeLillo consider changing the title to "Coming Sun. Mon. Tues." The *Kenyon Review* also suggests removing the "page 3 reference to Dachau" (Macauley, 1). DeLillo replaces "Dachau" with "Vietnam or Mississippi" in the final version.

1969

Jack Hicks, the editor of the *Carolina Quarterly*, appreciates the "Godard touches and murmurs" of "The Uniforms" and accepts it for publication at five dollars per page (1969, "Letter to Don DeLillo," 1).

1971

Jack Hicks contacts DeLillo about an anthology called *Routines* (published in 1973 as *Cutting Edges*), which will include "The Uniforms." Hicks asks DeLillo for material for the appendix of the anthology, which should include a "frame of reference" for the story, as well as some thoughts about "what fiction should/will do in the 1970s" (1971, "Letter to Don DeLillo," 1).

It is in this "frame of reference" for "The Uniforms" that DeLillo imagines that "in a cellar in Ludwigshafen, a ninety-four-year-old printer has been working for two decades on different mediums of type—malleable, multidimensional, pigmented" ("Appendix to 'The Uniforms,'" 532). Explaining why he turned a Godard film into a short story, DeLillo argues that "thousands of short stories and novels have been made into movies. I simply tried to reverse the process. Until elastic type is perfected, I submit this mode of work as a legitimate challenge to writers of radical intent" (533). Twice in DeLillo's 325-word "frame of reference," he evokes the notion of malleability, elasticity. Throughout his career, DeLillo will consistently seek elasticity in the source material for his fiction. He will not, however, embrace "elastic type" of the kind that digital technology makes readily possible.

1972

End Zone, with its first eight chapters appearing simultaneously in *Sports Illustrated* (see "Timeline I: Excerpt from Delillo's Official Publication History"), is published.

Other titles DeLillo had considered for this novel about football, nuclear war, and trauma include *Modes of Disaster Technology* and *The Self-Erasing Word* (DeLillo, "The Self-Erasing Word").

1985

White Noise, DeLilllo's breakthrough novel, is published. DeLillo's original title for the novel was *Panasonic*, a name the Matsushita corporation refused to give the rights to (Salamon, K1). DeLillo's list of alternative titles contained two columns of forty-four other possibilities, some of which were typed, others handwritten, and a few crossed out: Book of the Dead, The American Book of the Dead, Life-Savers, Blacksmith, Germantown, The Dead Motel, Dylar, Point Omega, Flying Saucers, Nyodene, Maladyne, The Blacksmith Book, The Art of Dying, The Power of Night, A Guide to Dying, Reno Amusements, Particle Smashing, Falling Bodies, White Noise, Donald Duck, Ultrasonic, Mein Kamp, Sirens, Doomsday, The Doomsday Book, Dying Words, Atlantic & Pacific, Escape, Simuvac, Superstition, Deathless, Eternity, Darkness, Necropolis, All Souls, Megabyte, Penny Dreadful, Psychic Data, Panasonic, Ultrasound, Matshushita, Panasonic Way, Air Waves, Secaucus (DeLillo, Notebook).

1991

DeLillo publishes *Mao II*, widely seen as an extended meditation on the Rushdie Affair and the role of the writer in the age of terrorism. But the novel is just as easily a reflection on the role of the writer in the age of digital reproduction.

In DeLillo's handwritten notes for *Mao II*, he writes "Reclusive Writer: In the world of glut + bloat, the withheld work of art becomes the only meaningful object" (DeLillo, Notes in Notebook). Significantly, in the novel, DeLillo attributes this sentiment not to Bill Gray, the reclusive novelist at the heart of *Mao II* but to Scott, Gray's personal assistant and eventual archivist. "The withheld work of art is the only eloquence left," Scott tells Gray (67). And Scott will indeed withhold all Gray's writings, hoarding them. Once Bill Gray leaves the country, becoming entangled with a terrorist organization, Scott sets to organizing Gray's papers. "He could arrange the reader mail geographically or maybe book by book," Scott muses, "although there was a great deal of mail that referred to both books or neither book" (143). Later Scott goes about "restructuring the mail by country. Once that was done he would put each country in chronological order so he might easily locate a letter sent from Belgium, say, in 1972. There was no practical reason why he'd ever want to find such a letter or any other piece of reader mail in particular. The point is that he would have it all in place" (184). With his point "that he would have it all in place," Scott's actions lampoon the idea of an archive. What goes in and in what order and why is arbitrary. In *Mao II*, the archive is organized according to whimsical principles that reveal little about its contents. Order trumps the ordered.

Meanwhile in Greece, Bill Gray is questioned at every turn by an intermediary for the terrorists about the possibility of writing with a word processor. "I find the machine helps me organize my thoughts," the terrorist intermediary tells Bill, continuing, it "gives me a text susceptible to revision. I would think for a man who clearly reworks and refines as much as you do, a word processor would be a major blessing" (137–38). Later on the man persists with this praise of word processing, telling Bill that "it's completely liberating. You don't deal with heavy settled artifacts. You transform freely, fling words back and forth" (164).

Here the macro and the micro, the archive and the manuscript, both risk revision; liberation; and, DeLillo seems to suggest, their very mooring onto meaning. It is the return of the death of the author, replaced by what Barthes calls a "modern scriptor" who is "born simultaneously with the text," neither "preceding" nor "exceeding" it (145). Perhaps this is the danger of the digital for DeLillo but also its lure? Perhaps this is why Bill Gray must literally die toward the end of *Mao II*, because he refuses to die symbolically?

1997

"The reason I use a manual typewriter," DeLillo writes in a letter to David Foster Wallace in 1997, "concerns the sculptural quality I find in words on paper, the architecture of the letters individually and in combination, a sensation advanced (for me) by the mechanical nature of the process—finger striking key, hammer striking page. Electronic intervention would dull the sensuous gratification I get from this process—a gratification I try to soak my prose in" ("Letter to David Foster Wallace," 1).

2003

The author, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, attends a DeLillo reading at the Philadelphia Free Library. As DeLillo signs a copy of *Cosmopolis*, the author thrusts a sealed letter into DeLillo's hands that begins, "Please forgive this clumsy introduction—a sealed letter thrust into the hands of an unsuspecting novelist might very well appear as a scene in one of your novels" (Sample, 1) The letter goes on to explain that the author is writing his dissertation on DeLillo's early fiction and "would welcome the opportunity to talk or correspond with you about your fiction." Grimacing and looking more than a little perturbed, DeLillo brusquely tells the author that "everything I have to say about my books is in my books."

A week later a letter arrives from New York, addressed to the author, typed on manual Olympia typewriter by Don DeLillo, in which DeLillo repeats, more kindly this time, that he prefers not to revisit his novels: "I'm not a student of my own fiction and I don't necessarily want to know everything that's happening there, or everything that may be swimming the space between the reader and the book" ("Letter to Mark Sample," 1).

2004

If Don DeLillo's most ambitious novels never reached the size of refrigerators—though *Underworld* (1997) comes close—then at least the manuscripts for those books approached the largest of kitchen appliances in weight, heft, and density. Beginning with *The Names* (1982), DeLillo used a separate page for every draft paragraph, no matter how small the paragraph. He held on to those pages, even for early drafts, and they piled, piled up high: "I want those pages nearby," DeLillo told the *Paris Review* in 1993, "because there's always a chance I'll have to refer to something that's scrawled at the bottom of a sheet of paper somewhere. Discarded pages mark the physical dimensions of a writer's labor—you know, how many shots it took to get a certain paragraph right" (Begley, 281).

Records, archives, the "physical dimensions" of the page, and the evidence of a "writer's labor." DeLillo's work is shot through with these themes. This is one reason Bill Gray abhors the "lightweight, malleable" form of word-processed text (161)—it leaves no trace. It is abstracted from the knowable world, unlike his typewriter where the long, meandering hours and days of his physical presence become intertwined with the machine, measured by the accumulation of hair: "hair that drifts into the typewriter, each strand collecting dust along its lengths and fuzzing up among the hammers and interacting parts, hair that sticks to the felt mat the way a winding fiber leeches on to soap so he has to gouge it out with a thumbnail, all his cells, scales and granules, all his faded pigment, the endless must of all this galling hair that's batched and wadded in the works" (199).

Going on in the *Paris Review* interview, DeLillo speaks of the sheer physical presence of earlier drafts of work, of their "awesome accumulation, the gross tonnage, of first draft pages. The first draft of *Libra* sits in ten manuscript boxes. I like knowing it's in the house. I feel connected to it. It's the complete book, the full experience containable on paper" (Begley, 281).

As of 2004, those boxes and many more, and all the dust and detritus and sloughed-off cells among them, were no longer in DeLillo's house. DeLillo's papers, all of them, 125 boxes of material containing thousands of pages of DeLillo's personal and professional correspondence, handwritten notes, research materials, drafts, and proofs were acquired for five hundred thousand dollars by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

It is an old-fashioned archive. It is not digital and cannot be conquered by digital means. It is purely physical, like the "gross tonnage" of his drafts. Though the archive is open to the public, it will resist "electronic intervention." As Richard Workman, an associate librarian at the Harry Ransom Center writes, "because most of our collections are under copyright, and because placement on the web is a form of publication, we have special problems in this regard. We can't do it without the creator's permission, and not many living writers or their heirs are ready to take the step of

publishing their entire archives. In DeLillo's case, in particular, I doubt he would agree to any such project" (Workman).

DeLillo's papers were "eerily immaculate," as D. T. Max puts it in a *New Yorker* article about the Harry Ransom Center, even before the library received them (66). They are meticulously ordered, especially the latter boxes, and there is no echo of Bill Gray's fictional archives, repeatedly rearranged according to some new arbitrary scheme. Still, there are surprises in the archive—rejection letters, legal wrangling over brand names, honorary degrees turned down, discussions of royalties, surprising changes in early drafts of novels, and letters from critics and fans including, wedged between a letter to Thomas Pynchon and a letter to the organizer of a book club reading *White Noise*, the very letter this author had thrust into DeLillo's hands a year earlier as well as DeLillo's reply to that letter.

Except by those who explore the archive and share their understanding of it, these surprises in the archive will remain unseen and unremarked on. Latent.

Timeline III: Excerpts from a Potential History

(Potential events are often more important than real events.)

1991

Researchers at MIT develop MaoMOO, a multiple-user, text-based virtual world inspired by *Mao II*. Funded in part by DARPA, the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency, MaoMOO lets users explore the cell in Beirut in which terrorists are holding an unnamed writer hostage.

1995

For the tenth anniversary of *White Noise*, its publisher Viking teams with the Voyager Company to create the *White Noise Omnibus* CD-ROM, an interactive multimedia experience. The CD-ROM contains the full text of *White Noise* as well as draft texts (scanned from DeLillo's original typescript manuscript), interviews with scholar Frank Lentricchia, and GIF images of the barn that inspired DeLillo's idea of the most photographed barn in America. Available for MS-DOS, Windows 95, and Mac, the CD-ROM is a critical success. However, the disintegration of the CD-ROM market and implosion of Voyager in 1997 means the CD-ROM never finds a popular audience. Rare and playable only with twenty-year-old technology, the *White Noise Omnibus* CD-ROM is now considered to be a collector's item.

1996

Curt Gardner launches Don DeLillo's America, a website dedicated to tracking DeLillo's writing and his interviews, as well as keeping current on the scholarly work

being done on DeLillo. The site serves as a virtual meeting place for fans and critics alike, and in 1997 Scribner allows the site to host an unformatted TXT file containing *Underworld*, DeLillo's eleventh novel, in its entirety. The plan backfires, however, when it is discovered that Gopher servers in Lithuania are distributing a corrupt version of the text file, which contains embedded within it an executable macro virus that, when opened in Microsoft Word 95, deletes the host computer's "My Documents" folder.

1999

An English professor skilled in computational analysis uses word frequency counts to compare the text of the *White Noise Omnibus* CD-ROM with a scanned and OCR'd version of the raucous but out-of-print novel *Amazons* by Cleo Birdwell, long suspected to be the work of DeLillo. The professor's computer proves with a +/– 10 percent error rate that DeLillo is the author of *Amazons*, primarily based on the recurrence of the name "Murray Jay Siskind" in both novels. The English professor publishes his findings in the journal *Social Text*, concluding that "now that the author has been found, the text is explained."

2002

Scholars using the TextArc visualization tool to data-mine the *Underworld* TXT file demonstrate a startling correlation between the words "waste," "desert," and "nuclear" in *Underworld*.

2005

Using the latest tools in GIS and 3-D climatological modeling, researchers prove that the "airborne toxic event" depicted in *White Noise* would have had a significantly different viscosity, velocity, and impact zone than what DeLillo describes. The researchers suggest that the entire Gladney family should have died before reaching safety.

2009

With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the National Science Foundation (NSF), a team of humanist and computer scientists at a nationally renowned digital humanities lab recreate the vast research complex at the center of DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* (1976) as an immersive 3-D virtual environment using the Unreal game engine. Players can interact with nonplayable characters (NPCs), gather treasure, and attempt to decode the same radio signal from outer space that appears

in *Ratner's Star*. Just as the novel itself is unreadable, *Ratner's Star: The Legend of Endor's Code* is unplayable.

2013

As part of the marketing campaign for David Cronenberg's cinematic adaptation of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003), the film studio teams with 42 Entertainment and the Harry Ransom Center to launch an ARG (alternate reality game) in which the Don DeLillo Papers play a key role. Core mechanics of the ARG include clues planted within the archive itself, such as letters from Murray Jay Siskind and other fictional characters, USB flash drives containing conversations between DeLillo and Cronenberg, keys to safety deposit boxes, and maps to other locations where further clues can be found.

DeLillo on the Outside of the Digital Humanities

"What does it all mean, signify, or demonstrate?" DeLillo wondered in 1971 in his "frame of reference" for "The Uniforms" ("Appendix to 'The Uniforms,'" 533). We might ask the same of these three timelines. What do they mean, signify, or demonstrate?

When I suggest that the digital humanities have failed scholars of Don DeLillo or other contemporary fiction, I am being unfair. The digital humanities are not responsible, nor are digital humanists. As my timeline of potential events suggests, if there were readily available digital versions of DeLillo's work, there would be no end to the computations that clever humanists could perform on them. Many of these projects might have failed or been misguided and overreaching, yet I do not doubt that the judicious use of visualizations, graphs, charts, maps, concordances, and other structures of meaning would reveal even greater depth to DeLillo's work than we already know to be there.

But the fact remains that the most promising, rewarded, or recognized work in the digital humanities has centered upon texts and artifacts in the public domain. The typical approaches to the digital humanities function quite well for medievalists, Renaissance scholars, Victorianists, nineteenth-century Americanists, or even modernists. Nearly everything scholars in these fields study is in the public domain and has been subjected to numerous and competing forms of digitization. But what if you study a living novelist, whose works are most decidedly copyrighted? What if you research a living novelist, whose life's work resides not on hard drives but in boxes and boxes of notes, drafts, and manuscripts?

The failure of the digital humanities to which I refer in my chapter title is not the failure to be able to do with DeLillo what we can do with Whitman or Blake. The failure is simply that nobody is talking about this disconnect. If the digital humanities are to be the future of the humanities, then we should be talking about what it

means that a significant group of contemporary writers and thinkers are not a part of this future, at least not yet.[3]

Yet—again, as I have parodied in the timeline of potential events—perhaps there are advantages to being left alone, to being forced outside the constantly advancing, sprawling digital humanities machine. Of the three timelines I present, I much prefer the second, the exploration of DeLillo's latent history, rooted in dust and documents, deterioration and decay.

DeLillo has often said—and thematized in his novels—some version of his response to a question Anthony DeCurtis asked in a 1988 interview about being marginal, or marginalized: "I think I have an idea of what it's like to be an outsider in this society," DeLillo told DeCurtis (DeCurtis, 288). In an undated letter to Jonathan Franzen, DeLillo revisits this idea, telling the younger novelist that "a writer ought to function as an outsider . . . he ought to be skeptical about the values of society and ready to write in opposition to them" ("Letter to Jonathan Franzen," 1).

Perhaps it's fitting, then, that DeLillo's work will remain outside the culture of the digital humanities. Perhaps there's some value in a text or a collection of texts, a vast collection of texts, millions of words' worth of texts, that cannot be accommodated by the latest trends in literary scholarship. A corpora that cannot be assimilated and reduced to a database or a graph, a body of texts accessible only through physical engagement.

I doubt anyone in this collection believes that it's an either/or choice, that the digital humanities is an all-or-nothing affair. Archival research can exist—and does exist—alongside digital editions, visualizations, modeling, and so on. What DeLillo teaches us, though, is that we ought to be skeptical. Just as DeLillo suggests that novelists should "be ready to write in opposition" to the values of society, scholars, too, should be ready to study in opposition to the dominant values of contemporary scholarship. We may be surrounded by the digital in our reading, writing, teaching, and scholarship, but we must not be circumscribed by it.[4] We must, I think, strive to remain cognizant of the latent and the potential realities of the digital humanities. The potential is easy to see. The latent, by its very nature, is hidden. It is our mission to uncover it.

NOTES

1. DRM: digital rights management, any number of copy protection schemes used by publishers or distributors to ensure that e-books are not shared, loaned, or otherwise endowed with any resemblance to a physical book. My estimate of four generations of copyright protection is based on current U.S. law, under which DeLillo's first five novels (*Americana* through *Players*) are copyrighted until ninety-five years after their publication date, while every novel published after 1977 (*Running Dog* through *Point Omega*) is copyrighted seventy years beyond the death of the author—the literal death of the author,

not some Barthesian poststructuralist disappearance of the author that begins as soon as the words, a "tissue of quotations," are written (Barthes, 146).

2. This point is disputable. The dispute, however, is pointless. The HATHI Trust Digital Library and Google Books have both scanned some of DeLillo's novels, a fact that would appear to contradict my argument that DeLillo has been left behind by the digital humanities. But the limited range and depth of the functionality offered by either HATHI or Google only highlight their failure. HATHI has scanned exactly one DeLillo novel, *White Noise*; that novel is full-text searchable, but the results show only page numbers of the search terms. Google Book Search at least goes a step further, showing three-line "snippets" for ten of DeLillo's fifteen novels. What Google offers is a glorified index of individual novels, useful for teaching and finding quick references but a shadow of the massive text-mining and data-visualization operations upon which humanities computing has been built.

3. John Unsworth has identified T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) as both a literal and metaphorical demarcation between public domain texts that can be freely studied using the tools of the digital humanities and copyrighted texts that are far more difficult to subject to nonconsumptive research—that is, research that relies on computational analysis of a text rather than the reading of a text (see Unsworth). DeLillo's work, as does the work of every writer published in the United States since 1923, clearly dwells in a digital waste land, a kind of forbidden territory tantalizingly out of reach for digital humanists.

4. See, for example, the work of Lincoln Mullen and Alex Reid, who have both suggested that all humanists are digital humanists now.

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