

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

12

POLYMORPHIC JOYCE

Papers from The Third Joyce Graduate Conference:
Dublin 22-23 January 2010

Edited by
FRANCA RUGGIERI AND ANNE FOGARTY

EDIZIONI 

ROMA, 2012

*Volume pubblicato con il contributo
del Dipartimento di Letterature Comparete
dell'Università degli Studi Roma Tre*

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ISSN 977-2281-373-005

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*“I’VE GOT THE STEPHEN DEDALUS BLUES”:
JOYCEAN ALLUSIONS, QUOTES AND CHARACTERS
IN DON DELILLO’S AMERICANA*

DeLillo’s connection to Joyce is especially evident in his first novel *Americana* (1971). Critics mention Joyce as a “guiding spirit”¹, a ‘high’ influence on the protagonist-narrator David Bell, opposed to the ‘low’ elements of media and advertising culture that appear in his narration. Yet, an exhaustive study of the Joycean references in *Americana* has never been carried out, and I intend to demonstrate that this connection epitomizes the transition from modernism to postmodernism, so much so that *Americana* can be seen as a postmodern rewriting of Joyce’s work.

Of course, we do not have any evidence of something similar to the “Linati schema” used by DeLillo to write his novel out of his predecessor’s work. As a keen reader of Joyce, however, he suggests analogies, quoting with subtle irony and a certain ‘respectful irreverence’ that the Irish author himself would perhaps have appreciated.

DeLillo chose a *Kunstlerroman* for his literary debut as a way of stating both his goals and literary influences. Although setting and characters belong entirely to 1960s America, he undoubtedly kept in mind Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Joyce himself appears in Bell’s dreams, sitting in the protagonist’s living room together with Antonioni and Beckett during the night when he decides to start filming his autobiographical movie. DeLillo sets an overt connection between his protagonist and Stephen Dedalus when he makes him say, in his college memories: “I wanted to be known as Kinch. This is Stephen Dedalus’s nickname in *Ulysses*, which I was reading at the time.”²

¹ P. Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 33.

² D. DeLillo, *Americana* [1971] London, Penguin, 2006, p.143. All the quotations are taken from this edition and shall hereon be indicated only by the page number in parenthesis.

Americana is a particularly atypical sample of *Kunstlerroman*. It is also probably the first to have a film director and not a writer as its hero, and thus to deal with images as well as words. Moreover, the fact that the only narrator is the aged, disillusioned protagonist completes the transition from the omniscient, unbiased narrator of nineteenth-century novels to the schizoid ego of postmodern literature, with the *Portrait's* subjective third-person focalization as a sort of 'middle step'.

Unlike the *Portrait's* narration, Bell's long excursus into his youth has an episodic character. The events do not follow a chronological order, but seem to be arranged according to a cinematic technique of flashbacks and anticipations, which allow the reader to understand the real motives of David's journey.

Americana is not an autobiographical novel³. DeLillo chose to represent his archetypal American artist with the features of Western cultural success, creating a character whose main peculiarity is his powerful outward appearance. Coming from a line of English-speaking writers, DeLillo knows that Joyce's adolescence in Dublin can rightly become the intertextual basis for the portrayal of any young artist as it is part of his literary heritage. In a postmodern perspective, however, individual conscience does not really exist on its own, being but "a conglomerate of effects (sensation, memory, fugue states, etc.) produced by new machinic assemblages specific to a modern urban/industrial milieu."⁴ While Stephen's mind is a Bergsonian *durée*, a continuous flow of memories constituting raw material for the author's more or less coherent process of organization, Bell's narration deals with entropy, indeterminacy and chaos.

The environments that produced Stephen Dedalus and David Bell are extremely different. Nevertheless, both Joyce's Dublin and Bell's dull neighborhood outside New York can be said to symbolize a whole nation in a particular era. Both the *Portrait* and *Americana* represent a young artist who tries to free himself from his roots, or at least to become an artist in the way his background allows him to: "This race and this country and this life produced me [...]. I shall express myself as I am"⁵.

³ "No one character in any of his [...] novels can confidently be said to speak for him. He is in all of them and none of them." (D. Aaron, "How to Read Don DeLillo", in Frank Lentricchia, ed., *Introducing Don DeLillo*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 67).

⁴ J. Johnston, *Information Multiplicity*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p.34.

⁵ J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [1916], New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 170.

Stephen's and David's families stand as symbols of their birthplaces and times. Simon Dedalus was an Irish patriot, disillusioned by Parnell's failure. The moments he spends with his son, like the trip to Cork, are used to show Stephen how his own country can offer him only hollow memories of the past. Clinton Bell, on the other hand, is the personification of economic wealth – the true religion of 1950s America – belonging to a dynasty of advertising men⁶ which started in “the good old days” when “you could afford to be innocent” (197). The role of David's father is to provide the narrator with all the media images that form one side of his conscience, while he owes his mother his bent for ‘high’ culture⁷. She also upsets her family with her mental illness and the fatal cancer in her uterus⁸, which makes David constantly think about his own origins, starting from the biological ones. As a child, he was shocked by the fact that his mother's gynecologist had access to her most private parts. As an adolescent, her disease made him form “mental pictures of a growth inside [his] mother's womb” (169). Even the climactic episode of the flashback centers on David's relationship with his mother. Immediately after the party representing David's entrance into adulthood, once the guests have left the Bells' house, he sees his mother near the refrigerator, wearing only one shoe and spitting on some ice cubes before putting them back into the freezer. Later on, when he goes back to the kitchen and finds his mother in the pantry, he experiences an illumination that seems close to a Joycean ‘epiphany’. As she stands before him with “something splintered and bright [...] that might have been left by the spiral passage of [his] own body” inside her (perhaps alluding to a new birth), he feels “close to some overwhelming moment”:

It was going to happen. Whatever would happen. *The cage would open, the mad bird soar*, and I would cry in epic joy and pain at the freeing of a single moment, the beginning of time. Then I heard my father's bare feet on the stairs. That was all. (196-97, my italics)

Stephen's epiphany sprang out of a girl seen on the seashore, earthly and heavenly at the same time, whose bosom is “*as a bird's soft and slight*,

⁶ Perhaps in contrast with the always struggling Joycean advertising man, Leopold Bloom.

⁷ M. Osteen, *American Magic and Dread*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p.20.

⁸ Cancer killed Dedalus's mother too.

slight and soft as the breast of some darkplumaged dove”⁹. David’s bird is, on the contrary, a “mad bird”, symbolizing a previously withheld incestuous attraction. His father’s appearance ends the passage in frustrated self-censorship. This interruption would stay in David’s subconscious, as he will admit later that his father’s death would bring some relief, because he still remembers “the sound of his bare feet on the stairs” (285).

The incident leaves a mark on David, as it is evident in the narration of the Christmas party with which the novel opens. Twenty-eight year old David, showing an attitude of disdain towards the guests, repeats his mother’s gesture of spitting on the ice cubes. Moreover, his lover and muse Sullivan, a woman he often regards as a surrogate mother, at a certain point of the party stands on one foot, leaving an empty shoe on the floor, and reminding David of the aforementioned incident. This is also the time when he expresses the decision to start his journey: his attempt to reconcile himself with his mother-country (instead of a father-land), is set off by the remembrance of that epiphanic moment. In David’s mind, the idea of America that lies beyond its present decay is equal to the one of his childhood, lasting remote over time before his mother’s death. Boxall goes as far as making Sullivan’s shoe the postmodern version of Proust’s *madeleine*: “[i]f [...] *À la recherche* grows out of a tea cup, then *Americana* grows out of the empty space of that cryptic shoe”¹⁰. The relationship with Sullivan is itself part of David’s pursuit, an occasion for a deeper insight of both the wombs that generated him (the national and the personal one).

David shares with Stephen a certain sense of guilt deriving from the loss of his mother. Dedalus does not go as far as to have incestuous thoughts about his mother; nevertheless, with his refusal to attend the Easter mass, Mrs. Dedalus becomes identified, in his mind, with both Catholicism and Ireland (the mother-land). Stephen has to abandon his family, country and religion in order to pursue his vocation. His mother’s death is the main reason why he goes back to Ireland, where Buck Mulligan blames him for even refusing to pray at her deathbed. His intellect tries to drown his sense of guilt in literary quotations (the references to “Agenbite of Inwit” or to Lady Macbeth), but his mother’s ghost constantly haunts him, symbolizing the country he will never be able to leave behind. With an idealistic urge, he tries to come to terms with his ‘personal’ and ‘national’ wombs through

⁹ J. Joyce, *A Portrait...*, cit. p.144 (my italics).

¹⁰ P. Boxall, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

the creation of a book, which was still possible for the modernist artist. The postmodern artist, however, can no longer find such a shelter. Two scenes in *Ulysses* and *Americana*, where Stephen and David confront the death of their mothers, exemplify the difference. For Stephen it is another chance to re-think his apostate condition in a doubt about the afterlife:

A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, shadowing the bay in deeper green. It lay behind him, a bowl of bitter waters. Fergus' song: I sang it above in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery. Where now?¹¹

Bell, on the contrary, gets nothing but the confirmation of ineluctable human mortality, and the realization of the fictitious nature of the wombs that generated him:

Beneath the blanket her body was little more than ash, crumbs of bone; her hands were dry kindling. Death became her well, so horribly well, and when I heard the bells of an ice-cream truck I had almost laughed. American sky-chariot come to take mother to the mansion with the familiar orange-roof and the twenty-eight flavors. I had almost, but not quite, laughed; and then the chill had entered and she died. (97)

As a modernist artist, Joyce tries to investigate and express the ultimate mysteries of life, literary references still being a suitable instrument. DeLillo, on the other hand, can only make a bitter remark about its ultimate senselessness, exacerbated by the ubiquitous presence of consumerism.

In college, David Bell wanted to be known as "Kinch", the nickname chosen by Buck Mulligan to mock Stephen Dedalus, because he likes the "knife-blade" quality of the word which mirrors the way he regards his mind: a cutting instrument to penetrate reality. He associated with a boy named Leonard Zajac, whose nickname, "The Young Man Carbuncular", is taken from Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). The two nicknames place the boys under the aegis of two great modernist writers. For a short time, David feels inclined towards Leonard's way of life, a life devoted to books and loneliness,

¹¹ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 9.

but it does not take him very long to connect Leonard's vocation with his "chronic boils and obesity", that practically forced him to "make the library [his] *womb-home* and *chapel*" (143, my italics). Reaffirming the superiority of images over words, David uses his good looks to betray his friendship. He seduces the girl Leonard is in love with, and does it by appealing to the power of cinematic image: as he knocks at her door, he 'summons' Burt Lancaster in *From Here to Eternity*. That image is connected to the night when David, at sixteen, discovered the power of cinema, recognizing that Burt "transcended plot, action, characterization" and became "inseparable from the noisy destinies of 1941" (135). "This was religion", he says: in postwar America, an actor was really capable of catalyzing dreams¹². As Baudrillard underlines, the cult of movie stars represents the immediate personification and subsequent mythic transfiguration of the American dream, for its quality of "visibilité immédiate, transcription immédiate, collage matériel, précipitation du désir. Des fétiches, des objets-fétiches, qui n'ont rien à voir avec l'imaginaire, mais avec *la fiction matérielle de l'image* »¹³. That is why David considers the seduction of that girl as the moment when "[his] career as an intellectual was over" (144). Although Joyce was actually attracted by the possibilities offered by cinema, David clearly regards him as belonging to a purely literary world, which he feels is in opposition to his own cinematic one.

When David starts to see another schoolfellow, Ken Wild, their friendship is surprisingly based on literature, like the previous one he had rejected. Still some differences are evident, since they only use "the gleeful God-baiting of Buck Mulligan" as "text" as they "commit the usual collegiate blasphemy" (145). It is a game, a tribute to an earlier rebel who survived through the years to become a "sacred scroll". When they regret not having had poverty and obscurantism to trouble their childhoods¹⁴, they may not be lying. Indeed, they both write poetry, and a troubled life is their idea of a poet's life.

Bell seems to love literature precisely for its belonging to a past that cannot be brought back. Poets seem to him the more valuable, the more distant they are from his life: "we loved them because their lines meant less

¹² According to twenty-eight year old David, Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas are "the American Pyramids" (12).

¹³ J. Baudrillard, *Amérique* [1986], Paris, Descartes, 2000, pp. 131-32.

¹⁴ "...we regretted that there had been no gray Jesuits to darken our childhoods and none now to swoop down on us with deathmask and *Summa*."

to us than the dark side of the moon” (173). It is important to note how David’s idea of Dedalus almost always comes from “Telemachus”. Perhaps David’s interest for *Ulysses* depends on the desecrating presence of Mulligan, thus confirming his inclination to parody. Nevertheless, the failure of the artist suits *Americana* better than his beginning. They worship a famous failure, knowing that they are equally doomed. But Bell does not seem upset by his inability to write: “After all,” he thinks “I had my camera” (145).

Cinema starts to shape his perceptions of reality to the point that, while narrating his life, he remarks that “it was all there but the soundtrack” (36). The cinematographic interpretation of his life preludes his actual staging of his life. This self-dramatization, however, does not take place with a stereotyped stage technique, but follows the principles of alternative cinema, which he studied in college. Cinema is itself ambivalent in *Americana*. It is both the reassuring, patriotic art of classical Hollywood – the ‘religious’ aspect of it – and a means of intellectual experimentation through the power of images. David has been living this dichotomy – which America itself can be said to experience¹⁵ – since his college years.

Several years later, David tries to escape his incumbent role of ‘true son of the dream’, trying at the same time to give a definite shape and meaning to the fragments that compose his story. Unlike Eliot at the end of *The Waste Land*, Bell cannot be pleased with the fragments he has been able to save from the decline of Western civilization: a movie to be left forever unfinished and a memoir that will compensate for it. Together, these two things stand as *almost* complete proof of his existence as an independent being. It is even possible to venture a comparison between Bell after *Americana* and Dedalus after the *Portrait*. Stephen moves to the cultural city *par excellence* of his age, but he will subsequently go back to his previous life, defeated. Bell’s departure is set out in two parts: the ‘mystical’ journey through the Midwest at twenty-eight and his much later exile in Africa. The reader is not given much information about what Bell *does* after his first escape from New York, but the fact that, on his flight back home, someone asks him for his autograph makes it easy to presume that he temporarily returns to his life of superficial success – just as Stephen returns to Ireland – before moving to Africa and writing his memoir. Whereas Dedalus welcomes life as he goes

¹⁵ There were at least two 1960s in cinema: that of “middle-aged, middle-class mainstream” which was “the second of the two 1950s”, and that of *The Graduate* or *Easy Rider*, which addressed a younger audience and challenged the mainstream image of America (cfr. J. Belton, *American Cinema/American Culture*, New York/London, McGraw-Hill, 1994, pp. 294-295).

“to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race”¹⁶, Bell knows he cannot do the same thing. He knows that “all the impulses of all the media were fed into the circuitry of [his] dreams” and that he is, therefore, only an echo, “an image made in the image and the likeness of images” (130).

Dedalus speaks from an age in which one was still able to believe in the capacity of art to recompose human conscience. He says that his artistic impulse comes directly from experience, not mentioning the fact that, during the book, he has acted – and written – very little. The past is re-utilized, not left behind: in the quote from the *Portrait*, the image of the craftsman comes from mythology and has survived the centuries. Yet, the conscience Stephen intends to give his “race” is new and old at the same time. Art is still a process of voluntary creation of a fully aware artist. DeLillo does not talk about experience: Bell’s existence is “almost totally symbolic” like that of his contemporaries. Its symbolic value does not take the form of a ‘prophecy’¹⁷ of an inescapable destiny; it seems to come as a side effect of being born and having grown up in the only country in the world that defines itself by using the word “dream”. He has been brought up in this dream when it was at its peak, and has to deal with all the advertising and the propaganda world that has gradually become, for him, the only source of symbols. David says that he believed, as a child, in “all those things which all people are *said to want*, materials and objects and the shadows they cast” (130, my italics). Bell does not know which dreams and passions are actually his own, and what has been instead “fed” into the circuitry of his dreams. He has no definite artistic project, but the confused necessity to find something to “match the shadows of [his] image and [his] self” (341). This is to be found in the West, as everything that is pure and uncorrupted in America has always been represented as close to the Frontier.

Bell tries to create simulacra that, having a tangible existence, can survive their author. He wants to do with his life the same thing he had noticed he was able to do with a hawk he filmed in the desert when he was a student: he “plucked it out of time and space and placed it in the new era, free of history and death”(33). In order to do so, he has to settle his inner contrast between the part that was born with cinematographic and commercial images and the part that tries to elevate itself, also trying to redeem his own generation. Does he succeed? His final exile presents him “falling silently

¹⁶ J. Joyce, *A Portrait...*, cit., p. 213.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.142: “...his strange name seemed to him a prophecy”.

through [himself]" (345), in tactile contact with his manuscript and film, the only tangible proof of his existence. In trying to cope with the chaos that, he says, has characterized "our lives", he has achieved some results, but not the ones he had hoped for: he has ended in "silence and darkness". David regrets having to leave some details out of his work "in the name of memory". These details had not been mentioned elsewhere in the novel and do not appear to be important ("...the scar on my right index finger, the white medicine I took as a child, the ether visions of my tonsillectomy", 345). Yet, they somehow sound special to David, who wants to include them. It is rather different from the careful selection Joyce makes in creating Stephen's life by choosing only five symbolic moments. Bell accumulates a chaos of memories and images, but his work cannot discharge his artistic duties. The encyclopedic equation of art to life proves itself useless.

Bell confesses, "I have not been cunning enough" in a clear echo of Stephen's "silence, exile and cunning", which DeLillo knows well. Indeed, when asked by Tom LeClair about the shortage of biographic information about him, he replied "Silence, exile, cunning, and so on"¹⁸. The end of *Americana* features exile and silence, but cunning is for David out of reach: "no amount of self-serving research" can persuade him "that cunning does not grow its sharpest claws at the very extremes of consciousness" (346), the forbidden areas he has not dared to enter. What Stephen had recognized as an arm that could help him in detaching himself from the crowd of non-artistic people is now used by David to describe the "middle path" he has taken in his artistic creation.

Threatened by all-engaging entities (the mass media), the postmodern artist is aware he cannot resist. David's split self, between 'high' and 'low' culture, makes his language ambiguous, full of irony and paradox. Quoting is still a means of salvation, but it is only a partial solution. After trying to penetrate the deeper meaning of reality once again, he realizes that the only escape is exile, if not the acceptance of the *status quo*. This is the end of literature as a way of penetrating reality in its essence. At the same time, it is the beginning of another kind of tale, the one that deals with the impossibility of telling.

In the novel, Warren 'Beastly' Beasley is a disc-jockey and a friend of David's, who never appears in person but only as a voice, broadcasting on the radio or speaking on the phone. Beasley's show, with no guests, and news

¹⁸ T. LeClair, "An Interview with Don DeLillo", *Contemporary Literature* 23 (1982): 19-31.

bulletins of his own making, is an outright expression of his personality, directly addressing his audience (“all the caffeine dregs of a century of national insomnia”, 94) and attacking the media establishment. His speeches do not add anything to the actual plot; yet they contain, hidden under considerable nonsense and irony, a certain amount of information that is fundamental to understand their meaning – and their Joycean connection as well, as he acts like DeLillo’s Leopold Bloom.

Beasley mentions Joyce as “an Irish Arab” living in his mind, who is “Jesuit-educated and wears the very best that dogma can buy” (368). He is educated, yet he likes to express himself in gross language, hiding his literary quotations behind vulgarity, an exaggerated replica of the operation that postmodernism performs with ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture.

Beasley addresses the American man, “unmasked and emasculated” (232) in the night, having lost the protection that society usually provides him with and his leading sexual role, looking for shelter in pornography and perversion. Beasley himself is another victim of the ‘social emasculation’ he talks about. He has been married five times and sees each wife as a menace to his emotional well-being. Referring to the woman he is about to marry, he states that he wants to take her to Dublin for their honeymoon in order to pretend she is Molly Bloom who, he says, is the only woman he has really wanted to have sex with (95). He depicts himself as “Mollycuddling [his] bloomless wife”, with a play on the word “bloom” that is also found in *Ulysses*. Beasley talks about a man in a mackintosh following him – something that also happens to Bloom – and alludes to Bloom’s work as an advertising man, and to his fervid sexual imagination:

You’ve placed an ad in the *L.A. Free Press*. Studs, butches and house-broken pets interested in self-stimulation. Adding no freaks please in small type. Using a box number corresponding to the day, month and year of your first holy communion. (232)

DeLillo seems to have taken inspiration for his disc-jockey from the brothel fantasy scenes, like when Bella Cohen transforms herself into a man to whom Bloom yields saying “[e]xuberant female. Enormously I desiderate your domination. I am exhausted, abandoned, no more young.”¹⁹

¹⁹ J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 496

Much like Bloom speaking about his “New Bloomusalem”²⁰, Beasley is a prophet just because he says so. He re-elaborates a culture that would otherwise be dead, and presents it to the audience in a comprehensible way, satisfying its generic need for ‘something new’. The distortion of quotes from previous texts is not enough to reach a deep meaning; yet, some serious meaning lies behind irony. When, for example, he quotes *The Waste Land*’s Tiresias by saying “I, Beastly, have foresuffered it almost all” (232), DeLillo is not just playing with the juxtaposition of cultural levels, but also giving a fundamental key to understand the character and his role in the novel. Beasley is not a savior, being even a part of the violence he witnesses. His power and sight are limited (he says he foresuffered *almost* all) and he cannot resist decadence, watching it with the ambiguous curiosity of a post-modern intellectual. In re-using the prophet’s character, DeLillo overcomes Eliot as well, going directly back to Sophocles: the reference appears when he talks about “the national incest” between America (“mamaland”) and the American man, her pervertedly devoted son. Covertly but constantly, this is the same theme which rules David Bell’s artistic pursuit as well.

Beasley seems to know David even better than David knows himself. He has a curious way of following him in his journey. David listens to him for the first time after meeting the actors he will employ for his movie; unable to sleep, he turns on the radio to find himself listening to “the whole nightworld scratching out there” (231), a confused mixture of voices broadcasting from different places. Like Dedalus in “Proteus”, he can be contemporaneously in various places and times, but feels also lost. Then “a familiar voice” comes, Beasley’s voice guiding him out of chaos.

In most of *Ulysses*, Bloom and Dedalus are two separate entities and represent the two poles of the Joycean universe. The former in search of a son, the latter fatherless, Stephen’s supercilious intellectualism and Bloom’s positive rationality remain incompatible as the two men meet and then salute each other. Yet they represent, in a way, their author. The identification is easier with Stephen, but also Bloom, along with other models, can be considered an *alter ego* of Joyce himself²¹, since he is directly linked to Joyce’s upcoming maturity and feelings of eradication. The similarities between Stephen and Bloom are underlined by Joyce in the “Ithaca” episode (“Both

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

²¹ John McCourt, in *The Years of Bloom* (Dublin, Lilliput, 2001) draws on works like *Giacomo Joyce* to formulate this hypothesis.

were sensitive to... Both preferred... Both indurated... Both admitted..."²²). They had to meet, in order to bring together Joyce's picture of mankind. In *Americana*, the new Dedalus and the new Bloom do not actually meet. Yet, their telephone conversation towards the end of the novel, when David is about to stop his journey, shares some features with the Eccles Street one. He has just listened to Beasley's show for the second time in the novel, and reaffirms how important it is for him to hear "a familiar voice". Beasley replies that he himself listens to his own show, with some narcissistic pleasure, since he has started recording it. David is upset by this revelation, a proof of his assumption that "[w]e're all on tape" (371). He had used this particular expression before. In New York, he thought that "all of us at the network existed only on videotape" and that their actions and words had been frozen "to await broadcast and rebroadcast when the proper time-slots became available."²³ In the age of obsessive, potentially infinite repetition of images, very little seems to stay real. The unpredictability of live transmission creates, from David's point of view, something closer to real life. The fact that even Beasley is now "on tape" means to David that a postmodern, pre-ordered version of life is inescapable.

Beasley tells David that he often has "the tapeworm dream". This is the same dream of a tapeworm growing inside him and devouring him that David reports having heard from Beasley (288). He seems to be quite obsessed with tapeworms. He calls his listeners "endoparasites" (367), and urges them to "pray that we stop repeating our lives into the sucking tapeworm" (234). The tapeworm represents "a culture that has absorbed entirely the history that has gone into its making, and become so fully itself that no time and no place can resist its centripetal pull."²³ Beasley is the personification of resistance against an America that swallows up time and history in the reproduction of an eternal present. With his 'lucid insanity', he tries to smuggle elements of high culture into this scenario. David's attempt to elevate his generation by representing a cinematic version of his cinematic life originates from this pursuit. Both of them will end in failure and standardization.

David's dream of composing a "whole picture" ends up in a post-verbal, post-filmic dimension²⁴. With no truth he can tell the world, his inner

²² J. Joyce, *Ulysses*, cit., p. 619.

²³ P. Boxall, *op. cit.*, p.23.

²⁴ Cfr. P.Mansutti, "Using the Whole Picture": Il doppio sogno cinematografico di *Americana*", *Nuova Corrente* 52 (July-December 2005): 250.

growth starts and ends in his useless memoir. Beasley explains this process when he says: “I’ve got the Stephen Dedalus’ blues and it’s a long way to Leopoldville” (234). It has been noted that this sentence seems to predict David’s African exile²⁵, but it is also the same path that leads a Stephen Dedalus to become a Leopold Bloom. His maturity corresponds to the then-remote end of the twentieth century, when “the first lamp to be lit will belong to that man who leaps from a cliff” and “soars to the tropics of the sun”²⁶ and David will come to a serene, yet resigned, acceptance of the postmodern condition, “wearing white flannel trousers” (348). The first image refers to Stephen Dedalus, always associated with Icarus; the second to Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock, a less heroic character, unable to face existential issues: this is David’s ultimate destiny. In his movie, he has already expressed this desire, and fear, at the same time:

“Is there anything else you’d like to tell the camera?”

“Simply hello. Hello to myself in the remote future, watching this in fear and darkness. Hello to that America, whatever it may be doing or undoing. *I hope you’ve finally become part of your time, David. You were always a bit behind, held back by obsolete sensibilities.*”

“Do you have any particular ambition in life?”

“To get out of it alive.” (286, my italics)

²⁵ F. Happe, *Don DeLillo*, Paris, Belin, 2000, p. 22, “...la paronomase suggère en inscrivant les signes joyciens dans une géographie africaine”.

²⁶ The verb “to soar” has already been used by DeLillo in describing David’s incestuous desires.

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