Withdrawing (from) waste, and the end of Law:

Reflections on De Lillo's prophecies in *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld (1997)*

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Abstract
An often heard phrase these days is 'There is something about this chaotic 21st century of ours ...'. The phrase is usually uttered when the current US government administration has sent out yet another (self-)contradictory statement, or when it launches another direct attack on the law (e.g. international law) and its institutions (e.g. the ICC). In this contribution an attempt will be made to outline the contours of this 'something'. This 'something' is not just present in the realm where government administrations operate. It lies at the heart of a new form of life which has become predominant in recent decades in globalizing culture: the life of aspiring, radicalizing sovereigns. This 'something', then, could the called the end of Law. In an age of aspiring and radicalizing sovereigns the Law, indeed law in all its forms and shapes, has become not just an irrelevance, but a nuisance and embarrassment as well. One of the manifestations of this irreverent sovereign attitude is the growing inability to accept waste, that is, an inability to live with all that generates waste (i.e. Law), and an inability to live with all that is waste. Waste, i.e. the accumulation of spent potential, is not what the aspiring, radicalizing sovereign wants. The sovereign's desires are all about conserving all potential. Although this new form of life -i.e. sovereign life that has withdrawn (from) waste- has become manifest only very recently, i.e. well into the 21st century, it had, in a way, been predicted by the novelist Don DeLillo in his novels *Mao II* and *Underworld*. The themes and images in both novels -DeLillo's only novels published during the 1990s- will be at the core of this contribution.

Key words

Lucifer – sovereignty – Don DeLillo – path dependency – entropy – the end of Law

1. The end (of Law)

One may perhaps be forgiven for thinking that something has ended in recent years, or wasted, perhaps. Something big: Law. When the government administration of a formerly hegemonic state issues, in the diplomatic sphere, the one contradictory tweet after the next, then many are beginning to sense that something has changed, and that something has been lost. It is not so much that some of the communications mentioned above do rarely, if at all, take into account the fineries of international law. The more important issue here is that the diplomatic communications thus tweeted seem to thrive on a blatant disregard for one of the basic codes –or Law- that underpins diplomatic communication. This is the code that commands: 'In Diplomatic Communications Thou Shalt Demonstrate a Certain level of Consistency and Coherence". In other words, for diplomatic communication to somehow succeed, communications must always at least to a certain extent make sense in the light of previous communications. In the diplomatic sphere in particular, it is expected that communications are somehow narratively path dependent. Not to submit to this Law is likely to make diplomatic communication impossible. Not to submit to this Law could mean that there might no longer be any communication at all. Many of the tweets that have been emanating from the White House, roughly since the early days of 2017, demonstrate little narrative path dependency. It may now perhaps be fair to

say that many are beginning to wonder what on earth is going on. It may of course be the case that the tweets demonstrate a certain lack of awareness of the need for narrative path dependency. However, one could also argue that the recent lack of consistency and coherence in the diplomatic twitter-sphere more likely betrays a willingness to demonstrate the obsoleteness of diplomatic communication. Indeed it may very well be the case that the diplomatic tweets are intended to hammer home the message that diplomatic communication, and the codes –or the Law- that underpin it, are a waste of time and effort.

Those that want to make the Nation absolutely and radically sovereign (First! Great!), or indeed those who want to be absolutely, radically sovereign themselves, have no need for diplomatic communication, nor for path dependency. He or she (henceforth 'he') has no need for Law. In the aspiring sovereign's imaginary, all code, all Law is wasteful. Law, the aspiring sovereign imagines, wastes the full potential of life. In the aspiring sovereign's imagination, there is no room for path dependency, whether actual or narrative. Path dependency implies that the fullness of choice would somehow have to be restricted, or would simply *be* restricted, by choices made earlier. That, the aspiring radical sovereign is no longer prepared to accept. Why would one have to submit to the Law that says: 'Thou Shalt not Eat Thy Cake, and Still Have it''. That is unacceptable. The aspiring radical sovereign refuses to accept, or submit to any code, any Law whatsoever. There can be no submission to Law. All potential must be preserved, ready to be accessed and mobilised, always and everywhere. There can be no path

dependency. There shall be no waste of time and effort. There shall be no waste.

Such radical aspirations may not be the preserve of only the twittering few. One could argue that the ideal of absolute, utterly absolute sovereignty, that is, sovereignty *before* and *beyond all* code and *all* Law, has now pervaded much of contemporary globalizing culture. The year 2016 may have been one of those moments when many became aware that 'something's up', but the drift towards radical sovereign aspiration had, very probably, been gaining momentum already since the dying days of the Second World War, when its first kernel slowly crystallised out of the anti-authoritarian mood that rose from the ruins on the day that the guns fell silent. It has taken a lot of time time for this kernel to grow into the full-blown culture of radical sovereign aspiration that we may be witnessing now, in this peculiar 21st century of ours. It is possible to discern, in this decade-long development, a transition in global culture whereby its default operational logic was gradually replaced with a radically anti-foundational one. The former was built around the command: 'All Else Failing, Sacrifice and Submit!'. The new default logic holds: 'All Else Failing, Refute all Foundation! Refute all Submission!'. To the extent that the default logic in global culture has indeed moved to the farthest ends of the anti-foundational spectrum –at the point, that is, where utterly radical sovereign aspiration is beginning to make itself felt- one can indeed say that something 'has ended' and that 'something's up' very seriously. 'Law' has ended. Its wastefulness is no longer submitted to by aspiring radical sovereigns who refuse to sacrifice to its authority. Its waste

of potential is no longer accepted. Its waste is no longer accepted. The aspiring sovereign withdraws all waste. He withdraws from all waste. All potential must remain intact.

We have elsewhere (Lippens 2018, 2018b, and 2019) called this farthest reach of anti-foundational sovereign aspiration the "Luciferian" moment in late modern culture. We shall revisit this theme in the final section of this contribution. But before we do we need to explore the work of one artist who seems to have sensed, already during the 1990s, that 'something was up'. The images and themes in Don DeLillo's novels *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld* (1997) had, we will argue, something prophetic about them. The novels can be read as holding clues to the Luciferian moment of our time.

2. Creation of waste

Don DeLillo's novelistic work, in a way, always chronicles American post-war life. Or, perhaps more precisely, it is inclined to outline the deep cultural contours, the bedrock almost, against which American post-war life has, over the decades, been carving its many-splendored shapes. The same has often been said about abstract expressionism, and it may then not come as too much of a surprise that one of DeLillo's main sources of inspiration is to be found, exactly, in that post-war aesthetic (see on this Knight 2011, 36 in particular). Two books seem to stand out in DeLillo's oeuvre for the force with which they managed to lift "America" –shorthand for late modern, mediatised, hyperreal, burnt-out, and apocalyptically entropic life- out of the rather narrow decor (i.e. the USA) against which it was nurtured and within

which it blossomed. The books referred to here are *Mao II* (1991) and *Underworld* (1997). By the time of their publication "America" had become a global culture. In both works a sense of the impending *End of Law* is palpable, as are the ambiguities of this approaching *End*. The End, already here -but not completely just yet- is both tragically catastrophic and potentially liberating. Both works are also prophetic. They are prophetic not just in the sense that in the works DeLillo managed to foreshadow events that were yet to come, but also, and more importantly, in the sense that the author was able to read the signs of a world that had arrived beyond history (as the phrase then went) and that, as far as he was concerned, the future had already happened. Indeed; 'no more history' also means: 'no more future'. The future, in other words, had already happened when DeLillo penned the final and highly enigmatic line on page 827of his monumental *Underworld* (1997): "Peace.". In what follows the focus will be on *Underworld*, a book that took DeLillo six years to complete. But we need to start our exploration with a discussion of DeLillo's only other novel from the 1990s, *Mao II,* which was published in 1991.

One could argue that the main theme that DeLillo explores in Mao II is the tragic inevitability of wavebands. It is only in the modern, mediatised age –the age of wavebands- that we have come to realise that wavebands are inevitable, that the world itself is nothing but wavebands, that it always has been wavebands and nothing else, and that, in all their tragic inevitability, wavebands can do nothing more than cut up and slice the full mystery of the world –its full and complete potential- into endless waves of fragments. What

remains of the world, in the waves, are mere images scattering in nicely separated out bands and intersecting "processing grids" (1991, 112), into "the machine" that "makes everything a message" (92). DeLillo uses the word "wavebands" only once, when his protagonist, the reclusive novelist Bill Gray ponders the plight of a poet who is held hostage by a factional "terrorist" group in Beirut (we are in or before 1990), and who Gray, after decades of living like a hermit, away from the world's spotlights, intends to negotiate to freedom by offering himself up to the terrorists. The trope of 'waves' had been mobilised by DeLillo before, e.g. in his 1985 novel *White Noise* -a book on late modern American life as a blend of cacophonic, vacuous consumerism and catastrophe- in which one of the chapters reads 'Waves and Radiation'. In *Mao II*, the captive poet's experience, Gray thinks, is "lost in the wavebands" (112). Experience is lost. We now know that all experience, like the mystery of the world that generates it and that is generated by it, is always going to be lost, inevitably, "in the wavebands".

DeLillo's ire, however, is not just about the wavebands of a late modern, mediatised global culture. Wavebands come in various shapes and forms and they all have, painfully inevitably so, the same effect: they cut up, fragment, separate, restrict, and scatter. Take crowds, for example. The "wave" that binds bodies into the pulsating movement of a crowd only consists of energized affective tremors. Those are nothing but the sum total of sliced, separated-off fragments, or aspects, of experience, and that as such cannot but restrict and reduce the fullness of life and experience into what the "waveband" of the crowd is able to "bind". But the mystery of life, the

mystery inside the countless bodies that are thus "bound" by the crowd's "waveband", is lost. *Mao II* actually opens with a crowd scene. A man observes the huge crowd that takes part in a mass marriage ceremony orchestrated by Master Moon. He is desperately trying to locate his daughter who he knows must be one of the pixels on the image ("waveband") in his binoculars. He fails: "They're one body now, an undifferentiated mass, and this makes him uneasy" (1991, 3). The daughter's body has disappeared into the waveband of the crowd. The mystery of her life, and her life experiences, are lost in the wave that binds the crowd. Nearly all is lost in the images that the event of the crowd generates and radiates outward. All that remains are the traces left by the images as they scatter through the grids that stretch out within their corresponding wavebands. The crowd is a recurring theme in DeLillo's work. Both novelists' prophetic fear (Gray's and DeLillo's, that is), back in 1991, was that "the future belongs to crowds" (16).

To human beings who have knowledge of the twentieth century this may of course not come as too much of a surprise: mass culture –restrictive and reductive mass waveband culture- does indeed hold the promise of totalitarianism. Or, as Peter Knight has been able to write in shorthand: "Crowd=Repetition=Image=Globalization=Death of the Individual" (2011, 36). However, the crowd being DeLillo's archetypal restrictive and therefore destructive "waveband", the latter also re-appear in a variety of guises. Ideologies, for example, cannot but cut through the full mystery of life and experience and "bind" separated-out aspects of it into waves of movement which can only generate images that are, in turn, "bound" to be captured

by and scattered through grids within separated wavebands. Ideologies only bind that which binds them, and in some cases that which is thus bound is unable to support the presence of what is unable to be bound by them. Not all wavebands, then, are able to persist in peaceful co-existence. "Peace", as DeLillo would sigh, in 1997, on the last page of *Underworld*, is not the inevitable modus of a world that is carved up by an endless spectrum of wavebands, and an equally endless number of proliferating grids within them. The fight against that within the fullness of life and experience, which could never be supported in a particular ideological waveband, will sometimes have to be fought in the world of extensive matter, in the waveband of particles, sinews and pumping valves, and blood and guts. Fundamentalism and its "terrorist" radiations of images and corresponding waveband bindings, do indeed appear often in DeLillo's work (e.g. in his 1977 novel *Players*, where the 'terrorists' act against the backdrop of a consumerist USA shot through with near total alienation and ennui). Like Gray, DeLillo is fascinated by the figure of the terrorist. Both notice a strange similarity between the figure of the terrorist on the one hand, and the novelist on the other. Gray says, "here's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists [...] They make raids on human consciousness" (1991, 41). Both the terrorist and the novelist generate and radiate waves of impulses (or images) out into the world of wavebands where they may, or may not be picked up in a wide variety of criss-crossing grids. The grids cut through life and experience and bind those elements that correspond to their wavebands. If and where and when this process of binding together takes place "human consciousness"

acquires focus, and is forced to at least forget, and indeed, sometimes repress, or worse, oppress, what is not thus bounded. So, both the novelist and the terrorist are quite similar. They are both "underground figures", as George Haddad, an unacknowledged spokesman for the "terrorists" who keep the poet hostage in *Mao II* in Beirut –does the poet stand for the fullness of life and experience?- explains to Gray (1991, 156). Whereas the novelist has had the upper hand in this process of binding throughout the best part of modernity, the terrorist, Gray-DeLillo claims, has taken over from the former in the age of entropy. That is, in the age of mass media wavebands and grids cutting and scattering anything that life is able to generate (see also Evans 2006). Only the terrorist is able to temporarily bind elements of life and experience (welling up as they do from their mysterious depths) by somehow using the circulation of impulses (images) in grids, and by forcing them to cohere in wavebands that are as close as possible to the sinews and to the valves of immanent life and experience. "What terrorists gain, novelists lose" (157), the novelist Gray-DeLillo concludes. The novelist has lost the battle for "human consciousness".

Gray was able to read the signs of this debacle in the post-war works of Samuel Beckett. "Beckett is the last writer to shape the way we think and see. After him, the major work involves midair explosions and crumbled buildings." (157). Beckett was the one, Gray seems to suggest, who, in those extremely wary post-war days, saw that the game was up. Not only had the experience of the War shown that it is extremely dangerous to bind human consciousness in wavebands, it may now no longer be possible at all in an age, as

10

philosopher Bernard Stiegler would much later (2016) argue, when the abstract and near-automatic algorithms of commodity/image have taken over almost completely the process of "binding", to the point of taking "human consciousness" into sheer entropy. This prophetic sense of impending doom is probably why Bill Gray, after a few highly impactful novels, which he published in the 1950s and 1960s, decided to retreat into absolute hermetic isolation, keeping the "mystery inside" (1991, 26), well hidden from all prying eyes in the wavebands. He is still working on his next novel though, perhaps in the faint hope of articulating impulses that are be able to be picked up and scattered by the grids in a great many wavebands, and thus "bind" "human consciousness". But the book is never finished. And so it should be, according to Scott, Gray's factotum: "[...] the withheld work of art is the only eloquence left" (67). Only silence –that is: the absence of impulses, of images- makes sense now. It is this silence that forms the outside of all the binding that goes on in the frenzy of the operating grids and wavebands world. Only silence still holds something of a promise of access to the "mysterious inside", indeed the unreachable "eloquence" of life and experience. As Silvia Bizzini surmises, in her paper on *Mao II*, publishing in an age of mediatised frenzy makes little sense for authors like Gray who are inclined to "feel that it is not *his* writing anymore" (1995, 108).

However, Gray abandons his reclusive withdrawal from the world following a visit from international photographer Brita. Brita is the image-maker per excellence. She takes pictures of novelists and chases them through the grids and wavebands of the world. Brita's visit ultimately makes

Gray look outward again, into those very grids and wavebands. When he is informed by his agent that a poet (the sensuous fullness of life and experience?) is taken hostage by a "terrorist" group in Beirut, the recluse decides to venture into the world and take part in a press conference. In other words, his intention is to enter the endlessly intricate mesh of grids and wavebands, and radiate impulses (images) in them, in the very circuits of "spectacle". The press conference is cancelled following news of a terrorist threat, but that does not lead Gray to withdraw back into his hermetic retreat. He now intends to bypass the grids and wavebands altogether and instead access experience directly. In a bid to save the mysterious core, or the poetry of life and experience (quite literally so), he travels to Beirut to negotiate the poet's release directly there, in Beirut, at the very point of experience. Gray however never reaches Beirut. He dies, quite 'mysteriously' so, on the ferry that takes him to the Lebanese shores. Nobody ever hears from him again. The mystery called "Gray", pure life and experience, once entered into the grids and wavelengths of our age, quietly evaporates in the entropy of the world. In the wake of Gray's unnoticed demise "terrorism", the only remaining assemblage of wavebands and grids that is able to "bind" human consciousness, is preparing for a future of "midair explosions and crumbled buildings". Meanwhile Brita decides to abandon her novelists-on-film project, and starts taking pictures of the Lebanese wastelands and the bodies –whether fighting or lifeless- in them. Her pictures, one assumes, are destined to scatter through the "wavebands" with their "processing grids", just like those of catastrophic crowd events that pepper DeLillo's *Mao II* (on

this, see Barrett 2011). In *Mao II,* waste is what is created in and by the grids and wavebands of the world. Not just is it the case that those grids and wavebands can only cut up, fragment and separate out the full original experience of life, wasting the latter in the process, but the thus created results –the images circulating in the endless variety of wavebands and grids- are nothing but waste. At the very least they are a waste of time and effort. In *Underworld* the overall theme seems to be that all creation, that Creation as such, is nothing but the creation of waste.

3. Waste of creation

Gray had learnt this lesson the hard way, and much too late: if you want to stay close to life and experience, and if you want to keep the "mystery inside", you'll have to withdraw from the world and from its grids and wavebands. As soon as you venture into this world, all of life and experience just becomes images, that is, fragments, aspects, indeed mere particles that circulate in those very grids and wavebands. Especially in the age of commodity/image algorithms –as a Stiegler would have it- the only achievement that awaits those particles is their use as mere fuel in an assemblage of wavebands and grids that operates according to the abstract codes, or better, according to the abstract Law that commands: 'Move, Consume, or Perish!'. All the "mystery inside" of life and experience, all of the fullness, all of its potential, has gone, wasted. As said, it took DeLillo six years to finish the book. In a way one could perhaps argue that this Gray-style "withdrawal" was the logical consequence of the lesson that Gray-

DeLillo had developed and learnt in *Mao II*. But unlike Gray's novel that never materialised, *Underworld* ultimately did. Many a scholar of DeLillo's fiction considers *Underworld* to be his *magnum opus*, and that is not just because of its massive volume, or its intricately labyrinthine structure. The novel, to use Hill Schaub's words, is very much about "the search for origins" (2011, 71). DeLillo's search is for all that has been wasted. Ultimately that is all that is ignored, discarded, and left as waste by all the "wavebands" and "grids" that be. And that is a lot: it comprises all of life, and all of the original experiences in it, which are not captured by the operational codes of those wavebands and grids. It comprises all that has not been cut up, separated out, and scattered in their intricate, labyrinthine circuits. In other words, it includes all the original "mystery" of life that can no longer be found in its circulating aspects, or images. But that is only half of the story, for of course the assemblages of "wavebands" and "grids" in which all this circulation takes place, those machines for the production of waste, are themselves also waste. They were themselves created out of the fullness of life and experience and, like all creations, like all Creation, they are built out of operating codes, indeed, out of Law. All Law is created; all Law is derivative. And all Law is wasteful. All Law restricts. All Law is the death of the full potential of life. All law, in other words, is a waste. All Law is waste. To venture into the operating codes of the world is to "sacrifice" to them (see also Knight 2011, 44). It is to sacrifice. And as Gray found out, to venture into them, with all the "mystery inside" that you can muster, is to sacrifice all; it is to waste all.

The "search" for the ultimate "origin" is at heart a Luciferian one. It is a search for full potential, for life in the zone of pure potential. This is a search for life at the very Origin, before anything like code or Law has had the chance to emerge. This search is one for life before, or beyond, the reach of "wavebands" and "grids" that cannot do anything but restrict, cut up, separate out, and scatter in circuits. Stronger still: the search for the Origin is the search for life before anything like "wavebands" have been able to emerged at all. We hope to be able to argue later in this essay that there is something Luciferian about DeLillo's search for the Origin, and that, in an age of what we shall call aspiring radical sovereigns, this should not come as a surprise. Like Lucifer, the aspiring radical sovereign withdraws from anything that has a whiff of code, or Law about it. The Luciferian aspires to withdraw from all Law, that is: from all waste. The Luciferian aspires to live in a zone of pure, un-wasted potential. For now though we suffice by noting that DeLillo's search for the Origin, like all searches for the Origin, could not be anything but paradoxical: the Origin can only be found in the waste that it has generated. The Origin is itself wasted. For all its generative force, it is as wasteful as it is itself wasted, or indeed: waste. This might be what DeLillo meant when he had one of his protagonists in U*nderworld*, Nick Shay, a waste management expert, state in a passage often quoted by DeLillo scholars: "Waste is a religious thing" (1997, 88).

The fifties are a "lost object of desire", Molly Wallace writes (2001, 371). In *Underworld* the search for the lost but desired Origin is symbolised by the baseball game that was played on October 1951 in New York. The New York

Giants won this game against all odds against the Brooklyn Dodgers following a spectacular, but also quite mysterious hit and homerun by the Giants' Bobby Thomson. The ball's trajectory was completely unexpected. The ball was shot into the lower deck stands, and was then never found again. The odds of the game were such that it was deemed impossible for the Giants to win the pennant, but Thomson's shot somehow made it happen anyway. The event still remains one of the legendary moments in baseball history and was quickly dubbed 'the shot that was heard around the world', a reference to another Origin, the start of the American Revolutionary War. The novel begins with an extensive and highly intricate description of the minutiae of the experiences of a number of people present in the stadium just before, during and after Thomson's homerun. The bewildering complexity of those minutiae, although highly suggestive of the impenetrable mystery of the collective experience of the event, are however unable to grasp the fullness of the mystery. The fullness of the mystery cannot be grasped in its totality. There are only countless experiences of it, each infinitely complex in itself. At the exact time of the homerun, a piece of scrap paper –waste, indeed- with the picture of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's 1562 painting *The Triumph of Death* blows against the body of one of the spectators, J. Edgar Hoover, the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who also hears that the USSR has been successful in its A-bomb test (another 'shot heard around the world'). Hoover thus misses out on one of the most imponderable mysterious moments in baseball history, and therefore in American culture as well, at the point when he realizes that the pure energy of the original Origin, the origin that is locked

into the raw matter of the world, is now showing itself as the potential eliminator –or waster, or cleanser- of the world that is, itself, this primordial energy's waste. A return to the Origin and its pure potential has suddenly become possible, albeit in total annihilation, in the complete apocalyptic *Triumph of Death* (on the apocalypticism in DeLillo's work, see also Nadyan 2012).

What J. Edgar Hoover missed out on though is the pure mystery of Thomson's shot and the subsequent homerun. In one infinitesimal moment that which was impossible became possible. Pure potential was unleashed in that split second. The baseball itself, the object of mystery, we know, was never found again. In DeLillo's novel we learn that a young African-American boy, Cotter Martin, wrestled it from a salesman's hands during the crowd's ecstatic melee following Thomson's feat, then took it home, where his alcoholic father, Manx, stole it to sell it on for a quick buck. In the labyrinth of the novel we are able to pick up and reconstruct snippets of the baseball's post-Thomson trajectory through the decades –embarking as it did upon a real "Martiniad", Herren (2015) might suggest- until it finally reaches the hands of the novel's protagonist, Nick Shay. Shay, it is suggested (but we can't be certain, it remains a mystery), may also have been present in the stadium on that 3d of October 1951 as a young boy, accidentally capturing and recording the only remaining sound waves of the event. Shay, a professional waste disposal manager and engineer, keeps the ball, this mere inert piece of waste, as all that remains of a miraculous mystery that was and will never be accessible again. He keeps it not because it reminds him of Thomson's

17

shot, but, rather, DeLillo tells us, because it stands for *loss*; for the Dodgers' loss, certainly, but also for eternal loss (on loss, and attachment to loss, as a theme in DeLillo's work, see Marshall 2013). As a piece of waste, it stands for what has been lost. It stands for all that could have been. It reminds us of potential; of all the potential that is locked in moments of origin. It stands for that which is "uniquely" ungraspable (see also Evans 2006, 123). In the words of Stefan Mattessich it could also stand for Lacan's Thing (*Das Ding*), that which is "latent, secret, virtual, withheld or *uncreated*, unnamble" (2007, 15; italics added RL). As soon as the unnameable Thing secretes an extensive effect, it generates waste, and in its material extensive effect, it itself, once *created*, also becomes waste. The baseball, then, it could be argued, reminds Nick Shay (and us as well) of that which always gets lost, or wasted, on trajectories, and on paths. It reminds us of what is wasted through path dependency.

And there are a great many paths and trajectories in *Underworld*. The novel not only retraces the hidden trajectory of the baseball through the post-war decades. It also suggests the bewilderingly vast network of the many protagonists' life paths. The protagonists are largely unaware of each other's trajectories, however closely connected they at times are. They are also completely ignorant of that which runs like a faint suggestion through the interstices in their intricate, labyrinthine network of life trajectories, connecting them all (on this, see also Mullins 2010). What connects them all is the baseball that, although it unleashed, in a split second back in 1951, untold potential, then vanished without a trace, was wasted, and could only

18

represent, if it were to be found (as Shay came to realise), the loss and the waste of the Origin. In other words, the protagonists are unaware of what flows underneath, in the *Underworld* of their path dependent little wasted lives, full of wasteful little choices, made in little wavebands. They are unaware of the full potential of life that, untouchable like the vanished baseball, runs mysteriously before and beyond their splintering and clashing path dependencies. They are unaware of the "Peace" that is to be found in total, full, pure, un-wasted potential.

Nick Shay's own trajectory drags him from one sense of waste and loss to the next. Unlike his brother Matt (a onetime nuclear physicist working for the military turned charity worker) Nick refuses to accept that the mysterious disappearance of their father when they were little, was anything other than a liquidation by the local *Underworld* Mafiosi. Having mysteriously killed – wasted- his friend, "George the Waiter", in his youth, Shay redeems himself with the help of Jesuits, and becomes obsessed with the management and redemption, or recycling, of waste. His fleeting early relationship with the artist Klara Sax, who redeems decommissioned bomber planes that are stored in massive numbers in the desert by painting them in bright colours, Shay tries to recall by paying the artist a visit during her work. For all its benign calmness, the visit is a waste of time and effort. And meanwhile the FBI Director's namesake, Sister Edgar, who used to be one of Shay's primary school teachers, and who lived a life on the tyrannical path, and in the company of the iron Law of patriotic militarism, finally finds "Peace" when she dies after witnessing a miraculous apparition. The apparition took the form of the face

of Esmeralda, a homeless girl who lived on an abject *Underworld* wasteland –
"the Wall"- and who had been brutally raped and killed –wasted- a few days
before the apparition of her face on a dilapidated billboard in the slum –
waste of all wastes. When she awakes, Sister Edgar finds herself immersed in
the fluid of cyberspace, connected to all, aware of everything. Nothing is
wasted there. All is constantly recycled into potential (see also McCormick
2013; Wasserman 2014). All "wavebands" are molten together there. In this
fluid, there is "Peace".

4. The beginning (enter Lucifer)

Todd McGowan's reading of *Underworld* places it in our contemporary
culture. To use Laschian language, this is a culture that is shot through with
"narcissistic self-absorption" (2015, 124). In such a culture "all our connection
with the Other has disappeared". There is nothing left –no object left at all-
that could bind us together. There is no centre left that holds. In this
Underworld of ours "what was once marginal and discarded has become
central" (125). Thomson's homerun might have been able to bind us, very
briefly, all that time ago. But that moment of transcendence cannot be
grasped nor retrieved. And there is nothing else to replace it. Something like
entropy has set in. There is no more tension between this, that, and "the
Other". This lack of tension leads the self-absorbed narcissist into a state of
permanent paranoia. In his paranoia the narcissist produces the "sacred"
waste that is absolutely necessary for him to maintain his 'solidity' or
'coherence' against. McGowan probably has a point. One could however

argue that our age is no longer one of mere narcissistic paranoiacs in search of tension and solidity. Life may have become a lot worse than that. It could very well be that we have arrived in an age of Luciferians. The last thing that the Luciferian aspires to is tension and solidity. Solidities –and the Law that keeps them together- only produce waste, and the last thing that the Luciferian sovereign needs is waste. Or Law.

In one of his latest works the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2014) is able to retrace a line of 'bastard-ness' at the heart of Modernity. The aristocratic bastards –quite literally: bastards- had to forge their own path in life, away from the family line, and away from tradition. This literal 'bastard-ness' evolved into one of the constituent elements of Modern culture. This attitude Sloterdijk calls an "anti-genealogical" attitude. It involved the gradual abandonment of adherence to the solidities of the past. The bastard's eye was firmly on the future; his future. The point that we would like to make here is that this anti-genealogical attitude has, in the course of the post-war decades, radicalised even further. In an age when the default operational logic seems to be 'All Else Failing, Refute all Foundation! Refute all Submission", the aspiring Luciferian radical sovereign, the 'bastard' *par excellence*, refuses to submit to all that has a certain solidity about it, and that operates according to a certain code, or that carries Law within it. He is no longer prepared to submit to, or sacrifice to the past, to the future, or to the present. All the "meaning systems" that human beings tend to cling to in dread, in a bid, as the anthropologist Ernest Becker (1975) had it (and as Jack Gladney, the protagonist in DeLillo's *White Noise* came to realise at the end

of said 1985 novel), to forget about their slimy creaturely origins, and in the vague hope of reaching some level of immortality, are, to the aspiring radical sovereign, ever so many coded solidities, or Law, that need to be treated as all wasteful Law, or as all waste: they should be approached with something like indifference burning in the void of the soul. Like Lucifer himself, the radicalized sovereign wades with cool indifference through all the solidities of Creation. They all carry code, or Law. They are all, in his Luciferian eyes, wasteful. They all represent waste. They all squander the primordial potential at the Origin. They all constantly waste pure potential.

Lucifer himself, as is well known from mythology, was the first Creature, the First Son of God, the Bearer of Light, or indeed the bright Morning Star. Lucifer emerged at the very Origin. As pure Light, pure unformed potential, it was his task, he thought, to safeguard this pure potential (yes, like all angels, Lucifer did not carry a gendered code; for brevity's sake we will use 'he' here though). But when his father continued Creation, using up –wasting!- all this potential in the process, and fixing it in path dependency and Law (whether divinely natural Law, or humanly theological Law), the Bearer of pure Light could only rebel, and has, since his Fall, continued to make attempts, all those eons, to reverse Creation, and to restore the realm of pure, un-wasted, primordial potential. Physicists tend to call Lucifer by another name: entropy. We know from the pre-historical and historical record that Lucifer never really succeeded in his ultimate aim. But the 21st century may be giving us signs that he is making very serious efforts, once again. As we have written above there are now those like Bernard Stiegler (see above) who are discerning processes

of social entropy in an age of automatic algorithms. Or there are those like Yuval Noah Harari (2015) who predict that in the near future a network of cyborgs will transcend humanity and all the coded solidities –all the Law- that came with it. But the Luciferian imaginary goes way beyond such processes of *faux* entropy; *faux*, for of course those processes still follow code, albeit abstract, automatic ones. The radicalised Luciferian though imagines a life before, or beyond *all* code; before or beyond *all* Law. Like the mogul Howard Hughes, who shortly after the war (no coincidence there, perhaps) withdrew from the world, keeping all potential intact (he even stored his urine), the Luciferian withdraws from all waste, and withdraws all waste. With cool indifference, he withdraws (from) all that is wasteful. His ultimate aim is to *trump* (no pun intended) the father and his Creation. His intention is to calmly wade through the waste (i.e. Law and its products) and to forge his utterly independent path. On his path, bathed in obliterating Light, he neither knows nor recognizes dependency. To live a Luciferian's life is of course impossible, completely illusory, and insurmountably paradoxical. But that is not the point here. The point is that the Luciferian imagines it might be possible, just possible, to live such a life.

The themes and images in *Mao II* and *Underworld* strangely prefigure the Luciferian dimension of our contemporary age: the hopeless loss of and search for the 'mystery' of the Origin, the inevitable wastefulness of communication, the accumulation of waste everywhere, the withdrawal from the world and its waste, the withholding and withdrawal of waste, the obsession with recycling and processing of waste and its desperate

transformation into new 'potential', the destruction –waste of all wastes, the *Triumph of Death* indeed- that is the result of the clash of foundational meaning systems, each with their intransigent coded Law ..... And at the heart of all this, there's a writer yearning for the calm of original, primordial "Peace".

5. Epilogue

After the turn of the century DeLillo kept revisiting the above themes and images. In *Cosmopolis* (2003*) for example*, he has a broker-billionaire driving around the city in his limousine. Protected from the world outside ("meat space", 64) he is only interested in the pure, abstract code, or algorithm, of investment flows. Otherwise nothing matters; he has withdrawn from the world. He feels "located totally nowhere" (23), and is only interested in a life lived in "white space" (5). He only likes the emptiness of "luminous" white space (27), and wonders about buying Rothko's chapel (abstract expressionism again ... on Rothko's "Luciferian" Chapel, see Lippens 2018). But when he decides to leave his abstract "white space", his limousine, and when he then enters "meat space", the life in there, and the many clashes that it generates (the city is a zone of riotous crowds; crowds again ...), gradually bring him down. Dying in an ambulance, and realizing that his attachment to code and algorithm, however abstract and "white", is no substitute for what we have called here a truly Luciferian life, he dreams that "he always wanted to become quantum dust" (206), that is: *original* dust, primordial dust un-governed by Law.

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