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Paranoia and Schizophrenia in Postmodern Literature: Pynchon and DeLillo

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## Introduction

Postmodern literature has been assigned a wide range of often contradictory attributes. Generally speaking, “postmodernism” is the new wave of thought and artistic creation in architecture, literature, and philosophy which developed in some sort of response to modernism. But just as there is no consensus among thinkers regarding what exactly postmodernism means, there is debate over how postmodernism relates to modernism—whether it is a radical break from or late extension of modernism, a style or a periodizing concept (Harvey 42). David Harvey, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, articulates the problems with categorizing postmodernism: “modernist sentiments may have been undermined, deconstructed, surpassed, or bypassed, but there is little certitude as to the coherence or meaning of the systems of thought that may have replaced them” (42).

What I intend to study in this paper is the shift in ways of viewing the self that occurs in the shift from modernist to postmodernist literature. Postmodern literature, as it is relevant to our discussion, is broadly the literature produced between the early 1960’s and late 1980’s that exhibits postmodernist qualities: an emphasis on multiple realities and distrust of totalizing discourses; fragmentation, irony, pastiche, and collage; “a shift from the kind of perspectivism that allowed the modernist to get a better bearing on the meaning of a complex but nevertheless singular reality, to the foregrounding of questions as to how radically different realities may coexist, collide, and interpenetrate” (Harvey 41). Ihab Hassan constructed a chart of “stylistic oppositions” between modernism and postmodernism to aid in plotting this shift, and while he clarifies that they are provisional and should not be accepted as clear dichotomies, it is difficult to read the chart and subsequent thinkers’ use of it in their analyses and not understand postmodernism in opposition to modernism (Harvey 42-43). The main “dichotomies” relevant to

this paper's exploration of the shift in perceptions of selfhood are "narrative/*grande histoire*" in opposition to "anti-narrative/*petite histoire*" and "paranoia" in opposition to "schizophrenia"; Hassan associates the latter terms with postmodernism and the former with modernism (Harvey 43). It is the conditions of modernity and postmodernity which produce their respective sensibilities. According to this model, characters experiencing a modernist world will interpret it through a paranoid sensibility (often referred to synonymously in this essay as a "modernist sensibility"), and characters experiencing a postmodernist world will interpret it through a schizophrenic ("postmodernist") sensibility.

Paranoia and schizophrenia are modes of knowledge, or ways of interpreting the world and viewing the self (Flieger 87). I will define these terms more thoroughly as they arise in the texts, but on a basic level paranoid characters suspect that there is an alternative narrative of the world hiding within the accepted narrative, and that this accepted narrative is just a façade for the "real" narrative. Schizophrenia, as I refine it within this essay, is a mode of knowledge which interprets the world to be comprised of multiple narratives. The postmodernist thinkers who associate paranoia with modernism and schizophrenia with postmodernism believe that paranoia was a psychological response to the conditions of modernity, while schizophrenia is the psychological response to the conditions of postmodernity. The experience of postmodernity is too fragmented, multiple, and overloaded with information to be understood through paranoia as well as it is understood through schizophrenia. But paranoia was the mode of knowledge through which modernist citizens understood their agency and identity, concepts which will be central to my argument. Postmodernist theory does not propose a new way of interpreting individuality through schizophrenia (although some theorists try to reconcile agency), which means that for postmodern citizens to experience the world schizophrenically, they must interpret the world

through a new mode of knowledge which does not so obviously incorporate agency and identity, or, as I propose in this paper, they must refine how agency and identity are defined.

The two postmodern novelists analyzed in this paper are working through the shift from modernist to postmodernist thought by working through the shift from paranoia to schizophrenia. I will analyze how this shift is constructed within each novel and what this means for postmodern selfhood. In these texts, the division between modernism and postmodernism is more nuanced than binary; rather than accepting postmodernism as a complete break from or overhaul of modernism, the writers acknowledge that postmodernism is different from yet building on modernist thought, a progressive rather than fractured change. I have chosen to study novels by Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo because both are grappling with the shift from modernism to postmodernism and both present new ways of interpreting agency and identity through the postmodernist sensibility of schizophrenia while not completely rejecting the modernist sensibility of paranoia. Pynchon, writing *The Crying of Lot 49* early in postmodernity, is specifically grappling with how characters can transition from paranoid to schizophrenic modes of interpreting the world and how an individual's agency and selfhood are affected by this shift. DeLillo, writing in postmodernism two decades later, rethinks the divide between the eras and their terms to construct an amalgamated interpretation of paranoia, agency, and identity in regards to schizophrenia in *Libra*. I have chosen these two works in particular because Pynchon's novel is proposing a certain way of dealing with paranoia in postmodernity that is expanded upon and refined in DeLillo's book. They are grappling with the same questions, but Pynchon is offering a very early version of an answer which DeLillo fleshes out from his later vantage point in postmodernity.

I feel it is necessary to study the way in which novelists deal with the shift from modernism, paranoia, and master narrative to postmodernism, schizophrenia, and anti/multiple narratives because postmodernist theorists' outlook on this shift is too bleak to allow for a practical application of their theories of identity and agency to literature after postmodernism. The schizophrenia which Frederic Jameson uses, based on Lacan and analyzed more fully in my first chapter, is a loss of the self which renders novelistic drama and plotting impossible because characters are not able to synthesize events. If all characters become schizophrenic in this way, there can be no literature as we know it now, because if the experience of postmodernity is really as apocalyptic as these theorists proclaim, how can literature advance from a shattering of metanarratives that leave characters unable to process history or contextualize themselves within time? Would a "post-postmodern" literature of identity-less and agency-less characters be meaningful and sustainable? I have chosen to study paranoia in particular because it is such a prevalent response in literature prior to postmodernism—John Farrell traces the paranoid response all the way back to the first written works in English in *Paranoia and Modernity*—that to suddenly declare it an unrealistic way of interpreting the world seems far too simplistic and bleak. This simplicity is especially pronounced given the paranoid responses to so many American historical and cultural events in the postmodern era and beyond. Writers of postmodernism are loathe to reject paranoia even as they embrace other tenets of postmodernity. Studying the way in which postmodern writers like Pynchon and DeLillo deal with paranoia in postmodernity will address questions about how characters might preserve agency and identity in postmodernism and how literature might continue utilizing paranoia as a mode of knowledge while incorporating postmodernism's schizophrenic mode of knowledge.

Before going into close readings of these novels and analyzing the issues of paranoia, agency and identity in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Libra*, I would like to clarify several terms that I use throughout. “Postmodernism” is the term applied by postmodernist theorists to the arts that are dealing with postmodernity. “Postmodernity” is the state of being in the postmodern world; “postmodern citizens,” then, are those people who experience postmodernity on the ground level, or in this case the postmodern characters in these novels. Postmodernists are those writing the big picture, and so a “postmodernist” view of the world would be one which is acutely aware of how these theories might be applied to postmodern experience. Pynchon and DeLillo, for example, are postmodernists writing works of postmodernism about characters that are postmodern citizens in postmodernity.

In this paper, I will show that the shift from modernism to postmodernism in literature is a trajectory rather than a complete break or revolt. By the end, I hope to provide the reader with a new way of considering paranoia, schizophrenia, agency, and identity in postmodernism, and offer a less bleak projection for the continuation of agency and identity in literature after postmodernism.

## 1.

**The Shift from Paranoia to Schizophrenia in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49***

*The Crying of Lot 49* is a transitional postmodernist text: it is a work of postmodernism that plots the shift from modernism to postmodernism through its protagonist Oedipa Maas. The text itself is postmodernist, with multiple plots; a collage of songs, jingles, and a play used to tell the story; and unreliable narration. The fictional world in which Oedipa resides is postmodernist, too, categorized by a late capitalist overload of information, media saturation, fragmentation and multiplicity. The text does not question that the world itself has changed since “modernity” and that a corresponding change in interpreting and situating oneself in the world might be useful in adapting; what is being put into question is whether this new way of interpreting the world must be so dramatically different from the old way. The novel proposes that the divide between modernism and postmodernism might be more of an advancement in sensibility than a radical break, and explores how necessary it is to acknowledge postmodernism’s debt to modernism through Oedipa’s inability to let go of her modernist sensibility as she transitions into postmodernism.

At the beginning of the novel Oedipa believes that her world is modern and interprets it through a modernist sensibility, which means that she sees only one overarching narrative to the world. Even as she is progressively awakened to the fact that her world is postmodern and thus her modernist interpretation of agency and identity might not work as well to face this new experience, she is reluctant to abandon her modernist sensibility. As introduced previously, the modernist ways of interpreting the world which will be analyzed here are paranoia and narrative/*grande histoire*. Alienation and paranoia are both modernist responses to the condition

of modernity, and at the beginning of the novel—before Oedipa becomes paranoid as a way of interpreting a world from which she has previously been isolated—she is alienated. Oedipa identifies with the trapped women in the tower of Remedios Varo’s painting “Bordando el Manto Terrestre (Embroidering Earth’s Mantle),” spinning a tapestry of the world but unable to ever see her creation or know that what she has created is the world (Pynchon 11). One could argue that this solipsistic state is the postmodern condition of a character overwhelmed by the multiple narratives and choices of the postmodern world, but at this point Oedipa does not see the multiple narratives because she believes the world is modernist: she can only see a singular narrative, and feels more oppressed and alone than overwhelmed. Seeing her fate in the imprisoned women “seeking hopelessly to fill the void” and realizing that she is trapped in this world, Oedipa cries, and then masochistically imagines carrying around the tears which no one else can see as a constant reminder of her inescapable fate: “she could carry the sadness of the moment with her that way forever, see the world refracted through those tears” (11). Being named co-executor of the will of Pierce Inverarity forces a hole in this tower wall through which she must confront the fact that there is a world beyond her own projection. No longer alienated by solipsism, she becomes paranoid because she realizes not only that she does not have control over the world but that there may be other people or structures which have control over her subjectivity. This realization that her subjectivity is at stake is part of what leads her to latch on to paranoia’s conceptions of agency and identity when she “discovers” the second narrative, since asserting the second narrative’s validity over the first will reinforce her modernist conception of the world and reclaim her subjectivity as her own.

Oedipa is awakened to postmodernity’s multiple narratives when she is named co-executor of the will of her former lover Pierce and realizes through this responsibility that there

is more to the world than the one narrative she previously experienced. As the novel advances, the words “will” and “executor” will take on multiple meanings beyond this legal context, for Oedipa begins to question whose will she is executing—her own, Pierce’s, or that of some unseen and unknowable structures of postmodernism which have eliminated her power to execute agency altogether. But the immediate effect of the responsibility is a jolt out of her mundane modernist life, and so Oedipa heads down to San Narciso to deal with the situation.

Upon arriving she “is soon assailed with various tenuous intimations that there might be more to America—and thus to her life—than the sterile modes of existence she has hitherto experienced” (Davidson 40). These “tenuous intimations” are the coincidences and associations of muted postal horns, corrupted postage stamps, stealth figures dressed in black, and subversive factions of government systems which she gathers and connects into “what she was to label the Tristero System or often only The Tristero” (Pynchon 31). It is significant both that Oedipa feels she must logically fit together all of the clues she finds about a subversive mail delivery service, and that it is a subversive mail delivery service which is her first introduction to the multiple narratives of postmodernism (Pynchon 31). Her compulsion to connect—and the subsequent paranoia when the clues don’t connect—is a modernist sensibility; she is trying to interpret the postmodernist world using modernist tactics, and I will soon analyze just how this fails. A subversive mail delivery service tampers with the dissemination of information, and implies that there is something sinister about the government-owned mail delivery service (a conspiracy perhaps) which has necessitated the secret development of an alternative. This is frightening because not only does it imply that there is a larger structure withholding information from above (a modern condition), but that there are many structures sharing and withholding information, and all of this information is so vast that it can never all be known (a postmodern

condition). Once Oedipa begins making connections about the Tristero, evidence to support her theory appears to her everywhere:

These follow-ups were no more disquieting than other revelations which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero. (Pynchon 64)

As much as the Tristero comes to haunt her later in the novel, in these early pages of making connections Oedipa is actually attempting to gain agency and identity by writing herself into the Tristero plot. She sees herself as the stealth agent who is receptive enough to certain clues to be able to put together the pieces of a puzzle and get to the ultimate truth of a subversive plot. But she becomes paranoid when she realizes that the plot might be writing her: that instead of agency and identity gained by uncovering a secret, her agency and identity have been threatened by forces beyond her control.

Paranoia has a complicated relationship with agency. It is both a fantasy of the loss of agency and a way to gain agency in the face of an uncaring structure. A nuanced definition of paranoia is taken from Timothy Melley's *Empire of Conspiracy*, in which he categorizes paranoia as an interpretive disorder:

Paranoia is an interpretive disorder that revolves around questions of control and manipulation. It is often defined as a condition in which one has delusions of grandeur or an unfounded feeling of persecution, or both. Understood less judgmentally, it is a condition in which one's interpretations seem unfounded or abnormal to an interpretive community. (16-17)

While defining paranoid characters as having either "delusions of grandeur" or "an unfounded feeling of persecution" appears to be contradictory, both are "fantasies of agency." The first is a heightened sense of one's agency and the second is the sense of one's agency under siege. But one can have a heightened sense of one's agency and believe that it is under siege: the feeling of

one's self being so important that an all-powerful, conspiratorial structure has targeted you for a plot. It is in this amalgamated sense of the two terms that we can best understand Oedipa.

Paranoia gives her agency (she is the one who has found plots) and removes her agency (the plots may have been set up by someone else for her to find). As Melley writes: "Conspiracy theory, paranoia, and anxiety about human agency, in other words, are all part of the paradox in which a supposedly individualist culture conserves its individualism by continually imagining it to be in imminent peril" (6). The other key term in Melley's definition is "interpretation": paranoids interpret their own world. They are also being interpreted by others, who in turn see the paranoid's interpretations of the world as false. Whether the paranoid is correct or the interpretive community is correct (or both are right or wrong, or neither is right nor wrong, as becomes possible in postmodernism), at the center of paranoia stands the individual's interpretive power: his or her agency in understanding the world. Oedipa, as a modernist character, has hinged her sense of agency and identity upon her paranoid interpretation of the world. A postmodern world in which paranoia is not the main interpretive experience puts into question what other way agency and identity can be interpreted.

As a modernist paranoid character, Oedipa believes that the Tristero is evidence that there is more going on than what is visible on the surface, but that only one of these narratives—the surface or the obscured—is really how the world works. In his essay *Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature*, Leo Bersani writes: "Paranoid thinking hesitates between the suspicion that the truth is wholly obscured by the visible and the equally disturbing sense that the truth may be a sinister, invisible design *in* the visible" (102). Note there are only two options, and while the paranoid character "hesitates" between the options, ultimately he/she only sees one of the options as "the Truth." This type of paranoid thinking is exemplified in Oedipa's insistence on explaining the

world in “either/or,” even when she begins to tack on infinitely more “or’s”: “Either Tristero did exist, in its own right, or it was being presumed, perhaps fantasied by Oedipa, so hung up on and interpreted with the dead man’s estate” (Pynchon 88). Oedipa believes that if she gathers enough clues and makes enough connections, she will understand which of the propositions is true, and therefore uncover the singular Truth of the Tristero plot and thus the narrative of the world. At several points she phrases it in a much more religious manner, as a search for the “Word”: “she wondered if the gemlike ‘clues’ were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night” (95). The last page of the novel leaves her waiting for the Word of the cryer-preacher, for what she hopes will be the final reveal of the Tristero plot. Scott Sanders explains this religious terminology in Pynchon’s books by reading his paranoia as “a secular form of the Puritan consciousness,” quoting a line in *Gravity’s Rainbow* in which Tyrone Slothrop equates paranoia to “a Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible” (Sanders 181). It is a reflex which Oedipa also possesses in *The Crying of Lot 49*. In a postmodern world in which God’s plot has been discredited, there must be a god-substitute at the center of control. “No matter how many connections he suspects or perceives, however, the paranoid must still posit some governing agency at the Center, to replace the numinous God,” Sanders writes (181). The paranoid believes in only one ultimate Truth, and his/her agency and identity depend upon discovering which of the paranoid plots is *the* plot, and *the* Truth.

Whether or not the Tristero is real, and if real, the only reality, is not answered in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Pynchon’s postmodernist text does not provide Oedipa with the ultimate Truth because there is no ultimate Truth in postmodernism. The loss of the Word, or a grand narrative to explain the world in a totalizing way, is a major aspect of the postmodern condition. To

understand how Oedipa's paranoia and insistence on finding a narrative truth are modernist rather than postmodernist sensibilities, we must first explain metanarratives.

A narrative, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account." In regards to "Literary Criticism," narrative is defined as "the part of a text, esp. a work of fiction, which represents the sequence of events, as distinguished from that dealing with dialogue, description, etc." (narrative OED). Both of these definitions emphasize "series," "order," and "sequence," to reiterate the fact that a narrative is built on the principle of cause and effect. "Metanarratives," or "master narratives," are those totalizing, universal stories which writers have been using to frame their individual stories for millennium: primitive to civilized, sin to redemption. David Harvey explains them as "broad interpretative schemas like those deployed by Marx and Freud": schemas that are supposed to be totalizing and universally applicable (45). But in the postmodern era, "universal and eternal truths, if they exist at all, cannot be specified" (Harvey 45). The world has become too fractured and too de-centered for a totalizing discourse to apply. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the more Oedipa sees of the world, the less she feels she knows about it; the multiple plot centers and overwhelming urban experience are drastically more fractured than the quiet, monotonous suburban experience she used to know. Postmodern writers, then, emphasize narratives of plurality and multiplicity instead of totalization: "[Jean-Francois] Lyotard in fact defines the postmodern simply as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'" (Harvey 45). There is a broad interpretive gap between "incredulity" toward or rejection of metanarratives and asserting a new way to organize narratives in a world without one totalizing discourse, and it is into this gap that Oedipa falls. She is distrustful of the metanarrative, but cannot take the interpretive leap to accepting multiple

small narratives, and so tries to assert a different metanarrative in place of the original metanarrative.

In his survey of several books on postmodernism—including Jameson’s *Postmodernism*, or, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*—Brian McHale writes on the subject:

Postmodernism’s Prime Directive, according to some influential accounts, is ‘Do not totalize; do not commit a master narrative.’... For there is a specter haunting the discourse about postmodernism, and that is the specter of master narratives... it was Lyotard who placed this anxiety on the postmodern agenda with his characterization of postmodernism as incredulity toward all totalizing master narratives (or ‘metanarratives’; Lyotard’s *grands recits*). (17-18)

To commit a master narrative is to commit to using an outdated narrative structure to describe a new era which does not conform to those constraints (or, if master narratives have always been ideological rather than attainable, it is committing to a narrative structure which has finally been rejected for false). In her insistence on reading the world in modernist paranoid binaries, Oedipa is trying to commit a master narrative. She is trying to find the root of the Tristero plot to determine whether it is the real narrative, but becomes frustrated when her connections branch off and reach out horizontally into infinite space rather than down to the pure one. E.M. Forster’s modernist catchphrase “only connect” (159) takes on a sinister tone in *The Crying of Lot 49* as Oedipa is immobilized by her inability to do anything but make connections, leading to more and more plots but no greater understanding:

Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold. (Pynchon 76)

These “compiled memories” are all Oedipa is left with at the conclusion of the novel, and the branching out has only ended because Pynchon concluded the novel. This postmodernist world

without metanarratives threatens Oedipa's agency in a more final way than does paranoia.

Paranoia may be the fantasy of a loss of agency, but paranoia still assumes a master narrative, and it is the assertion of a paranoid narrative for the master narrative which has become Oedipa's link to agency: so long as she feels she can assert a narrative, she feels she has agency.

To the interpretive (non-paranoid) community, the world is only comprised of the real narrative, or the master narrative. The paranoid character sees another narrative, the paranoid/"real" narrative, which the real narrative is actively working to cover up. But to both the interpretive community and the paranoid, only one of these narratives is true: to the paranoid, it is the paranoid/"real" narrative, and to the interpretive community, it is the master/real narrative. Because paranoia is pathology, the master narrative will remain the only narrative to describe the world unless the paranoid character can prove that his or her paranoid/real narrative is the Truth, at which point the paranoid/real narrative would supplant the "real" narrative as the master narrative, and no longer be a paranoid narrative. In either case, a master narrative remains.

Oedipa, in her paranoid state, has the agency to try and supplant her paranoid/"real" narrative for the master narrative. But the possibility that both narratives could coexist and both be true—the possibility offered within this text—is not one which she believes will leave her with any agency. Her anxiety with this postmodern condition of multiple narratives is expressed at the moment when she seeks the opinion of Dr. Hilarius, someone connected to her life prior to its postmodernist revelation. The decision to return back to Kinneret and see her psychiatrist when she gets there is prompted by a night spent wandering San Francisco, following the Tristero clues where they lead her rather than tracking them down to form a plot. During this scene Oedipa gets the closest to fully transitioning into a postmodernist sensibility, because she

sees and acknowledges multiple narratives of the world and does not try to assert her agency by asserting one over another. But as we see in the following quote, she does not want to accept postmodernism; she explicitly wants to return to a modernist sensibility:

She might well be in the cold and sweatless meathooks of a psychosis. With her own eyes she had verified a WASTE system: seen two WASTE postmen, a WASTE mailbox, WASTE stamps, WASTE cancellations. And the image of the muted post horn all but saturating the Bay Area. Yet she wanted it all to be fantasy—some clear result of her several wounds, needs, dark doubles. She wanted Hilarius to tell her she was some kind of a nut and needed a rest, and that there was no Tristero. She also wanted to know why the chance of its being real should menace her so. (Pynchon 107)

Oedipa has compiled enough evidence to convince herself that Tristero is a real narrative, but she cannot assert that it is the only real narrative. If she accepts Tristero as a real narrative but cannot supplant it for the master narrative, Oedipa has no agency in the modernist sense, which is the only sense in which she can conceptualize her agency and identity. This fear that accepting a postmodernist sensibility means accepting a loss of agency and identity is what pulls Oedipa back from the brink of accepting a postmodernist sensibility to instead cling to modernist conceptualizations of identity and agency. If she is hallucinating Tristero, and these multiple narratives are all fantasy, then Oedipa can be cured. She can go back to the dull, regulated world of the metanarrative where she didn't have to face the overwhelming uncertainty of postmodernity's information overload. At this point Oedipa is too fully aware of postmodernity to be called a modernist character, but neither is she purely postmodernist; she will spend the rest of the novel vacillating between the two identities, in limbo as a sort of postmodernist in denial.

Oedipa cannot fathom a novel without metanarratives because she has no sense of self without that framework. While Jean-Francois Lyotard identified postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives, other thinkers made the interpretive leap to theorize what a world without metanarratives would look like. One term several theorists used was "schizophrenia." In

opposition to paranoia, which is categorized as “an interpretive disorder” in which the paranoid’s interpretations of the world “seem unfounded or abnormal to an interpretive community,”

schizophrenia is the inability to connect and interpret anything at all (Melley 16-17).

Schizophrenia and paranoia are pathologies, but the way in which they are used in this context is not the same way that a medical professional would use them in a diagnosis; they are modes of knowledge. Frederic Jameson’s schizophrenia is a horrifying incapacitation of the self, while Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari consider schizophrenia as a liberating way of experiencing the world.

The World Health Organization, in its International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10<sup>th</sup> Revision, uses these symptoms to describe schizophrenia:

The most important psychopathological phenomena include thought echo; thought insertion or withdrawal; thought broadcasting; delusional perception and delusions of control; influence or passivity; hallucinatory voices commenting or discussing the patient in the third person; thought disorders and negative symptoms. (F20)

To the literary theorists, schizophrenia is a thought dis-order, an inability to organize. To experience postmodernity is to be so overstimulated, so overwhelmed, and so inundated with commerce and media and capitalist ideologies that instead of finding a way to situate the self in all of that noise, the self shatters. The dictionary definition of narrative used earlier emphasized order and sequence; the conditions of postmodernity have rendered linear cause-and-effect an unrealistic mode of interpreting the world to these theorists. Instead a decentered, nonlinear mode of knowledge is proposed. Frederic Jameson was a strong proponent of postmodernity’s classification as schizophrenic, when he acknowledged that postmodernity was an era at all. He defined postmodernism in opposition to modernism, and modernism to Jameson was exemplified in Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*: “a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation, a virtually programmatic

emblem of what used to be called the age of anxiety” (*Late Capitalism* 11). While the modernist subject was alienated, the postmodernist subject is fragmented (14). To Jameson, however, the fragmented subject is not a self in the same way that an alienated self is still a self. To be alienated assumes a self which is alienated from a larger group. To be fragmented is to not have a cohesive self. Jameson arrives at this definition by deriving his understanding of schizophrenia from Lacan’s theory of language disorder:

Schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ over time. (*Consumer Society* 119)

While modernity was focused on the signifier and signified, postmodernity shows what will happen when that chain snaps. Without an ability to put events into sequence, postmodern citizens have no agency, and without an ability to understand themselves temporally, they do not “know personal identity in our sense” (119). The postmodern schizophrenic is incapacitated by “the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents,” and so becomes an agent-less non-self (125). Jameson’s vision is not just a diminishing of agency and identity but a total removal.

Deleuze and Guattari do not take such an apocalyptic view of postmodern schizophrenia, viewing the condition as liberating rather than paralyzing. To them, schizophrenic experience is the “‘rhizomic’ organization of the real” (O’Donnell 25). Contrary to modernist narratives which all inevitably connect to one singular root, Deleuze and Guattari’s postmodernist multiplicity of narratives connect outward into infinitely expanding rhizomes of possible narratives. In the introduction to their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different

from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (7). The “tree or root” theory is that of master narratives, and in a postmodernist world in which master narratives are rejected as explanations for the world, one cannot assume that a “root” can be found (as Oedipa does). In his book *Latent Destinies*, Patrick O’Donnell, reading postmodernity through a lens of Deleuze and Guattari, writes:

‘History,’ as understood under Jean-Francois Lyotard’s ‘postmodern condition,’ rather than being seen as the grand narrative of major events or the national story, is an aggregate of minor narratives, each arising from an assemblage of perspectives, experiences, and vested interests. (15)

Instead of Jameson’s apocalyptic reading of schizophrenia as a condition which destroys the modernist self and leaves the postmodern character with no self, Deleuze and Guattari’s “assemblage” implies the creation of multiple “selves,” or subject positions. A subject position does not have identity in the way a singular self does, since an identity does not exist outside of the network within which it is placed; a subject position does have agency, but only within whatever particular narrative it is occupying at that time. Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomic understanding of the postmodern world offers a plurality of subject positions and narratives instead of predicting the elimination of self and narration.

This schizophrenic mode of knowledge sees multiple narratives coexisting without one dominating in a world of infinite connections. Still, since it is a schizophrenic mode of knowledge, it implies an inability to make connections. In Deleuze and Guattari’s vision it is the postmodern world, rather than the postmodern citizen, which is making the connections. Postmodern citizens simply fall into or end up in a particular space of the rhizome in which a particular set of narratives are available. This would explain why Oedipa used to see only one narrative while another narrative was operating in close proximity to her: she only saw one part of the rhizome. When she “finds” the Tristero plot, she is expanding her rhizomic understanding

of the real, but is not manipulating the narratives in any way. They will continue existing in tandem with each other, and a thousand other possible narratives, all of which are “true” to some extent.

These two readings of postmodern schizophrenia are the two options (for recall that these theorists are offering possibilities, not mandates, for interpreting the world) envisioned for Oedipa’s transition in *The Crying of Lot 49*. She can take Jameson’s view of the schizophrenic as a postmodern character without agency or a sense of self, or she can take Deleuze and Guattari’s view of the schizophrenic as a postmodernist character with multiple possibilities for understanding selfhood as subject positions in a rhizomic reality. Within the text, she takes neither. And because the book ends before the final reveal, the reader does not know in which one (if any) she might end up. But her view (and fear) of postmodernity seems to imply that she only sees Jameson’s vision of schizophrenia. She cannot consider the fact that “both-and,” rather than “either-or,” might be a better way to consider narrative because it would be less destructive to her agency and identity, so her understanding of agency and identity remain grounded in modernist terms (Venturi 16).

In the final chapter of the book, there are two major scenes in which Oedipa rejects the possibility of accepting a multiplicity and instead sticks to her very modernist sensibilities of paranoia and metanarratives. The second is the final scene at the auction, in which Oedipa “settled back, to await” (note the passivity) for the Word (Pynchon 152). In the first, Oedipa herself lists all of the possible narratives she has uncovered:

Either way, they’ll call it paranoia. They. Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret richness and concealed density of dream... maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps, planting of post horn images all

over San Francisco, bribing of librarians, hiring of professional actors and Pierce Inverarity only knows what-all besides, all financed out of the estate in a way either too secret or too involved for your non-legal mind to know about even though you are co-executor, so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull.  
(141)

This opening acknowledgment of a larger structure is already telling: Oedipa is presuming both that there is some higher structure or source of power which will determine her fate, rather than herself now that her agency is compromised, and that there is an “either/or.” Of course, she lists more than one “or,” rendering the logical binary moot while sticking with the linguistic insistence that only one of the possibilities can be true. This is her way of acknowledging the postmodern plethora of possibilities while systematically rejecting them as actual possibilities; in the end, she can only comprehend either/or, even if there are infinite or’s. She will always see the world in binaries.

But let’s first unpack each of her narratives, because they do not all lead to paranoia in the same way. The first narrative assumes that the Tristero and W.A.S.T.E. are all completely true, and operating underneath the government as an alternative communicative system for outcasts and deviants. This is not paranoia, because it is true to Oedipa, but “they” (the non-paranoid interpretive community) will call it paranoia because she cannot prove to them that it is true. In the second narrative, she has hallucinated all of the evidence or the connections (it doesn’t particularly matter which), and the individual pieces do not add up to a plot. Such a hallucination would certainly be pathological, but it is not quite paranoia. In the third narrative, a plot has been mounted against her (conspiracy), perhaps by Pierce himself, to make her believe that she has found the plot herself. This is paranoia only if it is not true, as she posits in the final alternative—if it is true she has simply been duped. But this final narrative is the truly paranoid

narrative, in which her agency and identity have been usurped and the meaning of her life created by some outside force which she will never be able to understand, in a conspiracy so large that she can never get to the bottom of it. It is paranoia as defined by Richard Hofstadter, the belief in “the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character” (14). It is a *belief*, however, one that can never be proven to be true or not: a paranoid style.

Oedipa has listed these possibilities in a particular order, from the one which grants her the most agency to the one which grants her the least. If Tristero is true then Oedipa has had a hand in its being brought more to light, but if Oedipa is hallucinating that a structure set up Tristero as a plot for her to find, she is without agency but with a serious mental illness. This hierarchy represents her confliction between modernist and postmodernist sensibilities, but the fact that she assumes only one can be true shows she is still hanging on to modernist concepts.

Because *The Crying of Lot 49* is plotting the transition into postmodernity, the reader knows that there will be no ultimate truth. The book ends before explicitly stating what happens to Oedipa, but the reader does know that she will not receive the “epileptic Word” she hopes the auction will provide her (Pynchon 95). What is left in question, then, is whether she will become schizophrenic, and if so, in what way. Within the text, Oedipa fails to fully transition into postmodernity because she sees only Jameson’s schizophrenia as an option. With her conception of agency and identity so tied to paranoia, she cannot see how she can retain her agency and identity in a schizophrenic world. The possibility of multiple narratives being true is horrifying rather than liberating, for they leave no room for her as an agent. In the final pages, Oedipa still clings to her binaries, and obstinately refuses to accept the possibility of multiple narratives existing within one world:

For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only was [sic] she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (150-51)

Oedipa can only see her agency existing within a paranoid framework. In her old world, in which she only knew and accepted as true the singular master narrative, she had no agency; by accepting multiple narratives she believes she cannot even return to this state of bliss in ignorance: she will have no agency, but it will be worse because she once believed she did. Unable to move forward or backward, Oedipa remains in limbo within the text, neither completely modernist nor completely postmodernist.

Aiding her resistance to postmodernist schizophrenia is her fear that she will end up like her husband Mucho Maas, who has lost his agency and self. Mucho is the one character in the novel that actually becomes schizophrenic in Jameson's sense of the word. Oedipa notices something off about him when she returns to Kinneret and asks Funch, the program director at the radio station where Mucho (Wendell) is a DJ, what has happened to him. Funch replies: "He's losing his identity, Edna, how else can I put it? Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know? He's a walking assembly of man" (Pynchon 115). His "self" has disintegrated, and he is perceived as multiple selves. But to Funch and Oedipa, multiple or assembled selves are not a cohesive self; he is no longer Mucho because he has lost his ability to be conceptualized as a singular self.

The direct cause of Mucho's schizophrenia is his abuse of LSD (Pynchon 117). Although resulting from a 1960's-specific drug with distinctly postmodernist disorienting effects, Mucho's loss of self is not directly caused by societal or economic conditions of postmodernity. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon is presenting the themes of modernism and postmodernism—paranoia and schizophrenia—and the idea of a shift, but he does not construct a trajectory in which a

character shifts between the two successfully. In 1973's *Gravity's Rainbow*, the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop does shift from paranoia to schizophrenia as he shifts from a modernist to postmodernist sensibility, but it is specifically into Jameson's sense of schizophrenia as loss of self. This novel expands upon the themes of *The Crying of Lot 49*, and Slothrop can be read as an amalgamation of Oedipa and Mucho. He begins, like Oedipa, on a quest for identity by trying to find the "They" he believes are controlling him in modernist paranoid fashion and will end up schizophrenic like Mucho, "losing track of where he has come from or where he is going, losing, that is, all historical perspective, Slothrop disintegrates" (Sanders 186). His disintegration is a direct result of his postmodern experiences, his schizophrenia the conclusion to attempting to find agency and identity through paranoia in postmodernity.

The conclusion of *The Crying of Lot 49*, which leaves Oedipa in limbo between modernist and postmodernist sensibilities, only concludes that modernist paranoia is no longer representative of the postmodern condition, and that because schizophrenia is more representative of postmodern experience, clinging to paranoia would be resisting the condition of postmodernity. But Pynchon does appear to believe that characters will eventually transition into schizophrenia; whether it will be Jameson's or Deleuze and Guattari's version has not been established. It is fitting that the two modes of knowledge for modernism and postmodernism are both pathologies: despite the apparent differences between the eras, people's minds are still dealing with the world in a deviated way. But perhaps Oedipa's inability to transition into any form of postmodernist thought, and the book's resistance to defining what happens in postmodernity, can be read as a way of questioning the very binaries of these terms. For what can the reader take away from Oedipa's "limbo" existence except the possibility that a pure transition is just as impossible as a reversal? I do not question that postmodernism is a new way

of viewing the world, whether it is an expansion upon high modernism or a revolt against modernism, but this does not necessarily mean that this new era must be viewed in complete opposition to modernity. Pynchon seems wary of making this dichotomous distinction in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and while a character does move from paranoia to schizophrenia in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the novel is so complex that it would be too simplistic to claim for sake of argument that this means Pynchon is claiming such a trajectory as the only possibility.

Published in 1965, *The Crying of Lot 49* is very much a transitional postmodernist novel, working through what it means to shift from modernism to postmodernism. Pynchon presents this transition as a shift in how characters understand agency and identity in relation to paranoia, but makes no definitive claim as to how a paranoid character can accept multiple narratives instead of a master narrative. The novel was written at a time when master narratives were just beginning to crumble and global systems of capital emerging as a threat to the previously accepted economic structure, but before any definitive theory of how to live in postmodernism was formulated. The fate of Oedipa, a character exemplifying modernist paranoid traits in a postmodern novel, is left in limbo at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*, leaving open the possibility of what will come next. Pynchon's theory of paranoia and schizophrenia is more concretely realized later in postmodernism with 1973's *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which the paranoid main character becomes schizophrenic in a world which never asserts a master narrative, but this work still exhibits the same questions of identity and agency in regards to paranoia and schizophrenia as did *The Crying of Lot 49*, albeit in a more complex and convoluted framework.

By 1988, when Don DeLillo published *Libra*, postmodernism was firmly established as a cultural theory for interpreting the "postmodern" world, and so the questions DeLillo's book posits about paranoia, schizophrenia, agency and identity in postmodernity are more nuanced and

advanced than Pynchon's because the conditions of postmodernity have more fully emerged and been more concretely articulated by this time. DeLillo is not dealing with how conditions might change in postmodernity, but how conditions have and are changing in postmodernity.

## 2.

**Rethinking Postmodernist Terms: Paranoid Schizophrenia in Don DeLillo's *Libra***

The theorists discussed in the chapter on Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* concluded that due to the conditions of postmodernity—late capitalism, an inability to totalize, information overload—it is increasingly difficult to understand the world through any mode other than schizophrenia. The postmodern world produces a schizophrenic response. This schizophrenic response cannot be totalizing, as paranoia was, and therefore characters cannot have total control over the narratives of their lives or their identities. While totalizing control may be impossible, that is not to say that characters cannot have some control over their agency, identity, or the ways in which they interpret and assert narratives. Don DeLillo asserts this possible refiguring of certain postmodernist terms in his novel *Libra*.

*Libra*, a fact-based yet fictionalized novel of the figure of Lee Harvey Oswald and the plot to assassinate President Kennedy, was published in 1988, two decades after Pynchon questioned the connection between paranoia and agency in the new era of postmodernity. As a book plotting the trajectory from modernist to postmodernist thinking, *The Crying of Lot 49* left open the question of how paranoid characters would transition from conceptualizing narrative in a modernist way to conceptualizing narrative in a postmodernist way, but the book seemed to presume that some shift from paranoia to schizophrenia would occur. It was the type of schizophrenia (Jameson's or Deleuze and Guattari's) into which one would transition that was left open in 1965. DeLillo, writing *Libra* in 1988, questions whether characters must transition into either version of schizophrenia, and instead further questions the very foundation of a

modernist/postmodernist and paranoid/schizophrenic dichotomy and redefines the language used to categorize each.

For example, DeLillo's book still includes paranoid characters. What are we to make of the fact that paranoia did not just go away, once paranoia was deemed impossible? While Pynchon left possibilities open for how a paranoid character could operate in a postmodernist text, unsure of how postmodernism would ultimately affect the paranoid impulse to see agency in plots, DeLillo can write about paranoid characters in postmodernity because he is revising the theory of paranoia. In *Libra*, paranoia is experienced as "paranoid schizophrenia."

As defined by the Mayo Clinic, "paranoid schizophrenia" is a type of schizophrenia in which sufferers exhibit traits of both schizophrenia and paranoia: "The classic features of paranoid schizophrenia are having delusions and hearing things that aren't real." The delusions are paranoid—thinking someone is out to get you—but sufferers are distinctly experiencing psychosis, which is a break from reality (Mayo Clinic). The World Health Organization classifies paranoid schizophrenia as:

dominated by relatively stable, often paranoid delusions, usually accompanied by hallucinations, particularly of the auditory variety, and perceptual disturbances. Disturbances of affect, volition and speech, and catatonic symptoms, are either absent or relatively inconspicuous. (ICD-10 F20.0)

We can read paranoid schizophrenia as a mix between paranoia and schizophrenia, but one which is not as strongly experienced as either paranoia or schizophrenia. The "disturbances of affect" usually associated with schizophrenia are missing from paranoid schizophrenia, and while paranoids' suspicions are overreactions grounded in reality (i.e., thinking someone is going to poison you because they handed you a drink), paranoid schizophrenics' suspicions are not grounded in observed events.

The main distinction relative to our understanding of the term, then, is that paranoid schizophrenics do not necessarily presume a metanarrative; their schizophrenic way of perceiving the world cannot comprehend a master narrative. It is suspecting not one system out to get you, but everything potentially suspicious, yet disconnected. Nearly every character in *Libra* experiences this form of paranoia at some point in the novel: it is Everett's suspicion of every large organization compromising him, Mackey's unfounded suspicion of everyone else in on the plot. More generally, it is the conviction that one's identity is compromised, under control by some forces larger than oneself, but not presuming that this control can be traced to one ultimate source.

Combining paranoia with schizophrenia is a uniquely postmodernist way of viewing the world, but DeLillo was not alone in presenting this as a possibility. John Farrell, in his book *Paranoia and Modernity*, writes that "paranoid thinking can be concomitant of schizophrenia" (1). It is, however, in contrast to the presumption in Pynchon's open-ended conclusion, as well as the theories of Jameson and Deleuze and Guattari, who wrote that paranoia would disappear and schizophrenia take over as the dominant experience of reality in postmodernity. DeLillo's book is centered on a postmodern historical event which resulted in excessive paranoid fantasies; it would be illogical for him to conclude that paranoia is no longer a part of how postmodern citizens experience the world in the face of the JFK assassination. But something has clearly changed. The Kennedy assassination marks the loss of "the sense of a coherent reality" in American history; to DeLillo, the event "conceivably serves as the point of origin for the fragmentation of reality under postmodernity" (O'Donnell 48). While the assassination alone did not mark the beginning of postmodernity, its mystery contributed to and was affected by the other incoherent and fragmented aspects of postmodernism. DeLillo is writing about an event

which both fragmented reality and evoked paranoid responses, and so he combines both modes of knowledge to produce a work of literature that answers the question of what will happen to paranoia and agency in postmodernity in a new way. In *Libra*, the postmodern condition is paranoid schizophrenia.

With the paranoid/schizophrenic dichotomy redefined, DeLillo is able to ask different questions about agency, identity and paranoia in postmodernity than could Pynchon. He is also complicating the structure in which this is analyzed. Not only portraying the paranoid writing himself into the plot, *Libra* is also about the plotters writing the plot and the reader/writer trying to make sense of the ultimate outcome of the plots. This allows DeLillo to question assumptions inherent in Oedipa's conceptualization of paranoia and agency: are we ever in control of the plot, and can we ever truly know the plot?

For Oedipa, agency could only be understood in relation to a paranoid plot, in terms of whether one believed one had agency (total control in asserting a master narrative) or believed one's agency to be under threat (under total control by the master narrative). DeLillo cannot reconcile paranoia and agency as deftly as he reconciles paranoia with schizophrenia because his definition of paranoid schizophrenia removes the master narratives whose existence grounded the agency of paranoids like Oedipa. Agency is just as much at stake in this postmodernist theory as it was in the modernist view. On the one hand this is a continuation of DeLillo's amalgamation of terms previously considered more resolutely modernist or postmodernist, but on the other it is a refinement which is too vague to use practically for understanding the impact on postmodern literature. While paranoid schizophrenic characters in *Libra* try to navigate their agency in relation to their paranoid schizophrenia, they do not have "total control." Instead,

DeLillo refines what it means to have agency and control, so that the postmodernist characters can retain control while they lose “total control,” or control over a plot.

*Libra* is comprised of multiple plots, but a reader hoping for yet another conspiracy theory about the JFK assassination will find no singular answer here. DeLillo takes a paranoid schizophrenic, rather than paranoid, approach in his writing of this history. “The paranoid approach to the assassination seeks the one big story that tells all, that links together the jumbled pieces of evidence and rumor in a grand scheme, a master narrative that will convert uncertainty into knowledge through the power of suspicion” (Green 99). DeLillo’s paranoid schizophrenic approach (that is to say, his version of a postmodernist approach), does not assume a master narrative at the center, because there is no master narrative, and therefore no “ultimate truth,” to be found. For DeLillo, this then means that there are only plausible events regarding the assassination: events which might conceivably have happened, but which are not the Truth. *Libra* shows how one can gather all of the knowledge about an event, and connect it all together, but still not actually know “the Truth” of what happened because a singular “Truth” does not exist. There will only ever be multiple plausibilities.

At the center of DeLillo’s novel is “the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century,” the November 22, 1963, assassination of President John F. Kennedy (DeLillo 181). While most theories of the assassination fall into one of two camps, “lone gunman” or “grand conspiracy,” *Libra* presents both of these as plausibly true at the same time, merging paranoia with schizophrenia (Melley 135). In his essay on *Libra* in *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, Jeremy Green writes: “DeLillo... structures *Libra* to embrace the possibilities of both narratives. He puts the enigma of Oswald at the center of his novel but also invents a small-scale conspiracy involving renegade CIA officers, anti-Castro Cubans, and a few

key players from the mob” (97). The two plots to kill the president are not mutually exclusive, and in fact neither can be explained without including the other.

DeLillo begins with Oswald’s story. In *Libra*, Oswald comes across as a confused, angry, misguided and ultimately contradictory character: he feels he is invisible, and so wants to do something to get himself noticed, but he is paranoid that large structures are already watching and controlling him, a “delusion of grandeur” we noticed in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Oswald’s paranoia is paranoid schizophrenia because he presumes that everyone, from the Russian and US government to pro- and anti-Castro factions, is out to get him, but he doesn’t presume that he can connect them all to a master narrative as did Pynchon’s paranoids. “The nature of things was to be elusive,” Oswald thinks; “things slipped through his perceptions. He could not get a grip on the runaway world” (DeLillo 211). Still, this paranoid schizophrenia grounds his sense of identity and agency: “They had plans for him, whoever they were... It was easy to believe they’d been watching him for years, working things around him, knowing the time would come” (329). Whenever Oswald imagines that the structures have stopped plotting and planning him, he loses his sense of self:

He feels he is living at the center of an emptiness. He wants to sense a structure that includes him, a definition clear enough to specify where he belongs. But the system floats right through him, through everything, even the revolution. He is a zero in the system. (357)

Oswald is not looking for a totalizing narrative—he knows that these schizophrenic narratives will not connect down to one root—but he wants to find a grounding of self in *a* narrative. The quote above was taken from a scene in which Oswald is being denied entry into both Cuba and Russia; none of his rhizomic links have led him into a coherent narrative or narratives, only farther out into what he perceives to be meaningless space. DeLillo is showing how Oswald, as a

paranoid schizophrenic, does not have total control over a narrative or the ability to insert himself into one—when he is inserted into a plot, it is due to coincidence.

While Oswald is looking for a narrative to include him, he is unwittingly being included in a narrative by Win Everett, Guy Bannister, and Laurence Parmenter, the three main agents of the Kennedy assassination plot. The former CIA operative Everett, teaching at a small women's college in Texas, is the paranoid schizophrenic who comes up with the grand plot. Suspicious of everyone but cognizant that there is no center on which he can pinpoint his paranoia, Everett decides to make a center himself through the creation of a paranoid plot. He describes his scheme to Parmenter, another former CIA operative, and TJ Mackey, the weapons specialist, in this way:

We want to set up an attempt on the life of the President. We plan every step, design every incident leading up to the event. We put together a team, leave a dim trail. The evidence is ambiguous. But it points to the Cuban Intelligence Directorate. Inherent in the plan is a second set of clues, even more unclear, more intriguing. These point to the Agency's attempts to assassinate Castro. I am designing a plan that includes elements of both the American provocation and the Cuban reply. We do the whole thing with paper... This plan... has a powerful logic. (27-8)

The words Everett uses—plan, design, logic—show how clearly he believes that he can simply set actions into motion and that they will fall in the way they have been set up to fall. But the plot does not go as planned. Some of the failure simply has to do with the fact that there are multiple players: for example, Mackey fails to relay to the gunman he hires that the plan is to miss Kennedy. But Everett's main failure is his belief that he could have complete agency over a paranoid plot. He conceives of his plot as a narrative of cause and effect, and while he has agency in creating the cause, the *effect* of the plot is out of his control. Like Oswald, Everett has not taken coincidence into account.

Everett's agency within the plot is his creation of a "lone gunman" with a paper trail that the investigators will follow after the attempted assassination. "Win Everett was at work devising a general shape, a life. He would script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper, the contents of a wallet" (DeLillo 50). Then, coincidentally, Parmenter calls him about an odd character with "a 201 file... dating to December 1960" who might work as their "lone gunman"; the character is Oswald (74). Parmenter says: "We could put him together. A far-left type. Work him in. Tie him to Cuban intelligence. Possibly even place him at the scene... There's never a dearth of reasons to shoot at the President" (75). After putting Oswald into their plot and then losing track of him, the group is unsettled with the coincidence when Oswald himself walks into Banister's office looking for an undercover job (DeLillo 129).

Oswald's storyline is that of the "lone gunman"; Everett and company are writing the "grand conspiracy." In both, characters are trying to gain identity and agency through paranoid plots. But the two storylines merge, due to coincidence, and create a third storyline. DeLillo's postmodernist theory proclaims that coincidence is the reason paranoid schizophrenic characters are unable to gain a sense of total agency through plots, because coincidence disrupts the narrative chain of cause and effect and any attempt at totalizing control over a narrative. After the real Oswald enters himself into the plot which Everett had so meticulously planned, Everett thinks: "It was no longer possible to hide from the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald existed independent of the plot" (DeLillo 178). There is a reality beyond Everett's constructed reality over which he has no control. Paranoid schizophrenic characters cannot gain agency from plots in the modernist sense (the way that Oedipa believed she could gain agency from plots) due to coincidence; to gain any sort of agency from a narrative plot, the characters must accept that they will not have total control.

The attempted assassination which does play out—in Dallas, not Miami, and fatally, rather than a warning shot—operates on the “third line” between constructed reality and coincidental reality. David Ferrie, “the investigator, bag man and spiritual advisor” (29), explains it in this way to Oswald:

You’re a quirk of history. You’re a coincidence. They devise a plan, you fit it perfectly (330)... Think of two parallel lines... One is the life of Lee H. Oswald. One is the conspiracy to kill the President. What bridges the space between them? What makes a connection inevitable? There is a third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest levels of the self. It’s not generated by cause and effect like the other two lines. It’s a line that cuts across causality, cuts across time. It has no history that we can recognize or understand. But it forces a connection. It puts a man on the path of his destiny. (339)

Ferrie’s idea of a “third line” is DeLillo’s idea of postmodernity. It is the space where constructed and coincidental realities collide, a space outside of cause and effect. Narrative, as described in the first chapter, requires a causal link between events. The third line is not a narrative; it cannot be understood by following the plotted effects back to their logical causes. And by metaphorically imagining it as a line, DeLillo sees this postmodernist reality as a continuum, unable to be traced back to one singular point yet moving forward all the same.

The moment which conspiracy theorists believe should be able to illuminate the “truth” of the plot behind the assassination is the several seconds of the assassination itself. If narratives can be traced back to their roots, then following the assassination back through time would lead to the people and events which put it into motion. But DeLillo is writing a postmodernist narrative of the assassination, which cannot be traced to a root. Therefore the “moment of truth” will not illuminate *a* truth, but it may hint at the various plots and coincidences which influenced the third line to culminate at that point. DeLillo’s description of the assassination itself, from

Oswald's perspective, illuminates that it is unclear how exactly these multiple narratives have arrived at this point:

Okay, he fired early the first time, hitting the President below the head, near the neck area somewhere. It was a foolishness he could dismiss on a certain level. Okay, he missed the President with the second shot and hit Connally (398)

...

Lee was about to squeeze off the third round, he was in the act, he was actually pressing the trigger.

The light was so clear it was heartbreaking.

There was a white burst in the middle of the frame. A terrible splash, a burst. Something came blazing off the President's head. He was slammed back, surrounded all in dust and haze. Then suddenly clear again, down and still in the seat. Oh he's dead he's dead.

Lee raised his head from the scope, looking right... He knew he'd missed with the third shot. Went wild. Missed everything... He was already talking to someone about this... Pointing out the contradictions. Telling how he was tricked into the plot. (400)

DeLillo does place Oswald at the scene of the crime with a gun in his hand, but he does not claim whether or not he killed the President. Oswald seems convinced that he did hit the President with his first shot, but missed on the third. Yet it is the third shot which kills Kennedy. Did Oswald watch another shooter hit the target in his sight? Did he actually shoot and kill the President, and his insistence that he missed a reaction to the realization that he has killed a human being? Did he even hit all the marks he thought he did with his first two shots? Although Oswald was accused, historians cannot explain why he killed Kennedy: "his involvement in the assassination falls outside the usual cause-and-effect accountancy of historians" (Green 96). DeLillo does not (cannot) provide a cause-and-effect accountancy, and does not answer the "why": he simply presents plausible explanations. In this scene, Oswald is both lone gunman and pawn of a greater conspiracy, and all of the above explanations could plausibly be true. The

culmination of the postmodernist third line of history is a distinct event with no distinct explanation.

If we accept this postmodernist line between constructed and coincidental reality to account for events, it would appear that DeLillo's grand questions (are we ever in control of the plot, and can we ever truly know the plot?) are answered with a resounding "no." Agency as total control is certainly lost, since there can be no totalizing acts, and there is no way to know the complete trajectory of an event since cause-and-effect have been disrupted, but DeLillo is making a much more subtle and less apocalyptic argument in regards to agency and knowledge in postmodernity. Agency and individuality are not necessarily lost in postmodernity, for DeLillo is redefining what it means to "control" and what it means to "know" paranoid schizophrenic plots. Oswald and Everett had agency in effecting the assassination's final outcome; both men are killed for their individual influences. What they did not have was total control, which is how agency is understood in modernist discourse, and how Oedipa sees her agency connecting to her paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49*. DeLillo is refining agency to be any free-will action enacted within a larger structure that ultimately affects the outcome, but which is not the sole cause of the outcome. Since characters associate their identities with agency, a refinement of agency which still allows for a sense of agency in postmodernity also allows for a sense of identity. For postmodern citizens, agency and identity can still be conceptualized through paranoid schizophrenia.

The second issue, in which DeLillo revises what it means to "know" a plot, is analyzed through the character of Nicholas Branch. Branch is not part of the 1963 plot, but is a contemporaneous character who has been working for 15 years on compiling all of the information on the JFK assassination. He is both reader and writer of the tale: "the Curator sends

him material” and then Branch reads, analyzes, and synthesizes the material coherently into writing (DeLillo 15). Specifically, Branch “is writing a history” (DeLillo 57).

What does it mean to “write a history” in postmodernity? The act of writing requires a sense of individual agency, since it requires one to piece together a great amount of disparate knowledge into a cohesive structure that will explain what happened in the past. But agency is not what is hindering Branch’s progress. The act of writing is still possible in postmodernity, as DeLillo showed how both Everett and Oswald wrote plots that were not totalizing. It is history which is impossible, because history is a metanarrative. “History” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a written narrative constituting a continuous chronological record of important or public events” (history OED). The very idea of a continuous chronology, or a narrative of cause-and-effect, is rendered impossible by DeLillo’s postmodernist theory. Events happen in postmodernity—the assassination certainly “happened”—but the cause and effect of these events cannot be logically strung together into a singular narrative. Tasked to write a history, Branch is tasked with finding the “ultimate truth” of the JFK plot, the root in a rhizomic reality, and cannot write anything because this is impossible.

Branch believes the problem hindering him from writing, however, is the staggering and ever-increasing amount of material which he has to synthesize: “it is impossible to stop assembling data,” he laments (DeLillo 59). An overwhelming and incomprehensible amount of information and data is certainly an aspect of the postmodern condition which is hindering Branch’s progress, but the main issue is that he insists on trying to find the root which is not there. Instead of reaching down to the singular one, Branch’s connections keep branching out, to use the explicit pun in his name. What Branch is left with is a web of connections:

He takes refuge in his notes. *The notes are becoming an end in themselves.* Branch has decided it is premature to make a serious effort to turn these notes into coherent history. Maybe it will always be premature. Because the data keeps coming. Because new lives enter the record all the time. (301, emphasis mine)

If the notes are an end in themselves, then the ever-expanding web of connections—Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomic reality—is the only “history” which Branch can show. Branch, like Oedipa, has failed to find the root of the plot, but has succeeded as a postmodernist subject by embracing multiplicity rather than continuing to search for singularity. Still, he has not written a history in the pre-postmodernist sense.

*Libra*, while certainly a novel, is also a postmodern history of the Kennedy assassination. DeLillo is able to construct such a history because, as a creative writer, he has the freedom to invent. Branch, conversely, is bound to the material given to him by the Curator and to the idea that history written by an historian is completely factual. So he is left with his web, which has gaps between the connections, while DeLillo fills in the gaps creatively. DeLillo did extensive research for his novel and used real facts and documentation for his base, but for that which can never be known he has used creative license (DeCurtis 291). DeLillo is emphasizing that writing history is a form of writing fiction, and so one cannot “know” all of the concrete details of a plot in the way that Oedipa and Branch want to know them, because they want to “know” a singular historical narrative which no longer exists. Instead, one can know plausible histories and multiple histories, which is what DeLillo is presenting in *Libra*. His conclusion is that postmodernist reality is a series of interlocking possibilities.

## Conclusion

Postmodernism was seen by many critics as a radical break from the theories which came before. In *Libra*, Don DeLillo shows that history cannot be understood in terms of radical breaks. History is not a singular thread constructed piece by piece in a linear fashion; it is multiple strings knotting together in various patterns, which can be analyzed differently depending on which thread one approaches from. Although conspiracy theorists wanted to take a modernist approach to the Kennedy assassination, asserting that some secret narrative was being hidden from the public, *Libra* shows how even finding a “true” secret narrative would not explain everything; coincidence alters any attempts at a linear plot, secret or otherwise.

It is important that DeLillo makes this distinction about history, and that his postmodern book amalgamates modernist and postmodernist concepts, because these distinctions are what is at stake in postmodern literature. In my Introduction, I write that I believe studying the way in which postmodern writers like Pynchon and DeLillo deal with paranoia in postmodernity will address questions about how citizens can preserve their identities and agencies in the face of a postmodernist world better understood through schizophrenia, which eliminates selfhood, and how literature might continue utilizing paranoia as a mode of knowledge while incorporating postmodernism’s schizophrenia. I will conclude my analysis by considering how well these issues were addressed, and projecting a way to think about how these issues will be addressed in post-postmodernism.

First, both Pynchon and DeLillo propose postmodernist ways of conceptualizing agency and identity that take into account and/or build upon modernist paranoia. Theorists considered paranoia a modernist mode of knowledge because it requires the assertion of a master narrative;

because postmodernism eschews master narratives, it would follow that paranoia is less adequately applicable to this world of multiple narratives. Schizophrenia is the mode of knowledge more likely to arise from the experience of postmodernity, but schizophrenia leaves little room for conceptualizing agency and identity. In Pynchon's novel, although the shift from modernism to postmodernism is categorized by a shift from paranoia to schizophrenia, there is a hesitation in claiming how the shift from paranoia to schizophrenia will work, and the main character never becomes schizophrenic or fully postmodernist because she can't imagine agency and identity in a non-paranoid and non-modernist sense. In DeLillo's novel, paranoia is adapted to postmodernism by way of paranoid schizophrenia, an alternative transition which retains paranoia's conceptualization of agency and identity yet acknowledges the schizophrenic mode of knowledge. Agency is still fraught in both novels, as no postmodernist characters have "total control" over a plot; according to these thinkers and writers, that particular modernist concept of agency is impossible in postmodernity. But the belief that transitioning into a postmodernist sensibility means becoming schizophrenic and losing any conception of self or identity has been critiqued and an alternative offered. One can be both schizophrenic and paranoid, since one can respond to the conditions of postmodernity schizophrenically and still understand one's agency and identity in relation to paranoid plots.

The novels of Pynchon and DeLillo emphasize that the divide between modernism and postmodernism is not a clear-cut dichotomy but a trajectory, which advances and refines certain modernist concepts and rejects others but is not a wholesale rejection of all that came before. In *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Libra*, postmodernist characters' modes of knowledge and ways of experiencing the postmodern world develop along a trajectory as well. This trajectory is essential to acknowledge if we are to confront what literature will follow postmodernism and how it will

conceptualize agency and identity. Understanding postmodernism as a trajectory, I believe that what will follow postmodernism will be a trajectory, too. I have yet to come across, nor can I imagine, a purely schizophrenic novel. Like a purely schizophrenic postmodernist citizen, a purely schizophrenic novel cannot be expanded upon; if Jameson's vision of postmodernist schizophrenia came about in literature, there would be no post-postmodernism. There can be no plot without agency and no characters without identity. Schizophrenia would be the end. But in the amalgamated postmodernism of Pynchon and DeLillo, what should follow are more amalgamations, refinements, and reconsiderations of old modes of knowledge, rather than complete rejections of or reversions in thinking.

In *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Libra*, it becomes clear that paranoia did not cease as a mode of knowledge in the age of late capitalism; that a schizophrenic mode of knowledge does not mean a loss of the self; and that while agency and identity will be refigured in postmodernism, they will certainly not be lost.

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