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Article Title: 'Death itself Shall be Deathless': Transrationalism and Eternal Death in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*

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Abstract: The status of human mortality in the face of rapid and overwhelming scientific and technological change is by no means a new topic in DeLillo's fiction. For many critics, death fulfils a crucial function in the author's work, its very possibility operating to maintain the boundaries of time and space that are otherwise under threat of disappearance in post war culture. Don DeLillo's eighteenth novel, *Zero K* (2016), offers an augmented examination of this conjunction between death and technology, depicting an industrial and scientific landscape where fantasies of eternal life can be legitimately realised via radical advances in cryonic technologies. Yet, rather than circumventing death and prolonging life as intended, this paper argues that DeLillo instead presents cryonic freezing as a form of eternal death. Subsumed within the technological matrix, death's ineluctability is disturbed and remodulated, meaning that temporal and spatial boundaries become violently unhinged and entirely immeasurable. This boundlessness becomes vividly mirrored in the architectural and temporal logic of the 'Convergence' facility itself, a "transrational" space that unravels concepts such as time, space, language and subjectivity.

Key Words: Don DeLillo, Death, Posthumanism, Transrationalism, *Zero K*, Technology

“Death itself Shall be Deathless”: Transrationalism and Eternal Death in Don DeLillo’s *Zero K*

In Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985), the persistent question that preoccupies protagonist Jack Gladney and wife Babette is, “who will die first?” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 118). This overwhelming fear of death punctuates the text, as both characters attempt to find ways to reconcile the profound and impending finality of their own existence, to render it “less strange”. This becomes manifested through a magnetic fixation with televisual representations of violence and disaster, all of which operate to anaesthetize them against the power and terror of their ultimate demise. Many critics have therefore interpreted *White Noise* as symptomatic of DeLillo’s broader rumination on the status of death in a world dominated by simulacra. Assailed by a hypnotic and numbing proliferation of free floating images detached from their original referents, the predominant function of such violent dissimulation is to conceal or escape the knowledge that death is the only remaining reality (Heller 40). Notwithstanding its frequent rendering through images and signs in DeLillo’s work, death therefore emerges as what Leonard Wilcox describes as the “ultimate signified”, the “single natural event which ultimately cannot be subsumed into simulacra, models and codes” (Wilcox 352). Characters in DeLillo’s texts retreat into the safety of goods, signs and simulations, a hypnotic flow of cinematic connections that numbs them to death and all its devastating reality. For Peter Boxall, death therefore fulfils a crucial function in DeLillo’s work, its very possibility operating to maintain the boundaries of time and space that are otherwise “under threat of disappearance in post-war culture”. Without death as possibility, death as border, Boxall argues that we are in danger of slipping into an endless and “unboundaried” reality, a “place which, is just like another place, an endless day” (Boxall 11).

Don DeLillo’s eighteenth novel, *Zero K* (2016), offers an analogous yet augmented examination of this conjunction between death and technology. Like *White Noise*, it oscillates around both the transience of human existence and the resultant yearning to circumvent the inevitability of death. Yet, whereas Jack and Babette’s desire to live forever in *White Noise* is an abstract fiction, *Zero K* presents us with an amplified industrial and scientific landscape where these fantasies of prolongation can be legitimately realised via radical advances in cryonic technologies. The narrative follows billionaire financier Ross Lockhart, who, stirred by the terminal illness of his wife Artis, seeks immortality through investment in an exclusive cryopreservation facility known as ‘the Convergence’. Part research centre part pseudo spiritual sect, the Convergence offers individuals the opportunity to transcend death, to “surrender what is left of their current lives to discover a radical level of self-renewal” (DeLillo, *Zero K*

124). By submitting to this systematic process of preservation and reanimation, patients are 'guaranteed' that they will reborn at some indistinct future time, one feasibly beyond the current reaches of anthropogenic existence.

Yet, rather than circumventing death and prolonging life as intended, this paper argues that DeLillo instead presents cryonic freezing as a form of *eternal death*. With bodies suspended in a state of endlessly deferred mitosis, *Zero K* offers an almost posthuman vision that forcefully disrupts recognised polarities of living and dead. These cryonically postponed entities are neither before or after death, but are instead perpetually 'in death', a state that lucidly actualises the very 'deathlessness' of death itself. As a consequence, this essay argues that *Zero K* creates a new modality of death, one that problematises its categorisation as a "disjunctive, disruptive space" (Boxall 11). Although by no means eliminated, what Peter Boxall describes as the "possibility of death", in traditional terms, finds itself severely under threat. Subsumed within the technological matrix, death's ineluctability is disturbed and remodulated, meaning that temporal and spatial boundaries – the very ones already under threat of erosion from the combined forces of technology and global capital – become violently unhinged and entirely immeasurable. This boundlessness, I argue, becomes vividly mirrored in the architectural and temporal logic of the 'Convergence' facility itself, a "transrational" space that "bends all previous belief" and pushes beyond the upper limits of "human viability" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 128). This not only becomes manifested in the disorientating distortion of paradigms of life and death, but also in the unravelling of concepts such as time, space, language and subjectivity.

"All Plots Tend to Move Deathward": DeLillo, Death and Technology

This overt engagement with the status of human mortality in the face of rapid and overwhelming scientific and technological change is by no means a new strand in DeLillo's fiction. Indeed, Rebecca Ray describes death and the attendant fear of finality as persistent and "perverse motifs" that can be traced throughout the author's works (Ray 54). This is maintained by critics such as Patrick O'Donnell, who points to *Underworld* (1997) as a novel that typifies DeLillo's fixation with the inextricable connection between death and narrative. For O'Donnell, this is most obviously illustrated via the text's numerous allusions to Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death*, a violent, sixteenth-century oil painting that – after being reproduced in *Life* magazine – hauntingly descends in glossy fragments amongst an array of litter during the opening baseball game. This is not the text's only reference to Bruegel's work. As the title of *Underworld's* prologue and a continuing source of intrigue for FBI director J Edgar Hoover, *The Triumph of Death* fulfils an important symbolic function, appearing to represent DeLillo's rumination on death's ultimate permanency and inescapability. Yet, for

O'Donnell, the resonance and implications of this image - and of death itself - are more nuanced than might first appear. Unlike the painting, he argues that *Underworld* does not so much engage with "the triumph or inevitability of death", but rather with "the notion that humans and objects are forever shuttling *between* life and death", a constant process of "recycling" delineated by what he terms "an underhistory of waste". It is this very shuttling, O'Donnell argues, that defines "contemporary identity" and modern consciousness (O'Donnell 114).

This relationship between death and contemporary experience has been further examined by Mikko Keskinen, who points to texts such as *The Names* (1982), *Libra* (1988) and *The Body Artist* (2001) as being symptomatic of DeLillo's characterisation of death as a haunting, "liminal phenomenon" (31). Despite describing violence as a key theme in DeLillo's work and one of the "tokens of the contemporary extreme", Keskinen argues that death is more spectral than "overtly present" in these particular texts. Death and spectrality become frequently and intimately intertwined with various media-based mediums, creating a stark convergence between what Keskinen terms the "technological and the mediumistic" (31). Here Keskinen taps into a broader debate regarding the association between death, haunting and the dissimulative effects of contemporary consumer society in DeLillo's work. Frequently engaging with the depthlessness of a world structured around hypnotic spectacles, surfaces and simulations, DeLillo's postmodern renderings of death have often been compared to the work of Jean Baudrillard, particularly due to the latter's positioning of death as the ultimate boundary. In a hyperreal, postmodern culture that strives towards mediatizing and ultimately defeating death, Gary Genosko argues that - for Baudrillard - death consequently emerges as the only thing that "can challenge this culture", the only thing that can resist being subsumed by the postmodern matrix (Genosko 92).

Yet, the function of death in DeLillo's novels, particularly its resistance to, and/or relationship with, the abstraction of postmodern reality, has been widely contested by critics. In his reading of *White Noise* for instance, Arno Heller focuses on the overwhelming mass of "entropic simulacra" that bombard the daily lives of Jack Gladney and his family, creating a stark disconnect between simulation and reality (40). For Heller, this assault of televisual images, information and codes not only operates to divest the family of any connection to the 'real', but also insulates them against the potency and immediacy of death. In the process, Heller argues that death, violence and suffering are transformed into mere televisual simulations divorced from any sense of real "concrete experience". This ultimately has an anesthetizing effect, not only delivering characters in the novel from the "burden of the real", but simultaneously immunizing them against the "visual impact" of such images through a constant process of repetition and deferral (Heller 41).

Cornel Bonca approaches this junction between mortality and technology from an alternative perspective, recognising the overwhelming fear of death that permeates postmodern culture not so much an anxiety that characters in DeLillo's fiction seek to circumvent, but rather as the source of what he describes as "epiphanic moments" (Bonca, "Being, Time and Death" 59). Citing the section in *White Noise* where Jack Gladney overhears his daughter mumble the words 'Toyota Celica' in her sleep, Bonca argues that this inane "consumer-blather" has the opposite effect on Jack than what one might expect (59). In what Bonca describes as a "rich and telling irony" ("Being, Time and Death" 59), rather than causing a sense of dejection or confusion in Jack, these words instead instil in him both a sense of "meaning" and presence", transforming this bizarre moment into one of "splendid transcendence" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 180). Bonca subsequently argues that this and other such epiphanic instances "signify a form of revelation in which DeLillo's characters penetrate, if only briefly, through the white noise of postmodern culture to the quick of the culture-wide fear of death that lies beneath and animates it" ("Being, Time and Death" 59-60). Bonca describes the very fact and fear of death as DeLillo's "ground zero", a "locus of charged psychic force" that catalyses heightened moments of deeper perception.

Such episodes underline how these spontaneous instances of understanding and connection commonly arise from the seemingly banal and everyday, flashing fleetingly and then submerging once again (Bonca, "Being, Time and Death" 60). Sylvia Mieszkowski sees Bonca's notion of "spontaneous epistemological breakthrough" as something deeply rooted in the modernist tradition, citing the works of Joyce and Wolfe as symptomatic of similar moments of "heightened perception/intensified experience" (320). Yet for Bonca, these visions into an essential reality or deeper truth do not merely signify a moment of profound, indefinable sublimity, but rather a fleeting connection with death as the final frontier of the real. As such, the 'Toyota Celica' scene emphasises what Bonca describes as "death-fear speaking through consumer jargon", an almost philosophical communication that precipitates not fear and revulsion, but – somewhat paradoxically – euphoria, transcendence and "wonderous awe" (Bonca, "Natural Language" 36). Although Bonca argues that these revelations fail to help Jack reconcile his anxieties regarding his own mortality in any perceptible way – principally because he remains unaware of what he is experiencing – his very contact with this underlying 'death fear' nonetheless precipitates a profound yet intangible sense of epiphany and connection (Bonca, "Natural Language" 34).

Though Bonca and Heller may therefore disagree somewhat on the role of death in DeLillo's work, both seemingly maintain the perception of death as final boundary, or what Wilcox describes as "the last vestige of the real" (353). Bonca in particular appears to position death outside of the mediating clutches of contemporary existence, as something almost approaching the sacred. This

inability of death to be subsumed or represented within a postmodern sign system is a central preoccupation in DeLillo's metaphysical mystery *The Names*. Whilst attempting to understand the precepts of a secret language cult that denies the inevitability of death, protagonist and risk analyst James Axon describes mankind's awareness of death as our "saving grace", a "base reality" that "sets us apart" from other animals. Axon proceeds to describe this knowledge as "our special sadness..... a richness, a sanctification" (DeLillo, *The Names* 175). The language Axon uses here is almost holy, presenting death as a sacred boundary that is at once sorrowful yet simultaneously the source of great transcendence. Marc Schuster argues that just as "consumer culture promises that accumulating and arranging signs of value will result in the abolition of our 'special sadness'", the cult in DeLillo's text "apposes death by systemically pre-empting it". Yet the result is not a greater sense of understanding of, and connection to "the world and others", but quite the opposite; disconnection and a form of "totalitarianism" (Schuster).

Schuster's reading of *The Names* would appear to reinforce death's position as a base reality, yet many critics see this boundary between technology, simulation and death in DeLillo's work as far less inviolate. In her reading of *White Noise*, Elise Martucci points to Jack's visit to the SIMUVAC authorities following his exposure to the toxic cloud as evidence of death's increasing "reduction to a set of data and postmodern simulacra" (88). After consulting with a SIMUVAC technician, Gladney's genetic, personal, medical and psychological data are subsequently crunched and analysed by a computer, creating a "massive data base-tally" designed to assess the long-term effects of his exposure to the gas (DeLillo, *White Noise* 165). When the computer comes back with an ambiguous result of "pulsating stars", Gladney's perception of his own mortality and identity is violently disturbed (165). Unable to conceptualise this alienating, digitalised rendering of death, Gladney experiences a profound sense of separation between "the self and the body" (Martucci 88). As Gladney himself notes: "It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 165). In the process, death becomes subsumed into the world of simulation, transforming it into another depthless screen image that becomes starkly separate from the notion of everyday existence and Jack's own corporeality. Yet, both Martucci and Wilcox argue that this in no way nullifies the reality and fear of death for Gladney and the other characters in *White Noise*. Rather than separating or shielding individuals from the reality of death as perhaps intended, Wilcox suggests that it is actually this very distancing that is the source of such overwhelming dread. In *White Noise* specifically, he suggests that the very *lack* of an "intimate relation" with death is what precipitates the emergence of a culture crippled and "haunted by the fear of mortality" (Wilcox 353).

Ultimately these discussions prompt broader questions about the relationship between technology and death in both DeLillo's fiction and beyond. Leonard Wilcox in particular goes onto question the very possibility of meaning if death too becomes another composite part of a world dominated by simulation:

...media and technology transform death into a sign spectacle, and its reality is experienced as the body doubled in technified forms: death by "print-out." But if death, the last vestige of the real, the final border of the self, becomes part of the precession of simulacra, what possibilities exist for meaning, value, for the autonomous self's endeavour to create meaning against death's limits and finality? (353)

Wilcox's postulation of a world where the possibilities of meaning are indissolubly effaced by the overwhelming precession of simulacra goes some way towards delivering us towards what Boxall describes as "unboundaried time and space" (Boxall 11). Death's articulation and assimilation via technology would seem to disrupt previous notions of death as boundary, as that "which cannot be bought into light" (11). Consequently, the ongoing mediatisation of death progressively opens up the possibility of an intermedial space, one that disrupts previous binaries of living and dead. Brian McHale sees such attempts to remodel death as a composite part of postmodernist and Cyber-Punk strategies to disrupt and dislodge fixed knowledges. In the process, he points to Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* as a novel that typifies this vision of an "ontological frontier between life and death" (264). McHale refers specifically to the Thanatoids, a race of beings who, because of a karmic imbalance, are not "permitted to fully die but must linger on in an ambiguous condition" (264) - one that Pynchon refers to as "like death, only different" (Pynchon 170). This is significant when placed in the context of DeLillo's work, providing the potential for a new modality of "eternal death" that threatens to precipitate the very boundlessness that Boxall envisions.

A New Modality of Death: *Zero K* and Transrationalism

It is this very possibility of a "middle state" between living and dead that *Zero K* amplifies to new and extraordinary heights, as DeLillo conjures a skewed yet recognisable reality where death prevention is now not only possible, but has developed into an emergent mode of private, commercial enterprise. This is manifested in the shape of the 'Convergence', an exclusive and remote research compound where death can now be controlled and ultimately 'prevented' through radical developments in biomedical and cryonic science. Leading us through the facility is Jeffrey Lockhart, a solitary and detached thirty-four-year-old American who struggles to find meaning in the detritus of modern existence. He occupies his days inhabiting what he describes as "the middling drift",

meandering between jobs with esoteric designations such as “cross-stream pricing consultant” and “implementation analyst - clustered and non-clustered environments” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 54). Possessing absolutely no meaning outside of the titles themselves, these vocations are an expression of Lockhart’s own free-floating disconnection. He describes how the roles are “swallowed up by the words that describe them”, existing as nothing but empty signifiers with no bearing to any precise idea or content. As Lockhart asserts: “The job title [is] the job”. Lockhart perceives this perpetual drift, this endless deferral from “job to job, sometimes city to city”, as fundamentally “integral” to the man he is. It allows him to operate on the boundary, to exist in a space “outside the subject.....no matter what the subject [is]” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 57)

This profound sense of peripherality and deferral is very much symptomatic of Jeffrey’s fraught connection with contemporary reality. Throughout the text, Lockhart is obsessed by language, or, more specifically, by the failure of language to satisfactorily or definitively convey meaning. *Zero K* is saturated with moments where words fail to articulate the reality of things, where the metonymic and metaphorical flow of signifiers unravel into a boundless and incomprehensible swirl. This is exemplified early in the text, when Jeffrey recounts overhearing an old confrontation between his parents, during which his father called his mother a “fishwife”. Unfamiliar with the term, Jeffrey consults a dictionary for clarification, only to be swept up in a limitless succession of semantic deferral:

Once when they were still married, my father called my mother a fishwife. This may have been a joke but it sent me to the dictionary to look up the word. Coarse woman, a shrew. I had to look up *shrew*. A scold, a nag, from Old English for shrewmouse. I had to look up *shrewmouse*. The books sent me back to *shrew*, sense 1. A small insectivorous mammal. I had to look up *insectivorous*. The book said it meant feeding on insects, from Latin *insectus*, for insect, plus Latin *vora*, for vorous. I had to look up *vorous* (DeLillo, *Zero K* 25).

The severe disconnect between signifier and signified is forcefully dramatized in this scene. Jeffrey’s attempt to find meaning in words only begets more words, leading to an endless chain of signifiers shorn free of their original referents. This precipitates a constant sense of slippage, where the illusive object of knowledge remains tantalisingly and irrevocably out of reach. In a compulsive epistemological quest, Jeffrey fruitlessly chases meaning through the pages of the dictionary, catalysing a domino effect of postponed signification where words can only be defined in the context of a limitless, rhizomatic web of signifiers. This becomes typical of Jeffrey’s behaviour throughout the text, as he repeatedly interrogates the names and definitions of objects, people and ideas in an attempt to render them distinct, to make them signify. Jeffrey functions as the embodiment of a postmodern contemporary reality devoid of any definition or substance, a “shapeless man” drifting through an equally shapeless world.

Jeffrey's sense of shapelessness is also heavily rooted in his fraught relationship with father Ross. A billionaire global investor, Ross occupies a detached, ephemeral position in Jeffrey's psyche, a "simulated man" belonging to the covers of glossy magazines standing shoulder to shoulder with other "godheads of world finance" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 82). The severity of this abstraction between father and son is magnified in chapter seven of the text, when Jeffrey reveals that Ross Lockhart is actually an artificial name. Born Nicholas Satterwhite, Ross's constructed identity has a profound impact on Jeffrey's self-identification, whilst further rupturing the already volatile structures of linguistic signification. This revelation validates Jeffrey's instinct that he is "someone [he isn't] supposed to be", heightening an already overriding sense that he is peering into his life "from the outside" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 82).

It is perhaps as a consequence of these deep-seated issues that Jeffrey is unable to resist when his father invites him to visit a top secret medical facility. After completing a marathon journey, during which the location of the facility is kept concealed from Jeffrey, he finally arrives at the Convergence, a "sealed, self-sufficient, subterranean cryogenic facility" subsidised by millionaire investors and clandestine government grants (Rich, "High Technology"). The centre is home to several wealthy patrons and investors, whose bodies have been frozen in clear cased pods and stored indeterminately within the facility. The bodies are stripped of their essential organs, which are preserved separately inside insulated vessels called "organ pods". Both body and organs then remain in a state of suspension, awaiting revival in some future time beyond the current comprehension of anthropogenic existence. Ross Lockhart describes it as "faith based technology", another "god" not so different from "some of the earlier ones" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 9). As Nathaniel Rich suggests, patrons must put faith in a number of variables: "that the pods will remain frozen indefinitely; that future civilizations will be able to reanimate the bodies and grant them immortality; that life in the distant future will be preferable to death". Yet Ross remains confident in the viability of the technology, asserting that – unlike other faith based practices – the convergence is "real", "true" and "delivers" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 9).

The interior of the Convergence possesses a design logic that is in complete synergy with its philosophical and scientific determinations. Long pastel-coloured corridors in various "gradations of muted blue" sprawl into rhizomatic nothingness, punctuated only by numerous doors, air locks and access tubes many of which conceal nothing behind their veneers (DeLillo, *Zero K* 23). Visitors and residents with the appropriate wristband clearance can access restricted sections of the facility by using the "veer", a horizontal elevator that glides illogically between its multiple numbered levels. Exterior walled gardens open up into synthetic vistas of fake trees and flowers, all of which remain unruffled by the breeze that sweeps across them. The sprawling halls are meanwhile haunted by mysterious pseudo-clerics, who wordlessly accompany Jeffrey around the indeterminate spaces of the

facility. At the end of one of these numerous corridors sits a large television screen, which at unspecified times will lower and then project disturbing images of violence and disaster that go seemingly unnoticed by the other patrons. Jeffrey observes a number of these screenings, which include elongated scenes of floods, tornados and self-immolation that loom “long past the usual broadcast length” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 11). The immediacy and hyperreality of these images hastens a strange compulsion in Jeffrey, as he finds himself unable to withstand the magnetism of the screen. He is struck by oscillating sensations of repulsion and attraction, gripped by the desire to “step back” whilst feeling simultaneously bound to “keep looking” (11).

The most surreal instance of these projections occurs in chapter 10 of the text, when whilst traversing the halls towards his room, Jeffrey is one again faced with the ominous lowering screen. This time the television begins transmitting footage of what appears to be a stampede, as a crowd of thousands of closely packed men and women charge frantically across a “barely visible” landscape (DeLillo, *Zero K* 152). As the desperate footage nears its conclusion, Jeffrey realises that the images on screen are not real. He decides that these fragments of “digital wave” are in fact “visual fictions”, designed and manipulated to broadcast the violence and suffering of human existence in all its visceral brutality (152). Yet, just as Jeffrey watches the images fade and the screen begin to lift, he is struck by a loud noise emanating from the distant corridors and growing progressively louder as it swiftly approaches his location. As he turns to confront the noise, what unfolds perfectly encapsulates the very ‘boundarylessness’ of the Convergence:

I went a few more paces and had to stop, the noise nearly upon me, and then they came wheeling around the corner charging in my direction, the running men and women, images bodied out, spilled from the screen. I hurried to the only safety there was. The nearest wall, back flattened, arms spread, the runners bearing down, nine or ten abreast, blasting past, wild-eyed.

[....]

I watched them come and go and then, in the thinning lines, with the last runners approaching, what I saw was a pair of tall blondish men and I leaned forward for a better look as they went by, shoulder to shoulder, and it was the Stenmark twins, unmistakably, Lars and Nils, or Jan and Sven.

They were drenching me, out-thinking me these several days, this extreme sub-lifetime. What was it beyond a concentrated lesson in bewilderment? (DeLillo, *Zero K* 152-153)

Just as Jeffrey concludes that the images are mere simulation, he is confronted with a performative stampede that is rendered all the more surreal by its stark authenticity. Choreographed by the designers of the Convergence, this performance piece precipitates a bleeding of the cinematic into the real that forcefully elucidates the facility’s dual function as both research centre and “conceptual art project” (Rich, “High Technology”). A “concentrated lesson in bewilderment”, the spaces, design

and environment of the facility are a composite part of a more comprehensive exercise in pushing the frontiers of experience and knowledge. As Convergence resident Ben Ezra conforms to Jeffrey: "We share a feeling here, a perception. We think of ourselves as transrational. The location itself, the structure itself, the science that ends all previous belief. The testing of human viability" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 128). The spatial and architectural logic of the interior of the Convergence operates as a physical manifestation of the 'transrational', directly mirroring its scientific attempts to warp ingrained conceptions of logic, teleology and temporality through advanced cryonics. The unanchored space and time of the centre becomes a reflection of the consequences of distorting death as boundary. The longer that Jeffrey spends at the facility, the more he senses that the days are beginning to lose their "grip" (DeLillo, *Zero K* 48). It delivers Jeffrey to the very "unboundaried" sense of time and space that Boxall describes, an "endless day just like any other day" (Boxall 11).

One of the patrons committing her body for preservation via freezing is Jeffrey's stepmother, Artis, who is suffering from several illnesses linked to her multiple sclerosis. As the day of her freezing approaches, Ross too decides that he will join her in cryo-suspension. Although the facility is only usually open to individuals suffering from terminal illnesses, there is a special dispensation for those who wish to enter suspended animation before their time. Named 'Zero K', as an investor, Ross is readily accepted by this special unit. Yet, heeding Jeffrey's concerns and unable to overcome his own fear of mortality, Ross is ultimately unable to go through with the procedure, leaving Artis to undergo cryosuspension alone. Part one of the text culminates with Artis's experience of consciousness once suspended in the pod, a disorientating stream of disembodied sensations that forcefully communicates Artis's location between polarities of living and dead, a location that appears as dislodged as the Convergence itself. Crucially, Artis does not so much appear to have circumvented death, but to have moved to some boundless third space of incomprehension and anguish; an "eternal death":

I can feel time. But I don't know what this means.

I am only what is here and now.

How much time am I here. Where is here.

I think that I can see what I am saying.

But am I who I was. And what does this mean. And did someone do something to me.

Is this the nightmare of self drawn so tight that she is trapped forever.

I try to know who I am.

But all I am is what I am saying and this is nearly nothing

She is not able to see herself, give herself a name, estimate the time since she began to think what she is thinking.

I think I am someone. But I am only saying words.

The words never go away.

Minutes, hours, days and years. Or is everything she knows contained in one timeless second. This is all so small. I think that I am barely here.

[.....]

On and on. Eyes closed. Woman's body in a pod (DeLillo, Zero K 161-162)

This scene vividly actualises the profound rupturing of temporal and spatial boundaries as a consequence of death's disruption as border. Artis exists in a state of exhausting perpetuity, where all notions of boundary – time, space, the self – become violently and incomprehensibly dislodged. This is most forcefully manifested in the seeming fluidity of Artis's corporeality, a sense of bodylessness and boundlessness that emphasises her location between binaries of existence and nonexistence, presence and absence. DeLillo's vision is what McHale would describe as intensely "posthuman", a complex "middle state beyond or outside of biological life yet not a state of non-being, not death itself" (264). Yet, how to specifically define this intermediary state is problematic, particularly as the process of cryosuspension seems only tenuously geared towards any sense of future reanimation. Indeed, Nathaniel Rich questions whether there is any real distinction between the suspended animation the Convergence offers and death itself: "None of the facility's deep thinkers seems particularly interested, after all, in discussing the future into which they would be reborn. One comes to wonder whether they even believe, with any sincerity, that they *will* be reborn. The closest anyone comes to having an actual vision of the future is Artis" (Rich). Although Rich concedes that Artis experiences a vision of reality post-death, he argues that its focus on images of "brilliant light" is more characteristic of a vision of the afterlife than of some indistinct future. Yet, neither of these possibilities really seem to comfortably align with Artis's disorientating experience of temporality, space and being, principally because she appears to exist in a location between such rigid binaries of existence.

Some clue to the exact nature of this frontier between life and death can perhaps be found in *Zero K*'s references to the writings of St Augustine of Hippo. After Artis undergoes suspension, Ross and Jeffrey initially return to their lives outside of the Convergence. Jeffrey perceives this as a return to a world defined by the very boundaries and structures that were deliberately dislocated by the 'transrationality' of Convergence: "When we returned from the Convergence, I announced to Ross that we were back in history now. Days have names and numbers, a discernible sequence, and there

is an aggregate of past events, both immediate and long that we can attempt to understand. Certain things are predictable.... elevators go up and down rather than sideways” (167). Nonetheless, adjustment for both men is difficult, and after a short passage of time Ross ultimately chooses to return to the facility so that he can join Artis in suspended animation. Although unwilling to undergo the procedure himself, Jeffrey accompanies his father on this return. It is during an induction presented by one of the mercurial ‘Stenmark twins’ that DeLillo offers an oblique insight into the nature of this space between life and death. Addressing Ross and the other “benefactors” preparing for cryo-suspension, Stenmark opens his speech with a quote from St Augustine, where he proclaims: “And never can a man be more disastrously in death than when death itself shall be death less” (240).

This is not the first time that DeLillo has used this reference to explore the concept of ‘deathless death’; St Augustine’s words also appear in *Americana*, when an anonymous executive in David Bell’s building sends around a cryptic memo with the very same message. Taken from a section of the *City of God* where Augustine ponders the condition of man prior to resurrection (and the correct grammar to describe this state), the implication of these words is significant when considered in the context of the text’s broader examination of an ontological space between the living and the dead. St Augustine contemplates how “the dead, until they rise again, are said to be in death, but cannot be called dying..... They are not before or after death, but always in death; and thus never living, never dead, but endlessly dying” (Augustine 379). When taken as a whole, St Augustine’s words illuminate the ontological and semantic ‘no man’s land’ occupied by Artis and these other entities frozen in stasis. With her organic matter stored in separate pods and her consciousness vacillating confusingly between time and space, Artis’s condition epitomises death’s remodulation and disruption as final border in *Zero K*. Indeed, if waking from cryosuspension can be deemed a form of resurrection, then cryosuspension itself is not eternal life at all, but the very opposite; endless death. In the transrational locale of the Convergence, death becomes co-opted into the technological matrix of consumer capital, producing a middle state that disrupts the possibility of death in traditional terms. Such ‘deathless death’ represents the apotheosis of DeLillo’s sustained scrutiny of the gradual displacement of “death, time and the historical” in contemporary culture, a displacement induced by the combined and overwhelming strategies of technology, media and capital (Voelz 175). Indeed, the transrational spaces of the Convergence facility emulates this denial of death through an architectural logic that deliberately confuses parameters of time and space. With its absence of windows and sprawling corridors of doors, Jeffrey experiences a similar sensation to that of Artis, that of “time compressed, time drawn tight, overlapping time, dayless, nightless” (115).

“Die a while, then live Forever”: Art and Posterity

The conclusion to *Zero K* sees Ross Lockhart similarly submitting his body for cryosuspension. Whilst discussing his decision with a cynical Jeffrey, Ross acknowledges the sacrifice that he must make in the quest for endless life. As he informs Jeffrey, the equation is simple: “Die a while, then live forever” (114). Here Ross’s language points to a recognition of cryosuspension as prolonged or eternal death, a remodulation of mortality that problematises straightforward delineations of being and nonbeing. Although the payoff is theoretically immortality, any details on what form this may take remain ambiguous and illusive even at end of the text. Indeed, the specifics of how and when reanimation or resurrection might occur do not seem to preoccupy Ross or any of the other patrons, suggesting that this concept of eternal life may signify what Nathaniel Rich describes as a form of “artistic immortality” rather than biological. Such a reading is validated by the ending of the text. After Ross enters suspended animation, Jeffrey is offered the opportunity to tour the facilities cryo-chambers. Faced with “rows of human bodies in gleaming pods”, Jeffrey is confronted with the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of the facility:

All pods faced in the same direction, dozens, then hundreds. And our path took us through the middle of these structured ranks. The bodies were arranged across an enormous floor space, people of various skin colour, uniformly positioned, eyes closed, arms crossed on chest, legs pressed tight, no sign of excess flesh.

I recalled the three body pods that Ross and I had looked at on my earlier visit. Those were humans entrapped, enfeebled, individual lives stranded on some border region of a wishful future.

Here, there were no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing. It was a form of visionary art, it was body art with broad implications (256)

Here Jeffrey recognises a differentiation between cryosuspension on a small scale and the devastating display of suspended bodies that confront him in this vast facility. As individuals, these entities occupy the endless space of deferral that is eternal death, that borderland of a “wishful future” that will never be fully realised. Yet, when viewed together, these pods augment and transmute into a different arrangement entirely, a spectacular installation of “body art” that reconfigures death into something transcendent and sacred. As the opposition between immortality and death is indiscernibly blurred, it becomes demonstrably clear that the Convergence is not really offering immortality beyond death, but immortality *in death*. Thus, rather than immortality compressing “enduring artforms and cultural wonders into nothingness” - a fear acknowledged by the convergence ‘philosophers’ near the beginning of the text - immortality, or immortality in death, is transformed into a conceptual artform in and of itself, an abstract hieroglyph or ‘cultural wonder’ that Jeffrey defines as “archaeology for a future age” (256).

The prolonged effects of the Convergence on Jeffrey's psyche are evidenced via his nomadic, erratic narration after leaving the facility at the finale of the text. In chapter 9 in particular, Jeffrey lurches between unconnected and seemingly incongruous 'impressions', all of which hint at the persistence of the very boundarylessness and transrationality embraced and practiced within the Convergence. In one separated paragraph, Jeffrey reflects: "Beggar in a wheelchair, dressed normally, clean shaven, no paper cup, gloved hand thrust into the street swarm". Such nonsensical abstractions are typical of Jeffrey's movement in and out of lucidity in this section. Although he attempts to retreat inside a life of normality in a deliberate retaliation against the precepts of the facility, he is unable to escape it. The "endland of the convergence" occupies a haunting and spectral presence in these final pages, with Jeffrey forever "standing in the shadow" of Ross and Artis. Yet, as Jeffrey reflects, it is not "their resonant lives" that haunt him, but "their manner of dying" (266). Ultimately *Zero K* reinforces a theme that Sally Bachner argues is also central to *Americana*, namely that "true life requires true death". As she continues, a life without death, which is "life that has been stripped of authenticating violence", is the very condition that "media conglomerates" and capitalist monoliths threaten to condemn us (125). This unboundaried space is one that Jeffrey still appears to occupy at the final of the text, one without logical spatial and temporal demarcations.

Zero K amplifies DeLillo's examination of the conjunction between death and technology to new, uncharted proportions, violently disrupting binaries of living and dead, organic and artificial. However, instead of eradicating death and forging the possibility of eternal life, this paper has argued that DeLillo instead presents cryotechnology as a form of postponed, *eternal death*. Whilst mortality is still not eradicated, the notion of death as boundary is forcefully and detrimentally ruptured. As epitomised by the Convergence facility, this precipitates a sense of incomprehensible boundlessness, a 'transrational' state that dislocates clear notions of time, space and language. As such, the facility becomes a microcosm of a contemporary culture increasingly under threat from the combined forces of technology and global capital. As the tactility of our already loosening reality begins to unravel, DeLillo presents us with the disorientating consequences of a world stripped of death as the final frontier of the real.

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