

University of Szeged (SZTE)
Institute of English and American Studies

Lilla Farmasi

“I am Lauren. But Less and Less.”

**Corporeal Narratological Aspects in Don
DeLillo’s *The Body Artist***

szakdolgozat / MA Thesis

Témavezető / Supervisor:

dr. Ágnes Zsófia Kovács

Szeged, 2014

SZAKDOLGOZAT □ MA THESIS
MÁSODIK CÍMLAP □ SECOND TITLE PAGE
Érvényes 2013. március 31-től / Valid as of March 31, 2013

Szakdolgozatíró neve/Name of thesis writer: Lilla Farmasi

Szakdolgozat címe/Title of MA Thesis: “I am Lauren. But Less and Less.” Corporeal Narratological Aspects in Don DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*

A szakdolgozathoz kapcsolódó, kötelezően választható órák/MA Thesis-related electives:

Az óra megnevezése Name of elective	Tanár neve Name of instructor	Időpont (év/félév) Time (year/semester)
1. Bodies Re/Presented: Gendered Identities in Visual Culture	Iren Annus	2013-2014-1
2. Postmodernism through revisiting modernism	Péter Bocsor	2013-2014-1
3. Literature and the Semiotics of the Subject	Attila Kiss	2012-2013-2
4. Race/Ethnicity/Class and Gender in American Culture	Éva Miháltzné Dr Federmayer	2013-2014-1

Declaration on plagiarism, previous research, language proficiency, correspondence between electronic files and hard copy, and the length of the Thesis

I declare that this MA Thesis, entitled “*I am Lauren. But Less and Less.*” *Corporeal Narratological Aspects in Don DeLillo’s The Body Artist*, is entirely the result of my own work, and that it contains no more than 30% of material for which a (BA or MA) degree has previously been conferred upon me. I have faithfully and accurately cited all my sources, including books, journals, handouts and unpublished manuscripts, as well as any other media, such as the Internet, letters or significant personal communication.

I also declare that the MA Thesis files uploaded on Faculty (Modulo) and Institute platforms are identical and are also identical with the printed copy submitted.

Furthermore, while I understand that it is permitted to consult another person concerning the language used in my work, I declare that the language of my work (beyond verbatim quotes) is indeed my own and faithfully represents my own level of proficiency in English.

Moreover, I declare that the length of my MA Thesis is words without the Appendices, thus it falls within the required range of 10,000 – 18,000 words.

Szeged, 29 April 2014.

.....
Szakdolgozatíró aláírása / Signature of thesis writer

Declaration on the Availability of the Corpus (Sign if applicable)

I declare that the fieldwork materials, questionnaires, or interview-based data I have used in this paper are the results of my own data gathering, and I will make them available for inspection at the request of the opponent or supervisor.

.....
Szakdolgozatíró aláírása / Signature of
author

Szeged, 29 April 2014.

Table of Contents

Abstract	Hiba! A könyvjelző nem létezik.
Introduction	4
1. The Don DeLillo Reception.....	5
2. Corporeal Narratology.....	8
3. Corporeal Narratology in DeLillo.....	11
4. The Body Artist.....	15
5. Abject/ion.....	17
6. Characterization in Corporeal Narratology	19
7. Body Artist(s).....	23
7.1 “In-signifi-can’t” bodies in <i>The Body Artist</i>	23
7.1.1 Language and the Narrative Voice (of <i>The Body Artist</i> /Lauren Hartke).....	24
7.1.2 Mr. Tuttle.....	29
7.2 Lauren Hartke as General Character	34
8. The “inaccessible” DeLillo texts and the Hitchcockian flair	37
Conclusion.....	43
Reference List.....	45

Introduction

In this thesis I will examine the novel entitled *The Body Artist*, written by Don DeLillo, one of the most acknowledged American, postmodern prose writers. In the course of my examination I will create my interpretation of the novel applying the terms of corporeal narratology, a post-deconstructionist narratological practice first popularized by Daniel Punday in his influential study, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* (2003).

I believe that approaching the DeLillo canon with the help of this relatively recent field of academic knowledge offers answers for the questions that I will address. My questions do not only concern *The Body Artist*. DeLillo is known as a writer who, while using a wide range of topics, tends to return to and revise certain ones in several of his novels. Concerning my thesis the most remarkable of these will be the thematization of language.

The way I see it, examination of the inexpressible, the unnarratable, which DeLillo attempts to thematize in his texts along with language, is closely tied to the curious, mysterious nature that critics repeatedly point out (but rarely attempt to explain) concerning his prose. I will explain this “inaccessible” quality with the textual peculiarities caused by the moments when the inexpressible seems to enter the text, and that is the most observable in the text of *The Body Artist*, the novel I labeled as representing the peak of DeLillo’s growing interest in what language cannot express, which one might understand as specimens from the prelinguistic or the extralinguistic sites. This tendency of experimenting with writing the inexpressible is accompanied with a growing interest in human embodiment and the functions of the body, which also have to originate from DeLillo’s well-known fascination with language. This tendency makes a relatively fresh interpretation—provided by the theory of corporeal narratology—of DeLillo’s works possible.

I aim at finding answers to the following questions: How could *The Body Artist*’s protagonist’s (embodied) character be fit into the theory of corporeal narratology? What makes the DeLillo texts “inaccessible”?

Where the unnarratable, for instance a trauma, is about to be (re)narrated, language collapses or misfires, and materiality, often in the form of human corporeality appears and takes over the role of signifiers. This tendency starts in *The Names* and becomes more and more articulate with time in DeLillo’s novels, and *The Body Artist*, from a certain aspect, is wholly dedicated to this task. Getting beyond language, which undeniably has a material dimension, seems to be a complex mission in the work. DeLillo’s works have a characteristic

of violating boundaries in numerous aspects, be it the boundaries of genres; the sheer physicality of characters; or the bounds of the narratological categories.

I will (re)interpret the characters and the narrator of the novel, with the help of Daniel Punday's ideas about characterization, focusing on character bodies and their bodily perceptions. Considering the figures of Lauren Hartke and Mr. Tuttle, as well as the narrative voice I will define the map of relationships between the character(s) of the novel, and contrast them to Punday's ideas of literary characters.

Eventually, inviting Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of the "flair" of Hitchcock films, I will examine the way the textual body of the novel affects the reader in order to find an explanation for the "inaccessible" nature of the DeLillo texts, which, in my view also has its peak in *The Body Artist*. My hypothesis will be that the so called "inaccessible" quality of DeLillo's novels is a result of his writing style that aims at incorporating what is outside or beyond language, which we see as unexpectedly, aggressively presented corporeality that surfaces at points where language reaches its limits, leaving "holes" or "gaps" in the texts. I assume these stem from the subversive nature of the body and they alienate, thrust out the reader from the text, resulting in the curious nature the critics referred to.

1. The Don DeLillo Reception

In the following section I plan to provide an outline of the reception of Don DeLillo's works. I will chiefly focus on the criticism concerning the themes of language in his novels, as well as the "inaccessible" nature of his texts. An introduction of the relatively new academic field of corporeal narratology will follow. Corporeal narratology is a post-deconstructionist narratological theory, which, regarding the themes I will highlight in DeLillo texts, might offer significant aspects to the reception.

Most of the studies written on DeLillo's novels focus on different themes he uses. Probably any attempt to plainly and briefly phrase who Don DeLillo is and what his works are about would result in a fallacious fragment of what they really represent. His novels are known to encompass numerous themes, fields of studies, and tones of voice, he likes to experiment with genres and themes (Dewey 2006, 3; Cowart 2008, 5) and his critics are sensitive to these features. Among his regular topics are conspiracies, terrorism, possibilities and limits of language, world politics, the role of artists, identity crises, catastrophes, and America itself—and DeLillo shows no difficulty combining them.

Enikő Bollobás describes the author as a canonized, white, male writer, an important figure of American postmodernism, noting that his works bear numerous postmodern features such as self-reflexivity and an intellectual tone (Bollobás 2006, 657). He can be called an exemplary postmodern novelist, and simultaneously he resists postmodern thought and practices (Cowart 2002, 12). He carries an “uncanny resistance to popularity” (Bloom 2003, 89-90) and a similar resistance to clear categories of criticism. He is a descendant of Italian immigrants yet his novels lack an ethnic consciousness (Aaron 1991, 67). His works, especially *Libra* (1988), a novel about the assassination of president Kennedy, have been harshly criticized for political content—he has been called a “literary vandal,” a “bad citizen,” and “a member of the paranoid left” (DeCurtis 1991, 65, Aaron 1991, 72), and while it would be difficult to deny the political and cultural criticism he passes on his country—Joseph Dewey in fact calls him a “cultural anatomist” (Dewey 2006, 6)—he claims to have no “political theory or doctrine” (DeCurtis 1991, 65) and ultimately his works are not interested in politics *per se* (Cowart 2008, 154). Despite the predominantly dark topics he thematizes humor is not hard to detect in his novels. It is probably the most emphatic in *White Noise* (1985), a novel with a Hitler studies professor as protagonist, who struggles with his pathological fear of death and his inability to learn German.

Besides the controversial features I have just mentioned his works are difficult to classify because of his curious writing techniques. According to Daniel Aaron the writer, in terms of style, is a “withholder” and a “mystifier,” and his texts are full of “unexplained phenomena” (Aaron 1991, 68), Joseph Dewey simply calls his texts “inaccessible” (Dewey 2006, 1, 3), David Cowart describes them as “avoid[ing] thematic directness”, and as being generally oblique (Cowart 2002, 9). In his narratives the “logical connections aren’t heavily underscored, but his books have their own musical structures” (78), even though DeLillo’s writing has also been judged as too “talky,” “boring,” and “overwritten” (Aaron 1991, 75). Moreover, it would be difficult to name a target audience of his works, since it addresses consumers of both popular and high culture (Bollobás 2006, 672).

Fragmented and heterogeneous as his textures may be, it is also important to note that there are numerous themes in DeLillo’s novels that he tends to revisit, and some of them go through remarkable evolutions in the oeuvre. Observing and analyzing such themes there is a considerable amount of studies attempting to locate various waves and changes in DeLillo’s entire body of work, such as Joseph Dewey’s *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo*, considering the visions of the apocalypse in the DeLillo canon, or David Cowart’s *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*, concerning the topic of language. Tom LeClair even

goes as far as claiming that DeLillo's whole literary career has to be understood as a metanovel, as if all the prose he has produced created a single enormous novel (Donovan 2005, 27).

The theme in DeLillo criticism which appears the most relevant regarding my thesis is that of language. DeLillo is undoubtedly deeply preoccupied with language, in fact he "demonstrates a seemingly inexhaustible ability to conjure fresh questions about language" (Duvall, 2008, 155). He also listens to and portrays the actual, everyday speech of people (Donovan 2005, 32).

His vocabulary is rich and sophisticated, his style is eloquent, and he is notably fascinated by "euphemisms and jargon" (DeCurtis 1991, 61) to the extent where some even find it harmful regarding his stories (Bloom 2003, 107-8). On the other hand, as Cowart examines it, from time to time language appears as the very subject of DeLillo texts. Although he avoids acknowledging that he follows the development of contemporary academic theories of language, his texts seem to be infused with them (Dewey 2006, 10). As Christopher Donovan notes, his first novel, *Americana* is already "replete with tentative delvings into the general nature of language" and some of its passages are "predestined to be seized on by academics with a deconstructionist eye" (Donovan 2005, 29). This inquiry into the nature of language, accompanied by a quest for what is beyond language, the "language beyond words" (40) becomes more and more emphasized in his subsequent works, for instance in *The Names* (1982), or in *The Body Artist* (2001). *The Names*, which is often recognized as a turning point, or a new beginning in the oeuvre (Donovan 2005, 51; Cowart 2008, 160), has key deconstructionist terms at its core such as inscription, signifying, referentiality, or meaning. David Cowart effectively summarizes DeLillo's relationship to poststructuralist theory when claiming that DeLillo might be familiar with theory, he just "does not think within its box" (Cowart 2008, 161).

All in all, as it is probably already apparent, what interests me most in DeLillo's works are their uncanny, mysterious nature at a textual level, as well as their preoccupation with language, and I hold it as a theory that these two features are strongly connected. I have reached this conclusion with the methods of corporeal narratology, which is capable of interpreting the nature as well as the structure of stories and which I am about to introduce.

2. Corporeal Narratology

Although the study of narratology roots in structuralism and it still shares some of its characteristics, such as a preference for punctilious terminology and classifying, it has survived and adapted to the theoretical shifts and reconsiderations of the second half of the twentieth century. Despite its strict schools, narratology proves to be a rather flexible study, the best evidence for which is the fact that it can even be reconciled with deconstructionist discourse, which is often linked to the criticism of narratology itself. Edit Kovács contemplates whether the indisputable renaissance of narratology, or the “narrative turn” as Daniel Punday calls it (Punday 2003b, 1) marks the end of the poststructuralist era (Kovács 2010, 8), while Punday, although admitting that deconstruction and narratology make up an unusual couple, thinks that new narratological endeavours simultaneously come out of and break away from deconstruction (Punday 2003b, viii). Narratology has become an interdisciplinary study and grew several new branches such as contextual, cognitive, or corporeal narratology, and each of them is equipped with different practices and views.

After noting the contemporary rekindled inquiry into materiality, Punday finds the key to post-deconstructive narrative theory exactly in its “complex engagement with materiality” (20). His 2003 study, *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology*, as the title says, elaborates on what he named “corporeal narratology,” examining the body—more precisely the monist understanding of the body claiming the unity of the human body and soul—as a narratological category and regarding reading as an embodied act. He claims that although body-studies became immensely popular in the last decades of the twentieth century, until recently narratology had seemed to avoid incorporating them. While developing the practice of corporeal narratology, Punday heavily leans on the phenomenology of perception—especially on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, where the notions of physical movement and the sense of touching become central in terms of perception.

Merleau-Ponty, the “the patron saint of the body” (Shusterman 2005, 151) examined the relationship of the world and the body (especially the ways we perceive things with our bodies) as well as the mind and the body, refusing to follow the Cartesian notion of the primacy of the mind. As Judith Butler explains, Merleau-Ponty “interrogates the body as a site of mobility and spatiality, arguing that these fundamentally corporeal ways of relating to the world subtend and structure the intentionality of consciousness” (Butler 2005, 181).

It is not difficult to see why Punday has chosen to build his theory on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy when we see how he regards the relations of the world and the body. He claims

“[o]ur own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 235). Merleau-Ponty also observes the fallacies, weaknesses and subversive nature of the body, explaining a phenomenon Peter Brooks and later Punday emphasize concerning the relationship of body and text: “[i]n so far as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent upon my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way which I do not choose” (511), he observes.

The aim of corporeal narratology is to reinterpret and recontextualize the elements of narratology by focusing on bodily perceptions and experiences; to investigate the relationship of the body (the embodied subject) and the text/language, asserting that it is the body that “breathes life into” any narrative. Brooks in his influential study entitled *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (1993), regards the body as an object as well as a generator of narratives, and explains the complex relationship between story and body observing the “semiotization of the body” and the “somatization of the story” (Brooks 1993, xii). According to him the body in stories is to be understood “as at once a cultural construct and its other, something outside of language that language struggles to mark and to be embodied in” (xiii), and while the body is regularly associated with a prelinguistic realm, it is important to note that “the most highly elaborated symbolic structures [...] derive from bodily sensations” (7). Through analyzing (the roles of) bodies in and outside of the text (including the body of the reader as well), contrary to the usual practice of narratology, Punday attempts to examine *what* we read instead of *how* it is told, therefore he focuses on elements instead of aspects.

Punday articulates two main aspects of his study. Firstly, we should analyze “how the body is used as a component of stories” (Punday 2003a, ix). This is carried out with the help of traditional narratological elements (plot, character, and setting), this way corporeal narratology enriches these terms, while the terms keep the theory practical, and eventually a new context is provided where we can reinterpret the body. “Likewise, since different cultures and periods think about the body in different ways, we can see how these different conceptions of the body lead writers to construct plot or setting, for example, differently” (ibid).

Secondly, we need to ask “how the body contributes to our ways of speaking about or analyzing narrative” (Punday 2003a, ix). This sort of thinking moves toward “a theory of narrative hermeneutics - how stories become meaningful to readers,” making it possible to consider the “historical condition of our own narrative hermeneutics. [...] [I]t may well be that [a given] way of thinking about reading itself is historically conditioned by, among other

things, a conception of the human body” (ibid). One of Punday’s most exciting observations is—as he illustrates it with the help of *Frankenstein* and the contemporary idea about the power of thought over the embryonal development¹ (34-5)—that new paradigms about human embodiment are always accompanied by changes “in what it means to read a story, and where writers put the body in the story” (x).

Punday rethinks and recontextualizes narratological categories applying chiefly the theories of the phenomenology of bodily perceptions and Brooks’ ideas of plotting. What Punday seems to overlook, though, is the nature of the so-called somatized text, the “body-text” as Anna Kérchy calls it (Kérchy 2008, 29). For solely applying the phallic male gaze as a perspective, Brooks’ (and later Punday’s) possibilities for thematizing the body in narratology have become limited (Kérchy 2010, 74; Kérchy 2009).

With respect to the materiality of the body opposing the state of language, where feminist criticism has done immensely influential work, more aspects are available, which reveal the ways the body “forces itself” into a text, the ways it affects meaning-making by uprooting language with its uncontrollable materiality:

[T]he discursively constituted body is endowed with [...] an unspeakable thus compulsively re-narrated corporeal surplus that is meant to decompose the text, to subvert conventional re-presentations, ideological inscriptions and narratively logo-, andro-, sano-centric narratives through textual ruptures, story gaps, narrative overflows, slippages in signification, breakings, becomings or polyphonization of voices. (Kérchy 2008, 27)

The human body in a text, as Kérchy understands it, therefore creates an ambiguous, tense atmosphere that results in tangible textual evidences, which she traces in Angela Carter’s stories in her study entitled *Body-Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter. Writing from a Corporeagraphic Point of View*, revealing how Carter rewrites female subjectivity in the process. The somatization of the text “dramatizes [...] how [the semiotized body] decomposes [meaning], how it transgresses canonized representational tradition [...]” (Kérchy 2008, 28). The Kristevan semiotic modality of language and her idea of the subject-in-process and the subject-on-trial are key concepts in this project, implying that there are levels of a text over which narration loses control (Földes 2011, 39).

¹ “Like the social critics who worried about the power of imagination to affect the fetus, in *Frankenstein* imagination is fundamentally linked to birth. *Frankenstein*’s imagination is, however, no longer a matter of literally influencing the gestation of a child, but rather a matter of metaphorically “birthing” a new world“ (Punday 2003a, 35).

The way I see it, corporeal narratology appears to be a project which still has unexploited potentials to offer, especially about the “somatized text” and the ways the body effects the text. In my thesis I will consider DeLillo texts concentrating on the narratological categories of characterization as well as aiming to examine how the body subverts DeLillo’s texts.

The role of language and its problems or limits would be difficult to overemphasize in the DeLillo canon. Since, as I observe, simultaneously with the problematizations of language, signifying, or referentiality the body habitually tends to surface in DeLillo texts, I believe a corporeal narratological consideration of his works is relevant if not necessary while his “inaccessible,” “mystical” texts might also have new aspects to offer for Punday’s project.

3. Corporeal Narratology in DeLillo

While DeLillo’s work has already a rich academic reception, most of the literature written on his work mentions the persistent incomprehensible, “inaccessible” nature of his novels (Dewey 2006, 1), as Cowart explains “the experience of reading this author resembles a dream in which one can never quite close with a cryptic meaning that seems to hover at the edge of consciousness, constantly threatening to slip over the horizon of the sentence, the page, the volume” (Cowart 2002, 8-9).

This nature of the DeLillo texts coexists and, I assume, cooperates with the increasing inquiry into language and its possibilities and limits as subjects of fiction—throughout his works DeLillo submerges himself more and more in semiotics (4), yet he avoids implying the idea that language is nothing more than an infinite chain of signifiers referring to other signifiers as the popular deconstructionist idea claims, in fact, occasionally he seems to undermine this theory.

Fully aware that language is maddeningly circular, maddeningly subversive of its own supposed referentiality, the author nonetheless affirms something numinous in its mysterious properties, for instance his stories habitually feature characters who avoid or incapable of lucid speech, but not meaning-making. (5)

What I presume is that the uncanny, dreamy, “inaccessible” quality of his novels is provided by the corporeality that surfaces at points where language reaches its limits. Where

the unnarratable, for instance a trauma, is about to be (re)narrated, language collapses or misfires, and materiality, with a special respect to human corporeality appears and takes over the role of signifiers. It is more characteristic and much more common in DeLillo's later novels, and I assume so far his 2001 short novel, *The Body Artist* represents the peak of this tendency. The novel attempts to abandon, to get beyond language as we know it and places the main character's body in the focus in turn, an act that is traceable in previous DeLillo novels as well.

I believe the tendency is easy to notice through the following examples. The importance of the physical body of the characters is emphasized already in his first novel when he has the protagonist confess:

I had almost the same kind of relationship with my mirror that many of my contemporaries had with their analysts. When I began to wonder who I was, I took the simple step of lathering my face and shaving. It all became so clear, so wonderful. I was blue-eyed David Bell. Obviously my life depended on this fact. (A 11)

As Bell somewhat ironically illustrates, materiality and its role in our lives are key themes in DeLillo's novels, and character bodies are repeatedly represented as the foundation as well as the source of the characters' identity and self-expression.

Concerning the tendency in DeLillo texts that it is often the body that becomes the signifier of what has to remain untold, a simple example can be found in his 1977 novel entitled *Players*: "They waited for [Lyle] to say something. He sat, moving slowly as possible. His nose started bleeding again. This became the joke, of course. It was funnier than anything he could have said" (P 83). When Lyle becomes speechless his body comes into the foreground and "speaks for him," carrying on the conversation.

The Names is the novel where DeLillo begins to thematize corporeality along with language as one of the main themes of the story. He claims to have experimented here with a writing style that would result in "the prose counterpart" to the "sensuous clarity" of the extraordinary ways he "tasted and saw and heard" when he was in Greece (DeCurtis 1991, 60), regarding that this was one of the goals of the novel, we can see the primacy of the body in it. Besides the problematization of language it becomes obvious that the body does not simply appear in this text where language reaches its limit, it often entails shocking, or even violent scenes, reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, the phenomenon continuously looming around the subject, threatening it with its attractive-repulsive, unclassifiable nature, and from time to time penetrating its symbolic skin.

In *The Names* DeLillo builds on the notion of the discursively constituted body, on language defining, determining materiality by emphasizing the power of names. A murderous cult chooses its victims by their initials, which have to match the name of the place where they stay. A former member of the cult insists that the act of killing became necessary exactly because the letters matched (*N* 209). The custom of hurting somebody by ritually destroying his or her name, or the act of killing somebody with a tool that has his or her initials on it (*N* 150) also stress the authority of language over the body. The scene where James Axton rapes a woman has been associated with the theory of logocentrism (Donovan 2005, 52).

On the other hand, materiality repeatedly subverts language, which admittedly leaves no place for the unspoken, the unspeakable (*N* 52). DeLillo stresses the physical nature of language itself when he describes the speech of Ann: “[w]hat she said was beside the point. It was the cadences that mattered, the rise and fall of the ironic voice, the modulations, the stresses. What we lacked was a subject” (100). Here the important parts of speech prove to be its physical features instead of its content, as if a message was possible to grasp without the words themselves. The mysterious cult is preoccupied with language and the prelinguistic, rather paradoxically: “We are working at a preverbal level, although we use words” (208), explains Andah, a former member.

In *The Names* the cult itself represents a mystery, an inexplicable, abject-like quality. It draws its members into committing manslaughter from time to time as an inevitable “final act” (208), implying that the delivery and the presence of a corpse, the ultimate meaninglessness, as Kristeva understands it (Kristeva 1982, 3), was the final stage of what they were working on. The mere act of an attempt to verbalize what the cult does elicits scenic physical reactions from the characters: James, the narrator vomits when he is asked about the cult (*N* 153), and later Andah keeps coughing, hawking, and spitting while telling about them to James, who, when witnessing the spitting Andah, is reminded of his vomiting which, as he explains then, was a result of his occupying a mental space “between ways of existing,” an ambiguous experience brought to him by the philosophy of the cult. Therefore, in *The Names* language and the human body are often presented as entwined phenomena, the language suppressing the body and the body subverting language, and in the latter case the idea of abjection, in violating surfaces is commonly detectable in the images of bludgeoned or vomiting bodies.

In one of his latest works, *Falling Man* (2007), we can observe important characteristics that are similar to those of *The Body Artist*: it features a performance artist as a key figure, and it also is about working through trauma—the national psychological trauma of the 9/11

terrorist attacks. The Falling Man does not speak a single word and his silent performances recall the traumatic event. His art is not explained, not commented on, it seems to repulse language, “looming” in the air. In fact, the artist can only be described by his bodily movement: the man falling (*FM* 165).

When traumatic events are to be re-narrated in *Falling Man*, the image of the body tends to enter the text in a rather aggressive way. As we are about to be retold what happened to Keith, a survivor of 9/11, right after the terrorist attack, the image of “organic shrapnels” emerges:

[T]he survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes, months later, they develop bumps, for lack of better term, and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber’s body. The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who’s in striking range. [...] They call this organic shrapnel. (16)

This striking scene of physical violation of the skin, the physical boundary of a human being, literally by the body of another (dead) human, apparently recalls the idea of the Kristevan abject. At this point the narration of the trauma notably fails, and it is replaced with a dramatic image of injured bodies.

But from different aspects the 2007 novel already represents a strongly ironic tone concerning the relationship of language and the body:

Someone told Rumsey one night that [...] everything in his life would be different, Rumsey’s, if one letter in his name was different. An *a* for the *u*. [...] It was the *u*, the *rum*, that had shaped his life and mind. The way he walks and talks, his slouchings, his very size and shape, the slowness and thickness that pour off him, the way he puts his hand down his shirt to scratch an itch. This would all be different if he’d been born a Ramsey. (149-150)

This passage might be understood as a mock illustration of the idea of the semiotized body.

The parents of the nine-year-old Tap in *The Names* encourage him to experiment with language, fancy his misspellings, and teach him the made-up Ob language². But when Justin, the child in *Falling Man*, who has been recently taught one-syllable words in school,

² A “language,” in which the speaker inserts the word “ob” after each syllable.

experiments with using solely one-syllable words, his parents tell him off and generally understand Justin's experiment as a problem, as if implying that DeLillo has had enough of exploring mysterious dimensions of language.

I hope to have illustrated the theme of the human body and the way it becomes more and more articulate in DeLillo's novels. The novel that I plan to elaborate on will be *The Body Artist* where, as has been mentioned, the body becomes a key element of the story on more than one levels. The protagonist, Lauren Hartke, a performance artist, is very conscious about her body and she develops detailed theories about language, its function, and its relationship to the body in the course of processing the trauma of losing her husband, and images recalling Kristevan theories of the abject and the prelinguistic, semiotic aspect of language are difficult to miss in the text. In the following sections I will summarize the plot of the novel, outline the Kristevan theory of the abject, and take a closer look at the body and its roles in *The Body Artist*, with the help of corporeal narratology.

4. *The Body Artist*

The Body Artist is DeLillo's twelfth novel published under his name. It is a rather enigmatic work, open to a number of various interpretations³. It is apparently different from the earlier novels of DeLillo due to the extremely narrow scope it employs; it focuses on one character, and the story unfolds in one very limited space. It is a peculiar novel that, despite its being extremely limited form several aspects, is supposedly "best [at] embod[ying] DeLillo's sense of modernist poetics" (Coward 2008, 14). The novel is of "deliberately glacial pace," and it refuses "to offer the easy pleasures of narrative" (Bonca 2002, 60).

The novel starts with a slow and detailed scene where the married couple, Lauren Hartke and Rey Robles, is engaged in the mundane act of having breakfast in a lonely, old, rented house on the seashore. This turns out to be the last morning they spend together since after breakfast Rey drives to his first wife's flat and shoots himself. After the tragedy Lauren plans to figure herself out alone, but she meets an "inevitable" mysterious visitor in the house where she temporarily lives, who has several qualities of an uncanny or abject-like entity, and who accompanies her for a while. As a result of the time they spent together Lauren reinvents

³ I will refer to several of these interpretations, and I definitely do not regard mine as the only possible or reasonable interpretation of the novel.

herself, becomes capable of coping with the traumatic event, and creates and performs a new piece.

During her mourning weeks Lauren isolates herself from the rest of the world, she rarely leaves the house and she does not meet anyone until she finds a strange man in one of the rooms upstairs. The man, who she names Mr. Tuttle behind his back, might be a physically and mentally impaired person, a homeless man, a ghost, or maybe a figment of Lauren's imagination (Karnicky 2009, 7; Cowart 2002, 206), his character is extremely mysterious. After they meet, Lauren spends a lot of time with him, though he triggers ambiguous feelings in her. After a while, Mr. Tuttle disappears just as simply as he appears at the beginning.

The novel is definitely "a turn away from the shared world of human culture to the inner experience of one woman's thought" (Karnicky 2009, 9). Although it is practically an antinarrative (Di Prete 2005, 505), it remains exciting on the level of events because there is a complex process that goes on inside Lauren. Since she is a performance artist she constantly invents and plays roles (subjectivities) as part of her "profession" but she does the same thing in her private life, too, during her reoccurring daydreams, when she injects herself into stories she reads in newspapers. As Jon Roberts points it out, "Lauren's art has everything to do with self-abandonment [yet this process is also] evidenced in moments that have very little to do with her art" (Roberts 2006).

I have already asserted that from the aspect of this thesis *The Body Artist* is a peak in the whole body of work produced by DeLillo. *The Names* was his first novel to be "almost obsessively" preoccupied with language (Cowart 2002, 162), and he applies the body and language as central themes all through this story. Getting beyond language seems to be a complex mission in the work of this author, who prefers to construct the structures of his novels as quests (198), and *The Body Artist*, from a certain aspect, is dedicated to this task; the readers are repeatedly presented with violations of the boundaries of both the body and the mind. As it has been illustrated in the previous section, the DeLillo canon has a characteristic of violating boundaries in numerous aspects: the boundaries of genres; the sheer physicality of characters, and *The Body Artist* clearly violates the boundaries of the narratological categories of characterization and narration, redefining them by practically having their borderlines blurred or simply erased.

What I am proposing is that once we analyze characters' and the narrator's voices in the novel we find that we have more voices than characters bodies, in fact, according to my idea

we only have one character body, that of Lauren Hartke and the character of Mr. Tuttle and even the narrative voice are imaginable as fragments of her identity.

My hypothesis will be that the protagonist of *The Body Artist* occupies a metaposition, where she can be interpreted as a creator, a character, a narrator, and an interpreter. She possesses narrative as well as performative qualities, and instead of her consciously using them, they uncontrollably stem from her physicality, repeatedly summoning the phenomenon of the abject, and making her role and function in the narrative complicated. My explanation for the similarly complex and confusing nature of the whole body of the text will be inspired by Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Hitchcock's films.

5. Abject/ion

I believe the textual phenomena I am interested in considering the DeLillo novels, that I call the "unnaratable," the "inaccessible," has a lot to do with Julia Kristeva's theories of the prelinguistic (or extralinguistic) sites to which the subject has no direct access. The "appearances" of the Kristevan semiotic realm, which is the "name for the unnameable" (de Nooy 1998, 29), might be what we experience in these texts, for, as Kristeva explains, it is always entwined with the symbolic, and since we cannot approach it directly, we only have access to it "through studying its effect on signification" (30). The phenomenon, which, I believe, grants us the access to this site is that of the abject. The text of *The Body Artist* carries a number of features and scenes where what we read resembles the abject and the process of abjection. In the following passages I will elaborate on this phenomenon.

When the subject is understood in the poststructuralist sense, as constantly being in the making, there is a need for certain forces to be effectively present to dislocate it from time to time, to keep it in process. Julia Kristeva outlined this procedure claiming that the subject, even after it is constituted, teeters between structuredness (the symbolic) and unstructuredness (the semiotic) and it falls into one from the other episodically; the structure of the subject remains unsafe forever and it is violated and rebuilt in a cyclic fashion, and it necessarily happens to all speaking subjects.

What I would like to discuss here is one of the strongest of the forces that keep the subject in process, which Kristeva discovered and elaborated on in her 1980 book entitled *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection* (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated into English in 1982). Abject is the phenomenon and abjection is the process in

which it involves the (would-be) subject. Abjection is the very first step in the constitution of the subject; it triggers the separation of the subject from the rest of the world with which it formerly identified itself. Whenever we are confronted with the abject, it takes us back to this stage.

Since due to the abject everything but the “I” – though partly even that – becomes separated from us forever, it is closely tied to the concept of loss: it establishes “the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (Kristeva 1982, 5). It signifies nothing, an absence; it comes from beyond the symbolic, it is associated with the eruption of the Real – which is otherwise forever lost and unapproachable – into our lives (Felluga).

The most important features of the abject are that it is permanently present and extremely ambiguous. It might be the most appropriately explained with the impressions it makes and the way the subject handles it. Its place is difficult to identify, as Kristeva explains it is neither part of the self, nor an object, yet it is still both.

Its ambiguity lies both in its main features and in the effects it has. It is disgusting and menacing, and at the same time attractive and irresistible for the subject, and while it threatens the self with annihilation, it has a vital role in constructing it. It is unclean and unclear and it disrespects borders. It resists the symbolic, it is meaningless, therefore it cannot be put into category – this is what makes it threatening to the subject. The abject penetrates our “symbolic skin” (the metaphor for our being differentiated from the rest of the world), it shatters the symbolic. But however hard the subject would try to escape or jettison it, it is impossible, since the abject cannot be divided from the subject. It is “[a] weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. [...] There abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture,” explains Kristeva (Kristeva 1982, 2).

The abject is often sickening and ugly, main examples for it are bodily wastes or cadavers, yet it is temptingly attractive. The primary feature of the abject is not its appearance or any other physical characteristic, though, but its nature: its disturbing ambiguity, its meaninglessness, and its quality of being constantly on the horizon. It is “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4).

The scope of the study of abjection has been strongly broadened since it had been created. Today it is applied in sociology, film studies, body studies, and identity politics among others, often in order to explain mechanisms of entire communities or cultures instead of individual subjects.

In *The Body Artist* I am about to discuss the main character(s) for whom the nature of the abject is rather elemental. It is not difficult to interpret the novel this way, since the main character(s) is deeply enigmatic and possesses “very few qualities which are recognizably and conventionally human” (Bonca 2002, 60). As we will see the text of *The Body Artist* includes a number of the features of the Kristevan abject, especially the way characterization is carried out in the novel concerning the figures of Lauren and Mr. Tuttle. To examine characterization in the novel I will apply Daniel Punday’s terms and understanding of literary characters, which I am about to present.

6. Characterization in Corporeal Narratology

In the following sections I will examine the features of characterization in *The Body Artist*. I will (re)interpret the characters and the narrator of the novel, strongly leaning on Daniel Punday’s ideas about characterization, focusing on character bodies and their bodily perceptions. Considering the figures of Lauren Hartke and Mr. Tuttle, as well as the narrative voice I will define Lauren as the possessor of the only body in/behind the text that is relevant in the creation and in the interpretation of the story, which problematizes the hermeneutic tool which Punday has invented and named “general character”.

In his study entitled *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* Daniel Punday builds a narratological practice around the phenomenon of the human body. He claims that “our very understanding of the idea of narrative depends on a particular way of conceiving the human body” (Punday 2003a, 53), for instance, according to him, the starting point of character identity is the birth of a character (28). “Narratology in this sense is a form of discourse that is deeply entwined with the modern body” (53) and it depends on “a theory of how the text can be meaningfully articulated through the body” (15).

Punday examines the ways bodies become meaningful narratological categories in a text by lending the given characters their significance (53). He draws on the observation of Mary Douglas who states that “the body must be instilled with a specific set of meanings before it can take on a role in culture,” (57) since, as Punday claims, the same process takes place in a narrative (ibid).

According to him, one of the central aspects of corporeal narratology is the understanding of character bodies. Minding textual bodies Punday applies a traditional

narratological interest, but he rethinks “the possible forms of narrative bodies,” (53) since narratology has “relied on a historically limited understanding of the body as an object of analysis,” (54) which resulted in interpretive difficulties regarding certain character bodies. Firstly, one has to decide what counts as a body in a text. This might sound plain, but considering robot or ghost characters it can become problematic, and these characters are not always easy to contrast with others, but as Punday states, each narrative “defines a certain range of body types. [...] at this point character bodies enter into semantic relations,” (61) which enable theorists to sort them. Character bodies may be sorted according to different categories, such as political principles, which is probably the most obvious in racist narratives; a notion of health, for instance Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* features a separated group of characters with the same health problems; or simply, but very typically, according to their gender, among other aspects (61-63).

The model of the sorted character bodies fails to account for some aspects, therefore Punday extends the limits of this understanding (73). His chief example for alternative character bodies is the character set of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, more precisely the character of Beloved, which invites a corporeally more complex interpretation. Beloved’s appearance is “ontologically heterogeneous—she quite literally does not inhabit the same world” (ibid) as the rest of the characters, while she is closely, physically tied to them, which makes it difficult to compare her to the other, “sorted” characters. It is precisely Beloved’s body what makes her character complicated, for instance her appearance is that of an eighteen-year-old girl while her behavior is occasionally “infant-like” (74). Her character is not only problematic, it fulfills an extra role:

Beloved, like *Beloved*, is clearly a text to be read, a message from the past. [...] Morrison seems to be suggesting that the relationship between Sethe/reader and Beloved/text is a physical, corporeal one. Beloved’s body is an overarching narrative body, a body more general than that of any character, which serves as our ingress to the novel and its difficult subject matter. (74-5)

In Punday’s theory Beloved’s body becomes a mediating figure between the other characters in the novel as well as between the reader and the text by “representing the many ways in which we can give significance to Morrison’s whole novel” (74), she is a “physical embodiment of a story” so to say with which the reader is confronted (77), suggesting that our interaction with a text is more complex than what a simple schematic structure could hold (75).

To make this concept clearer Punday invites Elizabeth Grosz's criticism of the "emphasis on sight as *the* model of perception" (75, emphasis in original). As Grosz—who relies on the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—reckons, the pattern of the thinking focused on the image involves the Cartesian body/mind dualism in which the body is the inherently inferior element, simplifying the relations between the body and the world and creating distances between the body and the world (ibid). Grosz, still following Merleau-Ponty, replaces the visual model with touching as a model for interaction between bodies and the world, considering "the ways in which individual bodies engage in an ongoing exchange" (76), therefore defining "a more fundamental corporeal 'atmosphere' [...] literally closer to the body [which is] the context in which all other relations between the body and the world [...] must be understood" (ibid).

The example of *Beloved* shows that a character type is capable of bringing "character and character, reader and text into contact [since] she is literally the means by which these narrative elements 'touch'", therefore being located "outside of narratology" (77). Narratology, as Punday points it out,

has failed to theorize moments when character corporeality will exceed individual bodies and provide a general hermeneutic atmosphere for the reader's contact with the narrative. This [...] is the equivalent in narrative terms of Grosz's theory of the importance of touch in our everyday experience of the world. (ibid)

While a visual model would try to "separate characters into distinct objects that we analyze from a distance" this understanding implies a more complex practice (ibid). To sum it up, the general body stands above sorted character bodies, mediates between them, and also provides access to the text for the reader.

By addressing the importance and the complexity of character bodies Punday articulates that "narratology should attend more closely to the corporeal atmosphere of a narrative as defining the fundamental hermeneutic conditions of the reader's interaction with the text" (80). He refers to the reader's bodily engagement with a text mentioning to Hélène Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine*, and acknowledges a corporeal element of any story that is "not a discrete object represented [...] but rather a whole bodily 'atmosphere' out of which the work is produced and through which it must be experienced" (ibid). Punday does not elaborate on this "bodily atmosphere," for it would entail a movement beyond the theory of characters (ibid).

He claims that in order to thoroughly understand “the semantics of narrative’s characters” we do not only need to sort character bodies but we need to see and locate them in a broader hermeneutics. This is necessary to make the bodies meaningful and this is the process that defines the general body, which does not have to be an embodied figure. The general body might be presented in various ways (83), the point is its function of being “our readerly ingress to the story” (82-3).

Punday keeps theorizing about the general character body when he discusses plotting, where, I believe his explanation gets overcomplicated (88-101). He necessarily arrives at the notion of the duality considering the role of the body in creating narrative, elaborated on by Peter Brooks, who defines the bodily (desire) as the motoric force behind plots as well as what resists plot observing the tension between getting to the end and creating delays on the way in his Freudian concept of narrative in *Reading for the Plot* (1984), closely tying the human body to the creation of narratives. Most of the theorists (Jablonczay 2011, 99; Földes 2011, 20; Kérchy 2008, 27) who continue Punday’s line of thought turn to Brooks’ idea of the “somatized text” and “textualized body” (Brooks 1993, xii) when discussing plotting, probably because it seems to be the same procedure that Punday attempts to theorize in his chapter about plotting. Brooks explains the complex relationship between the symbolic system and the somatic in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*⁴ (1993), where the individual body is presented as the source and the constructor of the symbolic structure that it simultaneously, continually subverts.

[L]anguage seeks to remotivate itself as a symbolism with an original referent in the body: to become a language embodied. Narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body’s entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifying factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning. (8)

Although in plotting I would not follow his theory either, I think Punday’s flexible understanding of character bodies and his idea of a general character body in a text serving as a “mediator,” an “ingress” into the text are highly relevant in this examination of *The Body Artist* for I believe the continually observable, “inaccessible” quality of the novel is caused by the protagonist, whom I understand as an incompetently functioning general character body.

⁴ Punday, for some reason, disregards this work.

7. Body Artist(s)

In this section I will examine the characterization in *The Body Artist*. The novel works with an extremely limited set of characters. After the death of Rey we mainly see Lauren, the protagonist in the empty house, being accompanied by Mr. Tuttle. The third entity in the novel that is important to mention is the narrative voice, which is unusually entangled in the thoughts and emotions of Lauren. As I will explain, I see the narrative voice as the voice of the protagonist, and Mr. Tuttle as a projection of her, which eventually leaves us with several voices but only one character body: that of Lauren.

With “in-signifi-can’t,” this mesh-up of an expression I aim at illustrating the activity and also the quality of the “bodies” of the narrator and Mr. Tuttle. They both repeatedly prove to have difficulties in expressing what they would like to express, while their bodies and bodily sensations can be defined as insignificant because neither of them has a solid, separate body. According to my interpretation Lauren is the only entity in the story, which possesses a discrete body, but occasionally even hers seems impossible to define. Tuttle’s presence and activities, the narrator’s speech, and at times Lauren’s speech and body all contribute to the “inaccessible,” incomprehensible nature of the text of *The Body Artist*, in which, I claim, Punday’s idea of the general body functions in a disabled way. In the following sections I will elaborate on the nature and the corporeal qualities of these characters to reach a conclusion about the characterization of the novel.

7.1 “In-signifi-can’t” bodies in *The Body Artist*

As has been mentioned, I am reluctant to interpret Mr. Tuttle as a distinct character. He ought to be understood as a projection of Lauren’s trauma or her inner artist that got dislocated (Cowart 2002, 206; Duvall 2002, Chapter 4). I see him as an important, inherent part of Lauren, that is temporarily conceived by her as an external entity.

Mr. Tuttle definitely has a lot to do with Rey and his death, for Lauren the two of them are so deeply entwined that it seems she occasionally fails or does not care to distinguish between them (Di Prete 2005, 488). I prefer not to understand him as a ghost of Rey, since he has more features that he shares with Lauren, and if one wants to provide him with physicality, again, Lauren’s body has to be the one behind Mr. Tuttle’s figure. Throughout the novel nobody else sees and talks with Mr. Tuttle besides Lauren, and considering his physical

quality he hardly has a distinct body. He undoubtedly serves as a muse (Coward 2002, 204; Dewey 2006, 131), since Lauren noticeably feeds on the incomprehensible expressions of Tuttle when creating her performance.

David Cowart understands Tuttle through his “ventriloquist talent” (he remembers and repeats fragments of past dialogues) and his ability to “shuttl[e] backward and forward in time” (Coward 2002, 205). He explains that this is what all literary artist do, therefore he draws a parallel between Mr. Tuttle and the author himself and he offers an alternative I have already mentioned: he may be understood as the inner artist of Lauren, which gets “temporarily obtunded or disoriented by late catastrophe” (205-6). This last insight is what is closest to my understanding of Mr. Tuttle, since besides concentrating on the similarities between him and Lauren he serves as an example for Lauren, appearing to occupy a position that she longs for—thus, the body artist of the title might be him. What Lauren admires about Tuttle are the mental and physical features she incorporates in her piece, entitled *Body Time*. These features and acts are often incomprehensible; they belong to the list of disturbing images and scenes I have previously presented concerning DeLillo’s whole body of work. These characteristics are unusual, incoherent, occasionally might seem to completely resist interpretation, and most of them involve physicality in one way or another.

Tuttle and Lauren have to be interpreted together since as numerous studies, for instance those of David Cowart, Laura Di Prete or Joseph Dewey imply, they share one character body and one (temporarily disturbed) consciousness. The similarities of the two of them are obvious, in many ways Tuttle is only more extreme. The narrative voice, as I have already stated, also belongs to Lauren. In the next few pages I will highlight those characteristics of Tuttle, Lauren, and the narrative voice, for which I claim *The Body Artist* is the peak of the DeLillo oeuvre concerning his “inaccessible” writing style. These characteristics often recall the Kristevan theories of abjection, as well as the prelinguistic, and extralinguistic realms, and they eventually make the narratological category of “character” rather problematic even in the flexible theory of Punday, exactly because of the way bodies are presented in the novel.

7.1.1 Language and the Narrative Voice (of *The Body Artist*/Lauren Hartke)

Almost the whole text of *The Body Artist* is narrated in third person. There is only one exception to that (disregarding now the brief obituary of Rey inserted after the first chapter), an episodic part entitled “Body Art in Extremis: Slow, Spare and Painful.” It stands out from

the novel in more than one way, and it is made visible, too: it is not an inherent part of the story, but inserted between the sixth and the seventh chapters, breaking the atmosphere of the narration. It is narrated in first person and signed at the end by Mariella Chapman, a former college, classmate, and friend of Lauren, who makes an interview with the artist, concentrating chiefly on her looks and her performance entitled *Body Time*. Chapman knows nothing about the details of Lauren's inner projects and processes, although she states that Lauren is continuously in the process of becoming someone else (BA 105). Lauren's inner movements, thoughts, and emotions that are habitually described by the narrator suddenly become untraceable in this part. Chapman's narration lets us catch a glimpse on what Lauren and her performance look like from the *outside*, given that otherwise, all through the novel we are *inside* (hence the contrast between these parts). What I propose here is that the third person narrative of the novel is only grammatically third person, and it is in fact the voice of Lauren, therefore it works as a first person narration. In the following passages I will explain why do I define the narrative voice as that of Lauren and why do I find it more complex and significant than simply a strategy of focalization.

Although among critics the novel is usually understood plainly as being narrated by an invisible third person, I find the narrator rather problematic. The text itself shows signs of being narrated by the protagonist, and it is even easier to see when one considers the nature of the narration in the DeLillo oeuvre. Almost half of the sixteen novels he had published so far are narrated in first person from the beginning to the end, and even more interestingly, several of his works contain both first and third person narrations. One of the main themes of DeLillo's novels is the issue of identity and subjectivity, and he stresses an interesting relationship between the first and the third person. He problematizes it already in his first novel, *Americana* (1971):

"How does a successful television commercial affect the viewer?"

"It makes him want to change the way he lives."

"In what way?" I said.

"It moves him from first person consciousness to third person. In this country there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising has discovered this man. It uses him to express the possibilities open to the consumer. To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled." (A 271)

While criticizing the American culture and media, according to Benjamin Bird DeLillo is also skeptical about the homogeneous "modernist conception of the self" (Bird 2006, 185) by

discussing not only the unattainable “universal third person” but also David Bell (the protagonist and first person narrator of *Americana*) as living in the third person version of himself, experiencing his own life as “a lesson in the effect of echoes” (A 58). At one point James Axton, the protagonist, and first person narrator of *The Names*, similarly to Bell, gets confused regarding his identity, sensing his voice as being outside of him, depriving him of control (N 208), and somewhat later he refers to himself in the third person (209). In the case of Bell, Bird also states that he has complications constructing and understanding his subjectivity, which is subject to changes; he shrinks from the experience of the first person for it seems illusory and “vulnerable to distortion” to him (Bird 2006, 186), which refers to the distortion caused by the successful television commercial, but it might also refer to any other change the subject is to go through.

Following Bird’s concern one may conclude that the altering of the subject is implied in *Americana*, and this idea was taken to a higher and more conscious level after thirty years, in the figure of Lauren Hartke. Her character seems so elusive and unpredictable that she might easily become the narrator of her own story, although most critics (such as Laura Di Prete, Mikko Keskinen, or Jon Roberts) understand the narrative voice as that of a separate entity.

One of the most spectacular talents of Lauren is that she keeps changing her voice throughout the novel so successfully that the voices she produces shock people: be it of any age or sex; she can imitate others and also develop different voices of her own. This is a feature of her performance as well, and Chapman observes “[s]he switches to another voice. [...] spooky as a woodwind in your closet. Not taped but live. Not lip-sync’d but real. [...] I search my friend’s face but don’t quite see her. [...] I can almost believe she is equipped with male genitals [...]” (BA 109).

One might also assume that Lauren projects herself into the role of the narrator, since she also has the habit of projecting herself into nearly any role or position she witnesses. In the first chapter she imagines that she is the person whom she reads about in a newspaper article. In situations like this she replaces the given person with herself, which also illustrates that moving between different conceptual frameworks is not uncommon for her (19). She does not do it on purpose though, as it is explained “[n]early everything she read sent her into reverie” (23).

Due to her being extremely talented in producing different voices and being able to occupy different roles effortlessly (sometimes without her noticing it) I claim Lauren is capable of mastering the narrative voice and presenting it as the voice of a third person. As it is stated at the beginning of the second chapter, “[e]verything [...] happens around the word

seem” (31, emphasis in original). This implies that everything depends on our perception of it, which might invite a phenomenologist interpretation of the position of this speaker.

The scope of the narrator of the novel is limited, uncertain about numerous things that are presented, provides no understanding or commentary on most of the characters’ thoughts and motives while sets out to giving extremely detailed descriptions about Lauren’s perceptions, opinions and insights in situations that might occasionally seem irrelevant. The narrative is focalized through the perspective of Lauren and only Lauren: when explaining the figure or the utterances of other characters the narrative voice is not only hesitant but also short spoken.

In some cases the narrator is clearly uncertain about what happens around Lauren: trying to make sense of one of the responses of Mr. Tuttle she tells “[h]e moved his hand in a manner that seemed to mean she didn’t have to say anything further. Of course he understood. But maybe not” (47). At other times it is hesitant even about Lauren herself: “[...] she felt like hitting him. No she didn’t. She didn’t know what she felt” (56), or “[...] She didn’t know what it meant. Of course she knew” (90). In scenes such as these the scope of perception gets extremely limited and subjective on the part of the narrator, as if it was from time to time withdrawing from its position and getting entangled in the fictional world. Occasionally, when reporting the thoughts of Lauren, the narration omits quotation marks or any mark that would separate the thought from the narrating consciousness. For instance the statement “I am Lauren. But less and less” (117) simply blends into the narrative telling.

In a few cases the tone of the narrative telling gets rather ironic, self-reflexive, and playful, as if the narrator was aware of her inability to provide a proper account of what happens. Besides being unclear and hesitant about the characters’ feelings and thoughts, she seems to have difficulties with language itself. During the breakfast scene we see that at first she does not remember the word “lever”: “What it’s called, the lever. She pressed down the lever [...]” (9), somewhat later she gets confused about conjugation: “The lever sprang or sprung and he got up [...]” (10), and she occasionally experiments with vocabulary: “[Rey] dropped this stuff on his toast – the flesh, the mesh, the pulp [...]” (15). She inserts into the text these mistakes and a hesitation, as if implying that precision is not a necessity since the message of the novel is impossible to express either way.

The choices of words concerning the representation of the characters may also lead one to presume that the narration is provided by Lauren herself. Even when she does not hesitate obviously, she often uses phrases such as “seemed,” “appeared to be,” or “as if” when it comes to describing anything other than her feelings and opinions. On the other hand, when

the narration sets out to describe Lauren's character and her feelings and experiences we are not only presented with longer, more detailed descriptions but we witness a different vocabulary. Lauren's feelings are often uncertain, however, while everyone else "seems to" be doing things, she is the only one whose experiences and activities are accompanied with descriptions of her opinions, she is the only one who ponders, remembers, notices, understands, knows, wants, and last but not least, tells things. Again, one can see that everything that is narrated in the third person is measured against the opinions and perceptions of Lauren.

As opposed to the above mentioned cases the narration becomes wordy and extremely detailed when it discusses the experiences of the protagonist. The following piece of text tells what Lauren thinks about the smell of soya:

The smell of the soya was somewhere between body odor, yes, in the lower extremities and some authentic podlife of the earth, deep and seeded. But that didn't describe it. [...]. Nothing described it. It was pure smell. It was the thing that smell is, apart from all sources. [...] it was as though some, maybe, medieval scholastic had attempted to classify all known odors and had found something that did not fit into his system and had called it soya, which could easily be part of a lofty Latin term, but no it couldn't [...] (15-16)

Here we can see how things get registered in the narration. The reader is provided with detailed, first hand reports on what Lauren sees and thinks, while crucial details and opinions remain overlooked. As far as the reader can see (at least at first reading), there is no sign that Rey, who later turns out to be suffering from depression, is about to commit suicide, while we are presented a meditation on the smell of soya, a vague, uncomfortable feeling that one piece of hair leaves on Lauren's tongue (12), and numerous other details of a morning—mostly involving bodily senses such as smell or taste—that appear completely trivial compared to what must be going on in Rey's head. This implies that the reader only knows about what Lauren knows about, the narrator seems to be capable of reporting only her perceptions and feelings. Moreover, the style of the narration changes according to the changes in Lauren's state. Besides its quality of everyday speech, which DeLillo usually applies in dialogues, while narrating the days of the traumatized artist the narrative telling is considerably more fragmented and hesitant than it is in the last chapter where Lauren manages to cope with grief (Dewey 2006, 137).

To put it simply, the narrator shares the conditions and limits of Lauren's perceptions which, as far as Merleau-Ponty's theory of bodily perception is concerned implies that they have to share the same body (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 69), hence the narrative voice is one of the voices Lauren produces.

All in all, the text is infested with evidence implying that the narrative voice belongs to Lauren. They share the same perceptual conditions and limits, not to mention the elliptic, hesitant, in-between nature that makes the narrative voice extremely similar to Lauren's speech, which entails that they share the same body, too. When it comes to logic the narrative voice always follows the opinions and thoughts of Lauren, and even on the level of vocabulary, regarding the verbs explaining the actions of the characters, Lauren's consciousness seems to be behind the narrative voice.

What is also important to point out is that considering the complicated, in-between nature of the character of Lauren one cannot claim that she is completely, cautiously in control of the narrative voice, similarly, she is not in control of Tuttle or her "daydreaming" periods of projecting herself into the positions of others. As I will explain in more detail later, Lauren occupies a metaposition in the novel; she shows characteristics of character, creator, narrator, and occasionally interpreter.

7.1.2 Mr. Tuttle

Mr. Tuttle, the slippery figure who appears after the death of Rey, is (physically and psychically) the most precarious, and therefore the most confusing figure in the novel. He appears to lack subjectivity as well as a separate body; therefore it is not difficult to see him as a product of Lauren's imagination, potentially a projection of her trauma.

Firstly, his physical structure is ambiguous from several aspects. He is "nothing but the sum of his corporeal functions, needs, and instincts" (Di Perte 2005, 502), which would imply that he lacks a consciousness. On the other hand, he is also described as being difficult to see (BA 46); easy to miss or forget quickly (95); his body undergoes impossible changes: firstly, he looks like a child, later he seems to be an adult, which means he is a ghostly, intangible figure without a solid body. "[H]is body is material yet immaterial, visible yet invisible, remembered yet forgotten, internal yet external" (Di Prete 2005, 503). "There is [a] reasonable doubt of Mr Tuttle's corporeality beyond the field of vision. When he is out of sight, he is out of mind" (Keskinen 2006, 33). He does not possess any permanent physical or psychical traits,

as if lacking a phenomenological shell, like someone who is stuck in a Kristevan pre-thetic dimension with uncertain boundaries (Keltner 2011, 27). As the narrator explains “[h]e had no protective *surface*. He was alone and unable to improvise, make himself up” (BA 90, my emphasis). This means that Mr. Tuttle has no symbolic “skin” that would mark and protect the territory of his discrete subjectivity. “His is a body [...] that does not become in time, that is unborn into the motion of time, but that is somehow naked, prehistorical” (Boxall 2006, 220).

Mr. Tuttle does not demonstrate real “corporeal performance” either: besides gesturing while talking he barely moves, he rather airily appears and disappears but he is rarely depicted as coming, leaving, or generally being in motion. Besides his general inertia, he simply does not react when he is physically touched, which would be a cornerstone considering the construction of an individual body both in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and in Punday’s theory about literary characters, where characters become significant when they touch (Punday 2003a, 81). “Lauren’s impression of his physical appearance is for a long time based on mere visual observation, on ocular proof only, without a haptic verification of his material being. Although Lauren does not explicitly problematize Mr Tuttle’s physical existence, she wishes to feel him” (Keskinen 2006, 33). She touches him when she bathes him (BA 68-9), when she lays on him at night (90), and later she touches his face (85). In each of these scenes little reaction is recorded on Tuttle’s part, in fact, the most intense interaction where they both act is when they look at each other (68) but even that is rare, therefore I disagree with Michiko Kakutani when he refers to sexual encounters between them (Kakutani 2001). Lauren does look at Tuttle as a lover at times since he is regarded “at once [as a] pet, child, and spouse” (Coward 2002, 205), yet I do not assume that such an active interaction is conceivable between the two of them.

DeLillo explains Tuttle’s lack of subjectivity with a reference to the way his sense of sight differs from that of others. “[Lauren] didn’t think his eye was able to search out and shape things. Not like normal anyway. The eye is supposed to *shape* and *process* and *paint*. It tells us the story we want to believe” (80, my emphases). Mr. Tuttle has not got his own means of perception through which his consciousness could be established and through which he could be integrated in the world (Toadvine 2007, 361, 396), therefore, similarly to the narrative voice, he is not in possession of a solid body where the conditions of independent perceptions are rooted.

Although he has a distinct voice he often imitates or “replays” the voices of Lauren and Rey, and when this happens he seems to be equipped with the physicality of the person he mimics. Lauren observes her own gestures and tones when she watches and listens to him (BA

50), and when he imitates Rey his voice bears the “accent and dragged vowels, the intimate differences, the articulations produced in one vocal apparatus and not another” (60).

Besides his physical features and his lack of motion, Mr. Tuttle would be impossible to see as a subject concerning that he does not have a specified signifying position, hence he is unimaginable as a part of any social system. This is what Lauren articulates when stating that maybe he “experiences another kind of reality” when she observes that Mr. Tuttle does not seem to grasp the concept of time, “[h]e didn’t know how to measure himself to what we call the Now” (66) and he also has difficulties perceiving space, identity, or narrative (ibid) for he represents the “distorted temporality of trauma” (Di Prete 2005, 492). He has no sense for any social order, and he does not respond when Lauren attempts to communicate with him, or, as Kessel observes, when she tries to interpellate him: he does not resist it with force, he is, by nature, “innocently ignorant of the call” (Kessel 2008, 192). He has no name either; Lauren calls him Mr. Tuttle behind his back because “she thought it would make him easier to see” (BA 48), easier to place him somewhere in her order. She feels that “[s]he had to find a name that she could call him to his face” (82), yet it never happens. “[I]t wasn’t his name. It was *her* name that she’d given him” (120, my emphasis), he remains unnamable.

Mr. Tuttle also seems to be incapable of using language. He only articulates meaningful sentences when he mimics the words of Lauren or Rey. Otherwise, what he produces is logorrhea (not unlike the speech of the Beckettian Lucky) (Di Prete 2005, 496), which resists grammatical rules. “In Mr. Tuttle’s monologue—in the oddly scrambled speech, the mismatched words and incongruent sounds, the unrestrained flow of thoughts—language collapses into a heap of obscure, impenetrable, merely juxtaposed fragments” (495). Adam Begley states he “often talks like Gertrude Stein on a bad day” (Begley 2001).

He has no signifying position and he is unable to signify with the help of language. There is not even one meaningful, conventional dialogue between him and Lauren, there is no real communication between them. As it is explained in the novel

[t]here’s a *code* in the simplest conversation that tells the speakers what’s going on outside the bare acoustics. This was missing when they talked. There was a missing beat. It was hard for her to find the tempo. All they had were unadjusted words. *She lost touch with him, lost interest sometimes*, couldn’t locate rhythmic intervals or time cues or even the mutters and hums, the audible pauses that pace a remark. He didn’t register facial responses to things she said and this *threw her off*. There were no grades of emphasis here and flatness there. She began to understand that their talks had no time sense and that all the *references at the unspoken level*, the things a man

speaking Dutch might share with a man speaking Chinese—all this was missing here. (BA 65-66, my emphases)

DeLillo's descriptions suggest that Mr. Tuttle is simply incapable of meaning making not only in English but in any form of language. When he attempts to express himself the results are confusing for both Lauren and the reader: his speech reflects his in-between status and expresses the very inexpressibility of what he himself embodies: the trauma, the unnarratable, the unspeakable.

However disembodied and distant his figure might seem, its influence is substantial in the novel, and its power stems exactly from his in-between, undefinable, abject-like nature. He simply appears in one of the rooms of the house Lauren rents, and, as Kessel explains it, he becomes and remains an intruder and a guest simultaneously (Kessel 2008, 189). Lauren does not make him leave, moreover, she feeds him, talks to him, and even develops a habit of following him around in the house and watching him as he sleeps. At the same time she often feels confused or disturbed by him. At one point, when their communication fails she gets indignant, then suddenly confused: "[...] she felt like hitting him. No, she didn't. She didn't know what she felt" (BA 56). She knows that she should make him leave; she plans to call mental institutions and hospitals to see if he had escaped from one of them, yet she knows she will not do that, because she is attracted to him in an inexplicable way.

As an abject-like phenomenon Mr. Tuttle signifies an absence. Besides his unstructured, meaningless speech, he himself seems to stand for a place of vacuum (Boxall 2006, 217), an "error" in the symbolic system, in the text. Lauren expresses her discomfort when trying to attribute "meaning" to Mr. Tuttle: "[h]e was always as if. He did this or that as if. She needed a reference elsewhere to get him placed" (BA 45). Still, she cannot find a reference, and cannot get him placed, she even fails to give him a name—he remains unnameable and meaningless.

Violating boundaries is one of the chief activities of both Lauren and Mr. Tuttle. Lauren is concerned with her physical and psychic limits and Mr. Tuttle, as being devoid of clear boundaries himself, also affects those of Lauren. While Lauren (more or less) consciously trains herself—including her body as well as her thoughts—to extend or break limits, Mr. Tuttle does it rather aggressively: he penetrates, intrudes, shatters. DeLillo expresses "[h]e violates the limits of the human" (BA 100) both because he lacks limits and because of how he affects those of Lauren.

Mr. Tuttle confronts Lauren when they try to communicate and perhaps the most spectacular scene in the novel is the one that contains the longest monologue of Mr. Tuttle. The monologue he produces one morning and which has reminded Di Prete of the Beckettian Lucky's logorrhea is the following:

Being here has come to me. I am with the moment, I will leave the moment. Chair, table, wall, hall, all for the moment, in the moment. It has come to me. Here and near. From the moment I am gone, am left, am leaving. I will leave the moment from the moment. [...] Coming and going I am leaving. I will go and come. Leaving has come to me. We all, shall all, will all be left. Because I am here and where. And I will go or not or never. And I have seen what I will see. If I am where I will be. Because nothing comes between me. (BA 73-74)

This is a point where the subjectivity of Lauren is the most threatened by the presence of the abject-like Mr. Tuttle. She is on the verge of collapse; she is on the way "out of herself" (75), explains the narrator. "Her immersion in Mr. Tuttle's words implies her abandoning structured, linear temporality to experience a full 'displacement of self'"—Di Prete points out that language use simultaneously "sustains and undoes subjectivity; it pulls the self into the depths of its own erasure yet reinstates the knowledge that restores life" (Di Prete 2005, 497). She adds that language is "the site where knowledge about death and life, loss and recovery, trauma and survival, and the mysterious possibility of their coexistence emerge" (500).

One might go a bit further pointing out that Harkte does not perceive the monologue as talk. She calls it singing and chanting, which, again, can remind one of Kristeva's semiotic modality where there is rhythm and rhyme but no structure and meaning. A process quite similar to that of abjection becomes even easier to observe here when one reads the explanation of what Lauren experiences:

This is the point, yes, this is the stir of true amazement. And some terror at the edge, or fear of believing, some displacement of self, but this is the point, this is the wedge into ecstasy, the old deep meaning of the word, your eyes rolling upward in your skull. (BA 75)

Besides being terrifying and amazing, the experience is also ridiculous: Lauren has to laugh. Here she becomes overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of the "fractured babble" of Mr. Tuttle (Dewey 2006, 131).

If one is to make some sense of what Mr. Tuttle articulates, it is obvious that, as Lauren contemplates he “drifts from one reality to another, independent of the logic of time [...] he lapses and seeps, somehow, into other reaches of being” (BA 91-2). In fact he seems to be escaping the narrative, existing plainly outside of it and occasionally intruding and subverting it with his presence. He is an “emissary from beyond” language, he “violates the symbiosis of time and narrative” (Cowart 2002, 204). He is a representative of a rather common feature in the DeLillo canon, a character with curious, occasionally unstructured language use—like Tap, the narrator’s son in *The Names*—who turns out to present “mysteries of language and temporality” (205); a “bridge between one world and the next” (ibid); as if being vehicles for the extralinguistic, inviting what is beyond language and making it a recurring element of DeLillo texts. While being a constant source of the pre/extralinguistic aspects, therefore occupying a significant role in the text he cannot be understood as a separate character, because both his body and his psyche are precarious and intangible, his being is a “nonbeing” (Boxall 2006, 220).

7.2 Lauren Hartke as General Character

While I argue that Lauren is the possessor of the sole character body in *The Body Artist*, she has numerous features that would render her difficult to define and classify as a “sorted character” as Punday would call it. Both her physicality and her mental state are lacking in security or stability, as if continuously remaining in a state of a flux. In the novel she is “suffering from a post-traumatic stress reaction” (Keskinen 2006, 33), but from her descriptions and from the way she acts in the first chapter before the tragedy we see that due to her profession she has extraordinary qualities and habits even when she is not traumatized.

As Chapman explains in her review of Lauren’s performance, she is “always in the process of becoming another or exploring some root identity” (BA 105); inside and outside she is forever in-between various stages. The novel gives several reports about Lauren doing her exercises—stretching, practicing specific bodily movements, breathing exercises, and eventually practically reshaping her appearance by chopping and bleaching her hair and even changing the texture and color of her skin.

She had an acid exfoliating cream, hard-core, prescribed, and after she stripped the hair she rubbed in the cream to remove wastepapery

skin [...] She used a monkey-hair brush on her elbows and knees. She wanted it to hurt. [...] She had a fade cream she applied just about everywhere, to depigment herself. (84)

She does this in an attempt to imitate what she sees in Mr. Tuttle's undefinable, ghostly physicality.

Lauren tries to enter into the space and the time of Mr Tuttle's body, tracing the lineaments of his moist, exposed face, trying to measure herself to the 'breathless shock of his being here' (BA 68–69). [...] And her own body work is an attempt to return, herself, to this naked body of history, to remove her own 'protective surface', to 'sand her body', to strip it of its 'names and dates and distinctions'. Her peeling, bleaching, exfoliating work is organised around her struggle to 'become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance' (Boxall 2006, 220)

"In the mirror she wanted to see someone who is classically unseen, the person you are trained to look through [...]" (BA 84), but paradoxically her physicality, while becoming "unseen" and unclassifiable, becomes even more emphasized and problematic in the text. In her performance she embodies three characters: a Japanese woman, a businesswoman, and a naked man with prosthetic genitals. The most extreme body she has "inhabited" so far is that of a pregnant man. Chapman explains that "[a]t times she makes femaleness so mysterious and strong that it encompasses both sexes and a number of nameless stages" (109). Lauren's body seems almost formed in clay, changeable, androgynous, and never quite stable, which might remind one of the Kristevan pre-oedipal stage of an infant.

As I have asserted she is similarly changeable and undefined psychically. What I find the most intriguing and the most confusing about her character is her habit of getting lost in reveries. This is something she does often and unintentionally, she has no control over it. She slides out of and back in her life episodically, effortlessly becoming a part of either this or that reality, occasionally both simultaneously, as she does during the breakfast scene when she projects herself into newspaper stories while also having a conversation with her husband. The narrative telling, not surprisingly, moves back and forth between describing the daydream and the conversation through the pages, awkwardly interrupting itself with one topic after the other:

it begins to gather you into it and there are people [...] and you have conversations with them more or less uncontrollably until you become aware you are doing it and then you stop, seeing whatever is

in front of you at the time, like half a glass of orange juice in your husband's hand [...] Or you become someone else, one of the people in the story [...] (19-20).

Here Lauren talks with her husband over her bowl of cereal while also having a conversation with a doctor in the newspaper. "She looked past the bowl into a space inside her head that was also here in front of her. [...] She read and drifted. She was here and there" (23). As the narrating voice explains later Lauren is "always maybeing" (92), she is unable to occupy a stable and permanent position.

Her speech, and here I also regard the narrative voice, is often fragmented and hesitating, in fact, as Mikko Keskinen observes

Mr Tuttle's parlance is not far from Lauren's. She is a body artist, and not an artist of words. In the first two chapters of the novella, before Mr Tuttle has materialized in the house, Lauren is described as hesitating over words, [...]. The linguistic affinity between Lauren and Mr Tuttle may be read as a further piece of evidence of his unreal nature. [...] his ostensible polyphony gets embodied in Lauren herself. She, in other words, not only hears voices but produces them herself. [...] Lauren may not, after all, imitate Mr Tuttle in the strict sense of the word, for she probably is the one who gives him voice in the first place. (Keskinen 2006, 35)

This also means that the only solid body in the novel is that of the protagonist.

Lauren occupies a metaposition for she is a character in the story but the narrating voice also belongs to her. She is also a creator of the text to some extent: she creates *Body Time*, the performance piece, yet at times she plays the role of the audience watching herself from outside; as Di Prete notes, "[i]n the exchanges with Mr. Tuttle and in vocal impersonations, she becomes at once the teller of a story she cannot tell and a listener to what she cannot understand" (Di Prete 2005, 490), and I would add, the narrating voice of the novel shows the same quality. Lauren performs and narrates simultaneously, and she cannot completely control either activity.

Considering her position with Punday's theory she does not fit the category of the sorted character bodies since her physicality is too undefined, fragmented, and inconstant, especially if we consider the narrative voice and Mr. Tuttle her parts, over which she has no control. Critics such as Di Prete and Dewey contrast *The Body Artist* to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* because the haunting figures of Mr. Tuttle and *Beloved* are unmistakably similar. *Beloved*, as I have mentioned, is a typical general character in Punday's view, therefore she fulfills a

mediating role between the characters and between the text and the reader. As Punday explains, the general character may be defined by the whole of the text: we can detect the figure which serves as an “ingress” into the text, and plays, as Beloved, a mediating figure, having a significant role in the hermeneutics of the text. *Body Time*, the *mise en abyme* commentary on the novel’s story, as Di Prete also notes (504), shows the same quality as the whole novel: as Chapman in the narration and Di Prete in the reception point it out the audience of *Body Time* is less than understanding. Lauren’s audience, be it the audience of *Body Time* or *The Body Artist* meets difficulties when they are confronted with the repetitions and the subverted monologues of both the performance and the novel (509). The audience seems to be left without a trustworthy “ingress” into these works.

Since each voice and character becomes meaningful when contrasted to Lauren, I would define her as the general character of *The Body Artist*, yet the category as a hermeneutic tool does not appear to fully function here. The reason for this is that Lauren chooses to articulate her message through her body, therefore applying a means of mediation that harbors such subversive qualities that—when surfacing in the text—disorient and disable the reader, and eventually the whole body of the text necessarily outruns the interpreter in certain scenes. Hence in *The Body Artist*, I problematize the hermeneutic tool of the general character exactly because its role does not seem to be completely fulfilled. The general body, an overarching phenomenon in the text should mediate between the characters and between text and reader yet in the novel this mediation seems problematic, if not impossible. The repeated recurrence of the Kristevan prelinguistic and extralinguistic sites through the abject-like elements cast the protagonist (and the reader) into confusions which do not get resolved. These scenes repel the reader, exceed narratological categories, occasionally abandon, get beyond the narrative and become challenging when it comes to interpreting the text, and they, as I will explain, seem to stem from *The Body Artist*’s body.

8. The “inaccessible” DeLillo texts and the Hitchcockian flair

The above mentioned problems which occur in characterization affect the body of the text as well. The functioning of the general character becomes impaired by the extralinguistic aspect I have observed in the narrative, which is invited by images representing the Kristevan abject, ultimately creating gaps in the body of the text that render it “inaccessible” for the reader. In

this section I will elaborate on the way the textual body of *The Body Artist* works and affects the reader.

As I have mentioned it earlier, critics observe a curious, incomprehensible nature of DeLillo's texts for which I will attempt to find an explanation, again, focusing on his 2001 short novel. I assume this nature of the texts is in close connection with his attempts to thematize language, especially what is beyond its limits, in his novels. I believe Slavoj Žižek's analysis of Hitchcock's films is highly relevant here. Žižek assumes that what provides Hitchcock's films their special "flair," as he likes to put it, is his habit of incorporating into them a motif, which Žižek claims is a materialization of the Lacanian *sinthome*: he says that Hitchcock "invented stories in order to be able to shoot a certain kind of scenes" ("Remake a Hitchcock Film"), which function as his *sinthomes*.

In order to better understand the "mysteriousness" or "inaccessibility" of DeLillo texts, which, I believe is largely a consequence of his inquiry into the technologies of language which ultimately involves the task of problematizing what is outside or beyond language, we need to look at the way these texts affect the reader. The author is a "mystifier," a "withholder" exactly because his texts remain distant and elusive even if simultaneously his writing can be referred to as "talky," "overwritten," or "boring". Since he often provides lengthy descriptions of even the smallest details, his writing technique ultimately leads the reader to feel that he or she does not understand what it is that he or she does not understand.

Considering that DeLillo is interested in the possibilities and the limits (including the possible breaking of these limits) of language and signification we can see that he continually attempts to feature in his novels that which cannot be expressed with language. He experiments with writing techniques as well as topics that circle around the task of expressing the inexpressible, such as presenting the language of trauma or the language of infants. What I am asserting is that his experiments with these techniques result in the fragmented, slippery, ambiguous texts, in and especially after *The Names* (1982), where language itself emerges as a key topic.

In addition I believe that there are exact locations in the texts where the reader loses contact with them, where the body of the text becomes "inaccessible." These are the scenes and images I have been highlighting in the oeuvre, and in more detail in *The Body Artist*, where language and narrative habitually seem to misfire, and we encounter what is outside of language and narrative. In these locations the text seems to crack, a gap appears which entails an un-familiarizing, alienating force that the reader confronts.

The working of these withholding, meaning-resistant scenes of DeLillo texts might remind one of the effects of the Lacanian *sinthomes* Slavoj Žižek examined in Alfred Hitchcock's films. According to Žižek, in Hitchcock's works there is a "specific flair [and a] substantial density of the cinematic texture" ("Remake a Hitchcock Film") persisting in his oeuvre regardless of the given narratives that is provided by specific motifs that Žižek identifies as a *sinthome*, which, in Lacanian psychoanalysis is described as "a signifier's constellation (formula) which fixes a certain core of enjoyment, like mannerisms in painting—characteristic details which persist and repeat themselves without implying a common meaning" (Žižek 1992, 126). Žižek reads several Hitchcockian motives as his *sinthomes*, such as the motif of "bodies which appear out of nowhere and disappear back into the void" ("Remake a Hitchcock Film").

According to Žižek, in the form of these motives it is the Real that we sense as a "surplus" or a "material leftover" (Žižek 2008, 76). This is what intrudes the text of the film, the symbolic order, and this might be the surplus Anna Kérchy refers to in her interpretation of Carter texts (Kérchy 2008, 27). Žižek explains that "we are dealing [in these scenes] with the level of material signs which resists meaning and establishes connections which are not grounded in narrative symbolic structures: they just relate in a kind of pre-symbolic cross-resonance" ("Remake a Hitchcock Film"). He observes that in these films we commonly meet "[t]he Hitchcockian object which materializes some *unspecified threat*, functioning as the *hole into another abyssal dimension*" (ibid, my emphases). This "hole" itself, "the gap which serves as the passage to a different ontological order" is what Žižek sees as the point where the Real "that which resists symbolization: [...] which is always missed but none the less always returns" (Žižek 2008, 74) "forces itself" into the text.

One is therefore tempted to read the ambiguousness of the text of *The Body Artist* against Žižek's interpretation of Hitchcock's "flair." While I would not diagnose a *sinthome* of DeLillo, throughout his oeuvre he is increasingly interested in problematizing that "leftover" or "surplus" that the symbolic order could not envelop and, he repeatedly features character bodies and bodily functions as "substitutes" for words, as signifiers for what language could not cover, having a similar function and effect to that of Hitchcock's motives.

Vomiting and spitting in *The Names*, tumors in the *Falling Man*, and whole ghostly, intangible bodies in *The Body Artist* appear in the text at points where the unspeakable, the unnaratable is about to be revealed, making the reader sense the gaps "between ways of existing" (N 211), and constituting obstacles for the interpreters of the text, resulting in the above mentioned mysterious nature of these DeLillo text. As Arnold Weinstein observes in

The Names, and, in my view commonly in any DeLillo novel concerning the problematization of language, an “unspecified, unlocalizable violence is at the core of the novel, just as it seems to be at the origin of language itself” (Weinstein 1993, 295). I see this “unlocalizable violence” as the materiality in language, the body from which it emerges, and it can be defined as violent due to its quality that resists and subverts the symbolic order, hence language.

I assume this “violence” is a key element in *The Body Artist* where character bodies, voices, and the possibilities of language and representation are problematized, continually subverting the narrative (time), in the figure of Mr. Tuttle. His intrusions into Lauren’s life make his very figure a place where the Real intrudes the symbolic in the form of the Kristevan abject, yet he is born out of Lauren; his body is Lauren’s body. In the novel “temporal elements are not given any final shape by virtue of their manifestation in the soft clay of Lauren’s body. Rather, past, present and future merge here [...] in an unbearable corporeal presence which is also a kind of absence” (Boxall 2006, 221), and this absence generates from the figure of Mr. Tuttle; he is the enabler of the performance (Coward 2002, 204) as well as the enabler of the text of the novel, which is built around his figure.

While interpreting this novel I drew a parallel between the figure of Mr. Tuttle, and the Hitchcockian materializations of the “unspecified threat, functioning as the hole into another abyssal dimension.” Mr. Tuttle, who cannot be understood as a discrete character body, represents a menacing ambiguity and in-betweenness, penetrates the symbolic order, threatening Lauren’s subjectivity (and the reader’s interpretation) with his meaninglessness, appearing as an error, a space of vacuum in the text (Boxall 2006, 217). His being impossible to be inserted into our symbolic system, the quality that makes him the most incomprehensible is spectacularly pictured in the way he resists the notion of time as we understand it. “Mr. Tuttle occupies and represents an unbroken time, *a time that is not in process* but that forms a kind of *groundless ground*, a kind of substratum to space-time, [and this is] borne out in the texture of his body” (219, my emphases). His figure itself is tenaciously undefinable, resisting structure, hence he can be regarded as the manifestation of the Real in the novel, and as the Real, Mr. Tuttle is “there but [...] is ineffable” (McAfee 2004, 62), unnameable. Lauren is not only disturbed and attracted by him, she cannot define him in any concrete way, and she is pushed to the brink of falling apart witnessing Mr. Tuttle’s “monologues” which she interprets not as speech but as a sort of chanting or singing.

[Lauren] felt an easing in her body that drew her down out of laborious thought and into something nearly uncontrollable. She leaned into his voice, laughing. She wanted to chant with him, to fall in and out of time, or words, or things, whatever he was doing, but she only laughed instead. (BA 74-5)

I find Lauren's reaction relevant here because of the metaposition I attribute to her character—occasionally she functions as an interpreter, highlighting the gaps, cracks, and errors in the text, which are ultimately inseparable from her and her body. When talking with Tuttle they repeatedly lose touch and due to that Lauren loses her interest (65), since Tuttle, as I stated is a place of vacuum (Boxall 2006, 217), an “error” in the symbolic system, in the text, and I suspect what Lauren experiences is what happens to the audience of the novel when they are left unsatisfied. Lauren's laugh, the only thing she can emit when attempting to produce the same chanting as Mr. Tuttle, is reminiscent of the vomiting and spitting that accompany speeches about the murderous cult in *The Names*: it is an involuntary bodily reaction that appears, signaling the inexpressible. In my view the gap Žižek observed in the text of Hitchcock's films is noticeable here.

Lauren keeps the narrative strongly tied to her body, mixes her perceptions and the world when understands the smell of tobacco as part of Rey's body (19), or when she “hears” the sound of tearing the wax paper along her spine (34). Yet the scenes which alienate the reader from the text are where the workings of the Kristevan abject are observable. The first time in the novel when Lauren encounters an abject phenomenon is when she finds a piece of hair in her mouth. She is disgusted and she instantly “tries to rid her system of the complicated memory of someone else's hair” (11), which is not easy, and for pages the text contains recurring fragments of the description of the feeling of having a piece of hair in her mouth (10-12). This kind of penetration of surfaces, of the symbolic skin, repeatedly returns in the novel and it usually unexpectedly enters the text, interrupting the ongoing description or dialogue. Therefore the body in the work seems to offer possibilities of interpretation, “entries” into the text as Punday would put it, yet it simultaneously “stands in the way,” confronts the reader with obstacles of interpretation due to its undefinable, heterogeneous nature.

Lauren herself also becomes an actor in scenes where meaning is difficult to detect. We find her performing ambiguous or incomprehensible actions for example where Michiko Kakutani sees sexual encounters (Kakutani 2001) but I, along with the rest of the critics, do not, or in the bathing scene where one cannot even surely tell whether or not Lauren talks,

when she names Tuttle's body parts "wordlessly" (BA 68). I think in these scenes the text is "inaccessible" because they are not only ambiguous but all their interpretations seem untenable.

The functioning of the hermeneutic tool that Punday named "general character" becomes impaired in *The Body Artist* exactly because of the gaps that are inserted in the text through the heterogeneous, polyphonic voices and the intangible bodies that often carry characteristics reminiscent of the Kristevan abject. As I have explained, I understand the textual body of the novel as being founded solely on Lauren's body: she produces the narrative voice, her body, from which the figure of Mr. Tuttle is born, is what generates the story, she is part creator, part interpreter, "part actress, part mime, part flesh-and-bone artwork" (Begley 2001), incorporating into her character different, otherwise incompatible roles and characteristics, and infesting the whole text with her bodily sensations, and her body's materiality.

To sum it up, I attempted to investigate the inaccessibility of the DeLillo texts text, especially that of *The Body Artist*, which is difficult to comprehend not because it is ambiguous but because it contains pieces of text that resist interpretation, for simply carrying no meaning. These parts of the text and the characters and scenes built around them attempt to envelop something which language is unable to express since they are altogether beyond language. The figure of Mr. Tuttle and occasionally even Lauren prove to be containing the quality that makes it impossible to place them in the symbolic order. This makes them, and the text, quite similar to what Žižek defined as intrusions of the Lacanian Real in the films of Hitchcock: motives where we seem to witness a "hole," an error, an "unspecified threat" to order and to us, "designat[ing] the limit of interpretation" (Žižek 1992, 126). DeLillo's writing technique here experiments, in the form of abject images, with bringing the prelinguistic and the extralinguistic and the subject together which the reader senses as holes, cracks, or errors in the narrative and in the text itself, which, if we regard DeLillo's whole body of texts results in his "mysterious," "withholding" style.

Conclusion

In my thesis I have offered an interpretation of Don DeLillo's novel, *The Body Artist*. What interested me most was the uncanny, mysterious nature of DeLillo's works at a textual level, as well as their preoccupation with language, and I held it as a hypothesis that these two features are strongly connected. I have reached this conclusion with the help of the terms and methods of corporeal narratology, a fairly recent, post-deconstructionalist narratological practice, which was first popularized by Daniel Punday.

At first I looked into the reception of the DeLillo canon, where I emphasized the incomprehensible nature of the DeLillo texts that critics often observe, and I presented a short introduction of Punday's corporeal narratology and its critical reception. In the following sections I focused on examining the characterization in *The Body Artist*. This is the DeLillo novel where corporeality is the most emphasized and characterization is the most problematic, and these features are closely tied to DeLillo's frequently applied theme of the technologies of language and its problems or limits.

My theory was that the uncanny, dreamy, "inaccessible" quality of his novels is provided by the materiality that surfaces at points where language seems to reach its limits. Where the unnarratable, for instance a trauma, is about to be (re)narrated, language collapses or misfires, and materiality, with a special respect to human corporeality appears and takes over the role of signifiers, and the text of *The Body Artist* contains sterling examples for this phenomenon.

I attempted to define the role and the functioning of the character of the protagonist. What I have found is that through subverting narratological categories the figure of the protagonist occupies a metaposition in the novel, serving as a character, a creator, a narrator, and also as an interpreter, while the character of Mr. Tuttle should not be read as a separate one but as a part of Lauren. Lauren's figure is extremely heterogeneous and fragmented, and this is also characteristic of the whole body of the text of the novel. The character of the protagonist has to be understood as what Punday calls a "general character," which should function is a "readerly ingress" into the story, but due to its strongly emphasized corporeality its hermeneutic function becomes impaired.

This has an observable effect on the text of the novel, which seems to include numerous “gaps” and “holes,” where the reader loses contact with it. I interpreted these phenomena with the help of the theories of the Kristevan abject, which can be understood as a point where the Real intrudes the symbolic system. Slavoj Žižek understands the strange “flair” of Hitchcock’s works as the result of similar phenomena in the text of the film. The way I see it there are certain, often aggressively or unexpectedly “intruding” images in DeLillo’s texts, which frequently feature bodily functions, such as vomiting, spitting, and whole ghostly bodies, and they appear in the text at points where the unspeakable, the unnaratable is about to be revealed, making the reader sense the gaps “between ways of existing,” and constituting obstacles for the interpreters of the text, resulting in “inaccessible” nature of DeLillo texts, that critics tend to notice.

In sum, I examined the way characterization is carried out in *The Body Artist*, and attempted to investigate the “inaccessibility” of the DeLillo texts, which occasionally resist interpretation, for simply carrying no meaning. I believe both the characters and the text become problematic for the same reason: DeLillo’s writing technique often experiments with bringing the pre/extralinguistic and the subject together in scenes featuring corporeality where verbalization is expected, which the reader senses as holes, cracks, or errors in the narrative categories and in the text itself. If we regard DeLillo’s whole body of texts, this results in his “mysterious,” “withholding” style.

Reference List

Primary:

DeLillo, Don.

A = Americana. 1989. New York: Penguin.

BA = The Body Artist. 2002. New York: Picador.

FM = Falling Man. 2007. New York: Picador.

N = The Names. 1982. New York: Random House.

P = Players. 1991. New York: Vintage Books.

Secondary:

“To Remake a Hitchcock Film”: Žižek, Slavoj. “Is There a Proper Way to Remake a Hitchcock Film?” Available: <http://www.lacan.com/hitch.html> Access: 04 April 2014.

“Felluga” = Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Kristeva: On the Object." In *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Available: <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/kristevaobject.html> Access: 06 June 2013.

Aaron, Daniel. 1991. “How to Read Don DeLillo” In Lentricchia, Frank ed. *Introducing Don DeLillo*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Begley, Adam. 2001. “Ghostbuster”. *The New York Times*. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/01/02/04/reviews/010204.04begleyt.html>. Access: 04 March 2014.

Bird, Benjamin. 2006. “Don DeLillo’s Americana: From Third- to First-Person Consciousness”. *Helderf Publications*. Winter 2006, Vol. 47, No. 2. 185-200.

Bloom, Harold ed. 2003. *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views: Don DeLillo*. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers.

Bollobás Enikő. 2006. *Az amerikai irodalom története*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.

Bonca, Cornel. 2002. ‘Being, Time, and Death in DeLillo's "The Body Artist"’. *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 37, 58-68.

Brooks, Peter. 1993. *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Boxall, Peter. 2006. *Don DeLillo: The possibility of fiction*. New York: Routledge.

Cowart, David. 2002. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

----. 2008. "Don DeLillo and the power of language" In Duvall, John ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Butler, Judith. 2005. "Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranche". In Cartman, Taylor, Mark B. L. Hansen eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DeCurtis, Anthony. 1991. "'An Outsider in This Society': An Interview with Don DeLillo". In Lentricchia, Frank ed. *Introducing Don DeLillo*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Dewey, Joseph. 2006. *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Di Prete, Laura. 2005. "Don DeLillo's 'The Body Artist'": Performing the Body, Narrating Trauma". In *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn), 483-510.

de Nooy, Juliana. 1998. *Derrida, Kristeva, and the Dividing Line. An Articulation of Two Theories of Difference*. USA: Routledge.

Donovan, Christopher. 2005. *Postmodern Counternarratives: Irony and Audience in the Novels of Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Charles Johnson, and Tim O'Brien*. New York: Routledge.

Duvall, John. 2002. *Don DeLillo's Underworld: A Reader's Guide*. e-book.

----. ed. 2012. *The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction after 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Földes Györgyi. 2011. "Szövegek, testek, szövegtestek. A testírás-elmélet irányai". In *Helikon: irodalomtudományi szemle. Testírás*. Budapest, 2011/1-2. LVII. évfolyam.

Jabloneczay Tímea. 2011. "A test narratológiája". In *Helikon: irodalomtudományi szemle. Testírás*. 2011/1-2. LVII. évfolyam. Budapest.

Kakutani Michiko. 2001. "'The Body Artist': A Marriage Replayed Inside a Widow's Mind". *The New York Times*. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/19/arts/19BOOK.html>. Access: 04 April 2014.

Karnicky, Jeffrey. 2009. "Avian Consciousness in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*". In *Anthrozoos*. Vol. 22 Issue 1, 5-18.

Keltner, S. K. 2011. *Kristeva: Thresholds*. Cambridge: Polity.

Kérchy Anna. 2009. "Tapogatózások. A test elméleteinek alakzatai." ["Corporeal Configurations. Towards a Definition of Body Studies."] *Apertúra. Film-Visuality-Theory*. IV.2. Available: <http://apertura.hu/2009/tel/kerchy> Access: 02 February 2014.

----. 2008. *Body-Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter. Writing from a Corporeagraphic Point of View*. Lewiston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

----. 2010. "A nő nyelvet ölt. A feminista narratológia dilemmái és a korporeális narratológia lehetőségei" [On the dilemmas of feminist narratology and the potentials of corporeal narratology] In: Szabó Erzsébet ed. *Új elméletek a narratológiában*. [Current Trends in Narratology]. Szeged: Grimm Kiadó.

Keskinen, Mikko. 2006. "Posthumous Voice and Residual Presence in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*" In Durand, Alain Philippe and Naomi Mandel eds. *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Kessel, Tyler. 2008. "A Question of Hospitality in Don DeLillo's *The Body Artist*". *Critique*. Vol. 49 Issue 2, 185-203.

Kovács Edit. 2010. "Posztstrukturális narratológiák, a narratológia dekonstrukciója". In: Szabó Erzsébet ed. *Új elméletek a narratológiában* [Current Trends in Narratology]. Szeged: Grimm Kiadó.

Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.

McAfee, Noelle. 2004. *Julia Kristeva*. New York: Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2005. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Taylor and Francis e-Library.

Punday, Daniel. 2003a. *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology*. New York.: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

----. 2003b. *Narrative after Deconstruction*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Roberts, Jon. 2005. "'Being Here or Where': Changing the Subject in *The Body Artist*". In: *Americana: E-journal of American Studies in Hungary*. Vol. 1 No 1. Available: <http://primus.arts.u-szeged.hu/american/americana/volIno1/roberts.htm> Access: 10. 10. 2013.

Shusterman, Richard. 2005. "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy". In Cartman, Taylor, Mark B. L. Hansen eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Mark C. 2013. *Rewriting the Real: In Conversation with William Gaddis, Richard Powers, Mark Danielewski, and Don DeLillo*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Toadvine, Ted, Leonard Lawlor eds. 2007. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Weinstein, Arnold. 1993. *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction from Hawthorne to DeLillo*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso.

----. 1992. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*. New York: Verso.