War as a Form of “Apotheosis”:
The Militarization of the USA and Don DeLillo’s *End Zone*

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper investigates Don DeLillo’s 1972 *End Zone*, arguing that football is a metaphor for war and that DeLillo’s analysis of football and its culture effectively constitutes a critique of the war mentality undergirding American society. In this novel DeLillo meditates on the historical process that historian Michael S. Sherry calls the “militarization” (xi) of the USA and that, since the 1930s, turned the country into a military and economic superpower allowing a war mentality to enter deep into the grain of American culture. The essay will read DeLillo’s focus on language against Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok’s psychoanalytical theories on demetaphorization as the linguistic counterpart of melancholia and against Herbert Marcuse’s notion of functional language as a linguistic behavior that facilitates the annihilation of critical thinking. Both functional language and demetaphorization allow militarization to enforce its own discourse. Suffering from melancholia, the novel’s protagonists fall prey to incorporation, a process whereby they disavow death as the product of war and, with it, pain, suffering, and destruction. As a result, the novel offers a cautionary tale about the consequences arising from an excessive exaltation of war as a means through which a nation seeks to affirm its “apotheosis” (*End Zone* 162).

Historian Michael S. Sherry argues that “[s]ince the 1930s, Americans have lived under the shadow of war” (ix). World War II, in particular, reshaped the country’s economics, providing a conspicuous source of liquidity and employment that enabled the United States to fully overcome the Great Depression. More significantly, by winning the war thanks to its military superiority, the United States cast its political, military, and economic hegemony worldwide and antagonized the Soviet superpower and its allies. Of course, war deeply affected the country’s social and cultural habits. Politically and ideologically, the American people accepted national security and war preparedness as indispensable necessities. In effect, the apparatus of national security fostered prosperity both at home and abroad, it encouraged collaboration between military and civilian think tanks and enhanced the power of large corporations.¹ War became “the paradigm in which Americans defined themselves” and the United States underwent a process that Sherry calls militarization, a process “by which war and national security became consuming anxieties and provided the memories, models and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life” (x, xi).

As a result of militarization, the separation between corporate, military, and governmental structures became increasingly blurred and gave rise to what sociologist C. Wright Mills called a “power elite” (3), wielding “the effective means of power” (4). A war mentality gradually infiltrated the civilian frame of mind so that military and civilian values, codes, interests, and beliefs began to overlap. Many educational institutions began to host Reserve Officer Training Corps units on their premises, encouraging students to savour military training and discipline. Governmental and military organizations funded academic research that implemented military technology and, by extension, civilian progress and national affluence. Those who wished to join the power elite were being educated to sustain the challenges of an “increased personnel traffic between the military and corporate realms” (215).

The United States engaged in several conflicts after World War II and thus war remained central to, and yet distant from, the lived experience of the vast majority of Americans. The geographical position of the United States effectively allowed them to prosper from war and its demands, while remaining safely at a distance from the destructive effects of the various conflicts (at least until 9/11). For the American people, war was something to be feared, a fact that justified a national “permanent arms economy” (Mandel 306). Yet, at the same time, U.S. isolation from all war theaters fuelled an imaginary construction of war as heroic, gratifying, and as a spiritually and morally elevating instrument through which freedom and democracy, mostly as a mask for corporate and political interests, could be enforced. War emerged as a practice through which both the positive qualities defining the American character could find their fulfilment and through which the United States could legitimize and affirm their worldwide hegemony. War, it can be argued, became for the United States a form of “apotheosis” (End Zone 162). Apotheosis is understood as “the glorification or exaltation of a principle or practice” (OED) and, indeed, the exaltation and glorification of war as the defining paradigm became a staple of U.S. culture.

War and in particular the language of war emerged as a model for governmental actions both at home (e.g. the ‘war’ against poverty/AIDS/drugs) and abroad. Ever since Franklin D. Roosevelt, who called the American people to arms in order to “wage war” against the Great Depression (Roosevelt, qtd. in Sherry 15), the war metaphor has come to be extensively used in the language of politics. Such a use highlights how the war mentality became embedded in American culture, and demonstrates how it “posited something good in war to be extracted from it and applied to other endeavours,” thus further legitimizing militarization at a cultural level (Sherry 461).

The extent to which the war mentality pervaded America’s institutions and culture proves central to Don DeLillo’s End Zone. The novel reads as Gary

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2 Mandel stresses that a permanent arms economy, such as that pursued by the United States, is parasitical and diverts capital and labour from other productive sectors, causing the paralysis and inertia of the capitalist system in the long run (306). More significantly, arms considered as commodities cannot find a profitable outlet on the general market since their circulation can neither regenerate the means of production nor labour power, as it would entail the destruction of both (302).
Harkness’s retrospective, first-person account of his season as a football player for Logos College, an obscure institution in the deserts of Texas. In this novel DeLillo critiques militarization and the war mentality as the predominant American “structure of feeling” in the early 1970s (Williams 132). Indeed, DeLillo’s choice of Logos College as the novel’s setting allows him to describe, to use C. W. Mills words, the “military invasion of the civilian mind [through] the pursuit of knowledge” (222). Offering courses in “Aspects of Modern War” (End Zone 69), Logos trains a new generation to accept a definition of “reality as essentially military” (Mills 195). Yet, as DeLillo demonstrates, Logos refuses to acknowledge that the war mentality is deeply embedded in American life. An institution founded, as the name implies, on ‘Reason’ and ‘the Word,’ Logos provides, to use Sherry’s phrase, a vision of “the good in war” applied to football. Football at Logos embodies the values of militarization, its frame of mind, its principles and its language so that, through sport, militarization effectively influences the everyday life of the players.

DeLillo’s characters constantly hover between compliance and resistance to the war mentality. While unable to reject such a mentality fully, characters such as protagonist Gary Harkness and Alan Zapalac, professor of exobiology at Logos, voice an anxiety arising from their view that the imperative to “MILITARIZE” (161) constitutes a form of apotheosis. Zapalac best expresses such an anxiety. He is not afraid of the Cold War nor of the Communist threat. Rather he is, as he says, “afraid of [his] own country” (155): “I don’t trust a place where that kind of i-z-e word appears. I-z-e words make me nervous” (161). Zapalac fears that “everybody will wake up one morning and get out of bed and put on a uniform, an actual military uniform, because everybody will know that the word is out” (159). His concerns echo those of President Eisenhower, who, in his farewell speech, warned against the all-encompassing influence of “the military-industrial complex” fearing that the nation could end up “defin[ing] itself by military power” (qtd. in Sherry 235). Of course, not only had former General Eisenhower endorsed militarization in his term in office, but he had also made “the pursuit of national security congruent with dominant aspirations for peace and prosperity” (Sherry 235). Similarly, while Zapalac fears the influence of militarization, he nonetheless refuses to see the war mentality at work in football: “I reject the notion of football as war. Warfare is warfare. We don’t need substitutes because we’ve got the real thing” (107). For people at Logos, identifying football with war means “risk[ing] death by analogy” (107) since football, as opposed to war, offers the “benign illusion” that this sport is “not just order but civilization” (107, 108). However, DeLillo’s focus on language, and particularly on tautologies such as Zapalac’s “warfare is warfare,” illustrates how language itself is used to render invisible the “unspoken and implicit logic of the war metaphor” (Sherry 461). Continuously repeating that “warfare is warfare,” Zapalac, like Gary Harkness, cannot see the similarities between the constitutive elements that structure both football and war.

The present paper will offer a multidisciplinary and theoretical approach to the novel in order to investigate such similarities and explain how they are obliterated both at the level of language and of consciousness. To investigate Logos players’ denial of death, injuries, pain, and suffering as the outcomes of war, I will
draw Abraham and Torok’s definition of melancholia (understood as a refusal to mourn) and on the attendant process of “incorporation” (130). I will read their incapacity to recognize football as a metaphor for war as the result, primarily, of the process that Abraham and Torok term “demetaphorization” (126), i.e., the destruction of language’s representational powers in order to obscure the linguistic traces that may reveal that a subject has effectively suffered from a loss. Furthermore, Herbert Marcuse’s theory of functional language will help me to analyze the novel protagonists’ incapability to use language connotatively and metaphorically and, consequently, their failure to understand the metaphorical associations between football and war.\footnote{According to DeLillo, “[l]anguage was the subject as well as an instrument in [End Zone]” (LeClair, “An Interview” 21). For a Derridean interpretation of the role of language in End Zone, see Le Clair, “Deconstructing.”} I will then investigate how the war mentality infiltrates the minds of Logos students and informs their ‘structure of feeling.’ The use of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the war machine and its numerical organization will foreground a study of football training at Logos as a form of military training, which eventually produces de-individualization and self-denial through the infliction of pain.

When read against the interpretative paradigms of melancholic incorporation, demetaphorization and functional language, America’s militarization and its fascination with technologies of destruction emerge as grounded in a fetishised notion of war that hides from view the real outcomes and effects of every armed conflict. However, the paper will point out how, despite the fascination it exerts, DeLillo recognizes the existence of a form of resistance against militarization and the war mentality. In particular, some of the novel’s characters are capable, albeit temporarily, of reversing the effects of melancholia and demetaphorization. Consequently, they are able to see the analogies between football and war and, more importantly, the sterility of war and its mentality. Ultimately, the paper will argue that *End Zone* offers as a meditation on the dangers attached to the pursuit of war as a moral, spiritual and cultural form of apotheosis and its exaltation and glorification as the defining paradigm for an entire nation.

**Words that Escape Their Meaning: Demetaphorization and Functionalism**

As the novel begins, its narrator and protagonist, Gary Harkness, explains the reasons that led him to join Logos College, an institution “in the middle of the middle of nowhere,” in the Texan desert (29). Gary claims to be “one of the exiles” and explains that for him “[e]xile in a real place, a place of few bodies and many stones, is just an extension (a packaging) of the other exile, the state of being separated from whatever is left of the center of one’s own history” (4, 29). At Logos, where the landscape is reduced to “a stunned earth […] born dead, flat stones burying the memory” (30), Gary desires to “be set apart from all styles of civilization as I had known or studied them” finds its fulfilment (5). While Gary’s exile might also stem from his wish to escape from his hometown, where signs with the
word “MILITARIZE” had suddenly appeared everywhere (20), he eventually reveals that his flight had deeper causes. Before coming to Logos, Gary accidentally killed a young player in a game between Michigan State and Indiana. Read against such an event, the words “exile,” “packaging,” “separation,” “burying the memory” may be read as semantic clues that indicate that he suffers from what Abraham and Torok call a “refusal to mourn” (130).

Abraham and Torok posit that a subject incapable of coming to terms with a loss denies that such a loss has ever occurred. As a result, he or she suffers from melancholia, from an “inexpressible mourning” that gives rise to “incorporation” (130). The subject who refuses to mourn buries the loss within a “crypt” inside himself or herself, a “crypt” whose “topography” the subject must continuously preserve (130). Refusal to mourn produces a split consciousness: on the one hand, the person acknowledges that there a “lost object” buried inside, and on the other s/he chooses to disavow that such a loss has occurred (100). Functioning as a crypt, Gary’s exile at Logos College, described as “packaging” (29), connotes—through the association with the verb ‘to pack’—both a psychic process and a protective environment that wraps up Gary’s traumatic loss and prevents it from leaking. Since it acts as a crypt for Gary’s memory, the desert reinforces this process of incorporation and exile.

Abraham and Torok further argue that inexpressible mourning profoundly alters language. Those who fall prey to melancholic incorporation obscure the linguistic elements that might reveal the existence of a traumatic secret buried within themselves. Specifically, inexpressible mourning produces a linguistic mechanism that works to destroy “the expressive or representational power of language” (105), a mechanism they term “demetaphorization (taking literally what is meant figuratively)” (126).

In order to understand demetaphorization, it may be useful to recall how metaphors construct their expressive power. Paul Ricoeur suggests that a metaphor rests on what he calls, borrowing from Roman Jakobson, “split reference” (145). A metaphor refers to two terms simultaneously, one of which is implied, hidden or buried beyond the first term’s literal meaning. As the etymology of the word suggests, a metaphor produces a semantic shift that reveals “the semantic proximity between the terms in spite of their distance” from which a new signification emerges (147). Ricoeur terms such a shift “semantic impertinence,” and explains that it preserves the literal meaning of the first term, while simultaneously yielding the elusive, buried meaning such a term keeps in hiding (148). By comparison, then, demetaphorizing implies denying the metaphor its status of split reference, blocking the shift from the literal term to the buried one, and reducing such a term to its literal meaning only.

Indeed, the idea of a blocked semantic shift is central to Abraham and Torok’s explanation of demetaphorization as the linguistic equivalent of incorporation. Incorporation stands in opposition to introjection, i.e. the acceptance of mourning and its transformative effects upon the mourner. Abraham and Torok derive such a concept from the idea that a baby, detaching itself from the mother to enter a broader community, successfully substitutes the mother’s breast with words (128). A similar passage (or shift) occurs when the work of mourning is success-
ful, in that the subject fills with words the emptiness left by the departed object of love. The refusal to express mourning via incorporation, they posit, “implements the metaphor of introjection literally” in order to erase the consciousness that a loss has occurred (129). The words that point to the loss are swallowed. Abraham and Torok coin the term “antimetaphor” to describe that figure of speech which represents “the active destruction of representation” (132) as a result of repressed mourning and of linguistic incorporation.

To return to the novel, in the light of both Ricoeur’s and Abraham and Torok’s theories, Gary’s speech reveals the work of demetaphorization at Logos, where Gary plunges himself into the seemingly unproblematic immediacy of antimetaphor. In particular, through the teachings of Coach Emmet Creed, football at Logos predisposes Gary and his co-players to disavow death, be it the outcome of war or that of a fellow player later in the novel. Disavowal also occurs at the level of language since the language of football is profoundly antimetaphoric: not only will it prevent players from verbalising loss, but it will also render them incapable of interpreting football as a metaphor for war. Creed possesses a single-minded belief that football is “only a game, [...] but it’s the only game” (15). The coach explains that football is “brutal only from a distance. In the middle there is a calm, a tranquility” (194). Such a vision allows Gary to perpetuate demetaphorization and thus to disavow death as the product of the violence of football. Demetaphorization and antimetaphor predispose Gary to accept Creed’s teachings, teachings in which language plays a seminal role. Football, as the anonymous narrator of Part Two points out, is “the one sport guided by language, by the word signal, the snap number, the color code, the play name” (108).

Naming the plays best exemplifies the mechanism of operationalism, of which functional language, as theorized by Herbert Marcuse, is an instance. Marcuse draws the concept of operationalism from P.W. Bridgman and defines it as a method where a “concept is synonymous with [a] corresponding set of operations” (15). Similarly, functional language “tends to identify things and their functions” and “words and concept tend to coincide. The former has no other content rather than that designated by the word” (90). Marcuse sees functional language as the linguistic expression of a one-dimensional thought (100). According to the German philosopher, functional language is an instrument of thought and social control, though which an advanced industrial society indoctrinates individuals by destroying their capacity for critical reasoning and negative thinking. Operationalism, in particular, is a form of containment (19), which aims at defusing a series of oppositional concepts insofar as they appear to lack a corresponding set of operations and behavior. At the same time, functional language blocks the individual’s capacity for conceptual development, serving as a vehicle of coordination and subordination for the prevailing system (100).

Marcuse’s notion of functional language helps in understanding how Logos is an institution that moulds its students’ “habits of thoughts” (Marcuse 19) so that they are prepared to unquestioningly accept not only the instructions of Coach Creed, but also war and its mentality as defining elements of U.S. culture and society. Via Creed’s teachings, operationalism has infiltrated the mental habits of Logos players: “Write home on a regular basis. Dress neatly. Be courteous. Ar-
ticulate your problems. Do not drag-ass” (11). Creed's language is functional in that it, to use Marcuse's words, “orders and organizes” and his syntax “is abridged and condensed in such a way that no tension, no ‘space’ is left between the parts of the sentence” (Marcuse 90). When referring solely to the names of play, Creed's language is “adequate to the pragmatic context” in which it is used (Marcuse 95). Yet, Gary recognizes that Creed uses football and its jargon to impose a belief system—or a creed, in keeping with his name—to instill “the conviction that things here were simple” (*End Zone* 3). Beyond the rhetoric that sees football players as “simple folks” (3) who travel “the straightest of lines” (4), Gary asserts that “Big Bend” Creed “had done plenty to command respect,” using his assistants to “tem-per and bend” his players, but ultimately he admits that “Coach wanted our obe-dience and that was all” (52). Like Logos founder Tom Wade, Creed “had an idea and followed it through to the end” (7), and consequently “his life was unfolding toward a single moment” (52). Basing his life on a form of operationalism, Creed finds in functional language “his power: to deny us the words we needed. He was the maker of plays. The name giver. We were his chalk scrawls” (131). As Marcuse warns, applying the abridgement of meaning to “terms which denote things or occurrences beyond their noncontroversial context” may deny things their power to signify beyond their literal meaning (91). Creed's functionalism thus becomes a counterpart to demetaphorization and the two processes mutually reinforce one another in shaping the way Gary and his co-players use language.

A brief analysis of the word ‘Logos’ may illustrate another linguistic process that compounds the work of demetaphorization and the usage of antimetaphor. Logos is a Greek word which means both ‘The Word’ and ‘Reason.’ One may also consider a third meaning of Logos: ‘Logo’ as an iconic sign. For Umberto Eco, “an iconic sign has the same function as the object it represents by virtue of some similarities between the imitans and the imitatum” (275). Eco takes as an example a child who, wishing to represent the sun, draws a circle with rays emanating from it. In doing so, the child produces an iconic sign. Therefore, although in actual fact the star called the sun is not really as the child represents it, the drawing reproduces the conventional image, which, in a given culture, is associated with the sun. Eco claims that iconicity functions by means of what I would like to call a perceptual (and cultural) ‘cramp,’ i.e., a narrowing down of a culture’s capacity to create multiple visual symbols for a concept as a result of which other possible representations within that particular culture are banished: prey to iconic representation, one fails to think of the sun in terms of the undulatory theory of light (274).

So the name “Logos” works as an iconic brand: the sign becomes what it claims to be by means of a similar ‘cramp,’ which Marcuse finds at work within functional language. Iconic signs as described by Eco may be said to produce, in Marcuse’s words, “an abridged syntax which cuts off development of meaning by creating fixed images which impose themselves with an overwhelming and petrified concreteness” (94). Iconicity as the interpretative paradigm helps to understand DeLillo’s use of capitalized words in *End Zone*. As used in signs like “MILITA-
RIZE” (20) and “SACRIFICE” (24), capitalization exerts a “sinister appeal” on Gary (17), emphasized by a sign Gary’s father posts on the wall of the boy’s room:

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH THE TOUGH GET GOING

I looked at this sign for three years (roughly from ages fourteen to seventeen) before I began to perceive a certain beauty in it. The sentiment of course had small appeal but it seemed that beauty flew from the words themselves, the letters, consonants swallowing vowels, aggression and tenderness, a semi self-recreation from line to line, word to word, letter to letter. All meaning faded. The words became pictures. It was a sinister thing to discover at such an age, that words can escape their meanings. A strange beauty that sign began to express. (17)

DeLillo effectively uses capital letters to indicate words perceived as icons (logos), words that, mired in literalism, produce “the blocked development of content, the acceptance of that which is offered in the form in which is offered” (Marcuse 94). At Logos College the ‘word’ possessing a single meaning blocks the very dialectical function of ‘reason,’ the ability to negotiate implied references within a word. The word becomes a sign prompting a very specific response. Iconicity plays a central role in End Zone: the perceptual cramp that icons induce prevents Gary from seeing the analogies between football and war. It also exposes a cultural cramp which causes American society, even as it thrives on technological progress and an economy of destruction, to be “preoccupied with technique—with the process rather than the results of delivering destruction” (Sherry 268). Such a cramp is expressive of a culture that cannot see the death is produces.

The War Machine and the Infliction of Pain

The football training at Logos resembles military training. Creed instills in Gary and his co-players the belief that football is a “[p]reparation for the more important contests of the future” (19). While in the past Gary refused to sacrifice his own individuality for the sake of the team (19), at Logos he agrees to the principle that “no boy place[s] his personal welfare above the welfare of the aggregate unit” (195). In so doing, he surrenders to what he had earlier defined as the “spiritually disastrous” mechanism “of human xerography” (19), a process, as the word suggests, whereby Logos players cease to think and act autonomously and start acting serially. During training sessions appropriately named “drills” or “blitz drills” (28), the individual player must accept the logic of the “aggregate unit,” the numerical element. As an “interlocking of a number of systems” (196), Creed’s football team invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s “principle of numerical organization” (387), which they take as constitutive of “war machines” (360). Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism as a structurally numerical organization helps to shed light on the analogies between football and war.

A nomadic structure differs from lineal organizations based on kinship and from territorial organizations centred around territoriality. Such a structure, instead, is arranged on the basis of “numerical relationships” (389). Within nomadic structures the number becomes the organising principle. A nomadic structure—of which the war machine is the best instance—functions on the basis of numerical
sets or aggregations, organized in the form of series, i.e., sets of ten, one hundred (392). The army’s numerical principle combines soldiers in “arithmetic units” with “an anonymous, collective, or third-person function,” depriving soldiers of their individual, intrinsic properties (352). Numerical organizations, Deleuze and Guattari argue, become extremely mobile since the number becomes a means of moving, of pursuing a trajectory over what they call “smooth space” within which points are only “factual necessit [ies]” (380). Read against Deleuze and Guattari, Gary’s notion of “human xerography” can be recast as the numbering of individuals within the structural organization of football. With its subsets of offense, defense, and special units, the football team displays a war machine-like structure based on numbering principles and numerical aggregations. In the words of Creed, the individual becomes part of a “small cluster” that can move along the chalked lines of the field towards the end zone (194).

By preaching self-denial for his athletes as a form of de-individualization, Creed enforces his normative numerical principle. Denial of the self, he argues, can only be attained through the infliction of “insults to the body” (193). Thus, the “players accept the pain” (194) because, as Gary affirms, it “is part of the harmony of the nervous system” (195). He goes on to explain that pain is crucial to Creed since by inflicting pain on his players, he has “the power to deny us the words we needed” (131). Creed uses physical and psychological pain to destroy the individual character and to inculcate a team spirit. Players, he claims, accept pain for the sake of the team and the game (194). As Elaine Scarry explains, pain and language are closely related. Pain lacks “referential content” in the outside world (4), remaining utterly “unsharable” since it resists language and destroys language and the voice of the person experiencing pain (5). Creed’s infliction of physical pain thus allows him to substitute his own voice and his use of functional language, for that of the players: “When the coach says hit, we hit. It’s so simple” (33). While Creed sees pain as a means to achieve knowledge of one’s self, pain in fact works precisely towards a destruction of the self that Creed deems necessary for any football player.

Thus, Creed’s language and training methodologies not only inculcate a war mentality, but also work to reinforce the perceptual cramp that prevents players from associating football and war. In order to reinforce such a cramp, Creed changes the name of the team from “Cactus Wrens” to “the Screaming Eagles” (10) and provides the team with a symbol, a logo: a screaming eagle with the “word SACRIFICE inscribed beneath the eagle” (24). Both the eagle and the word “SACRIFICE” appeal to the power of icons to instill in Creed’s players a sense of order, power, and self-sacrifice. “The Screaming Eagles” is the nickname of the legendary 101st Airborne Division, a special Air Force unit with a long history of dangerous wartime missions. The division’s motto, “Rendezvous with destiny,” echoes Gary’s description of Creed as a man whose life “was unfolding towards a single moment” (52). Bing Jackmin, a player in the team’s special unit, best expresses the power of Creed’s logo to transform his players into eagles: “we

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5 For information on the history and the motto of the 101st Airborne Division see the webpages US Army Center of Military History and Fort Campbell.
perform like things with metal claws” (33). References to the 101st Airborne Division, whose logo is an eagle called “Old Abe”—named after Lincoln, known, as Sherry points out, as “the war president” (1)—are not casual in a school with both one Army and one Air Force ROTC based on campus and whose principal, “Mrs Tom Wade,” widow of Logos’ founder, is described as “Lincolnesque” (6).

Despite Gary’s attempts to deny possible analogies between football and war, such analogies do exist. His denial nurtures the illusion that football expresses “violence put to positive use” (210). War games constitute only part of a much broader discourse with which DeLillo engages in order to expose American culture’s fascination with war.

The Dark Joys of War Games and the Linguistic Pleasures of Nuclear Destruction

Major Staley, who commands the Air Force ROTC unit at Logos and teaches a course in “Aspects of Modern War” (69), best expresses the frame of mind that derives from the ideological and cultural impact of militarization. Furthermore, as the son of “one of the crew on the Nagasaki mission” (69), Staley’s theoretical conversations with Gary about nuclear war summarize thirty years of concerns about how to live with the bomb. Arguably, Staley’s notion of war as a game displaces what Michal Oriard defines as “the inhumane blindness to the human misery of war” (20). For Staley “the bombs are a kind of god” (77), a vision fostered by the religious and apocalyptic language scientists employed when talking about the potential outcome of nuclear war. Politicians capitalized on such language to consolidate the belief that national security, preparedness, and deterrence strategy needed reinforcing. As the nuclear arms race between the USA and USSR escalated, to the point that both superpowers possessed the same nuclear capability, Americans felt they had lost their leverage and that their cities were liable to experience nuclear holocaust. As Staley perceives, “We have too many bombs. They have too many bombs. [...] The big danger is that we’ll surrender to a sense of inevitability and start flinging mud all over the planet” (77).

DeLillo uses Major Staley to convey common theories and discourses within the political and military establishment in the early 1970s, related to doctrines of ‘the balance of terror’ and ‘Mutual Assured Destruction (M. A. D.).’ Such doctrines, intending to stabilize the competition, effectively produced the impression that one of the two powers, perceiving itself as weaker and fearful that it could never survive a first strike, might launch such a strike itself (Sherry 222). Staley argues that the resulting sense of inevitability is compounded by an assessment that war provides the ultimate test for a nation constantly preoccupied with asserting its superiority, a superiority that now finds its best expression in “a country’s technological skills” (DeLillo 81). During one of his afternoon war games sessions with Gary, Staley proposes “humane war” as an alternative, operating via “clean

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6 Gary Harkness often imagines major American cities like Chicago and Milwaukee destroyed by nuclear firestorms and explosions (21, 41).
bombs” and a “limited human variant” (78), a suggestion which he considers a rational solution to a nation’s need to assert its ascendency. His conflation of irreconcilable terms like “humane” and “war,” “clean” and “bomb” provides a further example of functional language and exemplifies how it, in Marcuse’s terms, seeks to bestow “moral and physical integrity [on] destruction” (97). For Staley, limited war should be fought in the manner of a sports contest, with “a referee and a time-keeper” (79). Given such a purview, the war games that Gary and Major Staley play amount to training for this humane war. Yet, while Gary and Staley’s game should prove that “limited war options” and “selective target bombing” are feasible (219), the game instead culminates in “spasm response” and total war (220).

The contradictory nature of Staley’s game works as a critique of civilian war games that played a key role in U.S. strategic defense planning and evaluation of possible responses to nuclear assault. DeLillo seems to target the Rand Corporation in particular, a group that, as journalist Fred Kaplan describes in his book The Wizards of Armageddon, for thirty years hired civilians and military to think about, simulate, and prepare for Armageddon, even advocating the use of war games at “intercollege plays” (65). As Mark Osteen points out, DeLillo’s language and war game theories are directly taken from a book by one of Rand’s most eminent figures, Herman Kahn’s On Escalation (40). Furthermore, Steven Belletto argues that during the 1950s and the 1960s game theory gained popular currency by promoting the idea that scientific rationality could contain “the specter of an accidental nuclear exchange” and could lead the USA to triumph over Communism (334). Yet in doing so, the abstract and chilling scientific rationality applied to nuclear strategy—as epitomized precisely by Kahn’s theories and Staley’s “humane war”—produced a logic which rendered acceptable what is “irrational and irresponsible from a human perspective” (Belletto 347).

The undesired outcome of Staley’s game highlights DeLillo’s critique of such games and of the state policies they exemplify: such games instill an iconic perception that the game is the real thing. The language and scenarios of war games lead combatants in the game to perpetuate the perceptual cramp identifying war with sports or a game. Moreover, at a linguistic level, Stanley and Gary use terms such as ‘spasm response’ and ‘selective target bombing’ as names that identify a function in the war game. Functional language prevents game players from visualising the actual effects of such strategic moves in a real context and, of course, the casualties that would ensue. Players are led to believe that, in war as in games, they may “enter and exit […] freely” (Scarry 82).

The game “Bang You’re Dead” (30), which Logos students play before the beginning of the school year, further compounds the iconic cramp produced by football at Logos. As Gary explains, players simulate death by firearm, their hands assuming “the shape of a gun” and their voices reproducing “the sound of a gun being fired” (30). The hand, or the sound of the voice acting as a real weapon, functions as Eco’s iconic sign by virtue of the similarities between imitans and imitandum: the shots induce iconic deaths, in which participants cramp their bod-

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7 Staley’s discourse effectively echoes that of President Nixon in those same years. See Burr, and Sherry, 310-311.
ies in suitable postures. “Bang you’re dead” perpetuates the powerful narrative of iconic signs. As in “limited war” (219). Gary specifies: “We did not abuse the powers inherent in the game. [...] So we cooled things off and devised unwritten limits” (31). These limits, such as avoiding “massacre” (31), transform the game into a pleasurable, amenable, experience: “I began to kill selectively. When killed, I fell to the floor or earth with great deliberation, with sincerity. I varied my falls, searching for the rhythm of something imperishable, a classic death” (32). Gary feels that the game “possessed gradations, dark joys, a resonance [...]” (31). The game invented “to break the silence and the lingering stillness” of the days at Logos enables Gary to experience war, to kill and to die (32). However, death experienced via the game is hardly the brutal death or killing of mass murders and genocides. In ‘Bang You’re Dead,’ Gary experiences the illusion of death as “total relaxation” and is able to grasp the game’s value: “[the game] enabled us to pretend that death could be a tender experience” (32).

The game between Logos and Centrex Biotechnical Institute, which occupies the central part of the novel, exposes, in contrast to ‘Bang You’re Dead,’ the breaking point of such pretence. Logos players concede that Centrex embodies the brutality and violence of football and represents all that Logos masks behind the deception of football as a “as a series of lovely and sensual assaults” (94). One of the Logos Players, Hauptfurher, goes on to claim: “Centrex is mean. They’re practically evil. They’ll stomp all over you. [...] They like to humiliate people” (91). Gary, whose duty as a narrator would be “to unbox the lexicon” of football in order to prove that football is not war, fails to provide such an account. Instead, the game remains ‘boxed’ in the garbled jargon of sport, a jargon which can neither “express” nor “clarify” (68), but rather reproduces the action of the game as “combat writing”: “The special teams collided, swarm and thud of interchangeable bodies, small wars commencing here and there, exaltation and firstblood, a helmet bouncing on the splendid grass, the breathless impact of two destructive masses” (107). His account does not foster the “benign illusion” that football is “order” (107). On the contrary, readers recognize that Centrex sees football as war. Indeed, as in war, Centrex’s end zone is injuring. The game concludes with a casualty bulletin: one player has a “clean fracture” (141), Randy King has a “wrenched knee” (141), Dickie Kidd has suffered from a “shoulder separation” due to “shrapnel” (142), “Bobby Iselin, pulled hamstring [...] Terry Madden, broken nose” (143). Gary closes the list with the statement: “They killed me” (145).

Gary’s fascination with “disaster technology” (20) complements Major Staley’s ruminations about limited war. Despite the power of annihilation contained in the atomic bomb, he cannot help feeling “a thrill almost sensual” in reading his course books on disaster technology (20). Gary’s fetishism feeds on an intense disavowal of the death it produces. Disavowal is a mechanism that lies at the core of the fetish, the latter understood, via Henry Krips, as an object which “stands for that which cannot be remembered directly” (7). Krips draws on Freud’s account of the ‘fort-da game,’ in which the child compensates for the mother’s absence by throwing and pulling a cotton reel. The child knows that the reel is not the mother, but even so, he substitutes the object of need (mother) for another object (the reel) that he desires. Thus, the fetish is not really the desired object,
and yet the subject acts as if it were (Krips 20-22). The mushroom-shaped cloud, which Sherry defines as “the corporate logo of the nuclear age,” acts for Gary as an object of desire (248) that becomes a source of pleasure precisely because of its absence.

Gary’s erotic attraction to fellow student Myna Corbett further exemplifies his tendency toward fetishism. Myna Corbett is a female version of Gary. Like him she attempts to lead a simple life, an effort that for her consists in rejecting “the responsibilities of beauty” (65), which she associates with an aesthetic canon of slim bodies and smooth skin. Myna opposes her own weight to this notion of beauty. When Gary first sees her, Myna is “wearing an orange dress with a mushroom cloud appliquéd on the front of her dress” (39). As a logo, the mushroom cloud on her dress prompts Gary to identify her as a bomb, as an “explosion over the desert” (66). These elements, coupled with the girl’s massive weight—evoking the Bomb’s mega tonnage—produce an affective association in Gary’s mind between the girl and the Bomb so that both are equal sources of fascination him. While fascination with the Bomb prompts Gary to experience guilt derived from its destructive power, by substituting Myna for the bomb he can experience pleasure without guilt and the image of the bomb can turn into an image that nurtures aesthetic pleasure.

Aesthetic pleasure compounds Gary’s affective “pleasure in the words” of nuclear destruction such as “thermal hurricanes, overkill, post-attack environment, kill-ratio, spasm war” (20). Such pleasure derives from the power of the language of war that eliminates from view the cost of human suffering. The terminology of war effectively conveys images of destruction with such scientific precision and order that it erases the violence behind technological agency and produces, in Scarry’s terms, an “abdication of responsibility” (73). As in the case of Gary’s numerical casualty statistics, body counts render human suffering invisible: “Five to twenty million dead. Fifty to a hundred million dead” (20). Gary is aware that he uses “numbers [to cover] the words used to cover silence” (71), a silence deriving from human annihilation. Major Staley deploys the same language (cf. 78, 81, 219) and infuses his jargon with a plethora of acronyms—“ICBM,” “MIRV,” “SAC.” Such linguistic abstractions common for war terminology are thus profoundly anti-metaphorical. If demetaphorization entails taking words literally, the reduction of words to letters produces a verbal fiction that obliterates injury and death as products of war. Such words also mask the infliction of pain through injury, pain which in turn destroys “first, embodied persons; second, the material culture or self-extension of persons; third, immaterial culture, aspects of national consciousness, political belief, and self-definition” (Scarry 114).

Thus, the language of war gives substance to what is invisible, i.e., the outcome of war, but it does so in a way that constantly disguises the horror and death it produces. As Gary objects to Staley:

“Major, there’s no way to express thirty million dead. No words. So certain men are recruited to reinvent the language.”
“I don’t make up the words, Gary.”
“They don’t explain, they don’t clarify, they don’t express. They’re painkillers. Everything becomes abstract.” (81)
War jargon, with its abstracted, numerical terminology, effectively works to produce a historical amnesia over the human consequences of war and to reject the losses the latter generates, thus perpetuating an extended form of melancholic incorporation. In Gary’s case, war jargon prevents him from also acknowledging death as something other than a numerical account of losses.

While Gary responds to the logic of such language by attempting to restore to the metaphorical function of language, he also resists the insistence of military jargon. Walking through the desert to reach the college after one of his meetings with Staley, Gary comes across a terrifying vision of “excrement, a low mound of it, simple shit, nothing more.” Although he sees shit as “a terminal act, nullity in the very word,” Gary is overcome by fear and “want[s] his senses to deny this experience.” He perceives a “curse in that sight” because, in the silence dominating the desert, the word “shit” takes him beyond its literal meaning: “[s]hit, as of dogs squatting near partly eaten bodies, rot repeating itself; defecation, as of old women in nursing homes fouling their beds; faeces, as of specimen, sample, analysis, diagnosis, bleak assessment of disease in the bowels.” Escaping Gary’s predilection for the pleasures of functional language, shit becomes a metaphor for human decay, for disease, and for humanity as refuse. Its “infinite treachery” consists in forcing Gary to think about the end of life: “final matter voided, the chemical stink of the self discontinued.” His thoughts then move from “butchered animals’ intestines slick with shit and blood” to “armies retreating in that stench, shit as history” (85), as the history of human slaughter and butchery in war. Having temporarily rid himself of the mystifying terminology of military language, which “shields users from responsibility for planning and carrying out mass destruction” (Osteen 39), Gary can read the desert as a metaphor for nuclear wasteland. The desert, a geographical manifestation of the crypt buried within Gary’s consciousness as a melancholic mourner, suddenly opens up, revealing its hidden, repressed content. Gary restores metaphor and temporarily becomes a “[m]etaphorist of the desert” (41): “I thought of men embedded in the ground, all killed, billions, flesh cauterized into the earth, bits of bone and hair and nails” (86). The desert no longer appears as “born dead, flat stones burying the memory” (30), but rather made dead by the conflation of earth and flesh resulting from a nuclear explosion. For an instant Gary not only acknowledges loss and death as the product of war, but also avows the desert as a burial ground and a memorial for the dead. Ontologizing the dead and recuperating them via an act of memory might effectively oppose Gary’s inexpressible mourning and lead him to overcome his melancholia. Rather than accepting the implications of the multiple meanings of shit, however, Gary retreats into the linguistic bareness of literalism.

As a result, when death as a real event interrupts the seemingly endless repetition of the days at Logos, Gary can only grasp its essence through cliché and tautology. Flanders, like many other students, can only account for Mrs. Tom Wade’s death in a plane crash as tautology: “I wonder if she was ever burned beyond recognition. […] That usually happens in that kind of crash” (178). Similarly, the account of Norgene Azamanian’s death arrives through the State troopers’ notes, all “writing in their little notes, all copying from each other” (69). Finally, death becomes “the best soil for clichés” since they have “a soothing effect on the mind”
War as a Form of “Apotheosis”

and the “trite saying is never more comforting, more restful, as in times of mourning” (67). For Marcuse, clichés and tautology represent the quintessential form of linguistic functionalism: “The ritualized concept is made immune against contradiction” (92). Through their continuous repetition of an evident reality, clichés and tautologies, as DeLillo has Gary say, “don’t clarify, don’t express” (79). Clichés prompt a response substantially similar to antimetaphor: they are taken literally in that one accepts them without delving into the reality that clichés only superficially describe. Clichés facilitate denial of loss since, to paraphrase Abraham and Torok, they block the development of words that, by filling the silent mouth, might render introjection possible. Yet for those who, like Gary, suffer from melancholic incorporation and literalism, whose lives are “guided by clichés” (67), introjection becomes a “menace,” a crime to be “hidden with the darker crimes of thought and language” (67). As he indulges in such reflections, Gary manifests a continuous tension between a refusal and an acceptance of death-as-cliché, insofar as he recognizes that the war mentality feeds on cliché in order to reduce death to a series of “facts” or “a mass of jargon for the military mind, […] resembling clichés, passed from mourner to mourner in the form of copied notes” (70).

Unlike Gary, who attempts to resist the assault of military language, Anatole Bloomberg best exemplifies the successful work of demetaphorization and functional language. Anatole is a Jew who at Logos seeks to ‘unjew’ himself. Anatole’s unjewing is first and foremost a linguistic process: “ […] you revise your way of speaking. You take out the urbanism. The question marks. All that folk wisdom. The melodies in your speech, the inverted sentences. You use a completely different set of words and phrases” (44). After that, Anatole goes on to explain, he can finally use “simple declarative sentences. Subject, predicate, object” (183). Of course, Anatole’s guilt is symptomatic of a culture that rejects not only death as a result of war, but more significantly “democide” (Rummel 31) or death by government.8 His refusal to commemorate the Holocaust of his people may be read as his response to “a trauma whose very occurrences and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence” (Abraham and Torok 99). Impaired mourning for his people extends into a negation of personal loss. Anatole refuses to participate at the funeral of his mother, whose murder at the hands of a lunatic marks her as “another innocent victim” (183). Recalling the Jewish tradition of leaving pebbles at gravesides, Anatole leaves a black stone in the desert, an attempt to mourn in displaced form and in the wrong place. Rather than a memorial to his mother, the black-painted stone he leaves in the desert as a burial-marker functions as a crypt for his “unspeakable heartbreak” rather than a memorial to his mother (183).

Deprived of “the old words and aromas,” Anatole senses that his mind is “transform[ed] into a ruthless instrument” as he teaches himself “to reject cer-

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8 Rummel defines democide as “the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder” (31): “democide subsumes genocidal killing, as well as the concepts of politicide and mass murder, democide is for the killing by government definitionally similar to the domestic crime of murder by individuals, and that murderer is an appropriate label for those regimes that commit democide” (xiv).
tain categories of thought” (44). Anatole’s “linguistic abridgements” lead to “an abridgement of thought” (Marcuse 100). By such means, he rejects “the smelly undisciplined past” (DeLillo 182), malodorous of “the black bones” (183) of the Holocaust victims. Anatole’s language works to repel history and its memory. His “nonethical superrational man” can only “walk in straight lines…keep [his] mind set on one thought or problem” (180), and by “training himself toward that end” (180), may annul what Marcuse defines as the “subversive contents of memories” (100). Finally, in his new name “EK 17” Anatole finds freedom from the burden of his past and of his Jewishness (DeLillo 182). As in Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘war machine,’ the number becomes the subject. Deprived of his historical memory and his geographical and family ties in Creed’s football-war machine, Anatole’s numerical self-nomination disavows the fact that, as Deleuze and Guattari recall, Jews in concentration camps were “no longer anything more than deterritorialized ‘numbers’” (390).

Silence as an Alternative to War Language

Logos’s defeat by Centrex undermines the credibility of Creed’s beliefs and training techniques. After the match, Creed is forced into a wheelchair. His physical impairment symbolizes the paralysis of the functionalism and literalism that Creed personifies as well as the gradual waning of his power over his players. Taft Robinson, the player Creed had hired to win the season, is the first to abandon football and reject Creed’s values and beliefs. As “[o]ne of the best running backs in the history of Southwest” (3), Taft had been recruited “for his speed” (3). Taft embodies speed, or rather, in keeping with Logos’ penchant for iconic representation, Taft is speed. As he is an African American, he is also an “invisible man” (3)—a reference to Ralph Ellison’s work as well as something of a cliché. Taft’s function within the novel only amounts to releasing his speed in order to project Creed’s football machine towards the end zone. His function is entirely consistent within a football team modelled upon a war machine: speed “invents the weapon” and the war machine “implies the release of speed” (Deleuze and Guattari 395, 396). Indeed, Taft is the most powerful weapon in Creed’s arsenal. Yet, as Gary points out, Taft’s existence is limited only to the chalk lines of the football field. Off the field, Taft is ‘socially dead,’ invisible, a ghost who “no more than haunts this book” (3).

Taft’s immobility and his search for stasis and silence at the end of the novel constitutes a rebuttal both of speed and of his role within Creed’s team. Taft decides to quit football in order to reject the ‘package’ constructed around him, his iconic image, and Gary’s stereotypical vision of him as a savage mastering “a magic art” (186). By rejecting football, Taft refuses Creed, who had offered Taft a different “prospect of glory,” i.e. the transformation of the modern athlete into a war machine. Taft seeks to resist Creed’s functionalism. Taft opposes silence to the cacophony of military and football jargon. While such a cacophony produces, in the words of Peter Boxall, “the silencing of the dissenting voice” and expresses “the movement of [American] culture towards compliant, uncritical inarticulacy”
Taft adopts silence as the ultimate form of speech because, in his own words, a “new way of life requires a new language” (229). Silence “becomes almost a spiritual exercise. Silence, words, silence, silence, silence” (234). Taft’s babbling may represent what DeLillo in an interview calls “a purer form, an alternate speech. [...] Another way to speak” (Le Clair 24-25). Silence offers language an escape from the abridged syntax of functionalism and access to thoughts and meanings functional language forecloses.

Taft’s attempt at rejecting football and its association with war finds physical manifestation in the static lotus position he assumes, which reminds readers of the famous Tibetan monk Quang Duc. His choice may be best glossed by turning to Murray Jay Siskind’s invitation in *White Noise* to follow the Tibetan monks’ teaching that Americans should “stop denying death” (38). Through both Taft and Siskind, DeLillo voices a cultural need to recover death as an experienced presence, in order to oppose the prevalent fascination with “those very technologies that promise to eradicate death” (Boxall 10) and their destructive potential. Seen as an attempt to accept the reality of death, Taft’s reading “about the ovens” (235) represents his effort to come to terms with the horror of death as the *real* outcome of war: “I like to read about the ovens, the showers, the experiments, the teeth, the lampshades, the soap. I’ve read maybe thirty or forty books on the subject. But I like kids best. Putting the torch to kids and their mamas. Smashing kids in the teeth with your rifle butt” (235). Taft’s language possesses none of the abstraction characterising Major Staley’s technological jargon. As in the case of Gary’s confrontation with the excrement in the desert, Taft’s immersion in silence allows him to overcome literalism and demetaphorization and to restore the associative powers of language. Taft’s pleasure in repeatedly naming these atrocities may be best interpreted in the light of Elaine Scarry’s argument that to “attach any name, any word to the wilful infliction of this bodily agony is to make language and civilization participate in their own destruction” (43).

Similarly, Myna’s decision to lose weight and to endorse “the responsibilities of beauty” (65) may be taken as a rejection of Logos literalism. Her fasting represents a form of resistance against weight as an iconic representation of the Bomb, as an “expression of humanity’s reckless potential” (47). Her rejection of weight as a search for a new self-definition, read alongside Taft’s decision to abandon football, signals that the functionalism, literalism, and the war mentality that make up the founding principles of Logos have exhausted their affective powers and significance.

As the novel unfolds, stasis and immobility dominate the narrative, marking the end of a football season that leaves Gary idle, Creed confined to a wheelchair, and Taft in the lotus position. Stasis represents the atrophy of a culture that cannot find its definition beyond war. Arguably, the atrophying of war mentality within Logos as a dominant structure of feeling may reflect America’s disenchantment with war in the wake of the Vietnam conflict and indicate the crisis of military hegemony that compounded U.S. economic hegemony. It may also point to the stagnation of the U.S. economy in the early 1970s, the economic impasse of U.S. capitalism caught between an overaccumulation crisis and the need to maintain “the golden rule of never-ending domestic consumerism” (Harvey 61). As it
investigates the war mentality undergirding American culture and values, *End Zone* prompts recollection of the economic role that war has had in constructing American hegemony and of the identification between militarization and economic prosperity. DeLillo does not casually associate, via Harkness, the word “MILITARIZE” (161) and “apotheosis” (162). For many years, militarization, relying on a permanent arms economy, had sustained U.S. economic hegemony, itself an arguable form of apotheosis.

*End Zone* finally demonstrates how a country defining itself primarily through militarization and war not only produces death and injury but is ultimately bent on self-destruction. Having become co-captain of the team and Creed’s “law’s small tin glitter” (197), Gary adheres unconditionally to Logos values and seeks through extreme fasting to pursue that form of self-denial that constituted one of Creed’s fundamental teachings and his own ‘end zone.’ Gary’s final gesture seems to prefigure that there are no alternatives to the all-encompassing, overriding logic of militarization. However, while illustrating America’s fascination with war and its culture, *End Zone* can also be read as a cautionary tale highlighting the pitfalls of an excessive exaltation and glorification of war as the defining paradigm for an entire nation. DeLillo invites us to question the language that helps to enforce a spiritually and materially deadly culture and to find in silence an alternative to the dominant logic prescribed by militarization. Through the stifling immobility pervading Logos, DeLillo illustrates the failure of America’s relentless pursuit of militarization and a permanent arms economy as a source of legitimization for U.S. moral and military hegemony, and points to America’s need to discuss and redefine its position as a world hegemon.

**Works Cited**


