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## **UNDERWORLD - ABOUT FRAGMENTS OF TIME, J. EDGAR HOOVER, AND A BASEBALL**

Considering the recent critical perspectives on the fictions of the late 1990s, the paper interprets the narrative structure and the construction of the networks of time in the novel *Underworld* by Don DeLillo. Reviewing the dominant theoretical frames for the interpretation of history and narrative, historiographic metafiction proposed by Linda Hutcheon and the postmodern understanding of history as a collage of elements by Frederic Jameson, the paper examines the ideas of structuring the time in narrative from the perspective of *now*. Timeframe is thus interpreted as a sequence of present moments designed, recorded and repurposed as “future past moments” defined by the process of *archive fever* and the accelerated recontextualization of the ‘snapshots’, characters and historical figures. We propose that the idea of this structure is to bring light to seeing history as a series of contingencies rather than a teleological sequence with a predesigned outcome, and to emphasize the view on the past as a series of accidental *nows*. To illustrate these points the paper analyses the positioning in the structure of the narrative of the two key motifs of the novel, the baseball and the character of J. Edgar Hoover.

*Keywords:* *Underworld* (novel), Don DeLillo, time in fiction, history and narrative, postmodernist fiction

## **THE NOVEL OF THE TURN OF THE MILLENIUM AS A DEBATE ON HISTORY**

### *Theoretical concerns*

In one of the most influential early 21<sup>st</sup> century interpretations of DeLillo’s opus, Peter Boxall observes the novel *Underworld* as a coda, an apotheosis of the major concerns of the postmodern worldview, confirming “the arrival of the millennial moment” (2006, 186) as the ultimate end of things, which at the same time, nevertheless, announces the possibility of resisting the “historical closure” and prevents the homogenization of all the voices into one, the American one (186).

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This, seemingly contradictory line of thought becomes intensified in most of the recent critical reviews considering the literary production of the late 1990s and early 2000 included in the volumes of *Literature in Transition* series published by Cambridge University Press. In these edited collections published in 2017 and 2018, the retrospectives of the novels oscillate between the two dominant critical and cultural interpretations of the relationship between history and the fictional narrative. Confronting the approach of Fredric Jameson and that of Linda Hutcheon, the novel of the end of the XX century is often seen as an extension and an elaboration on the novel of the 1970s which represented the basis for the articulation of the two theoretical positions, while fiction was approached as the basis for the discussion of the “relationship between history and postmodernity” (Duvall 2017:124). The positions of Jameson and Hutcheon are mainly observed as competing where Hutcheon claims that fictions’ greatest value is precisely in their treatment of the concept of history, namely “they juxtapose what we think we know of the past ... with an alternate representation that foregrounds the postmodern questioning of the nature of historical knowledge. Which facts make it into history? And whose facts?” (Hutcheon 1989:71). Duvall interprets Hutcheon’s choice of fictions as a juxtaposition of the two approaches to the construction of the narrative - the playfulness, or the “antimimetic and ludic” (2017:124) aspect, against the approach that is “at base realist” (125) – which, according to Duvall, results either in the lack of history in the novel despite the appropriation of the “right names”(125) or in the “clear sense of the historical shift” (125) notwithstanding the changed names. Duvall concludes that, although both described approaches to history in fiction may be interpreted as historiographic metafiction, and would be seen as coherent in political sense, in terms of consistent narrative poetics, he finds the approach insufficient. Jameson, in turn interprets the relationship of fiction and history primarily as crisis of historicity marked by the disappearance of historical referent stating that “[t]he historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only ‘represent’ our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes ‘pop history’)” (Jameson 2005:25). For Jameson, the issue was the inability to structure, or cognitively map present, that is, to formulate class consciousness (Duvall 2017:125) in a context that Fukuyama describes as the end of history, or the times when liberal capitalist model prevails, and the ideological development reaches its outcome. The end of the Cold War thus coincided with “the end of history,” as the 1990s were marked by discourses of globalization, undermining the discourses grounded in the ideas of the nation-state and professing an interconnected world “as a space of either utopian promise or

apocalyptic threat” (Greenwald Smith 2017: 8). Therefore, in the study of the American novel of the 1990s and the period itself, Duvall claims the critical approaches of Hutcheon, Jameson, and Fukuyama to be “responses to late–Cold War conditions that lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall” (Duvall 2017:126). Although most of the American authors publishing their major work in the 1990s lived large portions of their lives immersed in the dichotomies of the Cold War; with the legacy of American cultural and economic imperialism and the ever-present threat, a dark shadow of communism, the binary oppositions of USA and USSR have been abolished by the 1990s. The remaining superpower was the USA, or at the time it had seemed to be the case, and the narratives reflect a moment in time which normalizes “the post–Cold War status of American exceptionalism” (Duvall 2017:126), while many of them criticize the neoliberal worldview. The novels of the 1990s present a stasis, a commentary to the idea of the end of history only being a pause, soon to be unraveled with the 9/11 and the subsequent conflicts. Although in this context, *Underworld* at least on the surface corresponds to Fukuyama’s approach of the “end of history”, it is perhaps even more of a challenge to contrast that apparent revelatory moment with this idea of the stasis and with the influences Boxall labels as currents that are “a form of resistance to historical closure” (186). This reading proposes that the structuring of the fragments of time in the novel intertwined with the structuring of the characters of the protagonists establishes the undercurrent contradicting the idea of closure.

*Underworld – a network of the fragments of time*

Longing on a large scale is what makes history. (DeLillo 2014:10)

Although *Underworld*, in Duvall’s opinion, is a representative of “most overt and massive reflections on the Cold War” (Duvall 2017:126) it reaches far beyond the Us-Them dichotomies successfully balancing the panoramic narrative to warrant the three theoretical positions on the status of history in fiction. Its structure is governed by the sections of time weaved into stories which seem to all originate from a single point in time, the 1951 baseball game labeled as Prologue. This event symbolizes the point in time marking the beginning of the Cold War that looms in the background of everything that followed. The Prologue is set up as an entry point into the narrative labyrinth, as an extended present moment also narrated in the present tense. It introduces the network of characters which further expands into different directions – the fictional versions of certain historic figures cross their paths with fictional characters, generate their fictional doppelgangers or become protagonists themselves: J. Edgar Hoover, Toots Shor, Frank Sinatra, Jackie

Gleason, Thompson and Branka, Truman Capote, Lenny Bruce or the Rolling Stones. Their fictional encounters overlap with their factual representations, media coverage and mutual interferences, and this generates the “ludic” effect of the historiographic metafiction. However, the narration remains firmly set in the structure which relies on the mimetic verisimilitude achieved by the shifts in narrative tense and in the alternations of the point of view, often involving repetitions or the retelling of the events from multiple angles. The resulting heterogenous structure depends on the several binding iconic motifs – realized as core events, artefacts, or characters – becoming a cohesive force holding the fragments together to form a meaningful whole. The structure of the novel, thus could be seen as emulating the postmodernist approaches to history from different angles. The most valuable motif of the novel, the baseball, as the object of the Thompson’s homerun, appears as the least likely protagonist of the novel. In the passage of time, instead becoming a used object, a piece of waste, its symbolic value as well as its monetary one grows, it becomes a valuable commodity, an actual piece of past and history, that is being bought and sold in the collectors’ market achieving ever greater price, symbolic of the nostalgia, or desire, resulting from the inaccessibility of the past. On the other hand, the process of the rise of the consumer society is contrasted with the (re)appearances of the character of J. Edgar Hoover who, like the baseball, becomes recontextualized with the passage of time, becoming a token of the Cold War era whose shadow appears as sinister as the bomb threat. Unlike the ball, the fictional Hoover represents a concept of impalpable and invisible power that almost inadvertently works as a bond between events and characters in the novel. Fictional Hoover suggests the interconnectedness not only in the relations established through the narration, but even more so in the references and allusions to the actual biographies and the actual events which formally remain outside the novel. The process of developing this elaborate structure evokes Jameson’s idea of creating a version of pop history for an individual reading experience. *Underworld*, along with several other historical fictions of the end of the Cold War era, sets the tone for the conversation about history, historical memory and politics which continues into the present day. By tracing the character of Hoover and discovering the interrelatedness of the events, it underlines the representation of history as a “collective memory of televisual [and cinematic] images” (Huehls 2017:138). History becomes a collage of the pieces of puzzle that never fit perfectly together, but rather leave gaps, silences defined by the noise that surrounds them. According to Mitchum Huehls, “the goal is not to understand history historically, but to use history to understand the present

historically, to produce a strong sense of historicity, that is, ‘a perception of the present as history’” (2017:141). The most important for understanding history Huehls considers the fallacy of the concept of linear teleological relationship of events which anticipates a chain of events leading to a pre-determined outcome. Contrasting it, the elaborate structure of *Underworld* encourages seeing past and history as a series of accidental *nows* reaching in different directions, affecting various, otherwise unrelated events and characters which is perhaps best illustrated by the transformation of leitmotifs in the novel. As one of the examples we may observe the links between the advertisements and logos, such as the Lucky Strikes and Minute Maid, and their reemergence in the narrative creating a contingency that opens the interpretation of present as imagined from the future-accidental-history or the past-yet-to-come (Huehls 2017:145). The concepts of time in contemporary cultural theory emphasize this relationship and reflect the change in the experience of the present, which is one of the most powerful features in the construction of the complex timeframes of *Underworld*. Deliberating on the future-oriented narrative, Mark Currie labels the features which are applicable to the interpretations of historical fiction as time-space compression, accelerated recontextualization and archive fever (Currie 2007:9). The time-space compression refers to the diminishing of time required to traverse space (either in physical travel or by the means of telecommunications) which consequently produces the “compression of time horizons” (9) foregrounding that “the present is all there is” and that it is shared on a global scale (9). Again, the gaps remaining between the pieces of puzzle in the modelling of time suggest that the present is always already contaminated by “the spatiotemporally absent” (Currie 2007:10). The present is interpreted as displaying the traces of the past through the process of accelerated recontextualization, which symbolizes the positioning of an item, artifact, notion, or even historical figure in a present, new, context. It is often referred to as the “recycling of the increasingly recent past” (10). In terms of narrative, the present may be interpreted as designed to be the object of future memory, emphasizing its potential to become a record of the past. The mode of anticipation of memory, or the view on the present as a source of records to be archived Jacques Derrida names the *archive fever* and it is a logical consequence of accelerated recontextualization. Archive fever is not simply a manner of recording a past that would exist even if it were not a part of the archive. Currie interprets Derrida’s concept as a process that *produces* the content as much as it records it. Constructing the dialogue of fiction and history, DeLillo experiments with the experience of the present which invokes the idea of archive fever and its limits in the systems of mass media communication as they evolve in

time. The characters memories of the past, especially the ones of Albert Bronzini, Klara Sax and Nick Shea remembering their childhood, are the most obvious examples of archive fever, representing a palimpsest of snapshots of present moments across the long span of time working towards the jigsaw puzzle composite portrait New York City, not unlike Jameson's 'pop-history' cross-referenced with other characters and places. In addition, the motif of the baseball and the re-emerging of the character of Hoover as well as the references to the historical figure of J. E. Hoover, introduce the series of present moments as anticipations of memory and as contaminations by the past, which in turn contributes to the perception of historical events as contingent.

### MAPPING THE SILENCES

The structure of the narrative in *Underworld* is complex, and the sequencing of the events is designed to prevent immersion despite the aspects of mimetic verisimilitude or despite the conventional approach to the characterization and structuring on the level of the event. The reading process demands engagement on the part of the reader in tracing of the motifs, but it also emphasizes the readers' role in establishing of causal relationships between the events, and in detecting shifts in the points of view. The story of the Cold War is framed by the Prologue and the Epilogue sections which are half a century apart, however, both are told in the present tense dedicating a lot of space to the intermedial aspects of narration, or the intersections of the visual and the verbal in the narrative. This technique points to the present from the perspective of future memory – the Prologue is constructed as a sequence of scenes focused on different protagonists and their respective perceptions. From the gate-crushing of Cotter Martin, a character from the social margin who will in the end claim the actual baseball after Thompson's homerun launched it in the audience, the story about the legendary baseball game unfolds as a backdrop of the initial setup of the major themes to be unfolded in the novel. The subsequent clusters of events are formed around major themes and move back and forth in time; however, all are narrated in the past tense and shift the narrator's focus between different characters and between first- and third-person narrative occasionally slipping into a direct address to the reader narrating in the second person. Among these fragments there are different strategies at work which influence the readers to integrate them into the networks of their own; for example, the story about the fictional Texas highway killer overlaps with the story about Kennedy's assassination and its mediated form, the Zapruder movie, which is a part of the novel, but also with the Charles Whitman shooting in Texas, which is an

event outside the narrative. The sections titled “Manx Martin” remain outside this structure and stay deliberately isolated – telling a story about the ball in the 12 hours after the baseball game that remains hidden for the main narrative and its characters. The fact that it remains unknown makes it impossible to authenticate the ball as a genuine historical artefact, which within the main narrative operates as the primary illustration of historical contingency conditioned by the (lack of) access to data. The fate of the ball is an example of the missing piece of the puzzle which compels the characters interested completing the story either to confabulate or to accept the lineage and the history of the ball as flawed, more a matter of belief than a proven fact. This creates one of the strongest arguments for DeLillo’s position on the relationship of past and history.

*Manx Martin – the missing 12 hours in the “aura” of the ball*

But how did it all begin?”

“You asked so I’ll tell you. With a man named Charles, let me think, Wainwright. An advertising executive. I have the complete sequence back to him. The line of ownership.”

“But not back to the game itself.”

“I don’t have the last link that I can connect backwards from the Wainwright ball to the ball making contact with Bobby Thomson’s bat.” (DeLillo 2014:155)

According to John Duvall, all Don DeLillo’s novels since *White Noise* show interest in the “American mass culture’s desire to find transcendence through such things as television, consumption, and crowd behavior” (Duvall 2002:16) and Duvall proposes the idea of *aura* as the materialization of that desire. Adopting the idea from Walter Benjamin, which DeLillo’s characters readily discuss in *White Noise* and *Mao II*, Duvall explains that aura is a part of the cultic and ritual shrouding of the works of art which works toward establishing the primacy of the high art forms by insisting on their *originality*. In contrast, Benjamin considered the possibility of technological reproduction of a work of art and the destruction of the aura as beneficial, since film and photography could “politicize the aesthetic” (16), yet, on the other hand he also understood that the industry of media could play a crucial role in the production of the new rituals. In *Underworld* it is baseball as a game; a social activity that both unites and divides, that Duvall interprets to have a ritual function in order to mask “crucial political realities” (26). By setting up the events to unfold from a single point in time, the Giants vs. Dodgers pennant game

of 1951, DeLillo places the baseball as an object in the center of historical contingency. As a common mass-produced object, the ball has no value – it is manufactured commodity to be used and discarded. However, in the context of the historical game, the ball becomes an artefact, an authentic piece of the past, and as such it acquires an aura and subsequently a value that is comparable to the works of art. Memorabilia are the consumer society's authentic points of access to the past, and a reflection of DeLillo's characters' desire to possess the past – on the one hand it is part of Marvin Lundy's version of world history as a baseball memorabilia collector, and on the other it stands for Nick Shea's attempt to authenticate his own personal experience of the game (which was mediated by Russ Hodges and the radio). Neither approach the ball focusing on its monetary value, but rather appreciate it for its ritual aspect, its authentic presence and involvement in the event that was of genuine historical importance. Yet, the ball in the novel is deprived of a genuine aura since its lineage cannot be established. DeLillo positions the final link in the line of ownership, the one that Marvin Lundy meticulously searched for, outside the reach of the network of characters and events of *Underworld*. The events that took place in the game are set up as the point of origin for the network that is going to unfold in the main narrative, resolving in the Epilogue to confirm the proposition that "everything is connected". However, the "Manx Martin" sections interrupt the flow, also confirming that not everything is accessible, that portions of the past will not be recorded or that they will not in time be recognized as relevant future memories. Simultaneously, this structure of Manx Martin narrative emphasizes that the portions of the past that we believe we can access are purely accidental and perhaps not even central to the event to which we wish to connect it. The story of the 12 missing hours of the baseball after it made contact with Thompson's bat, is the story that sheds light on crucial political realities that baseball as a game, as Duvall claims, was supposed to blur. It reverses the order of values in the appraisal of the ball as memorabilia. Cotter Martin, the underclass black teenager who crashed the gate to enter the ballpark, scooped the ball in the commotion and brought it home. Since he had missed classes he needed a note from his father, and had to tell him about the ball, which, for Cotter had value but not as a thing to sell. His father, portrayed as "a bit of a con man" (Duvall 2002:32) in a situation desperate enough to steal shovels from the building janitor in order to sell them, perceives the situation as an opportunity. Immediately as a consequence of accelerated recontextualization, the status of the ball changes; however, Manx cannot offer it to the Giants since Cotter has no ticket stub as a way to prove that he was in the stadium. On the other hand, Cotter does not wish to sell it, because for



him it represents his own memory which does not need authentication. Manx on the other hand only sees its monetary potential and steals the ball after Cotter falls asleep. He then, after careful consideration of the favorable aspects of the potential transactional situation, seizes the opportunity to sell the ball to Charles Wainwright, a white man waiting in line for the World series tickets with his son Chuckie. That scene emphasizes the issue of race and class difference that baseball as an All-American sport is intended to mask – it reframes the father-son relationship refracted between the Martins and the Wainwrights underlining the difference in the value of memorabilia as well as individual loyalties. The reader is told that the protagonist Nick Shay bought the ball for a price of thousand times greater than the one Manx agreed to sell it for to Charlie Wainwright. But for Nick the ball does not have a monetary value as it did not have it for Cotter. Neither Manx, nor Wainwright or Nick were not in the stadium to watch the game, so the ball, as a valuable memento, does not symbolically represent their witnessing of history being made in the way it did for Cotter to whose ‘archive’ it belonged, but rather a proxy which would allow the person who possesses it to share Cotter’s experience. In addition to elaborating on the idea that some pieces of information about the past remain undiscoverable because we are denied access, or they were never recorded, or we never witnessed them, we are confronted with ‘longing on a large scale’ – a series of contingencies that made it possible for the ball to become a commodified part of history in a frenzy of archive fever and that the production of the memento also meant the betrayal of the memory. In the main narration of the novel, it is repeatedly recontextualized reminding the reader of the moment in time designated as the beginning. It emphasizes how the change of context each time affects the perception of the event, or the characters involved, resulting in the network where ‘everything is connected’ yet leaving open the question who made the connections.

*Contaminated by... – J. Edgar Hoover in the blanks*

“In 1951, Hoover was the chief of what amounted to a kinder, gentler American Gestapo, a secret police with almost unchecked power to use electronic surveillance to spy on American citizens” (Duvall 2002:28)

In the Prologue, the character of J. Edgar Hoover signifies a different underworld, an invisible power which directs public versions of the events and the process of connection making. In the course of the baseball game, he receives the information about the successful testing of a Soviet nuclear bomb and comments: “By announcing first, we prevent the Soviets from putting their own sweet spin on the event” (DeLillo 2014:25). To his perception DeLillo assigns the symbolic vision

of the dawning era of the Cold War – Hoover’s attention is briefly focused on the potential unity and closeness of the people in the crowd united in the common everyday practices:

“All these people formed by language and climate and popular songs and breakfast foods and the jokes they tell and the cars they drive have never had anything in common so much as this, that they are sitting in the furrow of destruction.” (DeLillo 2014:25)

At the same time, Hoover is designed as a character who stands for the mechanisms set in motion to exploit the illusion of homogeneity predominantly contingent on capitalist practices, consumer society and media saturation. Hoover readily recognizes it as a potential for manipulation through Othering. This overlaps with his emotional response to a print of Bruegel’s painting titled the Triumph of Death from the pages of *Life* magazine tossed in the pile of papers the audience throws on the field. Amid the havoc and the commotion of the Thompson’s home run, Hoover is mesmerized by the image on the page – the skeletons marching in the army of the dead fell upon the living, the sinners, the weak. Edgar notes the representations of gluttony, lust and greed as the sins of humanity and the image fascinates him almost as a celebration. The irony of the scene is reflected at later points in the narrative when Hoover’s reaction to the image can be interpreted as a realization that the image also represents the source of the potential for manipulation that arises from the willingness of the masses to succumb to their vices, indulging themselves regardless of the consequences. The image becomes an invocation of the contemporary overwhelming power of death or the “secret of the bomb” (44), but through it the narrator announces the presence of this fear as a future memory materialized in the “secrets the bomb inspires” (44). At that moment, although he represents the underworld of manipulation and control operating in the underneath the varnished surface of the Western world, as “a man whose own sequestered heart holds every festering secret” (44), he is denied knowledge of the evolving plots that are to become. The character of Hoover, thus, reappears seemingly as an episode, at random, as a ‘snapshot’ of the Hoover from the baseball game, re-contextualized and repurposed, not only to remind us of the restrictions, manipulation and fear but also that he and the bomb operate as a coordinated sequence – he collects vices, the secrets of others, and the threat of the bomb has a tendency to create paralyzing fear of the consequences: “For every atmospheric blast, every glimpse we get of the bared force of nature, that weird peeled eyeball exploding over the desert—for every one of these he reckons a hundred plots go underground, to spawn and skein” (44). This sentence introduces

the ‘snapshot’ of the bomb explosion as a presence linked to the image of the character of J. Edgar gazing at the Bruegel painting. In a frenzy of archive fever, it re-emerges as a reference to multiple recorded *news* linking and contaminating stories of different characters who otherwise would not have crossed paths. In the chapter “Long Tall Sally”, Klara Sax, the artist painting the abandoned B52 planes which used to carry bombs, at the beginning of the 1990s invokes a memory of a photograph of herself next to “either Truman Capote or J. Edgar Hoover” (69) taken at “the famous event of the era, Truman Capote’s Black & White Ball at the Plaza Hotel in New York in the dark days of Vietnam” (69). In addition to initiating the networking of the of J. Edgar Hoover contaminating presence, this segment simultaneously announces his unmasking in the section dedicated to the Black-and-White Ball and speaks of the decommissioning of the bomb. At the beginning of the chapter “Cloud of Unknowing”, the bomb is already seen from the perspective of waste, while J. Edgar is a referent to the character Jesse Detwiler. Introduced as a theoretician of waste, Detwiler sees the waste as symbol of contemporary culture and argues against the practice of concealing the landfills and garbage recycling plants, prophesying that “the nuclear waste, this becomes a remote landscape of nostalgia. Bus tours and postcards” (247). In this conversation which takes place in the late 1970s, DeLillo introduces an older ‘snapshot’ of Detwiler as a “fringe figure in the sixties” (247). He became known for the manifestos based on the content of the stolen garbage of the famous people, and he got arrested for “snatching the garbage of J. Edgar Hoover” (247). Again, linking the bomb, the idea of waste and J. Edgar, this section will be referred to later in the novel focusing on the garbage theft from J. Edgar’s perspective. Finally, before re-emerging as a protagonist and one of the major figures attending the Black-and White ball, the ghost of J. Edgar hovers in the section of the chapter “Better things for better living” dedicated to Lenny Bruce and the missile crisis of 1962. Here the bomb is presented as an immediate threat of nuclear annihilation in a fictional stand-up performance of Lenny Bruce in San Francisco on October 24, 1962. Both the bomb and J. Edgar are interpreted in the context of beatnik (counter)culture. DeLillo describes it as a contrast to the consumerist America, and the crowd as sympathetic to Lenny’s troubles coming from the clash with the restrictive laws and oppressive government. The obscenity trials are a direct link between Lenny Bruce and J. Edgar which are not elaborated further in the novel, however, provide an important context for the interpretation of Lenny’s episode as a part of the “selected fragments public and private in the 1950s and 1960s” (DeLillo 2014:421) exposing Hoover’s actions against Lenny Bruce as vanity driven and obscene perversion of justice. On

the other hand, DeLillo explains that the bomb and J. Edgar Hoover in the context of the beatnik culture both belonged to the “America’s sickness” (463); they represented the cross-contamination, “moral squalor of America, the guilty place of smokestacks and robot corporations, Time-magazined and J. Edgar Hoovered” (463) which intensifies the tensions established in the Prologue: between the mass media distributed images of (national) unity in the face of the outer threat and deep divisions within the America’s social fabric, not only along the rifts of class and race, pushed into the underworlds of countercultures.

The episode revolving around the Truman Capote’s Black-and-White ball, one of the significant social events of the 1960s, exposes the character of J. Edgar as a symbol of oppression and restrictions of the Cold War America. It condensates the re-contextualizations of the figure of Hoover and elaborates on the mechanisms of manipulation and information control as a basic instrument of power successfully hidden in the underworld of its own. It reveals the manner of operation of which the historical figure of Hoover became symbolic – the dossier, as a collection of data compiled in files about people he personally perceived as “enemies” collected through every imaginable invasion of privacy including stealing someone’s garbage. “The second you placed an item in the file, a fuzzy photograph, an unfounded rumor, it became promiscuously true. It was a truth without authority and therefore incontestable” (474). The method of the dossier is presented as a construct similar to fiction writing and equally contingent as are historical records. In the process of taking revenge against individuals, they were objectified, the facts about their lives became “factoids” to be repurposed rearranged into fictitious histories which then became indictments against the real people (474). It invites our questioning of the values assigned to the labels used in the process of othering. As the “factoid” method is focused on “vice” as a major element of identity, it presumes guilt even before any action took place. In this context of perpetual struggle of the state against “secret groups of insurgents” (478), the character of J. Edgar explains that the imperative for the state was “stiffening its grip and preserving its claim to the most destructive power available” (478) which identified nuclear weapons with the state and empowered its mechanisms that held the threat of the apocalypse dangling above the heads of its (rebellious) citizens. In this context any possibility of resistance to the processes of homogenizing and othering could be read as an illusion, a simulation, since the force of the stifling fear emerging throughout the narrative in the character of Hoover, proved overwhelming. On the other hand, even the figure of Hoover may be seen as challenging for the central postmodernist idea regarding history as contingent. The

concept of history in the novel is further compromised not only through constructing volatile versions of the past but also by questioning the origin of the contingencies. The whole narrative of *Underworld* as a history of the second half of XX century could be seen as an attempt to pull strings from a tangle enveloping “the past” which in the process becomes “a history” – the question is whether the power lies in the hands of those pulling strings or in the hands of those creating the tangle. DeLillo seems to ask what if it was all created by deliberate and planned actions of power structures represented in Hoover? Following the strings, the reader then spins the yarn or tells the story: whether they start from personal histories or from media promoted fabricated facts and publicity campaigns (symbolically represented by the slogans and commercial adds for example) the stories inevitably reach the apparent gaps. Left with the missing pieces, either because of inaccessibility or loss, or because of the data being deliberately withheld, redacted, or restricted, in the end the reader must accept a compromise.

## CONCLUSION

In the structure of his elaborate and comprehensive novel DeLillo introduced an overwhelming number of events and characters deliberately blurring the boundary of facts and fiction. It emphasizes the view on history as a series of moments in time which were realized as a consequence of contingencies that are occasionally possible to reconstruct, but more often, they remain inaccessible because they never were recorded, or because they were accidentally or deliberately hidden from view. This principle is best illustrated in the destiny of the baseball as an unlikely protagonist. What is more, in the fragments of the past we do encounter, we are frequently confronted with the power play at work. It is most obvious in the construction and the appearances of the fictional J. Edgar Hoover, whose practices are directed towards the production of versions of history that fit the current purpose. In either fabricating or manipulating the records or altering the focus, the resulting stories about the past are either rendered inauthentic or multiple conflicting versions are allowed to exist simultaneously disqualifying one another. The version of history that *Underworld* invites the reader to construct depends on the process of meticulous tracing of the characters and motifs. It ultimately offers stories arising from the connections once these pieces of the puzzle are fitted together, but also brings to focus silences arising from the gaps and the missing pieces left behind in the structure.

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PODZEMLJE – ROMAN O FRAGMENTIMA VREMENA, DŽ. EDGARU HUVERU I  
LOPTICI ZA BEJZBOL

*Rezime*

Roman Podzemlje, Don Delilo smatra se jednim od velikih američkih romana koji se može tumačiti kao beleška o alternativnoj istoriji Amerike druge polovine XX veka. Međutim, ako posmatramo njegovu vremensku matricu, zaključujemo da svojom složenosti ona upućuje na postupke koji uslovljavaju čitaočev doživljaj prošlosti i istorije kao postupka kojim se odabir i interpretacija događaja kvalifikuju kao svedočanstvo o prošlosti. U radu se razmatraju skorašnja kritička razmatranja američke proze kasnih 1990ih koja sučeljavaju suprotstavljena dominantna gledišta o odnosu istorije i pripovedanja – ono Linde Hačion (Hutcheon) o historiografskoj metafikciji kao kritičkom komentaru i autorskoj interpretaciji koja u prvi plan postavlja pitanja o izboru istorijskih izvora i neimenovanom i nevidljivoj autoru koji stoji iza njih, i ono Fredrika Džejmsona (Jameson) koje govori o nemogućnosti da pristupimo autentičnim izvorima, te da „istorijski roman više ne može nastojati da predstavlja istorijsku prošlost; može samo 'predstavljati' naše ideje i stereotipe o toj prošlosti“ (Jameson, 2005: 25) te da ta predstava posledično prerasta u pop-istoriju. Kroz oba pristupa se posmatra postupak strukturisanja vremena u pripovedanju kojim dominira niz sadašnjih trenutaka postavljenih u matricu u kojoj oni funkcionišu kao „budući fragmenti prošlosti“. U toj složenoj matrici, ovi se događaji zabeleženi sa idejom arhivske groznice, rekontekstualizuju i daje im se nova svrha čime se stvara mreža slučajnih kontakata likova, istorijskih ličnosti i događaja. Prateći kako u toj strukturi funkcionišu dva ključna motiva, fiktivni Dž. Edgar Huver i neočekivani protagonist romana, jedna loptica za bejzbol, rad se bavi romanom kao Delilovim komentarom na problem predstavljanja prošlosti. Sudbina loptice u prvi plan stavlja problem (ne)dostupnosti podataka, dok naizgled nasumična pojavljivanja Dž. Edgara Huvera postaju svedočanstva o postupcima manipulacije podacima, kako u književnosti, tako i u sistemima medija masovne komunikacije ili istorijskim spisima.

Ključne reči: Podzemlje (roman), Don Delilo, postmoderni roman, književnost i istorija, struktura vremena

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