
The Art of Everyday Haunting

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Abstract

The question of where ghosts live can hardly be addressed without speaking of a haunted house. This essay reads Don DeLillo's novel *The Body Artist*, in which there is a ghost called Mr. Tuttle who haunts the house of Lauren Hartke, the body artist, as a text grafted onto Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination*. The essay takes as its starting point the first words spoken in DeLillo's text, 'I want to say something but what', a quasi-question directed to Lauren by her husband Rey, in order to ask if it can ever be said what lies on the other side of 'what', or if it remains forever unknowable, or unheard, at an 'infinite remove', even if it is one's self.

It is Rey's suicide, and Lauren's subsequent work of mourning, which locates DeLillo's phrase within the context of Derrida's efforts, again and again, to give words to those whose voices are absent: the lost friend, the other self, the dead. To Lauren's question, 'What am I supposed to say?' Derrida replies, 'Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence'. Through the ghostly form of Mr. Tuttle, DeLillo's work tells of the various mimetisms by which the silent speaker is heard and remembered.

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I want to say something but what. Something about Don DeLillo's short novel *The Body Artist* (2002), which opens on a beautiful morning,

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‘a strong bright day after a storm’ (DeLillo 2002, 7), as Lauren Hartke, the body artist, and her husband Rey Robles, the film director, are having breakfast together in the kitchen. They read the newspaper over coffee, they make toast, they move about the kitchen washing berries, getting the cereal or the orange juice, talking at times, or half-listening to the radio that plays in the background. They are all muddled and forgetful, and they shamble ‘past each other to get things... still a little puddled in dream melt’ (Ibid, 7). ‘I want to say something but what’ (Ibid, 8), the first words spoken in the novel, are Rey’s, and they echo throughout DeLillo’s text, prompting questions about the source and end of the words we speak, about the connection between two individuals, about mourning, and, because these are words of forgetting, remembering, and repeating, about how any one of us can be truly present to herself or himself.

‘I want to say something but what’ (DeLillo 2002, 8) prompts all of these questions without appearing to be a question itself, since there is no question mark at the end of Rey’s words. It’s as if they’re improperly addressed, or as if he never even meant to say them aloud; what he wants to say is right there on the tip of his tongue, and what has slipped out is more than likely accidental. Yet, this note to self, about which, perhaps, he didn’t mean to breathe a word, sheds some light on Rey’s inner world; he seems not to know himself completely at that moment. Jacques Derrida writes, in *Mémoires: for Paul de Man*, that ‘we are never ourselves, and between us, identical to us, a “self” is never in itself or identical to itself’ (Derrida 1989, 28). Rey’s phrase speaks to this self which is not itself, and is just one of numerous instances in DeLillo’s endearing account of the breakfast scene where this self figuratively shambles past itself. Of Lauren he writes, she had ‘noticed and forgotten’ (DeLillo 2002, 8); she ‘realized she had no spoon’ (Ibid, 13); she ‘got up to get something. She looked at the kettle and realized that wasn’t it’ (Ibid, 16); she ‘took a bite of cereal and forgot to taste it’ (Ibid, 19); she ‘read and drifted. She was here and there. The tea had no honey in it. She’d left the honey jar unopened’ (Ibid, 23); and ‘she realized there was something she wanted to tell him’ (Ibid, 24). Of Rey he writes, he ‘never remembered the juice until the toast was done’ (Ibid, 10) and ‘he turned on the radio and remembered he’d just turned it off and he turned it off again’ (Ibid, 15). The self tunes out, and sometimes, reconnects.

What Rey wants to say will come back to him, surely, but it’s not clear that he can rely on what Plato might call his own ‘internal resources’ (Plato 1973, 96) to remember. The words expressed, though aired outside the body so to speak, could be interpreted as Rey talking

to himself in words silent for being unheard and, for all intents and purposes, internalised. Except, it is the element of externalisation itself which seems key to the possibility of remembering; the words are uttered as if the distance from mouth to ear might bring with it an answer to this non-question. The distance from mouth to ear, then, is like the distance between that self which knows that it wants to say something and that self which would know what that something is.¹ Ideally, that would be no distance at all, but the words the self seeks, like these words that Rey speaks as if to himself, will always stray. The transit of these words from mouth to ear will circle out, will take in Lauren too, and perhaps this is what Rey intended all along when he spoke aloud and, yes, to her of ‘something I meant to tell you’ (DeLillo 2002, 8). His words, like writing, will prove ‘not a remedy for memory, but for reminding’ (Plato qtd. in Derrida 2004, 105) because Lauren, as the other half of the couple, might well be able to tell him what it is that he wants to say. Perhaps she has heard it all before, and that is how she will remind him now of his forgotten words, ‘echoing Rey, identifyingly’ (DeLillo 2002, 9), and he will nod in affirmation and repeat them, with certainty. Or perhaps he will affirm only his sense of distance from his own, forgotten words. He may wish her speak for him, speak in his place, with her voice but his words, saying this something that he cannot, for whatever reason. The question then is whether she can ever say what it is, or if that which seems to lie on the other side of ‘what’ will remain forever unspoken, or unheard, at an ‘infinite remove’ (Derrida 1989, 6).

In this way, the sense of being discontinuous with ourselves chimes with a discontinuous relation to the other which DeLillo also marks with the word ‘what’ (DeLillo 2002, 8). Rey, having told Lauren there is ‘Something I meant to tell you’ (Ibid, 8), later declares, ‘I know what it is’, to which she responds with ‘What?’ meaning, writes DeLillo, ‘what did you say, not what did you want to tell me’ (Ibid, 9). She is asking him to repeat, not to enlighten. What is it that Lauren and Rey talk about, as DeLillo presents, in the space of just nineteen pages, the following exchanges?:

‘Yes exactly. I know what it is,’ he said.... She said, ‘What?’... realizing what it was he’d said that she hadn’t heard. (9)

He said, ‘Do you want some of this?’... She said, ‘What? Never drink the stuff.’ (10–11)

‘I always think this isn’t supposed to happen here. I think anywhere but here.’ He said, ‘What?’ (11)

‘I’ve seen you drink gallons of juice, tremendous, how can I tell you?’ he said.... ‘What? I don’t think so,’ she said. (12)

'Cut yourself again.' 'What? ... Just a nick.' (13)

'Do you have to listen to the radio?' 'No,' she said and read the paper. 'What?' (14)

'Not the young woman who eats and sleeps and lives forever.' 'What? Hey, Rey. Shut up.' (15)

He said, 'What?' 'I didn't say anything.' (16)

'Weren't you going to tell me something?' He said, 'What?' (16)

'Just tell me okay. Because I know anyway.' He said, 'What? You insist you will drag this thing out of me.' (18)

'All day yesterday I thought it was Friday.' He said, 'What?' (20)

'Have you seen my keys?' She said, 'What?' He waited for the question to register. 'Which keys?' she said. (25)

(DeLillo 2002)

In all but one of these instances, when Rey asks what it is that isn't supposed to happen, the 'what' means 'what did you say'. And yet, repeatedly, a response follows the apparently unheard comment. Each time there seems to be a break in the communication, a message not received, but then the one responds to the other, responding not to the original utterance but instead to a delayed form of it, even its repetition. Lauren says 'What?' and then, 'She reached in for the milk, realizing what it was he'd said that she hadn't heard about eight seconds ago' (DeLillo 2002, 9). These spoken words, therefore, are rarely heard in the present, and the word 'what' marks a break in the here and now, a shift in the presence of the self and the other. The response is to an utterance remembered, not heard, and therefore to something that has its source within the self, and also to the other that lies without (but we've already seen how the words 'I want to say something but what' [Ibid, 8] disturb any sense of within and without). The question of self, therefore, is articulated around this 'what' which places the other at an impossible distance and yet also finds his or her tongue in my mouth: Rey 'handed her what remained of his toast and she chewed it mingled with cereal and berries. Suddenly she knew what he'd meant to tell her' (Ibid, 17). Rey says, 'I want to say something but what' (Ibid, 8) but it is Lauren who gives voice to what he has yet to say, repeating his as-yet unheard words, planting his words in her mouth, saying 'The noise' (Ibid, 18). 'The noises in the walls. Yes', says Rey, 'You've read my mind' (Ibid, 18). She had read his mind, as if these words were 'unspokenly, hers' (just before Rey says, 'I want to say something but what', DeLillo writes, 'They shared the newspaper but it was actually, unspokenly, hers' [Ibid, 8]).

The distance, from self and other, conveyed in the words ‘I want to say something but what’ (DeLillo 2002, 8) is at the heart of *The Body Artist* because, sadly, even on the first page of DeLillo’s novel, the new day is already identified also as ‘this final morning’ (Ibid, 7), the last morning Lauren and Rey will spend together. When it’s over, Rey will say that he is going for a drive into town and Lauren will think of a list of shopping to buy later on, some Ajax scouring powder, toilet cleanser, and a newspaper, but instead of just going for a drive Rey will drive to the New York apartment of his first wife and commit suicide, the cause of death ‘a self-inflicted gunshot’ (Ibid, 27). Lauren’s husband is lost to her. Now, suddenly, the distance between the self and other seems absolute, but perhaps there was, with every ‘what’, a sense of the other as absent, and a ‘sense that death is already here, already with us at the breakfast table’ (Boxall 2006, 218).

Again, the first words spoken in the novel ring out, ‘I want to say something but what’ (DeLillo 2002, 8), and seem to find what (a response, an echo, a reflection?) in a deferred anadiplosis in the second chapter, as Lauren asks, ‘What am I supposed to say?’ (Ibid, 39) ‘I want to say something but what’, ‘what am I supposed to say?’ (Ibid 8, 39) Lauren, as a mourner, must want to say something of, to, for the one who is now so absent, but what can be said? Derrida writes after Paul de Man’s death that, ‘Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence’ (Derrida 1989, xvi), as if the answer to the second part of the question is the same as the answer to the first, is ‘noise’ (DeLillo 2002, 18), the word that Lauren impossibly speaks when she gives voice to what Rey cannot say. The initial phrase, which gestures to its discontinuous other even as it prompts an answer to that question that hasn’t yet been asked, leads to Lauren both answering and questioning, both remembering and forgetting, a self never identical to itself. If we were to say, therefore, that DeLillo’s novel is about the relation of self to self and other, presence and absence, here and now and there and then, forgetting, remembering, repeating, and mourning, then the words ‘I want to say something but what’ (Ibid, 8) do not simply identify these things, but see them somehow enacted.

Moreover, the way in which the words ‘I want to say something but what’ (Ibid, 8) are further reflected in the chapter within which they appear gestures to how limiting it would be to say that the novel is simply about things like the relation of self and other. The novel, too, stages something of this relationship. That beautiful first chapter, for example, has something profound to say about everyday living, so full is it of ‘things outlined precisely’ (Ibid, 7) in the clear light of day. Opening

on that 'strong bright day after a storm' (Ibid, 7), the chapter, as if folding back upon itself, or half-pirouetting, also closes 'on a strong bright day after a storm' (Ibid, 25). 'Time seems to pass' (Ibid, 7), but perhaps it does not, and it is as if the book proper has not yet started; to paraphrase Derrida's opening line from 'Outwork, prefacing', this (therefore) will not have been a chapter and, instead, it is as if the novel, like Rey, wants to say something but what. In this light, Rey's words more clearly become a prefatory phrase, a supplementary extension to the words to come. As Derrida goes on to detail, the declared logic of the preface, which is 'preceding what ought to be able to present itself on its own', is that 'this residue of writing remains anterior and exterior to the development of the content it announces' (Derrida 2004, 8). It is as if the reader is stood in a doorway, or perhaps in a vestibule, between the entrance and the interior of a house, because the book also is, to use Rey's words, 'About the house. This is what it is' (DeLillo 2002, 8). At the same time, however, the reader already has one foot inside the door because the anadiplosis of 'I want to say something but what', 'what am I supposed to say?' vaults any threshold (Ibid 8, 39). As Derrida insists, despite its apparent logic, and like Rey's phrase, the preface 'belongs both to the inside and to the outside' (Derrida 2004, 10).

Looking further at the structure of the novel, an obituary for Rey appears after the first chapter, while in the second chapter, following the funeral, Lauren returns to the house, where she will prepare for her next performance. Between the sixth and seventh (and last) chapter, mirroring the placement of the obituary, an interview with Lauren by her friend Mariella Chapman creates another wrinkle in the fabric of the novel. Mariella's account describes how, in her performance, Lauren imitates, or is 'in the process of becoming' (DeLillo 2002, 105), a Japanese woman, a female executive, and a naked man. Following the interview, the final chapter finds Lauren in the house again but, like the first chapter, it's as if it is annexed to the house of the text or, like an outhouse, set at a distance, as an outwork, the afterword to the first chapter's preface. The final line describes how Lauren 'wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was' (Ibid, 124). In its reference to time this final line doubles back on the novel's first line, 'Time seems to pass' (Ibid, 7), even as the first chapter doubles back on itself with the words 'on a strong bright day after a storm' (Ibid 7, 25), and 'What am I supposed to say?' doubles back on 'I want to say something but what' (Ibid 39, 8) ('anadiplosis', from the Greek, means 'doubling back' or 'folding'). It is as if, with this prefatory phrase 'I want to say something but what' (Ibid 8), the first

chapter has annexed or taken possession of all that the novel must want to say, and what follows from it is repetition, because everything has already been alluded to, unspokenly.

If we take a step back from this, however, we could argue that there is something that comes before the quasi question 'I want to say something but what' (Ibid, 8) and that is the 'question of the title' *The Body Artist* (Derrida 2004, 192). The title, which identifies both the novel and its protagonist, naturally appears before the first chapter, and we could ask, therefore, where Lauren, as the body artist, stands in relation to Rey's words. If Derrida's essay 'Outwork, prefacing' is useful in understanding Rey's prefatory phrase, another of his essays from *Dissemination*, 'The Double Session', is useful in understanding Lauren as the body artist, especially if her performance art can be interpreted as mime. Derrida's text is primarily a reading of Stéphane Mallarmé's short piece *Mimique*, itself a response to Paul Margueritte's mime *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife*, though Barbara Johnson notes that Mallarmé's piece is not so much about the mime artist as it is an imitation of 'the very scheme of mimesis itself' (Johnson 2004, xxviii). Derrida's 'The Double Session', therefore, would provide a context within which to consider not only the figure of the body artist as mime, but the relation of DeLillo's text to the scheme of mimesis also. Such a consideration might find that DeLillo's text in some ways even mimics Derrida's, or Derrida's reading of Mallarmé, or Mallarmé's.

(The editor's note to Derrida's essay, for example, remarks that, on the occasion of its delivery, 'the room was lighted by a sumptuous, old-fashioned lustre' [qtd. in Derrida 2004, 186], even as Derrida describes Mallarmé's work as lit by the 'innumerable lustres that hang over the stage of his texts' [Derrida 2004, 194], the light glittering off the many crystal facets like the face of the sun broken, perhaps, on the surface of the water, like 'streaks of running luster on the bay' the day after a storm, as DeLillo writes in the opening paragraph of *The Body Artist* [DeLillo 2002, 7].)

When Derrida presented 'The Double Session', he did so as something of a mime artist himself. While reading from his text he would gesture to a blackboard, on which was written in white chalk a series of quotations. As he explains, these were to be 'pointed to in silence' (Derrida 2004, 192), so that, throughout his reading, Derrida mimes allusion to these quotations which, white on black, are the negative image of the black on white text he reads, like their white shadow.² It is a question, as he says, of 'writing in white' (Ibid, 192). Mallarmé's *Mimique* opens also in 'silence' (qtd. in Derrida 2004, 189) before the

appearance of Margueritte, the Mime whose Pierrot will be described by Fernand Beissier as ‘white, long, emaciated . . . with his cadaverous face’ (qtd. in Derrida 2004, 210). Lauren, DeLillo’s Mime, will in turn be described as ‘wasted . . . rawboned and slightly bug-eyed’ (DeLillo 2002, 103). Mallarmé writes that the Mime is ‘white as a yet unwritten page’ (qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), and when DeLillo writes of the body artist it is also often in terms of whiteness, or the uninscribed surface: ‘She is not pale-skinned so much as colorless, . . . ash white now, . . . albino’ (DeLillo 2002, 103–04); ‘This was her work, . . . to become a blankness, a body slate’ (Ibid, 84).

This blank page of the Mime, which means that no words, spoken or written, have been prescribed to him, so that he follows no script or order, leads Derrida to argue that there ‘is no imitation. The Mime imitates nothing’ (Derrida 2004, 208). This is not to say there is no mimicry, because ‘*There is mimicry*’ (Ibid, 216), but there is no imitation because there is nothing to be imitated, there are no words to illustrate. The Mime writes as he mimes, by and on his own body, so that the text is ‘composed and set down by himself’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), the Mime writing ‘himself on the white page he is; . . . At once page and quill’ (Derrida 2004, 209). Margueritte, in his white greasepaint, mimes the killing by Pierrot of his wife by tickling her to death on their marital bed. Like Lauren’s body, which ‘encompasses both sexes and a number of nameless states’ (DeLillo 2002, 109), the white body of the Mime plays all the parts, male and female, murderer and victim, his white figure writhing and writing on the white sheets of the bed, ‘white on white’ (Derrida 2004, 208), imitating nothing.

The Mime imitates nothing, but he also presents nothing. When Pierrot mimes the killing of his wife, the crime has already taken place. His wife is already dead, he has consulted with the undertaker and now, ‘*under the false appearance of a present*’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), he relates how he planned and committed the killing. The crime, therefore, is never in the present, ‘has never occupied the stage’ (Derrida 2004, 212), and what is mimed is the remembered rehearsal of a future crime and the remembered committing of a past crime. The mime, therefore, is in the present, but, ‘here anticipating, there recalling’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), it is not of the present. Never fully here and now, the mime is a reminder of Rey and Lauren in that opening chapter: ‘A voice reported the weather but she missed it. She didn’t know it was the weather until it was gone’ (DeLillo 2002, 24).

The body artist’s mime is never present either. In the text of *The Body Artist*, the mime is present only as a mime of the future and as a mime

of the past. Lauren's preparations include 'slow-motion repetitions of everyday gestures, checking the time on your wrist or turning to hail a cab' (Ibid, 58). These mimed gestures are a rehearsal for those future performances which, when past, will be described by Mariella: 'Here is a woman in executive attire, carrying a briefcase, who checks the time on her wristwatch and tries to hail a taxi... She does this many times, countless times. Then she does it again, half-pirouetting in very slow motion' (Ibid, 106). The mime, therefore, is never present in the text. But, it could be argued, Pierrot mimes what he remembers, whereas the mime that Mariella recounts is not about remembering, whether a crime, or any past. It may not be present in the text, but that does not mean it was not of the present. Except, the actions performed, checking the time and hailing a taxi, are described exactly as 'actions quoted by rote' (Ibid, 58), quoted by memory, 'the mechanical "by-heart"' (Derrida 2004, 111). These are reproduced, remembered actions, like Pierrot's remembered, reproduced crime.

Both mimes, Margueritte's and Lauren's, can be read in the context of Derrida's discussion, in 'The Double Session', of an account of truth and *mimēsis* in which 'the process of truth is *on the one hand* the unveiling of what lies concealed in oblivion... *on the other hand*... truth is agreement (*homoiōsis* or *adaequatio*), a relation of resemblance or equality between a re-presentation and a thing' (Derrida 2004, 205–6). Historically, mimesis has been understood within this process. On the one hand, therefore, mimesis 'signifies the presentation of the thing itself... in the presence of its image, its visible aspect, its face' (Ibid, 206); as seen, however, the Mimes do not present the thing itself, but the thing already doubled, as anticipated or recalled and not 'being-present' (Ibid, 204). The impossibility of the mime's self-presence is gestured to when Derrida quotes from 'The Double Session' in 'Outwork, prefacing', the opening essay in *Dissemination*: there, as if on the threshold of the text, the reader finds 'Now – this question also announced itself, explicitly, as the question of the *liminal*' (Ibid, 13) ['Or – cette question s'était aussi annoncée, explicitement, comme question du *liminaire*' (Derrida 1972, 22)], so that when, further on in the volume, the reader encounters 'But this question has also, explicitly, presented itself as the question of the *liminary*' (Derrida 2004, 245) ['Or cette question s'était aussi annoncée, explicitement, comme question du *liminaire*' (Derrida 1972, 267)] it is as if the reader is returned again to before the threshold, to the '(pre)liminary question' (Derrida 2004, 245) ['question liminaire' (Derrida 1972, 267)], or the question of the prefatory.³ Similarly, when Derrida quotes from Mallarmé in 'The Double Session', saying 'he

mimes—“in the present”—“*under the false appearance of a present*”’ (Derrida 2004, 211), he returns to a silent allusion in ‘Outwork, prefacing’ describing the preface, wherein it is as if ‘the text exists as something written—a past—which... a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader as his future’ and all ‘under the false appearance of a present’ (Ibid, 6). There is no present face, but the pre-face, ‘the preface is everywhere’ (Ibid, 42).

On the other hand, mimesis ‘sets up a relation... between two terms’ so that the ‘two faces are separated and set face to face: the imitator and the imitated, the latter being none other than the thing or the meaning of the thing itself, its manifest presence’ (Derrida 2004, 206). Of course, the unwritten drama of Margueritte’s mime, ‘composed and set down by himself’, is imitating nothing, except that it does have a source text, a booklet, *Pierrot Murderer of his Wife*, in response to which also Mallarmé writes *Mimique* (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190). It is here in the face to be imitated however, as Derrida notes, that Mallarmé would have read ‘a prescription that *effaces itself through its very existence*’ (Derrida 2004, 209), an order to the Mime to ignore all orders, to imitate nothing, no act or word. Moreover, Margueritte’s booklet, which was printed in 1882, included a Preface by Beissier which was replaced in the second edition, appearing four years later, by an author’s Note. This is the edition which Mallarmé reads, though it is possible he saw also the first edition, and perhaps even the performance itself. It becomes difficult, therefore, to say what the ‘supposed “referent”’ of *Mimique* is, what it is responding to, or when that thing occurred (Ibid, 211).⁴ DeLillo reflects this in *The Body Artist* when, like Beissier who met with Margueritte the day after the performance, Mariella too meets the Mime at a later stage and, like Mallarmé, she writes in turn her response to an unlocatable event, having seen ‘two of the three performances’ given by Lauren (DeLillo 2002, 105).

If Mallarmé’s text is hardly face to face with Margueritte’s, the same is true for the mime. The booklet’s prescription was written a year after the 1881 performance so that the late directions provided by the booklet for this past performance are to act as if these not-yet-written words will never have been written. This also means that the booklet relates to the mime as a preface to its text, because prefaces, written ‘after the fact’ ‘in view of their own self-effacement’ (Derrida 2004, 6; 7), direct the text to act as if the not-yet-written words of the preface will never have been written, as if the text were self-contained when written thus in white on white in the silence of a self-effacement. Mallarmé’s mimesis, therefore,

means we are ‘faced then with mimicry imitating nothing; faced, so to speak, with a double that doubles no simple, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference’ (Ibid, 217). There is ‘the copy of the copy. With the exception that there is no longer any model, and hence, no copy’ (Ibid, 217).

DeLillo’s body artist, and *The Body Artist*, everywhere prefaced by the self-effacing ‘I want to say something but what’ (DeLillo 2002, 8) imitates, therefore, the scheme of mimesis itself, the way in which the imitator ‘writes upon a white page on the basis of a text he is reading in which it is written that one must write upon a white page’ (Derrida 2004, 210). ‘What’ in the text marks, on the one hand, not being present and, on the other hand, the repetition of no original, as when Lauren says ‘“What?” . . . realizing what it was he’d said that she hadn’t heard’ (DeLillo 2002, 9). For example, there is a complex moment in Chapter 5 of the text, one comparable to Derrida’s repeated citations in his *Dissemination* essays, when part of Lauren’s conversation with Rey on that last day is replayed for her: ‘“But where are you going?” He said, “Just a little while into town.” . . .’ (Ibid, 86). As with Derrida’s reference to ‘*the false appearance of a present*’ (Derrida 2004, 211), the later repetition makes explicit an earlier allusion occurring in the opening chapter; then, Lauren is seen to note ‘the Ajax she needs to buy’ (DeLillo 2002, 25), but now it becomes apparent that she had remarked on this allusion to the hero of Greek mythology: ‘Ajax, son of Telamon, I think, if my Trojan War is still intact, and maybe we need a newspaper because the old one’s pretty stale, and great brave warrior, and spear-thrower of mighty distances, and toilet cleanser too’ (Ibid, 87). What Lauren does not say, however, is that Ajax also committed suicide. This allusion, therefore, anticipates Rey’s future suicide, while the later replaying of these words, like Pierrot’s mimed preparations for murder, repeats the past rehearsal of a future death even as it recalls Rey’s suicide, under the false appearance of a present. Lauren thinks this is not just ‘remembering. It is happening now’ (Ibid, 87), but what is happening now is not of the now. Rey’s death, like Pierrot’s crime, is never present to the text but alluded to as something there, and in the future, and in the past. The repeated allusion is to no simple reference, and the allusion itself is not simple, because at what point does the reference to Ajax become an allusion to Rey’s death? Is it at the point it appears, in the opening chapter, before he dies? Or is it perhaps at the point of ‘what’, as when she said, ‘“Scouring powder.” He said, “What?”’ (Ibid, 86).

The mime, therefore, ‘imitating (expressing, describing, representing, illustrating)’, alludes, ‘but alludes to nothing’ (Derrida 2004, 207; 217). This is why Mallarmé can speak of the ‘ever original reappearance of Pierrot or of the poignant and elegant mime’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 189). ‘Original reappearance’ (Ibid, 189), Mallarmé writes, which reappears in Derrida’s words as ‘repetition *and* first time’ which ‘is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost’ (Derrida 1994, 10). Yes, we have been waiting a long time, it seems, for the ghost to appear, here, in a paper on ‘The Art of Everyday Haunting’. But, as Derrida writes, the ghost, ‘the specter is always a *revenant* . . . it *begins by coming back*’ (Ibid, 11), like the Mime who, from the beginning, was described as ‘the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), and like *Mimique*, which is ‘also haunted by the ghost . . . of another text’ (Ibid, 214), and like Pierrots, who ‘are all, including Margueritte’s, at once living and dead, living more dead than alive, *between* life and death’ (Ibid, 293), and wander about ‘like a phantom’ (Ibid, 215). The ghost has been here all along, in this text of ‘mimes and phantoms’ (Ibid, 217), just as, in another text of mimes and phantoms, DeLillo’s *The Body Artist*, when Lauren sees the ghost for the first time she says, ‘You have been here’ (DeLillo 2002, 43). As DeLillo writes, ‘in the first seconds she thought he was inevitable. She felt her way back in time to the earlier indications that there was someone in the house and she arrived at this instant, unerringly’ (Ibid, 41). She is perhaps thinking of the noise in the house, the ‘noises in the walls’ (Ibid, 18) as Rey described it, so that when Rey says ‘I want to say something but what’ (Ibid, 8), it is a question of ghosts.

Plato had called ‘written discourse only a kind of ghost’ (Plato qtd. in Derrida 2004, 148), not living, or true, or present, or real, but instead ‘weakened speech, something not completely dead: a living-dead, a reprieved corpse, a deferred life, a semblance of breath’ (Derrida 2004, 144), but DeLillo’s text shows that the ghost is not outside of speech, or life, or the self; rather, it has been here all along. This ghost is a small, boyish figure of a man, and Lauren will call him Mr. Tuttle. She finds him ‘sat on the edge of the bed’ (DeLillo 2002, 41), exactly where one might find Margueritte’s Pierrot also, that white figure writ(h)ing on the white sheets of the bed. It is a scene that Mallarmé might be describing when he concludes *Mimique* with the line that ‘between the sheets and the eye there reigns a silence still, the condition and delight of reading’ (Mallarmé qtd. in Derrida 2004, 190), and the stage is ‘the space of writing’ (Derrida 2004, 218). The ghostly figure is between the eye that reads (in French, *lit*) and the bed (in French, *lit*), whose sheets double

now as sheets of paper, their surfaces warped by his slight appearance. He has been here all along, but barely here, for where is the 'here' of the 'between'? The ghost is 'in the walls' (DeLillo 2002, 18), between an inside an outside, here and there, now and then, and giving rise to the very structures within which we understand an inside and outside, truth and appearance, presence and absence, life and death. He takes place in-between, like the never-present 'what' of 'I want to say something but what', 'what am I supposed to say?' (Ibid 8, 39) which enfolds Rey and Lauren, and is the medium through which they communicate even as they find they cannot speak to each other. He is between Rey and Lauren, brought into the fold from his very first word: Mr. Tuttle 'said something. She said, "What?"' (Ibid, 43)⁵

The doubling over between 'I want to say something but what' and 'What am I supposed to say?' (DeLillo 2002, 8; 39) relates to the way in which Mr. Tuttle's speech often displays echolalia, as Mark Osteen points out (Osteen 2005, 70); he responds to Lauren's 'Talk to me' with 'Talk to me' and 'Say some words' with 'Say some words' (DeLillo 2002, 46), but later their positions reverse and Lauren now responds to Mr. Tuttle's 'Say some words' with 'Say some words' and 'In when it comes' with 'In when it comes. What?' (Ibid, 81) As well as this repetition, there is a more pronounced form of imitation, first when Mr. Tuttle replays Lauren's part in an old conversation, and later when he speaks in Rey's voice so surely that Lauren feels 'this was not some communication with the dead. It was Rey alive' (Ibid, 61). He'd 'heard her voice on the tape recorder' (Ibid, 56) she tries to convince herself, so that his repetitions are something to do with a reminding rather than a remembering. She is trying to identify the source of her own words, thinking they have strayed from her, and they have, for the hand gesture that Mr. Tuttle makes as he speaks her words, she realises, is 'unmistakably Rey's, two fingers joined and wagging' (Ibid, 51), so that these are her words as heard by Rey, and not exactly as spoken by her. Later DeLillo writes that 'she realized [Mr. Tuttle] was talking to her. But it was Rey's voice she was hearing' (Ibid, 60), suggesting again no simple source but rather one divided between mouth and ear.

Lauren, similarly, must learn to speak impossibly in response to Rey's death. DeLillo's text, then, incorporates Lauren's work of mourning, a work of 'memory and interiorization' (Derrida 1989, 34), as Mr. Tuttle instructs her in the repetitions, the 'mimetic interiorization', which let a dead man speak or, as Derrida writes, 'let him speak within oneself, to make him present and faithfully to represent him' (Derrida 2003, 38), without ever 'believing that the other living *in us* is living *in himself*'

(Derrida 1989, 21). This is why, when Mr. Tuttle is gone, ‘at first’, DeLillo writes, ‘the voice she used on the telephone was nobody’s, a generic neutered human, but then she started using his’ (DeLillo 2002, 101). This is the voice of the art of mourning. Because she cannot speak as Rey, because imitation presents nothing, she speaks instead as the ghost of Rey, the ghost of the other. And perhaps this follows Derrida, who writes, ‘Ghosts: the concept of the other in the same . . . the completely other, dead, living in me’ (Derrida 2003, 41–42).

What Lauren remembers is, in the end, between: she imagines him ‘sat on the edge of the bed in his underwear, lighting the last cigarette of the day’ (DeLillo 2002, 122), but is this Mr. Tuttle on the bed, or Rey lighting his cigarette? In the last few pages, DeLillo describes Lauren at the uncrossable threshold, ‘stopped at the edge of a doorway’, ‘stopped at room’s edge, facing back into the hall’, and looking back also at her final morning with Rey, wanting to re-play it. Despite Mariella’s assertion that Lauren’s body writing ‘is about who we are when we are not rehearsing who we are’ (Ibid, 110), when are we not rehearsing who we are? I am a perpetual allusion to myself, alluding to nothing, never breaking the glass. She ‘went to the window. She opened it. She threw the window open. She didn’t know why she did this. Then she knew. She wanted to feel the sea tang on her face and the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was’ (Ibid, 124); she asks again, ‘What am I supposed to say?’ (Ibid, 39).

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Notes

1. See Chiara Alfano's account, in this issue, of listening to the voice, where she observes that, for Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, 'voice never just sounds—it re-sounds' (2012, 221).
2. DeLillo's novel begins also with a silent allusion as the words 'Time seems to pass' (2002, 7) recall the title of the middle part of Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse*, 'Time Passes' (my thanks to Graham Allen for reminding me of this). Woolf, like DeLillo, saw her novel as an architectural structure, as 'two blocks joined by a corridor' (qtd. in Lee 1992, xiv). Hermione Lee describes the novel as 'a ghost story' and argues that 'this fiction is itself a "haunted house"' (1992, xxxiv).
3. Barbara Johnson's translation underscores this sense of a return (my thanks to Chiara Alfano for drawing attention to the variant translations of this line).
4. *Mimique* is itself the final of three versions of Mallarmé's text, which appeared in 1886, 1891, and 1897.
5. And the ghost says, 'So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear', to which Hamlet responds, 'What?' (Shakespeare 2006, 1.5.7–8)