

“Welcome to the Desert of the Real” : The Politics of Terror in Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*

Fatima Zahra Bessedik

Lecturer, Department of English / Faculty of Foreign Languages
University of Oran 2, Oran, Algeria
Email: bessedik.fatima@univ-oran2.dz

Abstract: This essay proposes a discussion on Don DeLillo’s short novel *Point Omega* (2010) with a particular focus on its desert setting as a narrative that projects a discourse of the War on Terror. Theoretically, the essay uses Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian notion of “the Real,” as opposed to reality, as an idea that articulates the Western desire for an encounter with the Other. The paper invites postcolonial criticism to maintain that DeLillo’s description of desert terror in *Point Omega* opens a space for otherness discourse. My argument is twofold. First, I sustain DeLillo’s representation of two sorts of terror: domestic terror, located in New York and which manifests in films and movies, and “unusual terror” located in desert culture. Second, I maintain that DeLillo’s desert is built on the ontological view of terror characterized by the excesses of the Lacanian Real and that leads to an imperialist discourse in the novel.

Key Words: Terror; Desert; The Real; War on Terror; Don DeLillo; Slavoj Žižek; and Jacques Lacan.

1. INTRODUCTION:

DeLillo’s writings are known for their treatment of “terror” in both domestic as well as international territories. Known as the “laureate of terror,” DeLillo addresses different categories of terror exposed through many issues like media, high technology, capitalist economics, and religious fundamentalism (Amis, 2011). Many of his narratives, like *End Zone* (1972), *The Names* (1982), *White Noise* (1985), *Underworld* (1997), “Bader-Meinhof” (2002), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2006), and in his latest novel *Zero K* (2016), project how postmodern American culture encounters terror in the increasingly postmodern and post-industrial universe. Interestingly, in his 2010 short novel *Point Omega*, DeLillo explores the radical notion of terror in both its physical and metaphysical meanings. In *Point Omega*, which takes its title from the existential and phenomenological theory of the French paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin¹, DeLillo telescopes man’s experience of terror with an incredible slowness. He meditates terror in a total concentration in order “to see what’s here, finally to look and to know you’re looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of motion” (6-7). DeLillo’s representation of terror is relevant for a study while trying to comprehend how the American identity conceptualizes “terror” in the context of late-capitalism and the post-9/11 politics of the War on Iraq. While many critics consider the novel’s meditation on major apparent themes like temporality, media, and what DeLillo calls “the end of human consciousness,” others reflect on its interest in the War on Terror² (2010, p. 70). This essay takes part of the latter camp of critics and demonstrates that DeLillo’s novel bears political implications.

In narrating Richard Elster’s exile from the West, DeLillo draws clear boundaries between two main spaces: the desert, the object of Elster’s romantic journey which eventually proves to be a place of terror; and New York, which manifests as a place of “conflict” from which Elster retreats (DeLillo, 2010, p. 51). This paper treats “terror” in both of these spaces. While I demonstrate how DeLillo conceptualizes the meaning of terror in New York and in the desert, I will argue the novel’s engagement with political themes. Though he contextualizes terror in both of the places, DeLillo ponders on the question of immediate political legitimacy towards War on Terror. DeLillo ultimately proposes, as one of the critics has claimed, the prospect of an omega point for the American empire (Coward 32). As a way of understanding the novel’s association of the desert to the War on Terror, the paper uses the link between the

¹ *Point Omega* is particularly influenced by the work of the paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. DeLillo’s epistemology of the End reflected in his novel owes debt to Teilhard’s evolutionary theory in his *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955). The omega point is Teilhard’s name for the final transformation beyond human consciousness; in Elster’s terms, “a leap out of our biology” (66). In Teilhard’s theory, things become more and more complex, drawn on to their ultimate end in the Omega point.

² For more sampling of material that reflects on *Point Omega*’s interest in the post-9/11 events, see (Rollins, 2010, 641), (Jamieson, 2010, p. 1); (Dyer, 2010); (Coward); and (Shipe).

ideas of the passion for the Real elaborated by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002)³ and the postcolonial desire to encounter the Other.

Point Omega is based on a dual plot structure. The first is set in a dark gallery in New York, where an anonymous man obsessively watches Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, a video that plays Hitchcock's *Psycho* slowed down for twenty-four hours. The other parallel story is set in an unknown desert where Elster, a secret seventy-three-year-old former war-adviser involved in the War on Iraq, retreats. The narrator is a film-maker, Jim Finley, who hopes to make a film with Elster through starring him "just a man and a wall" talking about his secret work with Iraq War-planners (DeLillo, 2010, p. 26).

In his prospect of recording the reality of War on Iraq, Finley follows Elster in the desert "somewhere south of nowhere" (25). Elster chooses to explore "the unknown desert" in order to find redemption and meaning of true life through its landscape, vastness, and heat; however, he ultimately confronts its overwhelming threat. The two men sit, talk, and drink, reflecting on the silence of the desert and its time. Elster's daughter, Jessie, intelligent but strange and detached, joins them. One morning, she mysteriously disappears and the two men encounter the desert as a pure expression of terror. They are led to look for Jessie and finally leave the place.

Before starting the analysis, it is significant to expose a short review of the theoretical background of this essay. Yet, before summarizing Žižek's account on "the passion of the Real," it is also crucial to start with the ontological theory of the Real as originally conceptualized by Jacques Lacan.

The Real vs. reality:

In psychoanalytic theory, there is a sharp distinction between what Lacan terms "the Real" and "reality." For Lacan, as for Žižek, the Real is the authentic truth that lays beyond our sensory perception and material order in everyday reality i.e. it takes part of the order of the metaphysical and the sublime (Žižek, 2014, p. 122). It is opposed to the realm of the image, beyond the other realms of what he calls the Symbolic and the Imaginary (Lacan, 1977, p. 85).

What remains is "reality," which refers to everyday life mediated with social and linguistic signs i.e. the Symbolic order. The latter lacks a sense of wholeness because it consists of translations, or so to speak, of representations of the metaphysicality of the Real which, for Lacan, is difficult to confront. Because we are subjects only in the symbolic order, we can only experience the Real as ruptures and glitches in that order.

For the interest of our investigation, it is crucial to highlight that the Real results in anxiety and trauma, for it is unmediated and no symbolic entity represents it in its pure essence. In Lacan's words, the Real is thus "this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence" (*Seminar*164). For Lacan, it is the missed encounter with the Real which presents itself in the form of trauma (11). Therefore, a possible way to confront the Real is through witnessing terror. As Žižek says, "the Real in its extreme violence (i)s the price to be paid for peeling the deceptive layers of reality" (2002, p. 6). Žižek exemplifies the postmodern passion for the "effect of the Real" with the phenomenon of "cutters," individuals, generally women, who desire to cut themselves with razors and hurt themselves (10). For Žižek, this phenomenon represents a desperate strategy to return to the real of the physical body (10). In this sense, Žižek understands that cutting is an attempt to regain a hold on reality and "ground the ego firmly in bodily reality, against the unbearable anxiety of perceiving oneself as nonexistent" (10).

"The Passion for the Real":

Žižek extensively analyzes the idea of "the passion for the Real" in the context of global capitalism and fundamentalism. According to him, in late-capitalist consumerist society, social reality is featured by a semblance of real life, a feature of what he calls "a staged fake" that acquires a digitized effect (14). Žižek understands that the ultimate moment of the twentieth-century resides in its passion for penetrating the Real. For him, experiencing the Real represents a moment of authenticity, as opposed to everyday social reality (2002, p. 5). Žižek's understanding of the Real is purely Lacanian. Not surprisingly, he specifically claims that the authentic passion for confronting the Real culminates in its reversal, i.e. in a moment of violence such as a political theatre like that of the Stalinist show trials, or spectacular terrorist bombings, or any other Event⁴ (9). By using this theory, it will be demonstrated how DeLillo defines desert terror as the point of extreme terror that is worthy of declaring war on it. I will show that desert terror, embodied in the infinite of its space and time, the nuclear testing area, and the ultimate disappearance of Elster's

³ The title of Žižek's book, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, comes from an expression said by the character Morpheus in the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Both Žižek's title and the quote delivered in *The Matrix* are inspired from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. See (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 5).

⁴ I use "Event" in capital to refer to the Žižekian understanding of Event. For Žižek, an Event presents a way to confront the Lacanian Real. He states that an event is "something 'miraculous,' from the miraculous of our daily lives to those of the most sublime spheres, including that of the divine" (*Event* 2). For him, the destructive aspect of an Event is what results in a traumatic encounter of the Real (122).

daughter Jessie, represents the Lacanian Real, which itself equates the omega point in the novel, the point which DeLillo sees to mark the end of human civilization. In order to apply this theory on DeLillo's novel, the Lacanian concepts of the Real and reality will be first analyzed in both plots of the story; then, they will be linked to the postcolonial idea of the War on Terror.

2. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

“Passion for Semblance”:

First, DeLillo portrays the characters in New York as lacking a perception of the reality around them, because they are mesmerized with T.V. and visual reality. He seeks to maintain that reality and meaning are vanished in contemporary Western culture that is overwhelmed with computers and screens, a culture that has become in a way “unreal.” All characters in the novel are archetypal examples of postmodern characters preoccupied with the artificial reality of camera and movies. Theoretically, this condition can be well sustained by postmodern theory which claims that the world simulated by computers and T.V. is as fake as what lies concretely behind the screen (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 78; Žižek, 2002, p. 12). Because the globalized, digitized West is saturated with screen, it remains constituted only of representations of reality, and hence lacks the authentic meaning of things. In this sense, as Žižek explains, technology produces a feeling of living in “an artificial constructed universe” (10). This eventually creates an “irresistible urge to ‘return to the Real’” (10).

For Finley, the filmmaker who wants to record the reality of War on Iraq, images and movies are the authentic reality that should be trusted by the Americans. For him, a one-take film involving “just a man and a wall” would be an ideal accomplishment that deserves to pursue Elster in a far place as the desert (DeLillo, 2010, p. 49). Following Žižek's theory, the movie, as such, can be read as the desert in itself for it incarnates the absence of meaning.

In recounting the unnamed man's experience of watching the slow film *Psycho*, Finley says, “it felt real, the pace was paradoxically real, bodies moving musically, barely moving, twelve-tone, things barely happening, cause and effect so drastically drawn apart that it seemed real to him, the way all things in the physical world that we don't understand are said to be real” (18). Although the movie is absorbed from real-lived reality, it is considered real for the man. Yet, the slower the movie is, the more real it becomes for him: “the original movie was fiction. This was real” (17). This expresses that virtual reality succeeds to replace the material order of postmodern Western culture.

Most important to our concern is the terror encountered through these faked spaces. The man who watches the slow crime scene is impressed by its terror, in which Janet Leigh, the woman in the film, experiences “a hellish death” (15). The Lacanian Real, as a form of traumatism and anxiety, is applicable in the case of the shower scene. The man's watching of the slowed down crime scene, which was a brief scene in the original movie, can be interpreted as a temptation to recognize the scene outside language and symbolization. Lacan's definition of the Real as “the essential object which isn't an object any longer” may be convincingly suitable in the context of the character's meditation of the prolonged scene in “broken motion, without suspense or dread or urgent pulsing screech-owl sound” (1991, p. 164; 15). The desire to eliminate motion, sound, and feelings from the crime scene can be understood as a postmodern desire to penetrate the Real.

Because the man is consciously aware of his existential situation in the faked reality of the postmodern universe, it is possible to state that his meditation on the crime scene exemplifies the Western ambition to return to the Real. It illustrates the Western desire to confront the borders of the Real order that, according to theory, involves extreme violence. This passion for the Real is projected in the making of these “hyperreal” spaces, spaces of terror: “still others look at salvaged videotapes of caged men being subjected to severe physical pain” (DeLillo, 2010, p. 42). It is in the process of this aim—of watching virtual terror—that the characters are willing to define their existence in true reality. The man's paranoid fantasy to watch the crime scene in slow motion for long hours directly suggests that he desires to transgress the “unreality” of his culture. The “passion for the Real” is epitomized in the character compelled to experience the crime scene as a nightmarish apparition, as he watches it again and again.

The man watching *24 Hour Psycho* wants “complete immersion” with the terror of the film. He wants “to bath in the tempo, in the near static rhythm of the image... He want(s) the film to move even more slowly, requiring deeper involvement of eye and mind, always that, the thing he sees tunneling into the blood, into dense sensation, sharing consciousness with him” (146). In psychoanalytic terms, the character's desire to watch the repeated scene of extreme terror is a demonstration of his ultimate perverse fantasy for the Real. The man reaches the ultimate passion for the Real and, yet, he might be claimed to “traverse the fantasy” of the passion for the Real (Lacan, 1973, p. 273). In Lacanian terms, the uncanny satisfaction he gets from the extreme terror of the movie is “jouissance” at its purest (1991, p. 183). In this sense, the man seems to approach the sense of real terror at a point when the movie becomes embedded in time: “What he was watching seemed pure film, pure time” (DeLillo, 2010, p. 7). That is, in the man's perception, *24 Hour Psycho* is pure terror, the Real, so to speak.

Žižek explains how virtual reality, as it appears in reality TV, pornography, and snuff movies, offers a semblance of reality. Žižek uses his famous instance of commercial products deprived of their malignant properties

found in today's market (like coffee without caffeine and beer without alcohol) in order to illustrate that virtual reality also functions as reality deprived of its substance (2002, p. 11). Just like decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee, the movie in DeLillo's novel is also experienced as real terror without being so. With regard to snuff movies, Žižek states that there is a strong connection between the virtualization of reality and Virtual Reality, in the sense that they produce an ability to endure pain through listening and watching an "undead victim" (12). The shower scene in the novel resonates exactly in Žižek's understanding of this passion for penetrating the Real. The man's watching of the slow-motion crime is an expression of his desire for that scene to become reality.

Characters in New York are consciously aware of their far distance from outside reality. They are conscious of a "life-beyond, a world beyond," "the thing that's not the movie," as Elster states (DeLillo, 2010, p. 21). It is significant to go a step backward at this level and evoke Žižek's description of the West during the terrorist attacks. In a conference held on the 25th of November 2015—that is, twelve days after the Paris attacks and subsequent to the question of Syrian refugees to Europe—Žižek described the Paris attacks targeting cafeterias, restaurants, and rock concerts as a kind of violent shaking of the Western civilization that is merged with unreality (2015). He refers to philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's vision that the West is aware of its existence in an isolated cupola, in which it sees the outside but does not see the wall. The idea is that the West does not know about the horrors going on out there in the Third World, and perceive it only as a virtual entity through T.V. screens. Syrian refugees, who sympathized with Paris, as Žižek states in the conference, replied that the horror Paris lived for one night and which the West perceived as real actually takes part in the Third World's everyday life.

If the separation between the outside, happening in the Other space, and the inside, happening in the West is declared transparent by Žižek, it is actually blind in DeLillo's novel. This is metaphorically pronounced in Finley's grey wall, the background of his films: "I have the wall, I know the wall, it's in a loft in Brookly, big messy industrial loft. I have access pretty much any time day or night. Wall is mostly pale gray, some cracks, some strains, but these are not distractions, they're not self-conscious design elements. The wall is right, I think about it, dream about it, I open my eyes and see it, I close my eyes it's there" (DeLillo, 2010, p. 34). Finley explains that the blindness of the wall is what defines his society's isolation from the Real, which remains outside America.

During his time in the government, "in the blat and stammer of Iraq," Elster recognizes and seems to embrace the idea that military war is abstract, just like sending an army into a place on a map is abstract (26). In constituting unreality of war on Iraq, the Pentagon tries to create "new realities overnight, careful sets of words that resemble advertising slogans in memorability and repeatedly" (34). Here, Elster plainly declares how the reality of war on Iraq is rendered artificial and has lost its essence. Fictionalizing war also lies in falsehood, as Elster confesses, "lying is necessary. The state has to lie. There is no lie in a war or in preparation for war that can't be defended" (34).

Elster contributes to theorizing war, and hence, contributes to building Žižek's cupola to constitute unreality. His mission is to "give them (strategy war-planners) words and meanings" and present new ways of thinking and perceiving the war (37). In his conversation with Elster about the war, Finley evokes an essay by Elster entitled "Renditions." The essay, as Finley recounts, had concentrated on the "word itself, earliest known use, changes in form and meaning, zero-grade forms, replicated forms, suffixed forms" and had eventually attracted the attention of certain research centers in Washington D.C. and the White House (43). In his "War as Haiku" (2016), Matthew Shipe notes that Elster's meditation on the word "rendition" demonstrates his attempt to justify the War on Terror and tweekle the liberalists' condemnation of the administration's foreign policy (15). In this line of thought, one is tempted to offer a theoretic description of Elster's manipulation of language to conceptualize war. Following Lacanian psychoanalysis, I add that Elster's concentration on the "word itself" can be read as an attempt to take hold of war as sustaining itself in the symbolic order. War becomes conceptualized even in poetic and symbolic demonstration, in "haiku," in three lines and in prescribed syllable count (37). In this way, the meaning of war is understood in a symbolic form and is made radically distinguished from the real which Lacan claims to be "the impossible" (*The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* 123). Elster, in this sense, builds a semantic obstacle of what declares war impossible. For Lacan, if the real is defined as the impossible, it is placed at the stage at which the register of a symbolic articulation is defined impossible to be true (172-173). For this reason, Lacan underlines the role of education and analysis, though he ultimately declares them to be impossible operations for truth (173). Instead of trying to explain the truth of terror and violence, Elster embellishes war and contributes to construct an illusory reality about its terror.

Yet, insofar as it is a constituent of the symbolic, i.e. of the realm that lacks a sense of wholeness with the real order, war is rendered "transient" (37). Elster himself confirms this when he states: "things in war are transient. See what's there and then be prepared to watch it disappear" (37). The violence of language lies in Elster's violent imposition of a certain vision of reality that is far from real terror. Here, I would blend Lacan with Žižek in order to underline the role of poetry in rendering political and physical violence legitimate. Žižek says that Slobodan Milošević manipulated nationalist passions in Yugoslavia—but it was poets who delivered him the stuff that lent itself to manipulation ("The Poetic Torture-House of language"). In this way, Elster and war planners, as other corrupted politicians, violate the moral prohibitions by recognizing the idea of war as a poetic image.

Welcome to the Desert of the Real:

After his experience with the “fantasists in the Pentagon,” Elster decides to retire to a house in the desert to do nothing, but sit and think (22). What he feels in the desert is “heat, space, stillness, distance” (24). Elster’s displacement from New York, where individuals “study electronic records on computer screens and still others look at salvaged videotapes,” to the culture of the desert is significant (42). This displacement from a metropolitan place to a place equating “the zero in mathematics” can be read as a direct metaphor of Elster’s passion for the Real (Glenn 4). For Elster, the desert “was outside (his) range, it was an alien being, it was science fiction,” as he states (25). His encounter with the territory of the Other serves him to view himself and the Western world authentically. Authenticity, as Žižek explains, consists in the act of the violent transgression of the Real. In the case of the novel, it equates Elster’s confrontation with the exotic desert, its negative time, and “unusual terror” (56).

It is worthy to underline the function of the desert as a place of the real order. Elster seeks to penetrate a place that denies physical existence, including “organic matter,” bodies, and technology (43). Just like the Lacanian real, the desert displays an absence of time, culture, and even language. In his “Too Many Goddamn Echoes” (2014), Martin Paul Eve says an interesting comment considering Elster’s experience in the desert. Paul maintains that Elster’s mission in the desert is “a quest for a tragic silence” (3). He says that DeLillo presents a “form of withdrawal: an implosion headed for extinction, for the omega point after which there is nothing to say” (3). This resonates convincingly besides the idea of the Real. Perceived a world beyond human comprehension, the desert remains for Elster a realm of the unknown and absurdity, just like the Real.

One is tempted to claim that the novel’s postcolonial vision resides in Elster’s passion to transgress the symbolic and confront the real order in the desert. Elster’s passion for the Real is demonstrated through his clear assertion to Finley that America needs an actual war (38). He states,

I still want a war. A great power has to act. We were struck hard. We need to retake the future. The force of will, the sheer visceral need. We can’t let others shape our world, our minds. All they have are old dead despotic traditions. We have a living history and I thought I would be in the middle of it. But in those rooms, with those men, it was all priorities, statistics, evaluations, rationalizations. (38)

Žižek states that only direct violent interventions like terrorist bombings and wars would “awaken us, Western citizens, from the numbness, from immersion in our everyday ideological universe” (*Welcome* 9). In this sense, Elster’s assertion “a great power has to act” is what perhaps would awaken Elster and America from their dream-like culture (38).

Elster, Finley, and Jessie, who are extremely attached to the dream-like reality of New York, best represent the Western irresistible urge to “return to the Real.” Michiko Kakutani, in his description of these three characters in *The New York Times*, well illustrates their situation: “All these central characters in the novel...are alienated, oddly detached people. They are individuals dwelling in a limbo state, searching for something that might give order or meaning to their lives or simply shell-shocked by the randomness and menace of modern life” (2010). In the desert, Elster confronts the real sense of things. The more he meditates in landscape, the more he sees reality: “the less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw” (DeLillo, 2010, p. 11). Far from being a technological universe, the desert is “nothing but distances, not vistas or sweeping sightlines but only distances” (22). All the elements of the desert are recognized to present a closer effect of the real as opposed to everyday social reality. The desert, with its categories of landscape, heat, silence, and eternity, reflects the “layers of reality” that take part of the same eternal entity—the real.

In the desert, Finley no longer uses the cell phone and “almost never touche(s) (his) laptop” (82). For him, these electronic devices lack sense because they are in a place overwhelmed with metaphysics. Jessie’s reading of science fiction also becomes meaningless for her because it does not match with the truth around her in the landscape of the desert. Experiencing the elements of nature, for them, is a way to return to the reality of their existence in the physical universe. In the novel, DeLillo explains why Elster retreats to the desert: “The sun was burning down. This is what he wanted, to feel the *deepheat beating into his body, feel the body itself, reclaim the body from what he called the nausea of News and Traffic*” (22 emphasis mine). Feeling the sun-burn would not be paralleled to a normal bronzage, which guarantees the inclusion of Elster’s subject in the Symbolic order. Rather, the case of Elster is the opposite, namely the assertion of reality itself. Far from being suicidal, far from indicating a desire for self-annihilation, the desert would be, for him, a way to gain a kind of normality, “to ground the ego firmly in bodily reality,” as Žižek states (2002, p. 10). Elster’s case represents the case of the postmodern American society at large, being distant from the true sense of reality.

The house sheltering Elster and the other characters in the desert is also perceived as a category of the real because it is not mediated with the technologies of the modern West (22). Underfurnished, situated in “nothing but distances,” the house helps the characters approach a more authentic reality. In his description of the house, Finley states that it “was a sad hybrid. There was a corrugated metal roof above a clapboard exterior with an unfinished stonework path out front and a tacked-on deck jutting from one side. This is where we sat through his hushed hour, a torchlit ski, the closeness of hills barely visible at high white noon” (DeLillo, 2010, p. 23). In this passage, it can be distinguished that the house is pre-modern and is far from the idyllic setting of the consumerist paradise that America fantasizes about. Being old, sad, and desolate, the house helps the characters feel alive and guarantees their inclusion in the real order.

Therefore, for the characters, the desert represents a purer and a more honest way to understand oneself and one’s culture. What they find in the far distances of the desert and its slow time is an affirmation of their existence in the real. In other words, this informs Elster that the culture of the East, embodied in the image of the desert, is not just geographically outside America, but also chronologically. As Almond states, it is an idea, “one which belongs outside history, hovering immutably in an almost Platonic way” (2007, p. 11). However, what Elster encounters is not just the eel in its sublime, but in its absolute Terror, i.e. which Lacan and Žižek refers to as Real.

The culture of the desert has proved to be the Real Terror for Elster. He ultimately confirms that the terror experienced in New York is a virtual one and the true terror resides in the cultural geology of the desert (DeLillo, 2010, p. 23). The violence propagated after the disappearance of Jessie is perceived as a symptom of Elster’s passion to return to the Real. It is as if his desire to perceive the truth of war in the space of the desert compels him to assume the outcome of his violent confrontation with the excesses of the Real. The terror of Real is expressed in “Point Omega,” which Elster perceives as the point of absolute terror: “the omega point has narrowed. here and now, to the point of a knife as it enters a body” (124).

This further confirms that the Western passion for the Real, illustrated through the man’s watching of the crime scene, fits Žižek’s formula of “passion for semblance” because it propagates an illusory sense of terror compared to the Real Terror of the desert (*Welcome* 10). The popularization of war on Iraq in the West, disseminated through “careful sets of words that resemble advertising slogans in memorability and repeatability” has proved to remain within the realm of unreality simulated by the screens. In an essay entitled “Distance,” Raymond Williams offers a critique of British Television’s coverage. The reporting, he claims, has had a dangerously sanitized abstractness, because of the “culture of distance” (1989, p. 49). Television, which comes from the Greek “afar,” is understood, managed and interpreted, as by war-planners in the Pentagon, as to distance people from the Real (36-38). The same holds in the discourse of *Point Omega*. In a review of the novel, a critic describes Elster as “a pompous intellectual who shamelessly justifies sending thousands of young soldiers off to die in an unnecessary war with abstract, philosophical arguments, but who suddenly comes to know the meaning of death and loss firsthand when his beloved daughter abruptly disappears” (Kakutani, 2010).

Finley, at some point, bites “the skin off the edge of his thumbnail, always the right thumb” in order to know he exists in reality (DeLillo, 2010, p. 47). However, the pain of the thumbnail never attains the gravity of desert terror. What is interesting to mention, at this level, is that the pain generated from the West, through screens and T.V., does not sound powerful, and most precisely, Real. The pain resulting from the severe confrontation of the hellish death of Janet Leigh in the movie is never articulated by DeLillo. The only instance in which pain is expressed is by Elster when he encounters desert terror. Is this not a further proof that DeLillo “orientalizes” the sense of terror? The concept of terror is exclusively conceptualized as accompanied by a violent incident or a “theatrical spectacle” within the context of the cultural Other (Žižek, 2002, p. 9). DeLillo’s surprising sentimental defense and his indictment of global terrorism and his canny interpretation of the U.S. role in global terrorism is based on this sense of terror accompanied by physical fatalism, as confronted in the desert. In this sense, Elster’s return from the desert cannot be comprehended beyond his severe ambition to contribute to the War on Terror.

Elster eventually embraces the idea of a necessary retribution that seems to be a motivating factor behind the War on Terror. Elster anticipates a future where:

Men and women, in cubicles, wearing headphones, will be listening to secret tapes of the administration’s crimes while others study electronic records on computer screens and still others look at salvaged videotapes of caged men being subjected to severe physical pain and finally others, still others, behind closed doors, ask pointed questions of flesh-and blood individuals. (41-42)

Elster’s anticipation of the future of the coming generations and acknowledging their means to encounter real terror (headphones, secret tapes, electronic records, and videotapes), is a clear assertion of his embrace of War on Terror.

3. CONCLUSION:

To sum up, the desert in *Point Omega* has been discussed as an object of representation, which contributes in the criterion of the line between the East's appetite for violence and the West's alleged tendency to claim War on Terror. In confronting desert terror, Elster reminds of Žižek's joke of "bakku-shan," a Japanese expression that means "a girl who looks as though she might be pretty when seen from behind, but isn't when seen from the front" (2014, p.122). One of the postcolonial lessons that the novel presents about the Other is rooted in the proper sense of the Real: though it seems authentic and utopian, it nevertheless bears a destructive aspect. In experiencing real terror in the desert, Elster experiences otherness itself, i.e. not only the idealized Other but the tragic Other that was kept out of sight.

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