

5-10-2014

# Kerouac's Dharma Bums (1958) & DeLillo's Americana (1971): An Investigation of the Influences of Media, Spatiality, & Buddhism on Selfhood in Mid-twentieth-century American Culture & Consciousness

Alex Ryan Gregor  
*Georgia State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_theses](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Gregor, Alex Ryan, "Kerouac's Dharma Bums (1958) & DeLillo's Americana (1971): An Investigation of the Influences of Media, Spatiality, & Buddhism on Selfhood in Mid-twentieth-century American Culture & Consciousness." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2014.

[http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english\\_theses/163](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses/163)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

KEROUAC'S *DHARMA BUMS* (1958) & DELILLO'S *AMERICANA* (1971):  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INFLUENCES OF MEDIA, SPATIALITY, & BUDDHISM  
ON SELFHOOD IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CULTURE &  
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

ALEX RYAN GREGOR

Under the Direction of Dr. Christopher Kocela

ABSTRACT

In *Dharma Bums* (1958), by Jack Kerouac, and *Americana* (1971), by Don DeLillo, the authors explore the complexity of selfhood as pertaining to individual identity and subjectivity in mid-twentieth century American culture and consciousness, paying specific attention to the relation that these concepts have with media, spatiality, and Buddhism. Although numerous critics provide extensive analyses of these texts, authors, and themes, no critic has paired these texts and authors, and investigated these particular themes in relation to selfhood. I argue that in *Dharma Bums* and *Americana*, Kerouac and DeLillo each investigate the influence of media, spatiality, and Buddhism on selfhood, as well as provide competing models of selfhood that offer either self-transformation or self-limitation.

INDEX WORDS: Kerouac, *Dharma Bums*, DeLillo, *Americana*, Media, Spatiality, Buddhism, Selfhood, Mid-twentieth-century, American culture, Consciousness

KEROUAC'S *DHARMA BUMS* (1958) & DELILLO'S *AMERICANA* (1971):  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INFLUENCES OF MEDIA, SPATIALITY, & BUDDHISM  
ON SELFHOOD IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CULTURE &  
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

ALEX RYAN GREGOR

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

Copyright by  
Alex Ryan Gregor  
2014

KEROUAC'S *DHARMA BUMS* (1958) & DELILLO'S *AMERICANA* (1971):  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INFLUENCES OF MEDIA, SPATIALITY, & BUDDHISM  
ON SELFHOOD IN MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN CULTURE &  
CONSCIOUSNESS

by

ALEX RYAN GREGOR

Committee Chair: Chris Kocela

Committee: Paul Schmidt

Mark Noble

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2014

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to all of my friends and family, for without your guidance and support, I would not have been able to complete a project of this capacity. Thank you to everyone, but I would like to specifically thank my close friends, Daniel Beauregard and Hilary Smith, for providing endless inspiration and ongoing comradery, as well as my parents, Janet Robinson and Michael Gregor, for building and maintaining the foundation upon which I stand.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who has provided me with academic and professional guidance and support over the course of my graduate career, but I need to acknowledge the following individuals for their exceptional assistance: Dr. Christopher Kocela, not only for planting the seeds for this project years ago, but for providing years of mentorship and inspiration; Dr. Paul Schmidt, for assisting in the nascent stages of this project and going on to serve as a reader on my committee; Dr. Mark Noble, for not only assisting with this project by serving as a reader, but also for serving as an influential professor during my time as an undergraduate; Dr. Lynée Gaillet, for providing quintessential professional opportunities and ongoing support as an instructor and tutor; Dr. Robert Burns, for not only serving as a highly influential undergraduate professor, but also for his professional and personal mentorship; Dr. Reiner Smolinski, Dr. Randy Malamud, Dr. Calvin Thomas, and Dr. Beth Gylys, for serving as exceptional, inspirational professors during both my undergraduate and graduate career; Kelly Elmore, for providing ongoing professional and personal mentorship.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 KEROUAC .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2 DELILLO .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>54</b>



## INTRODUCTION

In *Dharma Bums* (1958), by Jack Kerouac, and *Americana* (1971), by Don DeLillo, the authors explore the complexity of selfhood as it pertains to individual identity and subjectivity in mid-twentieth century American culture and consciousness, paying specific attention to the relation that these concepts have with media, spatiality, and Buddhism. Although numerous critics provide extensive analyses of these texts, authors, and themes, no critic has paired these texts and authors, or investigated these particular themes in relation to selfhood. I argue that in *Dharma Bums* and *Americana*, Kerouac and DeLillo each investigate the influence of media, spatiality, and Buddhism on selfhood, as well as provide competing models of selfhood that offer either self-transformation or self-limitation.

Critics provide extensive scholarship on these texts, authors, and themes. Of recent DeLillo critics, Benjamin Bird investigates how “the protagonist of *Americana* is representative of a characteristic, even archetypal American pathology” (186), Randy Laist explores “the characters’ inter-phorical relationships with their electro-material culture” (14), Mark Osteen studies how American “conditions are reflected and shaped by cinema” (8), and Robert Kohn provides Buddhist analyses of the texts which explore DeLillo’s strategies “for restoring the self to authenticity” (156). Of recent Kerouac critics, Lars Erik Larson examines “North American roads of the late 1940s as granting deliriously liberating social, sexual, philosophical, and spatial freedoms” (35), John Leland explores “the world of jazz” and its influence on the “American story of identity and time” (119), Jason Spangler exhibits how Kerouac and Steinbeck “use tropes of the hobo-tramp, the road, and the American Dream” (308), Mary-Beth Brophy illuminates how Kerouac’s progression through his novels “can be viewed, at times to closely parallel the Catholic ‘dark night of the soul’ experience” (419), and Sarah Haynes, Timothy Ray,

Steve Wilson, Thomas Bierowski, and Carole Tonkinson provide Buddhist studies of both the author and texts. Of these Buddhist readings, Ray claims that Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg “used the teachings of Buddhism in their own way in an attempt to reconcile and resolve competing ideologies that were at the heart of their own inner struggles” (188), Haynes explores Kerouac's “Buddhist books [*Some of the Dharma* and *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*] while focusing on his influences, their effects on his personal life and the impact these had on his writing and on Buddhism in America,” as well as how the content and form of his writing correspond to biographical involvement with Buddhism (153-55), and Wilson investigates Kerouac’s “Buddha-writing” as a “search for authenticity” (302). Furthermore, Tonkinson explores the Beat Generation's embodiment of the Buddhist term “Big Mind,” or as Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche explains as “a state without center or fringe,” in which “there is no watcher or perceiver, no division between subject and object; in this view all phenomena are acknowledged as temporary, dependent on causes and conditions, and utterly devoid of any fixed identity or self-existing nature” (vii). This survey reinforces the fact that critics have thoroughly investigated these texts and authors, and even these themes; however, critics have failed to provide an intertextual, comparative analysis of these texts and authors that investigates each author’s treatment of selfhood as related to media, spatiality, and Buddhism, as well as each author’s models of selfhood that either prompt self-transformation or promote self-limitation.

Before embarking on an analysis of the texts, in order to ensure an adequate understanding of the terms, it is necessary to explain the concept of selfhood these texts explore. According to Chris Barker, a prominent cultural studies scholar, subjectivity, “what it is to be a person,” and identity, “how we describe ourselves to each other” are closely related to the formation of self (Barker 10-11). This concept of the formation of self is an anti-essentialist

argument, in which identities and subjectivities “are not things that exist; they have no essential or universal qualities” (11). According to Anthony Giddens, a prominent contemporary sociologist, self-identity is an ongoing project, in which “the self forms a trajectory of development from the past to an anticipated future” (Giddens 75). Self-identity is simply a narrative that attempts to show the progress of identity through time, in order to maintain “biographical continuity” (Barker 221). Giddens' ongoing project of self understands identity as a creation, in which the self is always in the process of becoming, but never arriving at a destination. The essential self, in this sense, is both nonexistent and unachievable. It is “what we think we are now, in light of our past” and “what we think we would like to be” (222). This particular theory of the self as the postmodern subject, differs from the preceding theory of the self as the Enlightenment subject, in which, according to the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, the subject is a fully centered, unified individual that has an essential identity and self (Hall 275). On the other hand, the postmodern subject, according to Barker, is a de-centered self that “involves the subject in shifting, fragmented and multiple identities. People are composed not of one but of several, sometimes contradictory, identities” (Barker 224). According to Hall, the postmodern subject, therefore, “assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (Hall 277). Hall continues to explain that “If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves” (277). Subjectivity is “the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person” (277). Identity can be understood as both self-identity, which is constituted by self-descriptions and expectations, and social identity, which is constituted by the descriptions and expectations that others have of that person; both forms play important roles in the formation of self (Barker 219-20).

Despite these interrelations between subjectivity, identity, and selfhood, other elements constitute and influence the self. For instance, ideology, or, the “structures of signification or ‘world views’ that constitute social relations and legitimate the interests of the powerful, plays a significant role in the constitution of subjects” (Barker 225). Ideological “world views” are multiplicitous, and an individual consistently engages with ideology. In *Dharma Bums* and *Americana*, Kerouac and DeLillo seem to present three major ideological “world views” that influence selfhood in mid-twentieth century American consciousness: media, spatiality, and Buddhism. Before conducting an analysis, it is necessary to examine media's influence on self, and also how American consumer culture, which creates the media, has the ability to influence the self. Barker, in efforts to summarize the theories of Jean Baudrillard, claims that since the majority of Western societies have sufficient living conditions, individual identities “shift from location in the sphere of production to that of consumption” (164). Rather than identifying with his or her line of work, a person identifies with how he or she spends money, which results in a multitude of “taste preferences” (164). The greater part of consumption, therefore, is the consumption of signs that signify a person's identity (165). Mike Featherstone, cultural theorist, explains that a person's identity is developed through a lifestyle that is created by the consumption of objects and practices that reflect that person's identity (86). Within this understanding, identity becomes an assemblage of consumed objects and absorbed practices acquired from any realm of the capitalist market, and since media is a commodified product, consumer culture not only applies to goods but also to media. Frank Lentricchia coins the term “filmic self-consciousness,” in order to explain how media influences selfhood. He states that filmic self-consciousness is “the contemporary form of self-making and a new kind of storytelling about the magical third-person pitched by and to the audience of the first-person,

who is none other than the ordinary moviegoer or TV viewer” (207). According to Lentricchia’s model, the postmodern subject has developed a self-consciousness, not only in the typical first-person, but also in the third-person, in which the individual perceives himself or herself through his or her perspective and also through a cinematic perspective, as if the individual was a character in a movie or on a television show. According to Lentricchia, Featherstone, Baudrillard, and Barker, the individual consumes media, becomes an assemblage of the material viewed, and therefore develops a subjective mental experience and identity that is influenced by media.

Another major medium of Barker’s ideological “world views” that influences selfhood in mid-twentieth century American consciousness is spatiality. According to Barker, social space is “a dynamic, multitudinous and changing social construction constituted in and through social relations of power” (449). Social spaces, therefore, are not “empty,” but constituted by specific content and activities related to that content. For instance, a television set is a common object found in a living room of a domestic social space, which determines the common activity of that space: watching television. Barker explains how “broadcasting provides ritual social events wherein families or groups of friends watch together and talk before, during, and after programmes,” and how these ritual social events contribute to “the production of cultural identities” (332). For another example, the social space of a house is divided into different living spaces that are dedicated to different activities that connote different social meanings: bedrooms are private, intimate spaces, while living rooms are public, common spaces (348). Certain social spaces of a house are “gendered” as well; for instance, the kitchen is traditionally feminine while the garage is masculine (332). Each of these social spaces is constituted by the activities and content within that space; therefore, each of these spaces determines the activities and content associated with the actual people within these spaces. According to Barker, “forms of

identification are forged” by the particular space which an individual occupies (332). Here, Barker perfectly explains how a space has the ability to shape identity. In relation to subjectivity and identity, it is obvious how different spaces can both “limit” subjective mental experience and identity within a space, and also potentially encourage “transformation,” or offer some sort of transcendent subjective mental experience or understanding of identity. For example, in both *Americana* and *Dharma Bums*, DeLillo and Kerouac exhibit how traditional spaces of domesticity, including family homes and workplaces, seem to limit one’s subjectivity and identity; while other spaces, including the open road and nature, seem to offer liberation, transformation, or transcendence of one’s subjectivity and identity.

Buddhism, while not specifically mentioned by Barker, functions as another ideological “world view” that influences selfhood in mid-twentieth century American consciousness. According to Carl Jung, in his introduction to D.T. Suzuki’s monumental Buddhist text for the West, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*, Buddhist enlightenment concerns itself with “an insight into the nature of self” which allows “an emancipation of the conscious from an illusionary conception of self” (xiii). Jung explains that enlightenment inspires “consciousness of the consciousness” (xvi). This consciousness differs from that of the “consciousness of the existence of an object,” which is simply a sentient being’s ability to think about how it feels to be an object (xvi). Enlightenment provokes awareness of the nature of consciousness, in which an individual becomes aware of how this nature shapes the self. Thich Nhat Hahn, in *Zen Keys* (1974), discusses the Buddhist concepts of inter-being and not-self, in which “The Principle of not-self brings to light the gap between things themselves and the concepts we have of them. Things are dynamic and alive, while our concepts are static” (41). Furthermore, he claims that

Genesis in Buddhism is called interbeing. The birth, growth, and decline of things depend upon multiple causes and conditions and not just a single one. The presence of one thing (dharma) implies the presence of all other things. The enlightened man or woman sees each thing not as a separate entity but as a complete manifestation of reality..The doctrine of not-self aims at bringing to light the interbeing nature of things, and, at the same time, demonstrates to us that the concepts we have of things do not reflect and cannot convey reality. (41)

If this seems mystical, Suzuki de-mystifies Zen Buddhism by stating that “mysticism in its very nature defies the analysis of logic, and logic is the most characteristic feature of Western thought. The East is synthetic in its method of reasoning” (4). Furthermore, where as “Christians use prayer, or mortification, or contemplation so called, as the means of bringing [spiritual insight] on themselves, and leave fulfillment to divine grace...Buddhism does not recognize a supernatural agency in such matters” (5). According to Suzuki, the Zen method of spiritual training is practical and systematic, and allows one to “penetrate through the conceptual superstructure and what is imagined to be a mystification will at once disappear, and at the same time there will be an enlightenment known as *satori*” (4-5). Zen confronts selfhood, in that “Zen has again no 'self' as something to which we can cling as a refuge; therefore, in Zen again there is no “self” by which we may become intoxicated” (13). Furthermore, Suzuki states that “the object of Zen discipline consists in acquiring a new viewpoint for looking into the essence of things..This acquiring of a new viewpoint in Zen is called *satori*” (58). It is obvious how Buddhism thus fosters self-transformation: it denounces stagnation, encourages change and growth, and acknowledges emptiness, impermanence, and no-self, which are fundamental features of Buddhist ontology. Certain Buddhist terms are not only used by Kerouac and DeLillo,

but familiarity with and understanding of these terms will aid in understanding this analysis. *Dukkha*, or suffering, is caused by *tanha*, or craving, in the world, or *samsara*, and *satori*, or enlightenment, provides insight into the *dharma*, or truth, which leads to *nirvana*, or freedom from *samsara*.

Kerouac, in his book *Wake Up: A Life of the Buddha*, investigates the nature of consciousness, according to Buddhist doctrine: “death comes from birth, birth comes from deeds, deeds come from attachment, attachments comes from desire, desire comes from perception, perception comes from sensation, sensation comes from the six sense organs, the six sense organs come from individuality, individuality comes from the consciousness” (33). He goes on to state the four noble truths of the doctrine: “1. All life is suffering . . . (all existence is in a state of misery, impermanency and unreality). 2. The cause of suffering is ignorant craving. 3. The suppression of suffering can be achieved. 4. The way is the noble eightfold path” (37). The eightfold path consists of Right Ideas (based on the four noble truths), Right Intention (to follow the path out of suffering), Right Speech, Right Behavior, Right Livelihood (overall lifestyle that fosters these tenets), Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation (Kerouac 37-38). Buddhist philosophy and practice, as explained by Jung, Suzuki, Thich Nhat Hahn, and Kerouac, directly confronts the self, and investigates the nature of identity and subjectivity. Through Buddhist practice, an individual can become highly aware of the self, and attain a less mediated subjective mental experience. In *Dharma Bums* and *Americana*, Kerouac and DeLillo investigate the influences of Buddhism on selfhood, and present different models of Buddhist practice and thought that can offer self-transformation in the mid-twentieth century American individual.



Kerouac and DeLillo investigate the complexity of selfhood as pertaining to individual identity and subjectivity in mid-twentieth century American culture and consciousness, paying specific attention to the relation that these concepts have with media, spatiality, and Buddhism. Although both authors investigate similar elements of selfhood, each author provides a different approach to each influence. While Kerouac seems to denounce popular media, privilege certain social spaces over others, and laud a new American Buddhism, DeLillo explores the complexity of the relationships between self and space, media, and Buddhism, and seems to offer ways in which different forms of each can either encourage or inhibit self-transformation. Both authors provide insightful analyses and models of selfhood; however, DeLillo seems to apply the Kerouacian model to a new era of American cultural consciousness, in which media, space, and Buddhism have taken new shapes and forms since the era of the Beat Generation. Both authors seem to be interested in what Benjamin Bird, a recent contributor to DeLillo scholarship, identifies as “the capacity of the mind for both self-limitation and profound self-transformation” (187). Bird’s “self-limitation” can be used to understand conceptions of the self present in *Dharma Bums* and *Americana* which are confined and limited to the influences of popular media (popular film & advertising) or spaces of containment (jobs and home); “self transformation” can be used to understand conceptions of the self in the texts which are liberated through experimental art (documentaries, experimental film, journal writing), spaces of emancipation (cars, travel, roads, motels, road trips), or Buddhist thought. In *Dharma Bums* and *Americana*, Kerouac and DeLillo provide models of selfhood for two closely related, yet different eras in American culture, in which media, spatiality, and Buddhism take on different shapes and forms in relation to identity and subjectivity in the mid-twentieth century American consciousness.

## 1 KEROUAC

In *Dharma Bums*, Kerouac thoroughly explores the relationship between selfhood and Buddhist spirituality, while also illuminating key elements of both media and spatiality that have an impact on identity and subjectivity. Within this model, he presents popular media, including film and television, and spaces of containment, including suburban homes and business workplaces, as having limiting influences on selfhood; alternatively, he offers experimental art, such as bop jazz, spontaneous prose, haikus, and other Eastern art-forms, spaces of liberation, such as cars, trains, nature, and shacks, and Buddhist spirituality, as having potentially transformative influences on selfhood.

In the opening pages of the book, the narrator, Ray Smith, a fictionalized Jack Kerouac, describes his experience at the Six Gallery for “the night of the birth of the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance,” which featured readings by Alvah Goldbook (Allen Ginsberg), Rheinhold Cacoethes (Kenneth Rexroth), Japhy Ryder (Gary Snyder), Francis DaPavia (Philip Lamantia), and Warren Coughlin (Philip Whalen) (9). He states that it was “like a jam session,” because as the poets read, the audience yelled “Go! Go! Go!” and everyone drank wine and talked amongst themselves. Kerouac portrays this as a definitive moment of San Francisco literature because this event is exemplary of the “San Francisco Poetry Renaissance,” in which poetry was read aloud in a non-academic, public venue, in which participants and audience members performed and convened as if it were a party or a celebration. Ultimately, according to Kerouac, this event marks the creation of a new type of poetry, which he compares to bop jazz; furthermore, his representation of the reading shows how he privileges experimental art and informal public spaces over traditional academic writing, popular media, and traditional formal academic spaces. During the reading, Smith states that Japhy’s poems contained “anarchistic ideas about

how Americans don't know how to live, with lines about commuters being trapped in living rooms that come from poor trees felled by chainsaws" (10). Here, Kerouac illuminates one of many spaces of limitation, the suburban living room, in which "commuters" are ultimately "trapped" within their homes, since they're living sedentary lives of excessive work, commuting, and excessive spending without meaning or enjoyment. Smith describes the home that he shares with Goldbook as "a little rose-covered cottage in the backyard of a bigger house," which he seems to offer as a more transformative space compared to the suburban living room (11). The carriage house in Berkeley has a garden and a porch, and minimal modern conveniences, including a gas stove, mattresses, running water, floor mats, pillows, and a bathtub, but does not contain excessive furniture or an icebox. Smith also explains that the house had books and records, and that this was an important part of the house because of its emphasis on the reading and listening to "art," rather than comfortable, passive consumption of mass-produced entertainment. Kerouac seems to offer Goldbook and Smith's home as an important transformative space, in which minimal design and minimal contents not only allow Goldbook and Smith to live a more fruitful life by not overworking and spending more money than they had, and by maintaining a space that encouraged sustainability and engagement with music, literature, and art. Smith goes on to explain that Ryder lives in another carriage house in Berkeley, about twelve feet by twelve feet, "with nothing in it but typical Japhy appurtenances that showed his belief in the simple monastic life" (12). These "typical Japhy appurtenances" included camping equipment, straw mats, food, rugged second-hand clothes, and a table made from orange crates. While Goldbook and Smith had "books, books, hundred of books everything from Catullus to Pound to Blyth" (12), Japhy had "a slew of orange crates filled with beautiful scholarly books, some of them in Oriental languages, all the great sutras, comments on sutras,

the complete works of D.T. Suzuki and a fine quadruple-volume edition of Japanese haikus” (13). Here, Kerouac illuminates the convergence of Eastern and Western literatures; however, he doesn’t seem to privilege one over the other. Instead, he lauds literature, philosophy, and ideas, and posits that the homes of Goldbook, Smith, and Ryder are spaces of transformation and transcendence because of their focus on literature, philosophy, relationships, and ideas, rather than on comfort and consumerism. Kerouac also seems to argue that spaces like these homes are more conducive to meditation, learning, and an overall productive life, because of not only what the spaces lack, but what the inhabitants choose to own.

Before Ryder, Smith, and Henry Morley (John Montgomery) drive to Mount Matterhorn for a hiking trip in the mountains, Smith and Ryder walk through the University of California campus to gather supplies for their trip. Smith explains that they did not fit in with the other people on the college campus, mostly because “colleges [are] nothing but grooming schools for the middle class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time” (28). Here, Kerouac continues to differentiate between mainstream, suburban spaces of limitation, and counter-cultural spaces of transformation and transcendence. The American university, according to Smith, is a space that offers no transformation or transcendence, but rather, conformity with the American way of life; the American living room, as previously stated, limits individuals even more by not only spatial confinement, but also confinement in terms of thought, since American television broadcasts standardized information and entertainment. This, according to Kerouac, is the grand limiting factor of television: inherent control of media, resulting in mass identity formation in accordance with broadcasted programs. Kerouac's

statement resonates with Baudrillard's theory of identity formation through consumption habits (164), Featherstone's theory of lifestyle formation through an assemblage of consumer objects and practices (86), Lentricchia's theory of filmic self-consciousness (207), and Barker's theory of both production of cultural identities through engagement with media as social events (332) and identity formation as forged by activities in particular spaces (449). Instead of individuals engaging with multiple genres, mediums, and perspectives, individuals tune in to a largely similar genre, a standardized medium, and limited perspectives.

In comparison with the transformative spaces found in the homes of Goldbook, Smith, and Ryder, where inhabitants and guests talk, meditate, and study, and experience the expansion of self through these activities, the limiting spaces of the homes of “middle class non-identity,” where inhabitant- and guest-relations occurs around the television, offer containment and comfort, and thereby stunt the possibility for productive conversation, learning, or spiritual awakening. Smith continues, explaining that while “middle class non-identity” spends its time in front of television sets, “the Japhies of the world go prowling in the wilderness to hear the voice crying in the wilderness, to find the ecstasy of the stars, to find the dark mysterious secret of the origin of faceless wonderless crapulous civilization” (28). Here, Kerouac further highlights the difference between two types of people, and how spatiality and media play an important role in both identity and activities. Ultimately, Kerouac privileges Japhy's engagement with nature due to nature's characteristics as a space of self-transformation, as opposed to the limitation of the suburban living room.

Without the pervasive influence of popular media, Ryder pursues his desire to experience, learn, and explore nature, which Kerouac presents as another space of transformation. Japhy goes on, stating, “All these people, they all got white-tiled toilets and take

big dirty craps like bears in the mountains, but it's all washed away to convenient supervised sewers and nobody thinks of crap any more or realizes that their origin is shit and civet and scum of the sea. They spend all day washing their hands with creamy soaps they secretly wanta eat in the bathroom" (28). Here, Ryder expands upon Smith's comment about the origin of civilization, clearly indicating that it is merely "shit and civet and scum of the sea" (28). According to Ryder, since humans continue to separate civilization completely from nature (the good and the bad, including bacteria, feces, even dirt and insects), they have disconnected themselves from certain important instinctual elements of their existence. Ryder identifies this blunt disconnect between society and nature as a major problem with contemporary American society. He is not simply stating that humans should commune with feces; rather, his example illustrates how contemporary human dissatisfaction comes from extreme separation from all aspects of existence. Kerouac seems to argue here, through Ryder, that since people are removed from these basic, primal, natural aspects of existence, people end up living meaningless lives that offer no liberation or transcendence. This obviously does not originate with Kerouac; the self-limiting aspects of society as opposed to the potentially transformative aspects of travel and nature have a long history in both British Romanticism (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake), American Transcendentalism (Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau), and the Beat Movement of which Kerouac was a part of (Ginsberg, Snyder, Burroughs). The important differentiation between Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* and previous romantic literary pursuits is its engagement with Buddhism, mid-twentieth century technology (the widely-available automobile, television, film), and contemporary romantic concerns.

While traveling towards the mountain, Smith and Japhy stop at a roadhouse bar for dinner. Smith describes the people in the bar as "an advertisement for the hunting season,"

because not only is the bar decorated in an “upcountry mountain style...with moose heads and designs of deer on the booths,” but the people are “loaded, a weaving mass of shadows at the dim bar” (33). Smith’s use of the word “advertisement” is interesting, mostly because his subjective mental experience perceives the hunters and the roadhouse as similar to a commercial that advertises the hunting season. The use of the word seems appropriate, especially according to Featherstone’s concept of identity formation as being constituted by an assemblage of products and practices (86), because a group of people in the real world can’t simply be a group of people with shared interests and hobbies. At this point in American culture, people, places, and all of the objects in relation to these are representative of an assemblage of products and practices available on the consumer market. Therefore, in a sense, the gathering of the hunters in this particular location for this particular practice with all of their equipment, clothes, and innumerable other items related to hunting is an advertisement--albeit a non-media advertisement--which promotes the lifestyle, identity, and practice of hunting for the hunter. This is one of the few moments in Kerouac’s text that resonates with Bell’s popular-media-laden consciousness in DeLillo’s *Americana*: even though Kerouac resists popular television, his mental processes are influenced by the content and form of media technologies.

Interestingly enough, after the trio camps for the night in the wilderness, they stop by another lodge for breakfast. The server in the lodge asks them, “Well you boys goin huntin this mornin?” to which Ryder responds, “No’m, just climbing Matterhorn,” and the server exclaims, “Matterhorn, why I wouldn’t do that if somebody paid me a thousand dollars!” (37). This conversation perfectly highlights the awkward disconnect that Ryder, Smith, and Morley experience as individuals with different intentions, practices, and identities than those of the hunters in the area. The conversation also resonates with another conversation the previous night:

“when [the hunters] heard we were out in this country not to kill animals but just to climb mountains they took us to be hopeless eccentrics and left us alone” (34). Not only do these social spaces influence the topics of conversation and activities that are conducted within them, they also shape the types of people that occupy the space. Nevertheless, it is important to note that spaces do not *determine* the identity and subjectivity of the individuals within; rather, spaces and individuals work together to influence both the nature of the space, as well as the nature of the individuals within.

When hiking Mount Matterhorn, Smith expresses his appreciation for Ryder: “Japhy I’m glad I met you. I’m gonna learn all about how to pack rucksacks and what to do and hide in these mountains when I’m sick of civilization. In fact I’m grateful I met you” (41). Japhy responds, “Well Smith I’m grateful I met you too, learnin about how to write spontaneously and all that” (41). Here, Ryder and Smith’s statements about one another explain the nature of their friendship, which is built around learning, sharing, and most importantly, self-transformation. Kerouac seems to offer their friendship as a catalyst for transcendence, in which Japhy teaches Smith the value of Buddhist spirituality, and Smith teaches Japhy the value of experimental art, specifically spontaneous prose. Kerouac seems to illuminate the nature of their relationship in order to argue that human relationships are the medium in which transformative ideas and concepts are shared and encouraged; without human interaction around transformative art, spaces, and ideas, individual growth and change is not possible. Kerouac's view here seems different than that of Barker, who argues that individuals gather for social events around the television; these relationships do not offer the same type of transformation as Kerouac's relation with Japhy, mostly because popular television is the medium. Barker's individuals share nothing and simply consume the content of the television.



As they continue to hike the trail, Ryder talks about haikus: “Walking in this country you could understand the perfect gems of haikus the Oriental poets had written, never getting drunk in the mountains or anything but just going along as fresh as children writing down what they saw without literary devices or fanciness of expression” (44). Here, Ryder uses Eastern poetry to enhance his experience of hiking in the mountains, because the Eastern haiku, according to Ryder, encourages individuals to simply “go along as fresh as children” and make observations without attempting to complicate their experiences, thoughts, or writing with flourishes or fanciful literary expressions. It is important to note here that Ryder’s comment about Buddhist monks “never getting drunk” complicates the Beats’ identification with Buddhist spirituality, especially Kerouac, due to his consistent use of alcohol (44). Kerouac’s struggle with alcohol can be seen not only in this novel, but in most of his work---even in his most characteristically “Buddhist” texts, such as *Some of the Dharma*, a published collection of Kerouac’s notes on Buddhist history, practice, and thought. Throughout this text, there are several moments in which he oscillates from wanting to live a life of complete sobriety on one hand, and wanting to continue drinking on the other. In one entry, he states: “This is it . . . the day / I decide to go forward instead of / backward . . . will stop drinking, cold / turkey (if I can do it) . . . Drink is / the curse of the Holy Life---Alcohol / is the curse of the Tao---” (240). Here, he has made his decision to quit drinking altogether, acknowledging that it not only negatively affects his spiritual well-being, but also goes against the principles of Buddhism; however, in a later note, he bluntly accepts his drinking habits, claiming, “. . . what’s the use of torturing the temporary arrange- / ment of your body with precepts against wine, love, and song--- / ECCLESIASTES IS RIGHT.....eat drink and be merry for that is your / portion under God...” (286). In this excerpt, he’s justified his drinking and dismissed the strict code of Buddhist monastic life, but then, by

the end of the page, he's already oscillating back towards the decision to stay sober: "STOP DRINKING OVERMUCH" (286). Then, on the next page, he simply resigns to not being a pure saint or monk: "Apparently I am not a Man of Saintship-----Just another drunken artist----- / SO BE IT, in Lay Life Write & Drink / in the Hermitage, Meditate Only" (286). This last excerpt seems to most accurately represent his most consistent stance on alcohol consumption as seen in his life and his work: drink alcohol in certain situations and places, such as in social settings & while writing, and then avoid alcohol in others, specifically when practicing Buddhist meditation. Ultimately, Kerouac never really "solves" this issue, since alcoholism eventually causes his death; however, I would argue that Kerouac's major struggle with alcohol, especially as related to selfhood and Buddhist spirituality, comes from his own creation of a dualistic model for himself: the black or white choice of either intoxication or complete sobriety. This being said, whether or not Kerouac's use of alcohol adulterates his status as a supposed "bodhisattva" is irrelevant to this project; rather, it is only necessary to mention this ongoing struggle, so that Kerouac, Snyder, and other fictionalized characters in *Dharma Bums* don't seem like pure Buddhist monks, but rather, as posited by Timothy Ray, practitioners of a type of "syncretic" Buddhism shaped and formed within the context of mid-twentieth-century American culture (Ray 188).

After Ryder explains the significance of the aforementioned haiku, Smith responds with a haiku: "Rocks on the side of the cliff, why don't they tumble down?" (44); however, Japhy claims, "Maybe that's a haiku, maybe not, it might be a little too complicated" (44). He goes on to state,

a real haiku's gotta be as simple as porridge and yet make you see the real thing, like the greatest haiku of them all probably is the one that goes "The sparrow hops along the

veranda, with wet feet.” By Shiki. You see the wet footprints like a vision in your mind and yet in those few words you also see all the rain that’s been falling that day and almost smell the wet pine needles. (44)

Here, Ryder’s explanation of the haiku, as a genre of poetry, forces Smith to re-evaluate his subjective mental experience. Smith’s haiku, about the rocks on the side of the cliff, is not simply an observation; it is an attempt to understand the situation and gather meaning from his surroundings; Ryder seems to not only teach Smith that this is not the proper way to think about a haiku, but also that this is not the proper way to think and observe your surroundings while hiking. In this way, Ryder uses the haiku as a tool to teach Smith a different mode of thinking--a new subjective mental experience. Kerouac's description of Japhy's lesson concerning the haiku not only is exemplary of the possible transformative factors of experimental art in the form of the haiku, but also the lessons of Buddhism.

Not only does Buddhism play an important role in the text for Kerouac, but it also plays important roles in relation to selfhood. It even has its own relation to both media and spatiality. To illustrate this point, here is an excerpt from a letter from Kerouac to Ginsberg written in 1955:

Now let me give you this: on the subway yesterday, as I read the Diamond Sutra, not that, the Surangama Sutra, I realized that everybody in the subway and all their thoughts..were buried in selfhood which we took to be real ... but the only real is the One, the One Essence that all's made of, and so we also took our limited and perturbed and contaminated minds..to be our own True Mind, but I saw True Mind itself, Universal and One, entertains no arbitrary ideas about these different seeming self-hangs on form, mind is IT itself, the IT...If I sit with True Mind and like Chinese sit with Tao and not with self

but by no-self...I will gain enlightenment by seeing the world as a poor dream.

(Tonkinson 43)

Here, it is clear how Kerouac not only explores Buddhist thought in *Dharma Bums*, but he reads, practices, and extensively engages with Buddhism in his life. He merely uses *Dharma Bums* as a vehicle to further understand his engagement with Buddhist spirituality, as posited by Haynes, Ray, Wilson, Bierowski, and Tonkinson. In this excerpt, Kerouac attempts to explain not only the concept of satori, or enlightenment, to Ginsberg, but also the “suchness” of things, and the concept of self and no-self. These concepts pervade not only Kerouac's private life, but also his writing.

As Japhy and Smith continue to hike Matterhorn, Japhy explains:

The secret of this kind of climbing is like Zen. Don't think. Just dance along. It's the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than walking on flat ground which is monotonous. The cute little problems present themselves at each step and yet you never hesitate and you find yourself on some other boulder you picked out for no special reason at all, just like Zen (48).

Here, Japhy seems to posit that nature is a transformative space that encourages meditation, contemplation, and ultimately, learning. Japhy's lesson is that an individual should not overthink activities, especially activities as simple as walking. Rather than trying to over-think, plan, and control the situation, it is best to simply face the “little problems [as they] present themselves.” This also resonates with Japhy's previous lesson on haiku, in which he encourages Smith to not over-think his observations, but rather simply observe his surroundings. Both of Japhy's lessons resonate with Suzuki's denunciation of rationalization and dualistic logic, as well as the basic Buddhist principles of mindfulness and speculation. Japhy goes on:

..to me a mountain is a Buddha. Think of the patience, hundreds of thousands of years just sittin there bein perfectly perfectly silent and like praying for all living creatures in that silence and just waitin for us to stop all our frettin and foolin ... This is the beginning and the end of the world right here. Look at all those patient Buddhas lookin at us saying nothing. (50-51)

Again, the wilderness of the mountains is a space that encourages insight, enlightenment, and therefore, transformation. The “lesson” of the mountains is one of patience, silence, stillness, and insight into the vast abyss of time.

Later in the evening, Japhy and Ray meditate together in a clearing, in which Smith explains that they sat along an overlook and fell into deep meditation, in which “the roar of the silence was like a wash of diamond waves going through the liquid porches of our ears, enough to soothe a man a thousand years” (53). He explains how they sat in silence, and how he meditated with his eyes closed, but Ryder meditated with his eyes open. Smith explains how “the silence was an intense roar,” and Kerouac seems to use this statement to illuminate the immediate effects of Buddhist meditation on the senses. The silence resonated with “the sound of the creek, the gurgle and slapping talk of the creek,” along with faint “Yodalayhees” from Morley (52). When Smith opens his eyes, he notices the gradual shifts in light and color caused by the setting sun, as well as the dim stars. He goes on to describe his thought process, “Rocks are space, and space is illusion. I had a million thoughts” (53). Thought by thought, Smith contemplates Japhy, their friendship, the mountains, and the nature of his consciousness. Similar to the haiku, *zazen*, or sitting meditation, encourages a type of subjective mental process that forces awareness, pursues *satori*, or enlightenment, and therefore offers self-transformation.

Furthermore, this meditation experience exhibits important connections to spatiality, in which being in solitude in nature allows one to gain a more appropriate meditating experience.

After meditating, Ryder thanks Smith for teaching him the importance of the common man's language: "You know what I like about you, Ray, you've woke me up to the true language of this country which is the language of the working men, railroad men, loggers. D'yever hear them guys talk?" (55). Through Kerouac's experimental writing, in his spontaneous prose style, Japhy believes that he has not only captured colloquial, vernacular American English, but also that this has "awakened" Japhy in some way to reality. Later, Smith reflects on his relationship with Japhy: "There was another aspect of Japhy that amazed me: his tremendous and tender sense of charity. He was always giving things, always practicing what the Buddhists call the Paramita of Dana, the perfection of charity" (56). Throughout the text, Ryder practices charity towards Smith, such as giving him his cherished Japanese meditation prayer beads, ensuring Smith's comfort, nourishment, and health, and giving flowers and clothes. When Smith would protest, Ryder would exclaim, "Smith you don't realize it's a privilege to practice giving presents to others," and Smith would state that "the way he did it was charming; there was nothing glittery or Christmasy about it, but almost sad, and sometimes his gifts were old beat-up things but they had the charm of usefulness and sadness of his giving" (57). Kerouac's sense of charity is a definitive feature of his own adaptation of Buddhism. He privileges Mahayana Buddhism over Theravada Buddhism, because while Theravada encourages separation from the world after enlightenment (life in the monastery), Mahayana focuses on compassion. Regardless of his preference of Mahayana over Theravada, there is no true way to separate the different forms of Buddhism, including Kerouac's. When explaining the complexity of the history of Buddhism, Suzuki claims that "anything that has life in it is an organism, and it is in the very nature of an

organism that it never remains in the same state of existence” (2). Furthermore, he states that “We teach ourselves, Zen merely points the way” (8). So if Kerouac first engaged with Zen, and then he moved on to Mahayana, he is indebted to Zen, Mahayana, Theravada, the entire historical lineage of Buddhism and his own adaptations of the thought and practice. Additionally, Timothy Ray refers to Kerouac's Buddhism as “syncretic Buddhism,” since he seems to incorporate different forms of Buddhism with Catholicism, as well as elements of contemporary American culture (188). While Ray's assertion seems correct, Suzuki would merely claim that his Buddhism was simply Buddhism, since organisms are always in a process of changing.

Ryder and Smith not only incorporate Buddhist practices into their experience, but they also discuss Buddhist texts. From the opening pages, Smith alludes to the Diamond Sutra, stating, “Practice charity without holding in mind any conceptions about charity, for charity after all is just a word” (2). When describing his friendship with Japhy, Kerouac explains that Ryder “claimed at once that I was a great ‘Bodhisattva,’ meaning ‘great wise being’ or ‘great wise angel,’ and that I was ornamenting this world with my sincerity” (7). Additionally, Ryder and Smith both thought of Avalokitesvara, or Kwannon, as their favorite Buddhist saint; Smith stresses his interest in Sakyamuni’s four noble truths, but expresses his disinterest in Zen Buddhism, because it “didn’t concentrate on kindness so much as on confusing the intellect to make it perceive the illusion of all sources of things” (9). Smith goes on to admit that he reads the Diamond Sutra daily, and that Ryder has “all the great sutras...the complete works of D.T. Suzuki...the Book of Tea” (12-13). Ryder even goes on to translate the poems of the Chinese scholar, Han Shan, to whom Kerouac dedicates the book (14, xxxi). Their engagement with Buddhist texts not only provides them with additional information on the culture and spirituality of Buddhism, but also reinforces the transformative influences of experimental art on the

individual. It is not only necessary to practice Buddhist spirituality, but also to engage with art that encourages growth, change, and transcendence. This correlation between spirituality & engagement with art is not only present in *Dharma Bums*, but also in *Americana*: David Bell's engagement with different media technologies ultimately seems to be a spiritual endeavor, which leads him to the growth, change, and transcendence that Japhy & Ray reach in the Kerouac text.

While atop Matterhorn, Smith expresses his desire to pursue a journey in which “All over the West, and the mountains in the East and the desert, I'll tramp with a rucksack and make it the pure way” (58). While many would expect Smith to live in a monastery to practice Buddhism, he insists on a New American Buddhism which co-exists with contemporary American culture, in which he is “an oldtime bhikku in modern clothes wandering the world ... in order to turn the wheel of the True Meaning, or Dharma, and gain merit for myself as a future Buddha (Awakener) and as a future Hero in Paradise” (2). Over the course of the novel, he travels to San Francisco, across the country to see his family in the mountains of North Carolina, back to Corte Madera to live with Japhy in a shack, and then up to the Northwest to serve a summer as a mountain lookout atop Desolation Peak in the Cascade Mountains. Regardless of the location, Kerouac continues to explore the influences of media, spatiality, and Buddhism on selfhood. While meditating at his cottage in San Francisco after an evening of socializing with Ryder and Goldbook, Smith attempts to “quiet [his] self down to [his] normal self” (23), and when meditating in a grove near his family's house in North Carolina, he describes his experience of *satori* as awakening to the immense freedom of spending his life however he pleased (112). At his shack in Corte Madera, he claims that “If the Dharma Bums ever get lay brother in America who live normal lives with wives and children and homes, they will be like Sean Monahan”



(122). Finally, at the end of the novel, on Desolation Peak, he describes another moment of enlightenment:

Standing on my head before bedtime on that rock roof of the moonlight I could indeed see that the earth was truly upside down and man a weird beetle full of strange ideas walking around upsidedown and boasting, and I could realize that man remembered why this dream of planets and plants and Plantagenets was build out of the primordial essence (182).

Kerouac presents a model for selfhood that offers transformation and transcendence through engagement with experimental art, spaces of liberation, and Buddhist thought, in contrast to the model of selfhood as exhibited by mid-century popular culture that limits the self by committing the individual to passive engagement with popular media and spaces of containment. For Kerouac, self-transformation depends on Buddhist practice, engagement with appropriate media, the development of relationships that foster growth, and occupying spaces of liberation.

## 2 DELILLO

While Kerouac seems to denounce popular media, privilege certain social spaces over others, and laud a new American Buddhism, DeLillo explores the complexity of the relationships between Self and space, media, and Buddhism; DeLillo thus explores the ways in which these elements can either encourage or inhibit self-transformation. Specifically, in *Americana*, DeLillo closely investigates the way in which the media influences the perception of individual subjects. While Kerouac thought it necessary to emphasize Buddhism and spatiality in the 1950s, DeLillo, while exploring these elements, seems to have thought it necessary to emphasize media in relation to identity and subjectivity in the 1970s. DeLillo responds to Kerouac's resistance to popular media and limiting spaces with a closer analysis of how these forms influence identity and subjectivity. For DeLillo, it's not as easy as simply "othering" popular media and limiting spaces; by the 1970s, these forms have influenced American culture and consciousness to an extent unimaginable by Kerouac in the 1950s. For Kerouac, it was as easy as switching off the television, since he didn't grow up with these invasive media technologies. For DeLillo, however, selfhood is impossible to understand without close investigation of the relation between media and self.

Within this relationship, subjects are not passive receivers which simply view media, but are rather, active receivers that engage with, and absorb media, in what Laist would refer to as an inter-phorical relationship. This term, an idea developed by Charles Feidelson, Jr. but neologized and applied to DeLillo by Laist, is different than metaphor, which is a one-way carrying across of attributes from one term to another; an interphor, in contrast, is a bidirectional carrying-between. He explains that "in DeLillo, the relationship between individuals and their technological environment is characterized by techno-psychic interphoricity, a mutual carrying

across of attributes and ontological values between psychology and electro-mechanism” (6). So, instead of human engagement with technology being a unidirectional process, it’s actually a bidirectional process in which “We are what we behold” (McLuhan via Laist 6). While exploring this interphorical relationship that humans have with technology, DeLillo also offers spatiality and Buddhist thought as elements that influence subjective mental thought. Throughout the text, he provides an extensive analysis into the complex relationship between the self and media, space, and Buddhism, in which he goes on to present a model of self-transformation and self-limitation: while DeLillo seems to illuminate the elements of self-limitation prompted and perpetuated by popular film and advertising, and certain spaces of containment including the corporate office, he also offers the possibility for self-transformation through experimental film, travel, spaces of liberation including the open road, a camper, and motels, and Buddhist thought and practice.

DeLillo uses *Americana* to explore the influence that popular media has on human subjectivity. The novel tells of how the main character, David Bell, embarks on a journey to a less-mediated, first-person subjectivity. This resembles Ray Smith’s journey in *Dharma Bums*; however, while Smith resists media and embarks on a Buddhist journey of selfhood, Bell embraces media technologies and furthers his understanding of his own self through engagement with certain media technologies. Throughout the course of the book, he explains how he realizes his own media-influenced construction, and then attempts to deconstruct and then reconstruct his identity to achieve a more genuine perception. DeLillo discusses this type of self-deconstruction and -reconstruction in an interview, in which LeClair states that “[Your main characters] withdraw, reduce their relations, empty out, discipline themselves,” and DeLillo explains that “I think they see freedom and possibility as being too remote from what they perceive existence to

mean. They feel instinctively that there's a certain struggle, a solitude they have to confront" (8). This is exactly what *Americana* is about: Bell must confront his self in order to further understand his identity, subjectivity, and overall selfhood, and he is ultimately unable to do this without exploring different forms of media, space, and practices. His constructed identity looks just like Barker's explanation of identity as self-description, and the American essentialists' explanation of identity seems to be what Bell awakens to and attempts to shed (10-11). His journey is similar to Giddens' project of self-identity in that Bell realizes his constructed identity and his ongoing process of trying to achieve a less-mediated self (75). In this respect, Bell's journey to awaken to and shed his highly-mediated self, and ultimately attain a less-mediated self, resonates with Kerouac's vision in a letter to Ginsberg, in which he penetrates through the perceived "self" and realizes the universal True Mind of everything (Tonkinson 43). Bell's relation to film and advertising seems to be in direct relation to Featherstone's theory that identity is constructed by the individual's consumption habits in order to assemble a lifestyle (86), as well as Lentricchia's model of filmic self-consciousness, in which Bell's subjectivity and identity depends not only on his first-person-perspective of his self, but a self-consciousness that depends on how others would see him as if his life were a movie (207).

Even though David Bell's subjectivity and identity are almost completely constituted by his exposure to film and advertising from the beginning of the novel, it is first necessary to investigate a scene near the end of the story, in which DeLillo, via Bell, provides his own explanation for the relationship between subjectivity and media. At this point in the story, Bell has already realized his media-constructed self, and has embarked on a journey to reconstruct his own self as independent from popular media. In the first step of this journey, he begins an experimental film-making project; this endeavor seems to embrace the power of media to

construct self, while implying that the individual must make their own media to replace the media already in existence. According to Bell and Ray Smith, if popular media has the power to negatively construct individuals' subjectivity and identity, then experimental media (spontaneous prose and Eastern artforms for Kerouac, experimental film for DeLillo) has the ability to offer transformation, and ultimately, positive construction of individuals' subjectivity and identity. The key, for both DeLillo and Kerouac, is active engagement with the experimental art form, rather than passive consumption of popular media. In *Americana*, Bell's experimental film-making project is his first step in self- deconstruction and -reconstruction. Since his understanding of the world has been developed through others' media, he is able to develop a more authentic understanding through his own media. In one of the scenes from his film, he conducts a scripted interview with his friend Glenn Yost, in which Bell has already written the questions and answers. Bell begins the interview by asking Yost to explain the influence that television commercials have on their audiences. Yost responds by stating that successful advertisements arouse the desire for change in the viewer's life. This arousal of desire, Yost goes on to explain, shifts the viewer's perception from a first-person-consciousness to a third-person-consciousness:

In this country, there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising has discovered this man. It uses him to express the possibilities open to the consumer. To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream. Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled. (270)

DeLillo's analysis of consciousness as presented in this interview is essential to the understanding of subjectivity in the novel, and it is what separates DeLillo's investigation from Kerouac's. Where Kerouac resists and largely ignores the relationship between the selfhood and

engagement with media, DeLillo confronts the relation and provides an explanation. The first-person-consciousness is simply the individual's own point-of-view, while the third-person-consciousness is that of the desired prospective individual, who can be understood as the “me-in-the-future,” or the “he-that-embodies-what-I-want-to-be.” The third-person-consciousness becomes a universal-third-person-consciousness when several individuals desire to be the same third-person. In simpler terms, first-person consciousness is “me,” third-person-consciousness is “s/he-that-I-want-to-be,” and universal-third person-consciousness is “s/he-that-we-all-want-to-be.” In relation to American advertising, this model of subjectivity addresses the American mass desire for possibilities, which can be referred to as the American Dream. Advertising, then, exploits the American Dream by presenting products, and of course their accompanying lifestyles (aligning with Featherstone), the only possibilities for consumer change and growth.

It is important to note that DeLillo's model of subjectivity does not assert that advertising creates the desire for the third-person, but rather exploits the desire for the American Dream. The model actually states (through the interview with Yost) that the *consumer* invents the third-person-consciousness. DeLillo is claiming that the third-person is ingrained in American ideology, and Bird proclaims that this third-person consciousness is “the archetypal American condition of mind and self” (Bird 12). Bird explains that Americans have pursued the desire for possibilities since the discovery of the continent, for as DeLillo states, the third-person-consciousness “came over on the Mayflower” (DeLillo 271). DeLillo distinguishes the influence of advertising on subjectivity from that of film. Advertising, as Yost explains, exploits the limitation of dreams, while film exploits the infinite possibility of dreams (271). Within this model, advertising presents achievable desires that can be acquired as products, while film presents unachievable desires that function as fantasy. DeLillo not only suggests that advertising

and film take advantage of the desire of possibilities, but also that these two mediums contribute in the construction of subjectivity and identity.

From the beginning of the novel, David Bell's identity is highly influenced by popular American cinema. After describing the famous Hollywood actors Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas as monumental figures that embody male perfection, he likens them to his own physical appearance (12-13). Even though his comparison seems to be a joke, he is in fact completely serious. It is obvious that Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas are examples of both Bell's third-person-consciousness and the historical universal-third-person-consciousness for the time period in America. Bird posits that the actors are Bell's "immortal mirror image[s]," which he explains as being the desire for immortality displaced onto images (9). Bird associates this with Rankian psychoanalysis, in which an "immortal mirror image," as an immortal alter ego, can be used as a "symbol of eternal life" to minimize death-anxiety (Rank 76). Lancaster and Douglas definitely seem to be both Bird's "immortal mirror image[s]" and Rank's "symbol[s] of eternal life" for David Bell. Bell's identity is constructed by both the displacement of his fear of death, and the mapping-on of these characters' appearances and identities onto himself, so that his own image will live on through his mirror images.

Not only is Bell's self-identity influenced by popular media, but so is his social identity. When describing his relationship with his ex-wife, Merry, he explains that they treated their relationship as a movie, in which their time together was spent pursuing experiences they had seen in movies. Their identities in the relationship were merely their immortal mirror images and symbols of eternal life. Bell explains that they framed their nights as "a series of cuts and slow dissolves," wore costumes, and re-created scenes from movies (36). Bell even states that "everything we did was the most wonderful thing that had ever been done," as if their

relationship was a fine work of cinema that they had written, directed, acted in, and apparently nominated for awards (35). Their relationship was completely inspired by the films that they were going out to see regularly. This film-inspired-relationship illustrates the power of film to affect the way in which individuals perceive people, time, and their own identity. Within Bell and Merry's relationship, each played the male and female lead characters, and each of their perceptions were dictated by their own cinematic eye: instead of viewing their relationship from the first-person, they viewed it from the third-, as if a camera was following them around. This cinematic-eye, within the framework of DeLillo's presentation of consciousness, is the third-person-consciousness of Bell and Merry, more easily understood as the "they-that-they-both-want-to-be" (or want-to-appear- to-be). Their desired identities aren't simply prospective future selves, but rather desired cinematic identities. From their engagement with popular media, they are influenced to embark on a journey to mold their identities around the identities on the screen. DeLillo even goes so far as to claim that their identity as a relationship was completely based on the third-person-consciousness, for the relationship fails once they are unable to live cinematically (37). They are actually unable to live in the first-person-consciousness; when the third-person becomes exhausted and unable to perpetuate itself, rather than shift into the first-person, the relationship is forced to end.

Even after Bell and Merry divorce, Bell's cinematic eye and third-person-consciousness prevails. He regularly describes women as looking like characters in movies (DeLillo 38), and he discusses what famous Hollywood actors would play real people in their hypothetical respective biographical films (186). This sort of attempt to place people into their popular media role is an attempt to impose, or apply, a third-person-personality onto that of a first person. Whether Bell does this to better understand unfamiliar real people, or simply imagine (or even cast) them on



the big-screen is irrelevant; the point is that he is perceiving people as related to media, instead of individuals in and of themselves. It even seems that he can not understand people from the perspective of a first-person-consciousness, but rather, he must depend on the images presented in the media as a third-person-consciousness to understand the images in his own life. When Bell's sister, Mary, explains to him how she met her boyfriend, she says that they smiled at each other like Leslie Howard and Ingrid Bergman (163). In her mind, that exact moment had been a repeated scene from a specific movie. By mentioning this, she is implying that her attraction to her boyfriend was influenced by this cinematic moment, and she was probably satisfied that a moment in real life looked like a moment on the screen. In this sense, Mary's subjectivity and identity are equally as mediated as her brother's, which implies the influence of popular media on general audiences of varying age and sex. Her use of famous Hollywood actors also implicates that the actors from this time period were regularly seen as an individual's third-person-consciousness, making them the historical universal-third-person-consciousness of that time in America.

Bell's subjectivity is not only limited by the influence of film, but also by advertising. When Bell's mother describes the preacher, she describes him like an automobile commercial (much like Kerouac's description of the hunters in the lodge as an advertisement): "She would run through the litany of his credits as if he were a make of automobile that had competed successfully in the various economy runs and endurance trials" (140). Bell's awareness of advertising's effect on consciousness is very apparent here. He hears his mother's description as an advertisement, and also, his mother delivers the description like an advertisement. She does not seem to be aware of this, which signifies that her perception is unknowingly influenced by her exposure to advertisements. After years of engaging with mass-produced television

advertisements, her own understanding of people, and the way in which she talks, has been partly constructed by the form and content of the commercials. Within this mode of thought, people begin to become desirable products, such that the delivery of their characteristics is important to the way in which people endorse, approve, and even “buy” them. Bell's own perception of his mother's description as an advertisement also signifies his own awareness of the media's influence on the way in which he hears and processes information. The preacher becomes something that is being sold to Bell. This particular example of the media's influence on subjectivity seems to engage with Featherstone's discussion of the absorption and assemblage of commodities, which include media (86). Through Bell's mother's exposure to advertisements, she has absorbed the practices used in commercials to structure her everyday conversations with her family.

During Bell's time in college, when he is separated by great distance from Merry, he explains how he imagines Merry sitting in London on a bench with a yellow umbrella (166). The imagined Merry seems to be very similar to a character in a movie scene. In order to remember her, he has to cinematically picture her in his memory. Again, Bell's perception heavily depends on his media-influenced third-person-consciousness. Even at this stage in his life, before he and Merry are married, their relationship is built on perceiving each other as actors in the movie of their life. Bell regularly explains memory in filmic metaphors, where “old times” with his college girlfriend Wendy are on “tapes” which documented that particular time. It is possible that he actually had recorded parts of their relationship; however, he refers to their entire relationship as if it is on tape, which signifies Bell's technological understanding of his own memory. DeLillo obviously does this deliberately to exhibit how media technologies have affected the way in which we understand our own bodies and minds. When Wendy asks about these “old

times,” Bell claims that they were “accidentally destroyed,” as if all of his memories were on tapes in his brain (25). Bird exclaims that this scene exhibits Bell's awareness of how “his mind is susceptible to fundamental corruption by media technologies” (5). Bird is illuminating how Bell thinks of his first-person perceptions as inauthentic in comparison with his third-person perspective. The destruction of the “tapes” of his memories of Wendy seems to engage specifically with Giddens' ongoing project of the self (75), and Barker's narrative of biographical continuity (10-11). Bell, unknowingly at this point in the novel (since he still hasn't embarked on the journey towards a less-mediated perception), perceives his life as a narrative of past, present, and future where his present self desires to forget parts of his past because they do not “fit in” to his own biography. As in his relationship with Merry, he views his own life as a movie, and if all of his life is recorded onto different sets of tapes, only some can be selected for and edited into Bell's narrative of self. Any memory which does not fit into his biographical narrative must be erased to maintain continuity. Bell desires a stable, essential self, and hopes to perceive himself as such if he frames his life into an edited movie. There are other moments in which he speaks of his life as a film. At the beginning of Part Two, for instance, he parenthetically states that the story being told (the book of *Americana*, which we later find out is the manuscript written in conjunction with this mentioned projected film) is a film being “projected” in front of him (129). Again, these “memories” are documented footage. Not only are Bell's memories within the story described as movies, but the actual story of *Americana* is a movie of memory itself, as well as an investigation of the self.

Throughout the novel, DeLillo not only emphasizes Bell's relationship with subjectivity and media, but also Bell's understanding and eventual combatting of popular media's influence. Early in the novel, he states that he wants to free himself from the “montage of speed, guns,

torture, rape, orgy, and consumer packaging which constitutes the vision of sex in America” (33). This statement implies that Bell is aware of the negative effects that popular media has on his own understanding of his experience, and that he wants to shed these negative influences. Bell is claiming that his perception is constituted by the images which the American media broadcasts, which collectively connote the concept, or “vision of,” “sex.” Bell understands sex only from the third-person-consciousness; he neither possesses his own understanding, nor a dictionary definition. In the spirit of Featherstone, Bell has absorbed the images that the media has “sold” to his self, and the absorbed accumulation has imposed a particular meaning of the word “sex” into his identity and perception (86). This admitted desire to free himself from this “vision of sex” foreshadows his eventual quest to arrive at a more genuine first-person-consciousness, which is much like Kerouac’s “vision” of America in Ryder’s poems, expressed through “anarchistic ideas about how Americans don’t know how to live, with lines about commuters being trapped in living rooms that come from poor trees felled by chainsaws” (10). Bell, Smith, and Ryder want to free themselves from these “visions,” and instead, “go prowling in the wilderness to hear the voice crying in the wilderness, to find the ecstasy of the stars, to find the dark mysterious secret of the origin of faceless wonderless crapulous civilization” (Kerouac 28). They want to “leave that place, to go roaring onto a long straight expressway into the West...to face mountains and deserts; to smash my likeness, prism of all my images, and become finally a man who lives by his own power and smell” (DeLillo 236).

In a later scene, Bell asks his friend, Sullivan, “When you wash your legs, do you lift one leg way up...like the models in TV commercials?” (208). His question seems to be an intentional real-world confrontation with the “vision of sex” as provided by media. He realizes that women do not wash their legs like television commercials depict, but he asks Sullivan in order to

confirm his realization. Even though Bell knows that women do not shave this way in reality, his lifetime engagement with these types of commercials has “corrupted” his understanding of this female behavior at an essential level. Regardless of his rational mind, that tells him that this televised behavior is a fantasy, the material has still infiltrated his mind in a sense that he can not separate the televised fantasy from his experienced reality. At this point in the novel, he has recognized his own media-constructed perception, and is beginning to confront the “desire for possibilities” that constitute his third-person-consciousness. Sullivan responds to his question by claiming that she doesn't shave her legs like the women in commercials; however, Bell doesn't seem to believe her. Later in the novel, this issue resurfaces. When Bell is visiting an unattractive woman, Edwina, in a motel room, he describes a commercial that appears on the television during his visit: “There was a commercial on the television set. A woman in a bathtub was washing her legs...One knee out of the water, she slowly guided the soap along her calf, then up over her knee and down her thigh...” (259). This commercial is the exact type of commercial that Bell asks Sullivan about; however, because of the direct parallel between Edwina (reality) and the television commercial (fantasy), he understands the difference between the commercial and his real-world experience. The parallel between this scene, and the scene with Sullivan, is also very clear. In both scenes, he is in a motel room with a woman in which there is the potential for sexual attraction and intercourse. Bell is attracted to Sullivan, and when she is bathing in the motel bath, he wants to pursue his desire for Sullivan, and his desire that develops from the fantasy of television models shaving in bath tubs. Bell is not attracted to Edwina, and when Edwina is standing next to the television and this commercial appears, Bell realizes the stark difference from the the real-world image of Edwina and the televised image of popular media. At

this moment, he understands that the shaving model is a misrepresentation of reality given by the media that causes a misperception of reality in its audience.

Within DeLillo's model of subjectivity, there is a cultural desire for the images portrayed in the commercial, which can be understood as a universal-third-person-consciousness. Bell's understanding of this misrepresentation as a device to provoke the third-person-consciousness of the audience represents his own realization of the relationship between media and subjectivity. This image is exactly what he means by the "vision of sex" that connotes sex for America. DeLillo, then, through this scene, exemplifies Marshall McLuhan's archetype for the postmodern artist. McLuhan posits that the "serious artist is indispensable in the shaping and analysis and understanding of the life of forms, and structures created by technology" (McLuhan 71). McLuhan's "serious artist" is one who explores the relationship between humans and technology, and according to Laist, DeLillo successfully investigates this relationship (14). Kerouac, on the other hand, does not fulfill this role, and it may be for this reason that DeLillo's investigation of selfhood in the 1970s differs from Kerouac's investigation in the 1950s. DeLillo's character realizes that technologically-projected images have affected and exploited his own desires and understanding of the world. These images of misrepresentation become more apparent to Bell as the story progresses. In one instance, he provides another exploration of the American Dream, in which he analyzes the image that Americans have of "the dream of the good life," which includes "the red carpet welcome on the aircraft carrier as the band play[s] on" (130). This "dream," also discussed in the interview with Yost, is representative of the American Dream, and, like Bell's perception of "sex," his perception of the "dream" has been constituted by the images produced by popular media. The American Dream, in this instance, is merely an image that Americans have constructed of the "good life," but few to none have actually experienced

it. Instead of the desire for the American Dream being limited to the individual opinion expressed in the first-person- consciousness, or even the collective desire expressed in the third-person, the American Dream is depicted in images created by the media, which imposes a desire onto the masses through the creation of a universal-third-person- consciousness. Bell goes on to say that the citizens of America who have volunteered to fight in wars aren't willing to die for America, but for photographs of America (132). Like his discussion of the “dream of the good life,” he claims here that Americans have a perception of their country that is influenced by popular media. They are united not by a collective desire that arises from individual desire, but rather by a desire evoked by the presentation of images in the media that impose what nationalism means for Americans.

In other parts of the novel, Bell addresses another problem concerning the influence of misrepresented images on human subjectivity: the inability to crop out and edit undesired aspects of reality. Not only does media misrepresent reality, but it omits undesirable elements of reality in order to present a certain story or message that is consistent and pure (which, in fact, looks much like Giddens' narrative of the self, and Barker's biographical continuity, since both attempt to present a stable meaning for self). When Bell explains why his father couldn't understand his mother, he claims that his mother “was not a photograph that could be retouched” (137). The problems that are presented to his father in his advertising job could be solved by certain methods that were inapplicable to reality. If an ad wasn't perfect, he could easily edit it, or crop out, any undesired part. His father's exposure to advertising had influenced his perception of problems and solutions: a negative aspect in advertising could simply be omitted, but the negative aspects of reality could not simply be technologically removed in the interest of a perfect life, unlike the production of a “perfect” advertisement. Bell addresses this problem again

in his interview with Yost, in which Yost explains how a minor undesired detail in an advertisement campaign causes the company to force a re-shoot. When Bell asks him why, he responds, “Because of the Oriental. Because of the old man standing at the edge of the group” (274). Yost goes on to explain that the old man conflicted with the message of the commercial, which was “health, happiness, [and] freshness” (274). In order for the commercial to be successful, it was important to convey a pure message through the use of a pure image. Even though the old man was a small detail in the advertisement, he could diminish the strength of the message. DeLillo is obviously examining the “power of the image,” in which the images presented in media are more powerful than the actual form and content that accompany the image. The commercial, depended not on the product (mouthwash), or the language used to describe the product, but a small detail in the image that detracted from the message. In terms of DeLillo's model of media-influenced subjectivity, if an advertisement contains elements which are not desirable to the universal third-person- consciousness, then it has to be revised in order to appeal to every individual that seeks the universal third-person- consciousness. The old man did not fit into a prospective third-person-consciousness, and if a third-person- consciousness was not presented to account for the desired lifestyle that could accompany the product being sold, then the advertisement would not arouse the desire in the individual for the “desire of possibilities” presented through the advertisement.

As Bell realizes and confronts these issues, he eventually begins to combat them by attempting to deconstruct and reconstruct his perception through experimental film-making. Bird claims that Bell's endeavor is ultimately in pursuit of “a model of self that is recognizable as 'subjectivity'” (3). This “model of self” is merely a first-person-consciousness that is not mediated by popular images, or driven by a perception created by a third-person-consciousness.



While Kerouac uses spontaneous prose and Eastern artforms to achieve “a model of self that is recognizable as ‘subjectivity’” (Bird 3), Bell uses filmmaking in order to revert the power of the image from popular media back to the individual, in order to pursue original exploration and understanding. He first discovers the potential of filmmaking to arrive at a first-person-consciousness in film school, recalling, “I felt I could do things never done before,” but he seems to abandon this endeavor until later in life (DeLillo 33). There are, however, moments when Bell recalls his fascination with the power of the camera. For instance, he describes a scene in which he witnesses a man “photographing [a] photograph,” and realizes how film has the ability to annihilate time and distance (86). He explains how the camera has “religious authority” that commands “reverence from subject and bystander alike” (86). Because of the immediacy of the camera, and its direct relation between photographer and potential photograph, photography creates experiences of first-person-consciousness that are as powerful as religion. When Bell begins filming out West, he claims that he is making an attempt to explore parts of his consciousness, implying that he is exploring the dimensions of first-person-consciousness, third-person-consciousness, and universal third-person-consciousness. While Kerouac explores aspects of his consciousness through Buddhist meditation and practice, as well as alternative spaces and experimental art, DeLillo uses experimental film to aid in the deconstruction of his subjectivity and identity.

When filming, he dedicates a portion of the process to filming twenty-second advertisements that attempt to sell no product, which signify his own reconstruction of parts of his identity constructed by advertising (241). If the leg-shaving commercial had constituted certain parts of self, he was attempting to override this influence with meaningless, product-less, and self-imposed influences. Just as Ryder encourages Smith to use haiku-writing as a model for

appropriate, non-subjective thinking while hiking Matterhorn (Kerouac 44), Bell uses these experimental commercials as new, productless models for identity and subjectivity. In other segments of the film, Bell films his friends playing themselves, or playing people in Bell's life, with all romantic plot and set nonexistent (DeLillo 240). If the experimental commercial was shot in order to reconstruct parts of his self influenced by the third-person- consciousness presented in images through advertising, his experimental short film segments were shot in order to reconstruct parts of his self influenced by the third-person- consciousness presented in images through popular American cinema. Bell needs to film people who aren't famous Hollywood actors, like his immortal mirror images, Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas, because he needs to cast people from reality, and see them on the screen in order to replace the images of popular media; he needs to film the content in an interview format in order to replace the romantic plot and set, and strip down his film's content into realistic content, without any of the familiar images present in popular media. These choices illustrate Bell's efforts to reconstruct his conscious understanding of time and space, and all of the perceptions that had been mediated and influenced by the images shown in popular film and advertising.

Some critics of *Americana*, according to Bird, posit that Bell's project to shed his third-person-consciousness and pursue a less-mediated first-person-consciousness is a failed endeavor, but these critics have “not fully appreciated the nature of his project” (15). Bell's experimental film-making project marks the beginning of his own pursuit of Giddens' project of the self, in which Bell strives to get closer to a first-person experience. He eventually abandons the filmmaking project, but this is not to be understood as the failure of the project, but rather the continuing of the project through a subsequent phase. Bell's filmmaking marks his first step towards deconstruction and reconstruction, after his realization and understanding of the

different layers of his consciousness. From here, his journey continues throughout the country, bringing him back to New York, and eventually to an African island on which he reviews the manuscript of *Americana*, and the movies that he filmed. The phase that we are left with, on the African island, does not seem to be a final step that serves as a resolution to DeLillo's presentation of the complicated relationship between popular media and human subjectivity, but rather a conclusion revealing that Bell's pursuit did lead him to a better understanding of his own subjectivity and identity, and a less-mediated first-person-consciousness.

While DeLillo specifically investigates the elements of self-limitation prompted and perpetuated by popular film and advertising and the possibility for self-transformation through experimental film-making, he also illuminates similar connections concerning certain spaces of containment including the corporate office, the possibility for self-transformation through travel, spaces of liberation including the open road, a camper, and motels. This spatial analysis, unlike the media investigation, fully resonates with Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*, not to mention his earlier text, *On the Road* (1957). Both of these texts practically laid the groundwork for the American travel novel, which is primarily concerned with the liberatory nature of the "road trip." DeLillo's road trip not only seems to be purposefully Kerouacian, but he seems to adapt the road trip to meet the needs of the 1970s cultural climate, in that a primary reason for the road trip is to make the experimental film. In an interview, DeLillo explains his use of what LeClair calls "abstract spatial analysis of characters [and] situations":

It's a way to take psychology out of a character's mind and into the room he occupies. I try to examine psychological states by looking at people in rooms, objects in rooms. It's a way of saying we can know something important about a character by the way he sees himself in

relation to objects...the most important thing I can do is set [a character] up in relation to objects, shadows, angles. (14)

For DeLillo, as for Kerouac, people are not independent of the space they occupy; rather, the person and space are dependent on one another, such that the space determines the particular activities that occur within it, and the person engages in space-specific activities. In *Americana*, David Bell begins in the constraints of spaces in New York corporate culture: cocktail parties, upscale restaurants, and his own advertising agency office. Within these spaces, Bell wallows in his “ego-moments,” in which he participates in activities that engage his egomaniacal consciousness. He admits that he “had almost the same kind of relationship with my mirror that many of my contemporaries had with their analysts. When I began to wonder who I was, I took the simple step of lathering my face and shaving...I was blue eyed David Bell” (11). He goes on to explain the need for compliments and acknowledgement from others, in which “There was an energy in me which demanded release in these small ways. To thief one smile from that man's afternoon. I hoarded such ego-moments, remembering each one” (17). The remarkable aspect of Bell's condition is that this “energy” seems to be fueled by the spaces he occupies. In all spaces which correlated with his lifestyle, he was “blue-eyed David Bell,” and most importantly his “life depended on this fact” (11). There are moments, interestingly enough, in these spaces, in which he seems to temporarily “break-out” of his boundaries. While at a cocktail party, he makes eye contact with Sullivan from across the room, and starts acting like a chimpanzee. As strange as this moment is, it represents another type of “release” that Bell needs: the release from the stability of his own stifling self. These moments are few and far between, but they are indicative of Bell's progression of selfhood throughout the novel, and eventually, he flees these spaces of

containment for a road trip out west in a camper with Sullivan and his other eccentric friends. It isn't until this trip that Bell can truly experience self-transformation.

As Bell, Sullivan, Pike, and Brand travel in the camper on their road trip, Bell describes his observations: “the young and the very young, leaving their medieval cities, tall stone citadels of corruption and plague, not hopeless in their flight, not yet manic in their search, the lost, the found, the nameless, the brilliant, the stoned, the dazed, and the simply weary” (203). Not only does his description explain the spatial freedom available on the road (“not hopeless,” “not yet manic in their search,” “the lost”), but it also contrasts with the spatial corruption and toxicity of stagnant civilization (“medieval cities,” “plague”). Furthermore, this excerpt echoes Kerouac’s appreciation for the same type of people that he celebrated in *On the Road*: “the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Awww!’” (Kerouac 5). For DeLillo and Kerouac, these individuals who are fleeing the cities in search of greater meaning are representative of a large-scale societal hope and need for transformation and abandonment of the restraints and inherently confining cities. In *Americana*, the vague, yet present, “search” of the road trip provides Bell and his friends with direction, while also providing them with freedom; the actual individuals of the road, in contrast to the people in Bell's corporate life, provide insight and camaraderie that seemed non-existent before. The use of the camper and motels allows the group transience and anonymity, which greatly contrasts with the “energy” of the “ego-moments” as experienced in New York. Bell even admits to moments of realization and enlightenment gained from the trip: “as we drove through the cloverleaf bedlams and past the

morbid gray town I perceived that all was in harmony, the stunned land feeding the convulsive radio, every acre of the night bursting with a kinetic unity, the logic beyond delirium...What a mysterious and sacramental journey” (204).

DeLillo's “abstract spatial analysis of characters [and] situations” continues with an investigation of motels and their occupants:

There is a motel in the heart of every man...One hundred hermetic rooms. Despite its great size, the motel seems temporary....The forest lodge, the suite of mauve rooms, the fleabag above the hockshop, the borrowed apartment---all too personal, the unrecurring moment. Men hold this motel firmly in their hearts; here flows the dream of the confluence of travel and sex. (257)

Bell offers some important insight here: on his “quest” for “authentic selfhood,” the anonymity as provided by the road, and more specifically, the motel, offers its occupants the opportunity to shed selfhood, and potentially to arrive at a state of diminished ego, self-consciousness, identity, and subjectivity. For DeLillo, the motel is a refuge from the self that is identifiable in the familiarity of ordinary occupational and living spaces. For most though, the motel does not offer complete transcendence; rather, it offers a different part of the “dream” or American consciousness that connotes “travel and sex.” Regardless of the inherent limitations, Bell still seems to offer the motel as a space of transformation. He further explores the transformative possibilities of the open road: “I felt an urge to leave that place, to go roaring onto a long straight expressway into the West...to face mountains and deserts; to smash my likeness, prism of all my images, and become finally a man who lives by his own power and smell” (236). Here, the road provides him with the possibility of shedding his “likeness” and “images,” and ultimately to approach a more “essential” self, and even though he doesn't necessarily “live by his own power

and smell” in the sense that he is “living off the land” in the wilderness, he definitely approaches a more “essential” self through engagement with self-transformative media, space, and thought.

Bell’s pursuit of a more “essential” self, in which he seems to consistently use a method of self-awareness, -confrontation, -deconstruction, and-reconstruction, resonates with Buddhism. Even though DeLillo only directly incorporates Buddhist thought into the text once (unlike Kerouac, who makes this the overall pursuit and purpose of his text), when Bell takes a Zen Buddhism course in college, the presence of Buddhism in the overall trajectory of the text is unavoidable. While on the trip with Sullivan and his friends, he telephones a friend and states that the trip has provided him with a “whole new perspective” (243). This, according to D.T. Suzuki, is at the heart of Zen: “The object of Zen discipline consists in acquiring a new viewpoint for looking into the essence of things,” and furthermore, “This acquiring of a new viewpoint in Zen is called *satori*,” or enlightenment (58). DeLillo claims that he knows little about Zen, but rather, he is “interested in religion as a discipline and a spectacle, as something that drives people to extreme behavior” (DePietro 10). Regardless of this statement, *Americana* is primarily concerned with selfhood and enlightenment, even if DeLillo does not provide Buddhism as *the* “vehicle” for exploration of these themes.

According to Bird, DeLillo uses Zen to “contrast the destructive third-person 'dream' of America with examples of relatively liberating first-person experience” (191). On the final day of the Zen Buddhism class with Dr. Oh, Bell sits up from lying down in meditation, noticing that:

Oh looked at me and motioned me down again, a whisper of his eyes, down, my child, this is your last chance, tomorrow the corporations come calling, never again will you come to this moment, the chance to capture the sleep of awakening. (177)

DeLillo draws an important parallel here between the practice of Zen and Bell's experience in corporate America, in which meditation provides an individual with the ability to not only transcend the American "dream" as offered by the corporations, but also the "dream" of existence that contemporary culture perceives as reality. Even though Bell does not practice Buddhism later in life, this scene, situated in the middle of the book, strongly resonates with DeLillo's thread of subjectivity, identity, and selfhood as explored in the entirety of the novel. According to Bird, the reason why Buddhism is an important lens to understand the construction of Bell's consciousness is because Buddhism is "a realist philosophy that takes seriously the access of the world provided by consciousness" (191). He even references Suzuki, stating that "in Zen the mind can adopt an 'absolute standpoint' that gives the human subject access to the 'suchness' or essence of things" (191). Along his journey, Bell closely investigates his perception and consciousness through a deconstruction and reconstruction of his subjective mental experience and identity. Ultimately, Bell seems to have found the "absolute standpoint" into the "suchness" of things on the African Island. He engages in practiced meditation (albeit, not any traditional Buddhist meditation) on his own selfhood over the trajectory of the past, present, and future selves through reflection on manuscripts, film footage, photographs, and the actual novel of *Americana* itself. The most fascinating aspect of the African island is that it may not even be an actual island, but rather the removed, "absolute standpoint" to which meditative practices have allowed him access. Within this model, Bell's Buddhist practice doesn't involve traditional zazen meditation as in Zen, but rather, meditation that incorporates elements of American culture and consciousness, including contemporary forms of media and spaces.



#### 4 CONCLUSION

Even though both Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* and DeLillo's *Americana* explore the influences of media, spatiality, and Buddhism on selfhood, each text presents a distinct model for addressing the possibility for self-transformation or inherent self-limitation as encouraged by these influences. Both authors present popular media, including film, television, and advertising, and spaces of containment, including suburban homes and business workplaces, as having limiting effects on the self. Furthermore, both authors offer experimental art, spaces of emancipation, and Buddhism as having potentially transformative influences on selfhood. However, while Kerouac's experimental art includes bop jazz, spontaneous prose, haikus, and other Eastern art-forms, DeLillo's includes experimental film; while Kerouac's spaces of liberation include roads, shacks, trains, and nature, DeLillo's include roads, a camper, and motels. Both authors present a story of a character that answers what Joseph Campbell refers to as "the Call," in which an individual seeks a broader base or relationship with the world because they don't feel satisfied with "the way of the village compound" (23-29). While both authors present similar models, DeLillo doesn't offer Buddhism, or any element, as *the* element that prompts self-transformation; Kerouac, on the other hand, has no problem prescribing Buddhism (albeit a New American Buddhism), experimental art, and liberating spaces as *the* model for transformation and transcendence. This is due to the temporal gap that separates the authors and the texts. DeLillo, as a postmodern author, is more likely to provide readers with an array of multi-faceted possibilities for truth, while Kerouac, as a Beat author, is more likely to provide readers with the Dharma as applicable to contemporary American existence in the form of a rising counter-cultural consciousness.

Even though I have identified and traced a “thread” of mid-twentieth century American thought found in both texts, I have not investigated the actual reasons that the texts, authors, and eras are ultimately different. What actually happened during these years in the United States to prompt DeLillo to revisit Kerouacian themes and to revise them for his own era? Interestingly enough, Kerouac provides a kind of answer in *Big Sur* (1962), in which he begins to witness the major cultural shifts that would eventually contribute to the overall transformation of the Beat counter cultural movement present in *Dharma Bums* (1958):

This is the first time I’ve hitch hiked in years and I soon begin to see that things have changed in America, you can’t get a ride any more ... Sleek long stationwagon after wagon comes sleering by smoothly ... the husband is in the driver’s seat with a long ridiculous vacationist hat with a long baseball visor making him look witless and idiot--- Beside him sits wifey, the boss of America, wearing dark glasses and sneering, even if he wanted to pick me up or anybody up she wouldn’t let him---But in the two deep backseats are children, children, millions of children, all ages, they’re fighting and screaming over ice cream, they’re spilling vanilla all over the Tartan seatcovers---There’s no room anymore anyway for a hitch hiker, tho conceivably the poor bastard might be allowed to ride like a meek gunman or silent murderer in the very back platform of the wagon, but here no, alas! here is ten thousand racks of drycleaned and perfectly pressed suits and dresses of all sizes for the family to look like millionaires every time they stop at a roadside dive for bacon and eggs ... It’s time for motels, roadside driveins, bringing napkins to the gang in the car, having the car washed before the return trip---” (Kerouac 44-45)

While this passage may seem merely like the excessive complaining of a hitchhiker, Kerouac actually describes and addresses a part of the major shift that occurred in the cultural consciousness during this era: travel had become an industry, and Kerouac's once liberating concept of the "road trip" had become a commodity of the masses. The concept of the American "family vacation" was born, and this type of journey changed from being self-transformative to self-limiting in both form and content. If Kerouac would have called the types of journeys found in *On the Road* (1957) and *Dharma Bums* (1958) an Emersonian effort to "establish an original relationship to the universe" (Emerson), then the nature of the "family vacation" completely undermined this sense of effort or purpose by emphasizing identical experiences for all participants. This perfectly resonates with Kerouac's statement in *Dharma Bums* that "colleges [are] nothing but grooming schools for the middle class non-identity which usually finds its perfect expression on the outskirts of the campus in rows of well-to-do houses with lawns and television sets in each living room with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time" (28). The car has now become this same type of space, in which "the middle class non-identity..usually finds its perfect expression...in [lanes] of well-to-do [cars]...with everybody looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time." According to this understanding, every family in America was taking the same road trip on the same route for the same reasons: they stopped at the same restaurants, ate the same food, saw the same landmarks, and ultimately saw no transformation, growth, or change in themselves.

This type of collective cultural shift in experience contributed to the nascent beginnings of postmodernism, inherited by DeLillo, for Kerouac's confident prescription of certain types of media, spaces, and a forms of spirituality as a means of self-transformation had already been commandeered, misinterpreted, and adulterated by popular culture. In this sense, DeLillo

couldn't provide a simple solution to prompt self-transformation in the age of postmodernism; rather, he is faced with a whole new cultural landscape that must be evaluated in order to understand the role of the self in this different context. In *White Noise* (1984), for instance, DeLillo seems to revisit Kerouac's hitchhiking experience in *Big Sur*:

Several days later Murray asked me about a tourist attraction known as the most photographed barn in America. We drove twenty-two miles into the country around Farmington. There were meadows and apple orchards. White fences trailed through the rolling fields. Soon the signs started appearing. THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA. We counted five signs before we reached the site. There were forty cars and a tour bus in the makeshift lot. We walked along a cowpath to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and photographing. All the people had cameras; some had tripods, telephoto lenses, filter kits. A man in a booth sold postcards and slides---pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot. We stood near a grove of trees and watched the photographers. (12)

DeLillo's description of the scene resonates with Kerouac's, in which tourists are merely taking trips to tourist attractions because it's a tourist attraction; there wasn't any reason or point in going to photograph "the most photographed barn in America" except to go to photograph "the most photographed barn in America." For Kerouac, this would be no different than watching television or taking a "family vacation," because ultimately everyone was just "looking at the same thing and thinking the same thing at the same time." The important distinction to make here is that while Kerouac would have merely described and critiqued this scene, DeLillo must go on because this type of experience has become a common cultural practice:

Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The

thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism. (12)

While Kerouac's writing is representative of a rising counter cultural consciousness in the 1950s, DeLillo's writing is representative of a rising postmodern consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which forced DeLillo to not simply dismiss a cultural practice and prescribe a new one. Instead, he was forced to assess that particular cultural climate, and hopefully gain insight or awareness behind the reasons or purposes present in our culture. In this excerpt, for instance, DeLillo attempts to unpack the significance or meaning behind these types of tourist experiences, and he even asserts a sense of mysticism: tourism becomes a form of spirituality and religious experience.

These excerpts from both *Big Sur* and *White Noise* show that while Kerouac abandoned the project of understanding self-limitation and the possibility of self-transformation as the times changed, DeLillo picks up where Kerouac left off and goes on to analyze the new cultural context in which the individual resides. Of course, DeLillo does this by heavily relying on the investigations as conducted and presented by Kerouac and the other writers of the Beat Generation. However, DeLillo is not resigned to nostalgia. Instead, he applies the ideology of Kerouac to his own age, and ultimately, he leaves us with a compelling investigation of the individual amidst the forms of media, spaces, and Buddhism as present in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## REFERENCES

- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Mirror of Production*. Trans. Mark Poster. St. Louis: Telos, 1975.
- Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Macmillan, 1973.
- Bierowski, Thomas. *Kerouac in ecstasy: shamanic expression in the writings*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011.
- Bird, Benjamin. "Don DeLillo's Americana: From Third- To First-Person Consciousness." *Critique* 47.2 (2006): 185-200. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 6 Feb 2012.
- Bloom, Harold. *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post Christian Nation*. New York: Simon, 1992.
- Boxall, Peter. *Don DeLillo: The possibility of fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Brophy, Mary-Beth. "Strange Solitary Mystic: Tracing The Dark Night Of The Soul In Kerouac's Desolation Angels And Big Sur." *Religion & The Arts* 14.4 (2010): 418-447. *Religion and Philosophy Collection*. Web. 5 Mar 2012.
- Maher, John M. & Dennie Briggs, eds. *An Open Life: Joseph Campbell in Conversation with Michael Toms*. Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1988.
- Charters, Ann. *Beat Down to Your Soul: What was the Beat Generation?* New York : Penguin, 2001.
- Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader*. New York: Penguin, 2003.
- Charters, Ann. *Kerouac: A Biography*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972.
- Cowart, David, ed. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of language*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2002.
- DeLillo, Don. *Americana*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971.
- DeLillo, Don. *Great Jones Street*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.

- DeLillo, Don. *Libra*. New York: Viking, 1988.
- DeLillo, Don. *Point Omega*. New York: Scribner, 2010.
- DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. New York: Viking, 1985.
- DePietro, Thomas ed. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Oxford, MS: U of Mississippi P, 2005.
- Dewey. *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo*. Columbia, SC: U of SC P, 2006.
- Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method and Meditation and Principles*. Trans. John Veitch. London: Orion, 1994.
- Duvall, John. *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.
- Evans-Wentz, W.Y. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*. New York: Oxford UP, 1960.
- Ewen, Stuart. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: Basic, 2001.
- Featherstone, M. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991.
- Florman, Samuel. *Blaming Technology: The Irrational Search for Scapegoats*. New York: St. Martin's, 1981.
- Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Hahn, Thich Nhat. *Zen Keys*. New York: Harmony, 1974.
- Haynes, Sarah. "An Exploration Of Jack Kerouac's Buddhism: Text And Life." *Contemporary Buddhism* (6.2) (2005): 153-171. *Academic Search Complete*. Online. 5 Mar. 2012.
- Herrigel, Gustie L. *Zen in the Art of Flower Arrangement*. London: Souvenir Press, 1974.
- Hipkiss, Robert A. *Jack Kerouac: Prophet of the New Romanticism*. Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1976.

- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Keesey, Douglas. *Don DeLillo*. New York: Twayne, 1993.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Big Sur*. New York: Viking, 1962.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Desolation Angels*. New York: Coward McCann, 1965.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Dharma Bums*. New York: Viking, 1958.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Viking, 1957.
- Kerouac, Jack. *Wake Up: A Life of The Buddha*. New York: Viking, 1960.
- Kohn, Robert E. "Tibetan Buddhism In Don DeLillo's Novels: The Street, The Word And The Soul." *College Literature* 38.4 (2011): 156-180. *Literary Reference Center*. Web. 20 Feb. 2012.
- Laist, Randy. *Technology and postmodern subjectivity in Don DeLillo's novels*. Oxford: Peter Lang P, 2009.
- LeClair, Tom. *In The Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987.
- LeClair, Tom. "An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Contemporary Literature*, 23.1 (Winter): 19-31.
- Lentricchia, Frank. "Libra as Postmodern Critique." In *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. Lentricchia, 193-215. 1991.
- McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Moss, Maria. "Writing as a Deeper Form of Concentration: An Interview with Don DeLillo." *Sources*, 6 (Spring): 82-97. 1999.
- Nadeau, Robert. *Readings from the New Book on Nature: Physics and Metaphysics in the*



- Modern Novel*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.
- Nagel, Thomas. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.
- Nobel, Johannes. *Central Asia: The Connecting Link Between East and West and Other Lectures*. Nagour, India: Arya Bharati, 1952.
- Osteen, Mark. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.
- Rank, Otto. *Beyond Psychology*. New York: Dover, 1958.
- Ray, Timothy D. "Syncretic Visions Of The Buddha: Melding And Convergence In The Work Of Kerouac And Ginsberg." *College Literature* 37.2 (2010): 187-195. Education Full Text Online. 6 Mar 2012.
- Savvas, Theophilus. "Don DeLillo's 'World Inside The World': Libra And Latent History." *European Journal Of American Culture* 29.1 (2010): 19. *Advanced Placement Source*. Web. 10 Sept. 2012.
- Searle, John R. *The Rediscovery of the Mind*. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1992.
- Shan, Han. *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang poet Han Shan*. Trans. Burton Watson. NY: Columbia UP, 1970.
- Smith, Laurence. *Behaviorism and Logical Positivism: A Reassessment of the Alliance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1986.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider & Co, 1948.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Studies in Zen*. Ed. Christmas Humphreys. New York: Dell, 1978.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider & Co, 1950.
- Tonkinson, Carole. *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism And The Beat Generation*. Carole Tonkinson, Ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 1995.

- Wilson, Steve. "Buddha Writing": The Author and the Search for Authenticity in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and *The Subterraneans*." *Midwest Quarterly* (302-315), 1999.
- Yehnert, Curtis. "Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside!: Subjectivity in Don DeLillo." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42 (2001): 357-66