Plot, Postmodernism, Plotlessness
in Don DeLillo’s White Noise
and Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude

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Introduction

It is hard to say whether or not either Don DeLillo or Gabriel García Márquez are "truly" postmodernist writers. Though I tend to think their voices come from some other place --a postpostmodern New York or a protopostmodern Macondo-- I cannot help but believe that the word "postmodern" holds the key to unlocking their work.\(^1\) To work through to this key, I intend to explore how these writers treat plot in their two most famous works: White Noise and One Hundred Years of Solitude.

I have found Peter Brooks' work on plot enlightening:

Plot... is an interpretive structuring operation elicited, and necessitated, by those texts that we identify as narrative, where we know the meanings are developed over temporal succession in a suspense of final predication. (Brooks 19)

More plainly put, plot is the underlying structure of narrative. It organizes the narrative in such a way that the events taking place form a cohesive whole that leads to some meaningful end. For Brooks, plot is a dynamic that moves narrative from the anticipation of meaning to the consummation of meaning. This consummation, or "final predication," may be as simple as a character satisfying his or her objectives. It is the point beyond which plot cannot continue, for it is the objective towards which all the narrative events flow. At this final moment, the plot reveals the key to understanding
these events as a totality whose sum contributes to some common end. When anticipation of this key ceases, plot lacks motive to continue. In order that this end does not come prematurely, allowing time for narrative development, plot must put off the revelation of this key. It delays satisfaction of both the reader's and the characters' desire with the promise that it will, in the end, provide them with meaning.

This anticipation, or "narrative desire" (Brooks 37), not only postpones meaning, but gives the narrative plot momentum. Because desire is not satisfied, further action must take place. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes this dynamic of desire and satisfaction:

[I]t is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained. (qtd-in Brooks 55)

As long as a discrepancy exists between desire and the amount of satisfaction received, the narrative continues. In light of Freud's analysis, Brooks likens this dissatisfaction to a kind of fuel, a gasoline that drives the engine of plot down its road. Brooks explains, "Life in the text of the modern is a nearly thermodynamic process; plot is, most aptly, a steam engine" (Brooks 44). It not only causes the combustion within the engine of the car, the force or momentum of narrative out of which events arise, but paves the superhighway upon which the car will travel towards its destination. When narrative
desire is satisfied, the plot car pulls into the driveway of its destination. Ideally, at this point, the characters, along with the reader, join in a static, death-like repose, satisfied by narrative coherence. The end, a function of the common whole, remedies the characters and the reader’s separation from the purpose of events. Plot, then, is a system whose end is the orderly communication of information—a point that becomes important in the light of postmodernism.

French philosopher Francois Lyotard argues that narrative has always served a fundamental, paradigmatic role in the creation of cultural identity. Individuals, as well as whole cultures, search to reveal narrative structures, coherent frameworks from which to define their purpose within history. Lyotard examines the act of storytelling in Cashinahuan culture in order to define the cultural significance of narration: it is the means

through which the community’s relationship to itself and its environment is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is a set of pragmatic rules that constitutes the social bond. (PC 21)

Structure, or plot, may be implicit in these types of stories. For instance, the Bible, a communicator of cultural "rules," bases itself upon a teleological structure, a cosmic plot. The fall of humanity in Genesis initiates the flow of narrative establishing an object of desire, the recovery of humanity’s lost state of divinity. Read from this Christian point of view, the Bible begins in suspense, works through suspense, and then reveals coherence: "I am the alpha and the
omega." Because Christian identity is inseparable from God, the fall causes a yearning to return to God. Like the beginning of a conventional plot, the loss of Eden is a fall into incoherence from which the Christian reader awakens. The events of the Old Testament (actually the history of the Hebraic peoples' relationship to Yahweh) have meaning because they plot the coming of Christ, the savior who will remedy the reader from his or her fallen condition.

Lyotard identifies Enlightenment notions of human progress as a new imposition of narrative upon history, the creation of a new history. Because events such as natural disasters and plagues can no longer be explained without the underlying structure provided by God's will, the awesome power of Nature itself replaces the Fall as a source of suspense. It, like Genesis, confronts the world with a mystery and inspires the desire for coherence. Scientists become the new readers. They collectively investigate and gather information in the hopes that, one day, they will learn the key to the synthesis of their data. The end of suspense for these readers can be nothing less than the revelation of the system governing all natural events, a sort of utopia in which science reduces the natural world to synthesized data. The scientific narrative must represent the natural world as an orderly system of data. This consummation of Progress is the ultimate termination of suspense: to see everything at once.

Representation, then, poses the essential stumbling block
for the scientific narrative; contemporary technology allows us to see too much. While we have access to an ever growing mass of information, we no longer have the ability to synthesize and represent it as an orderly system. To compare our plight to that of a postmodern detective— the postmodern Miss Marple becomes too successful an investigator, and like the scientific community, she receives new information regarding her cases at nearly an exponential rate. This persistent increase in information collected, in turn, causes an exponential increase in the mystery's suspense. The growing chaos of information disperses her attention and progressively limits the amount of energy she can put forth in investigating each piece until she can no longer function as a collector of information. Immersed in a sea of meaningless clues, she feels bombarded into a paralysis that wears on her will to investigate, her will to believe a plot exists.

In the place of her lost will, Miss Marple experiences "a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration," what Marxist social critic Fredric Jameson calls awe, the "'hysterical' sublime" (Postmodernism 76,77):

> The sublime was for Burke... the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether... refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself— so that the object of the sublime is now not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature, but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces. (Postmodernism 77)

The structure, or plot, underlying the information becomes
like a balloon expanding to infinite lengths. Miss Marple standing in the midst watches the expanding material of her case lose "its depth and [threatens] to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density" (Postmodernism 77). The "density" of meaning expands into an infinite almost imperceptible flatness which inspires awe in Miss Marple. She can no longer conceive of her case as a whole. If Miss Marple refuses to give up her desire to uncover the plot, then her subjectivity may, like the case, become infinitely dispersed. The infinite number of fragmented data become "a matter of sheer power" that "crushes" Miss Marple's subjectivity. Postmodern theory explores the global implications of the moment that follows this hysterical sublime.

Lyotard addresses the significance of this sublime moment in which the object world becomes transparent in terms of the legitimation of knowledge itself. He cites non-hegemonic narrative as a means of protecting subjectivity. Proceeding from the awe inspired by the destruction of the metanarrative of progress, postmodern culture rejects the metanarrative as a means of legitimation. The world, then, consists of a web of unsynthesizable subjectivities playing an endless language game, the rules of which are agreed upon collectively, to maintain their own subjectivities. Global culture endlessly reshifts in order to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between each subjectivity, rejecting the metanarrative as a source of
universal order.

Unlike Lyotard, French sociologist Jean Baudrillard would probably argue that Jameson's "hysterical sublime" destroys the authenticity of all narrative representation. In this new world, representation gives way to simulation;

the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials-- worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems and signs, a more ductile material than meaning... It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself. (Precession 254)

Ironically, the scientific narrative that had originally sought to synthesize and represent reality as an orderly plot, when confronted with the sublime, "liquidate[s] all referentials." If signs for the real are "a more ductile material than meaning," why bother with reality itself? While reality inspires awe, simulation affords the feeling of narrative coherence. Progress as simulation becomes

an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes (Precession 254).

The end of progress is no longer the total representation of the real, but the creation of a "perfect descriptive machine" that substitutes "signs of the real for the real itself." The hysterical sublime ceases to inspire awe, the realization of difference between the subject and the object, and becomes what Baudrillard calls ecstasy, the end of distance between subject and object. Paradoxically, the impulse to plot, a
subjectivity's attempt to understand the object world, ultimately destroys the subject. The T.V., though less sophisticated than many of the other gadgets on the technological horizon, is such a "programmatic machine." It is the postmodern Bible.

Baudrillard argues that, due to television, domestic life has ceased to be what he calls a "scene." Rather, it has come to resemble the "screen" that flashes information from the farthest reaches of the world:

It is no longer a scene where the dramatic interiority of the subject, engaged with its objects as with its image, is played out. We are here at the controls of a micro-satellite, in orbit, living no longer as an actor or dramaturge but as a terminal of multiple networks. Television is still the more direct preconfiguration of this. (Ecstasy 128)

In the habitation as a "scene," the human "subject" is an actor. He or she consciously recognizes that the separation between the self and the object viewed represents a mystery for interpretation. Because subjects actively attempt to overcome mystery, through the interpretative act of reinvisioning the objective world, they believe they can distinguish between an image or representation of an object and the real object itself. Consider this example: A mother (the subject) opens the metal locket she wears around her neck. Within it she has placed a photo of her daughter (the object) who has been away at summer camp for two weeks. She smiles and feels a longing for the child's return. In this case, the representation corresponds directly to a real
object, the woman's daughter, a component of the mother's scene. The image simply acts as a mediator between the emotion and the absent person. Then that same mother closes the locket and turns on the T.V., only to see the dead body of a child her daughter's age. "Micro-satellites, in orbit," beam the image of a dead child lying in a Sarajevo street right into her living room. She is moved. She has never been to Yugoslavia, and knows little about "ethnic cleansing." Nonetheless, she automatically accepts that the image carries with it Sarajevo's reality. This acceptance also reinforces the presumption that her feelings of sorrow are authentic.

These emotions, however, change with each channel. Like Miss Marple and her warehouse of clues, the mother does not have the reserve of energy to feel authentically for each image. The television, then, bombards her into passive emotional response, eroding her ability to interpret what she watches. She becomes literally plugged into the world via satellite, her "scene" interfaced perfectly with the "screen:"

As soon as this scene is no longer haunted by its actors and their fantasies, as soon as behavior is crystallized on certain screens and operational terminals, what's left appears as a large useless body, deserted and condemned. The real itself appears as a large useless body.
(Ecstasy 129)

The image itself becomes the determinant of its object's "reality." It elicits an almost programmed empathetic reaction from the subject. The medium, having taken over, supersedes subjective judgement, leaving the subject "a large useless body."
Authentic emotion gives way to ecstasy, a feeling similar to the awe of Jameson’s "hystericasl sublime," but different, in that the subject, now a "useless body," no longer exists to feel the alienation from which the awe arises. The state of constant ecstasy is schizophrenia:

No more hysteria, no more projective paranoia, properly speaking, but this state of terror proper to the schizophrenic: too great a proximity of everything, the unclean promiscuity of everything which touches, invests and penetrates without resistance, with no halo of private protection, not even his own body, to protect him anymore. (Ecstasy 132)

When the "subject" is "in too great a proximity of [the object] everything," it can no longer tell the difference between "itself" and "everything." Subjectivity dissolved, the schizoid enters into an "unclean promiscuity," an obscene closeness to "everything:"

It is no longer then the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible-than-the-visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret, of what dissolves completely in information and communication. (Ecstasy 131)

Postmodern obscenity arises out of the fact that categories of "traditional obscenity... (what is hidden, repressed, forbidden, or obscure)" no longer exist. It replaces traditional obscenity with a kind of "transparent eyeball," a satellite that, rather than simply representing "traditional obscenity," erases the concept of the "secret," mysterious, and "obscure." We no longer know that we cannot see and understand everything. Swept up from its context and placed
into the television of an American woman, the image from Sarajevo becomes "more-visible-than-the-visible." The horrifying reality of the dead child "dissolves" in its own image precisely because horror no longer exists. Because the viewer can no longer react authentically, the image should not be televised. It becomes an obscenity, "transparent," hyperreal.

The postmodernists call "hyperreal" any representation that blurs the distinction between the reality of an object and the artificiality inherent in its representation. In the hyperreal representation, the object loses its place as the final determinant of its own reality. Instead, its representation adds to the object's "reality." For instance, though the image of the child refers to an actual dead child in Sarajevo, it no longer represents this reality for the mother. Instead, the image takes precedence over its object in a way that suggests the object need never have existed. The image no longer refers to an object; instead, it simply refers to itself.

If, as Baudrillard seems to argue, no form of representation can transcend his definition of obscenity and narratives are nothing more than "programmatic perfect descriptive machines" that erase reality, fiction would seem to have as much validity as any other form of narrative. Fictional worlds, however, often flaunt their unreality. For instance, one of García Márquez's characters ascends into
heaven, and in DeLillo’s America, every ex-wife has ties to the intelligence community. How would the postmoderns feel about these tall-tales posing as reality? Lyotard retains some faith in narrative’s ability to deal with postmodernity:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. (PC 81)

Lyotard defines here the implied purposes of DeLillo’s and García Márquez’s work, for even in this "postmodern" era, they retain an unshakable faith in the validity of narrative and the communicative power of the image. Aware of both the complexities of global mass culture, and the dangers of the hegemonic use of narratives (e.g., Nazism), these writers explore new means of creating narrative, of encompassing what Lyotard calls "the unpresentable." Through their representations of reality they attempt to deliver our culture from obscenity.

These postmodern narratives throw out the presupposition that the universe is organized on the basis of a cosmic metanarrative, that some plot underlies reality. Rather than a system with a central principle, as in the biblical or scientific universe, their narrative universe resembles an
onion consisting of layers of mystery. For each layer of mystery stripped off, a new one underlies. Readers often wonder if they will ever understand why events happen in the narrative as they do; for, in the absence of plot, the layers of mystery leave the reader and the characters with nothing coherent to desire. Brooks warns that without an object towards which desire projects itself, nothing happens. Yet these two novels do present the reader with narratives in which things happen. Characters act, and stories occur because at the heart of these narratives resides, not an absence of plot, but rather the presence of a plotlessness—a force that represents the infinite complexity from which even the smallest events arise. Plotlessness embodies the "hysterical sublime," by definition an unrepresentable power, and makes it an explicit agent within the narrative world.²

The pre-socratic notion of moira, meaning fate, matter, and sometimes justice, may prove useful in defining plotlessness. The Presocratics believed that the universe and all of the events occurring within it arose out of a conflict between a few basic kinds of matter. The moment time began, this matter was thrown into motion, initiating the succession of events that would create each following moment out of the sum total of preceding moments. In the first moment, a homogeneity of matter exploded into the chaotic differentiation that these thinkers perceived. Though the Presocratics were talking about earth, wind, fire, and water,
not subatomic particles, one can see how moira might correspond to the findings of modern physics that suggest the universe originated out of conflicts among a mass of homogenous particles that exploded outward, creating space and time. This original configuration of matter predestined the formation of the earth billions of years later. And, in the eyes of moira, every event that was to occur in this world following its formation results out of this impersonal process.

In light of this complexity, it would seem impossible for narrative plot to render the reality of even the smallest event, for each event's occurrence has been collectively predetermined by an infinite series of elements, e.g. butterflies flapping in China etc. Faced with this complexity, plot either collapses into awe, or creates an ecstatic hyperreality which denies what I am calling a postmodern moira. Narrative plotlessness, because it embodies rather than denies complexity, establishes an equilibrium between awe and ecstasy. The narrative will neither collapse into hysterical awe, nor become wholly "programmatic" like Baudrillard's machine. To protect the characters from awe, plotlessness allows them to believe in their ability to create coherent plots. However, to prevent the ecstatic creation of a hyperreality, the consummation of plot, it also resists the construction of these plots. Plotlessness, the presence of indescribable complexity, an antitmanarrative, both defines
narrative structure and resists the characters' attempts to understand the structure. Like moira, plotlessness enforces the influence of primal mystery, that of time's origins, upon contemporary events. This impenetrable mystery raises many questions about the dynamics of contemporary narrative. If the characters and reader cannot overcome the mystery of the text, how can narratives begin, progress, and end?

Like the conventional plot, the plotless narrative depends upon the relationship between desire and mystery. Both narratives move because the characters desire to overcome some kind of incoherence. Plot continues until the characters' various desires make sense to the reader. When some coherent goal is reached, suspense gives way to satisfaction. In the plotless narrative, this goal lies beyond the reaches of human desire. Narrative events arise out of a conflict of wills, one impersonal and cosmic, the other personal yet infinitesimal. The interplay between these two wills can be reduced to a dialectical system in which the two elements in conflict are radically disproportional. The first will, plotlessness, embodies primal reality. Unlike plot, it is not an order, but a resistance to order that threatens a collapse into the material stasis from which the universe came into being. This timeless presence, lingering within time, represents the original mystery from which the complex interrelation of all events originate. From it arises the narrative world in which characters begin to act.
The second will, human or reader's desire, represents the characters' quest for narrative goals. It attempts to impose a coherent order upon the complexity of the surrounding narrative world. Essentially, the characters desire plot. They view the world from the reader's perspective with the desire to exercise control over events. Without this will to plot against plotlessness, the postmodern story would be impossible. Without human desire, plotlessness reduces the narrative to a reflection of primal chaos, a total stasis of matter, white noise or solitude. By upholding the ideal of order, the characters imagine that they hold off the increase of entropy.

Working together in mutual resistance, plotlessness and human desire create stories. Again imagine a narrative text as if it were an onion consisting of infinite layers. The characters within this onion text do not know its nature, and find themselves desiring to know. They begin peeling it, layer by layer, in hopes that they will reach some end which will permit them to understand the workings of the layers. Each layer, unfortunately, reveals a new layer of mystery. Soon, the characters and the reader (by involvement) find themselves surrounded by the various layers that make as much sense stripped as they did as a part of the onion. The accumulation of layers represents the story of how the characters desired to understand the onion. This is the plotless narrative: a collection of complex layers. It is not
a progression towards one goal. Rather, it is a series of progressions towards understanding and deterrence, the repeated construction and destruction of human plots. The narrative ends when the characters can no longer peel the onion, their desire eroded in the conflict with plotlessness. The end of narrative occurs, not in the desired coherence, but when primal mystery reestablishes itself over human desire.

Early in these novels, the perceptive reader will become aware that the workings of narrative reality tend to far exceed the power of the characters, that the forces shaping events reside in a magical realm. While García Márquez represents plotlessness magically, DeLillo’s plotlessness consists of the exaggeration of the everyday domestic environment. Both authors use their magic, ironically, to preserve reality, to purify it against other forms of magic, simulation, a hyperreality that polishes over and simplifies a complex reality. This magical complexity, however, also overwhelms both the reader’s and the characters’ desire for coherence, threatening premature narrative collapse. For instance, individual characters who realize the futility of their goals and forfeit their desire create a halting effect on the narrative momentum. Their collapse into awe of the complexity of reality anticipates the direction of the entire narrative. The brilliance of the plotless narrative is precisely the self-consciousness with which it presents its own limitations.
As Lyotard implies in his defence of postmodern art, these narratives have worth only if the reader learns to read in new (or possibly not so new) ways. Modern notions of tragedy may be helpful in accessing the worth of the plotless narrative, a series of essentially tragic situations. The element of magic that underlies the Shakespearean tragedy suggests the presence of a kind of plotlessness. This magic element generally presents itself in the beginning of the narrative in order to make the reader, and oftentimes the character involved in the tragic action, aware that the action will occur. For instance, the weird sisters of Macbeth foreshadow the murder of Duncan. Both the reader and Macbeth know what will follow. Yet the reader still reads and Macbeth still murders the king. We can only conclude that the importance lies not in the actual unfolding of the events that take place in the narrative, but rather in the emotions and experience of the interaction between human desire and the limitations placed upon it by the complexity of events. The witnessing of the tragedy awakens in readers a heightened feeling of empathy. They realize that the ultimate goals of plot are universally unattainable. Reading becomes less of an interpretive activity done from an objective standpoint, and more an immersion experience. This immersion in the unrepresentable awakens the reader to higher awareness of the mystery from which all things originate.

The "postmodern" tragedy, unlike those of Shakespeare
and Joyce, seeks to dramatize the collective. García Márquez and DeLillo seek out the tragic paradigms of our time in order to comfort and encourage a mass society in its struggles and collective fears. What Baudrillard says is true; the cultures of the Americas are losing their image within a terrifying and vague complexity. And although Baudrillard does not admit it, our culture cannot live without an image of itself. Tragedy dramatizes the loss of the image in order to awaken us, to encourage us to recover and redefine it. As DeLillo’s Murray Jay Siskind says, we must rediscover our innocence and represent it in a new way. We need to read the Shakespearean tragedy of the individual and identify its real presence in our own mass culture. This is the postmodern apocalypse of the Americas.

If as Don DeLillo says in his first novel Americana, "television came over on the Mayflower" (Lentricchia 87), he is also right in saying that America has been getting bad reception lately. A white noise has taken over the screen, and we are afraid to watch it now. At the time of colonization, however, the Old World perceived North America to be "a new Canaan," as Thomas Morton put it. Seventeenth century English merchant, Morton described the riches of the New World:

I did not think that in all the knowne world it could be paralel’d fro fo many goodly grouses of trees, dainty fine round rifing hilucks, delicate faire large plaines, sweete criftall fountaines and cleare running fstreams that twine in fine meanders through the meads...
(NEC 180)

Morton was a propagandist for colonization. In order to attract English settlers, he created a hyperbolic America, a new image to compete with the Old World. North America was founded by iconoclasts. They wanted to reinvision Europe, destroy its religion, its individual, its landscape. America was a vastness, a vast emptiness and a vast resource.

Now, it appears to be a crowded, littered emptiness. The tools we created for ourselves have turned around and begun to destroy us. White Noise’s Murray Jay Siskind, professor in the "American Environments Department," wants to assure us
that there are still "huge amounts of data flowing through [our] house[s], waiting to be analyzed" (D. 101), huger amounts than we have ever thought possible. America is still a vastness, only now it is a vastness of people and their machines, a vastness that Murray suggests even America has not yet found the means to recognize. Though Americans originated out of iconoclasm, they have unknowingly recreated an iconography, television, the contemporary American vastness.

In a discussion with colleague Alfonse Stompanato, Murray defines the proper use of the American image. Stompanato argues that television serves to "fascinate" (D. 66) the viewer;

"The flow is constant... Words, pictures, numbers, facts, graphics, statistics, specks, waves, particles, motes. Only catastrophe gets our attention. We want them, we need them, we depend upon them. As long as they happen somewhere else." (D. 66)

He seems to embrace Baudrillard's obscenity, for the viewer in this ecstatic "fascination" derives a paradoxical feeling of closeness and distance from the events and information viewed. The screen allows one to watch sublime events without having to experience their reality. The viewer both feels a sense of participation in the event, and acquires a simulated feeling of safety, a feeling that the television keeps the incoherence of the event at bay. For Murray, the viewer who watches in fascination displays "the wrong kind of attentiveness," and, therefore, is subject to "brain fade" (D. 67), a loss of subjectivity and interpretive faculties. Murray theorizes:
People get brain fade because they've forgotten to look as children. They've forgotten how to collect data. In the psychic sense a forest fire on TV is on a lower plane than a ten-second spot for Automatic Dishwasher All. The commercial has deeper waves, deeper emanations. But we have reversed the relative significance of these things. This is why people's eyes, ears, brains and nervous systems have grown weary. It's a simple case of misuse. (D. 67)

According to Murray, the expectation of coherence "reverses" humanity's fundamental relationship to the world. The viewer should neither desire coherence, nor fear incoherence.

Rather than a symbol of technological progress, or receiver of coherent images, the television is a window through which the viewer gets in touch with the most primal human consciousness. He explains to the Gladneys that he has

'come to understand that the medium [TV] is a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring. It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dream-like preconscious way.' (D. 51)

As Murray says of the supermarket, understanding television "is just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability. Not that we would want to, not that any useful purpose would be served" (D. 38). Television, another representation of this "unspeakability," the indescribable nature of fundamental reality, cannot be approached with a desire for order. Rather, Murray calls the viewer to "remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness and disgust" (D. 51) that arises out of the inability to make any conventional sense of what is viewed. According to Murray, however, we are not to fear
"unspeakability." We are supposed to embrace it as a truer vision of reality. Continuing his lecture on the supermarket and the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Murray explains that acceptance of this unspeakability results in "clear vision, without awe or terror. We don’t have to cling to life artificially or to death for that matter. We simply walk toward the sliding doors" (D. 38). To relate this to television, he encourages the viewer to watch without desire, the failure of which is ecstasy, an "artificial clinging" to life.

Murray delights in Wilder’s reaction to his televised mother precisely because the child "responds innocently." Unlike the other Gladneys who initially respond with intuitive awe (Jack’s "infantile cry") and then snap out of it, Wilder never questions the reality of his mother’s image. While Babette lectures on TV, "Wilder approached the set and touched her body, leaving a handprint on the dusty surface of the screen" (D. 105). His reaction is pure and intuitive because, being an infant, he is "preconscious." His subjectivity has not developed to the stage in which he recognizes the difference between a thing and its representation. Therefore, he accepts all things on their surface level as real, unaware of the "flatness" which Jack has begun to detect and fear. Not yet conscious of mystery and death, the originators of all plots, Wilder is "immersed" in a pure relationship with the world.
The toddler’s crying spell demonstrates this purity;

The huge lament continued, wave on wave. It was a sound so large and pure I could almost listen to it, try consciously to apprehend it... He was crying out, saying nameless things in a way that touched me with its depth and richness. This was an ancient dirge all the more impressive for its resolute monotony. (D. 78)

The child’s weeping "says nameless things," as if it were in synch with Murray’s primal state of "unspeakability," the primordial space inhabited by the TV screen. Wilder is somehow on the other side of the screen, immersed within its rhythm. Jack describes his attempt to enter "it, in a sense... I began to think he had disappeared inside this wailing noise and if I could join him in his lost and suspended place we might together perform some reckless wonder of intelligibility" (D. 78). However, as in his experience with the TV, he is only able to enter this place for a moment because he requires "intelligibility." When the child ceases, Jack feels the "wonder we hold in reserve for feats of the most sublime and difficult dimensions" (D. 79), the feeling of awe and separateness in witnessing a televised disaster. The child’s "monotonous wailing noise, wave on wave" is on the same frequency as the televised white noise that underlies the narrative.

Murray hopes to achieve an immersion experience similar to Wilder’s. He explains that he wants " 'to immerse [himself] in American magic and dread’ " (D. 19). Murray attempts to find the right rhythm, to place himself on the right frequency, the frequency of the American image. To do
this, he sheds himself of the plots of big city life. He explains:

'I want to be free of cities and sexual entanglements. Heat. This is what cities mean to me... The heat of the air, traffic and people. The heat of food and sex... The entire infrastructure is based on heat, desperately uses up heat, breeds more heat. The eventual heat death of the universe... is already underway.' (D. 10)

This heat is the desire that fuels all happenings, all plots: personal plots as simple as being hungry and buying a cheeseburger, as complex as personal relationships. Murray extrapolates this cycle of heat from the infinitesimal to the cosmic, including all things within its system. However, he argues that this cosmic plot never consummates itself. Instead of ending in total satisfaction, it will collapse and burn out as its entropy increases. Murray finds empirical analysis of this system useless because ultimately it collapses into the mystery of death. Rather than attempting to stand outside and view the system, Murray immerses himself in it. He is "[a]n exception" within the American Environments department whose faculty gives off an "impression... of pervasive bitterness, suspicion and intrigue" (D. 9), the disposition of the professional plotter.

Fortunately, for the sake of narrative movement, the other characters do not have the same agenda. If the Gladneys followed Murray's advice, they would simply enter this "primal" relationship with the "wealth of data concealed in the grid" (D. 51) of their television screen. Nothing more would happen. The narrative continues to move because the
characters defy, rather than succumb to, this "unspeakable" rhythm. In the seeming absence of plot, the characters attempt to create out of their lives "coherent" systems in which they can satisfy their desires. These plots inevitably fail because they attempt to deny the reality identified by Murray. Jack describes this failure to his class early in the novel:

All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots... We edge nearer death every time we plot. It's like a contract all must sign... Is this true? Why did I say it? What does it mean? (D. 26)

The narrative speaks through Jack here. It warns the reader of the narrative's limitations and then hands over the "contract" for the reader's consent of participation. In one way or another the characters, Wilder excluded, "sign" the plotter's "contract" as well, assuring that the narrative will move. White Noise's "contract" stipulates that, rather than a progression towards a meaningful end, this movement is a rhythm, a repeated construction and destruction of the characters' plots which, in the end, collapses. This is the death which Gladney foreshadows in his lecture, narrative death. Only the characters' will to plot and construct narratives holds off the essential resistance to narrative order, the white noise that underlies and makes narrative movement seem impossible.

Television is an essential tool in Jack's plot. In describing the small town conception of neighboring
metropolises, he hints at the function of television within his life:

We don't feel threatened and aggrieved in quite the same way other towns do. We're not smack in the path of history and its contaminations. If our complaints have a focal point, it would have to be the TV set, where the outer torment lurks, causing fears and secret desires. (D. 85)

Television allows Jack to simulate invulnerability. In his mind, Blacksmith is sealed off from the "outer torments," the incoherence of disaster, because the television contains this "outer" chaos within the limits of the screen. The screen becomes the "focal point" towards which all fear and awe can be directed. When he turns off the TV, he also turn off incoherence. His domestic "scene," to use Baudrillard's term, becomes safe from what he believes is reality, the images he views on the T.V. Gladney also describes this "focal point" as being the object of "secret desires." Despite the apparent security and separation of his inner world, Jack cannot totally rule out the possibility that he may be vulnerable to the "outer torment" in some way. Television functions like Baudrillard's "perfect descriptive machine" in that it weaves the outer torment into a cohesive narrative. Jack's "secret desire," then, is very much like Brooks' definition of the reader's desire. Television becomes a text that permits the viewers to interpret mystery and reveal coherence. As Bee says the moment after she survives the "crash-landing" and finds that no one from the media has arrived to cover the event, "They went through all that for nothing?" (D. 92).
Without media coverage, the event remains a horrifying and meaningless near-death experience.

Television representation not only distances the participants from the horror of the actual event, but weaves the event into a coherent story for them to interpret. One of the passengers, identified as "the narrator," fills in for the absent reporters by retelling the story of the landing to a crowd of fellow passengers:

No one disputed his account or tried to add individual testimony. It was as though they were being told of an event they hadn’t personally been involved in. They were interested in what he said, even curious, but also clearly detached. They trusted him to tell them what they’d said and felt. (D. 91)

The other passengers willingly give in to "the narrator’s" interpretation because their own feelings did not reach beyond awe and fear of the situation when it was occurring. The retelling structures the events which, in their awe, the passengers only perceived as mysterious. Therefore, they detach themselves from their actual experience of the plummeting airplane, and exchange it for the narrator’s orderly conclusion. As the narrator finishes, "His face had the rosy and confident polish that is familiar in handlers of large passenger aircraft. They looked at him and wondered why they’d been afraid" (D. 92). Because the narrator, like a newscaster, "polishes" the story and reveals an underlying plot, the crowd no longer sees the event as mysterious. It becomes more coherent than awe-inspiring.

If television allows Jack to secure his domestic inner
world, then Hitler provides him with the means to confront the outer world, the place where the real "outer torment lurks." For Jack, Hitler extends television's plot-creating faculty beyond his living room. Hitler is "'always on. We couldn't have television without him' " (D. 63) because he answers to Jack's "outer torment" on the collective level. Like television, the dictator plots against the incoherence of reality. Gladney depicts the "mass desire" (D. 26) for coherence in his Nazi propaganda films:

Ranks of thousands of flagbearers arrayed before columns of frozen light, a hundred and thirty aircraft searchlights aimed straight up- a scene that resembled a geometric longing, the formal notation of some powerful mass desire. There was no narrative voice (D. 26).

For Gladney, the "searchlights" have little to do with the detection of enemy aircraft. Rather, they are the instrument of a collective desire for illumination, an understanding of the universe, and the place of Germany within it. Their "geometric" shape suggests a "longing" for order. In the absence of order, the dictator himself stands in as an alternative object for the searchlights.

With his speech, Hitler seduces the "crowds erotically charged" (D. 73) with their desire for coherence. Jack describes this relationship during his defence of Murray's new discipline, Elvis Studies:

"Hitler called himself the lonely wanderer out of nothingness. He sucked on lozenges, spoke to people in endless monologues, free-associating, as if the language came from some vastness beyond the world and he was simply the medium of revelation." (D. 72)
The dictator saves his people by occupying the "nothingness" with his own "narrative voice." His claimed contact with the core of reality, "the vastness beyond the world" makes him like narrative plot, "the medium of revelation." He conquers mystery for the German people in his portrayal of the meaning underlying this "vastness," the coherence beneath the perceived layers of "unspeakability." The conquest of Europe is not only a military campaign, but a struggle with language, a battle to impose the Nazi narrative. Germany follows him, like a reader turning pages, awaiting the end.

In his defence of the dictator, Jack comes to resemble a little Hitler, a single voice of desire for narrative order within the American "vastness." In response to Denise’s reminder that the Germans lost World War II, Jack affirms Hitler in his allusion to the dictator’s successful creation and imposition of a powerful identity:

'A valid point. But it's not a question of greatness. It's not a question of good and evil. I don't know what it is. Look at it this way. Some people always wear a favorite color. Some people carry a gun. Some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer. It's in this area that my obsessions dwell.' (D. 63).

Jack suggests here that totalitarianism responds on the collective level to the common everyday need for security felt by individuals. We understand that he puts on Hitler as a "uniform" to "feel bigger, stronger, safer." Later in the novel, Murray analyzes Jack’s plot to share in Hitler’s power: "'On one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his works. On another level you wanted to use him to grow in
significance and strength'" (D. 287). His name change, weight gain, dark glasses, German language studies comprise a personal plot to both end his fears and assimilate Hitler's power, cloaking himself against the "outer torment." Jack's desire to maintain his Hitler also serves to give the narrative momentum. It acts as a narrative goal imposed upon the "vastness." He narrates, "Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward" (D. 17). As he was for the German masses, the dictator is a telos, an end towards which Jack's personal Mein Kampf narrative may grow.\(^5\)

Recall, however, that Jack's Nazi film footage lacks "narrative voice" (D. 26). As Hitler's voice of authority seems absent in the montage of images, so too is Jack's hold over his narrative. The narrative death identified by Jack constantly threatens "Gladney's Hitler" (D. 11). For instance, Eric Massingale catches Jack shopping at the mall without his Hitler props and tells him "'You're a different person altogether... You look so harmless, Jack. A big, harmless, aging indistinct sort of guy' " (D. 83). Shed of his Hitler, Jack instantly becomes vulnerable to the "outer torment." The encounter spurs him to shop frantically. Shopping makes him "grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me" (D. 84). Because Massingale reveals Hitler to be simulation, Jack resorts to a different action in order to reestablish his
feelings of power. The activity seems to reinflate the area Hitler had occupied, replacing Hitler with a "brightness," that, like Hitler, is an ecstatic power that conceals Jack's weakness only temporarily. Jack willingly confesses to his plotting, "I am the false character that follows the name around" (D. 17). He concedes that his name, idol, and appearance comprise a failed plot, an impossible conspiracy against the "outer torment." The first section, as a whole, works to unweave Jack's identity, to reveal that his narrative constructions are merely a collection of simulations and that something deeper and unknowable directs his identity.

Babette's surprise appearance on television at the end of "Waves and Radiation" exposes many of Jack's simulations and seems to confirm Murray's conception of television and reality. The screen normally provides a simulated sense of security for the Gladneys' inner world, a boundary that distances it from the dangers outside. When Babette, a real element of the Gladney family's inner world, is televised, the family seems to experience these same feelings of distance from her. Jack narrates:

The face on the screen was Babette's. Out of our mouths came a silence as wary and deep as an animal growl. What did it mean? What was she doing there, in black and white, framed in formal borders? Was she dead, missing, disembodied? (D. 104)

They watch with the awe and "fascination" described by Stompanato, as if they were witnessing a disaster. Here, the screen's ability to defamiliarize the viewer with reality
becomes powerfully explicit to the reader. "Framed within formal borders," Babette becomes mysterious and unfamiliar to her own family. Also, television's power to frame, which Bee invokes following the crash-landing, no longer makes the incoherent coherent. Rather, it takes a "reality," coherent and familiar to the viewer, and "disembodies" it, making it appear incoherent.

In this moment, the tension between the "screen" and "scene," as defined by Baudrillard, becomes explicit. The moment in which the "reality" of the inner world, the scene, coincides with the reality of the outer world as televised on the screen, reveals that the artificiality of the televised has leached its way into the domestic scene. Because it makes explicit the "transparency" of the televised, Babette's appearance shatters television's power to distance the viewer or provide the viewer with coherence. In this instant, though he does not understand why, Gladney begins to feel a real vulnerability to the "outer torment." His comparison of the image of Babette to the Babette he knows betrays this feeling:

I'd seen her just an hour ago, eating eggs, but her appearance on the screen made me think of her as some distant figure from the past... a walker in the mists of the dead. If she was not dead, was I? A two-syllable infantile cry, ba-ba, issued from the deeps of my soul. (D. 104)

Despite that the screen's fictionalizing power has "killed" her reality, Jack for a few moments considers the image real. This is something he normally does when watching-- assume that the images correspond to something real. However, Babette's
"presence" here is powerfully unreal to him. He knows she is absent, yet there she is on TV. If her image is not "dead," unreal, then is his perspective of her dead, fictionalizing? It could be that the Babette he saw "eating eggs" a few hours earlier is not the real Babette, but, rather, the Babette he wants her to be, a collection of simulations suitable to him. If so, then the screen and his domestic scene have reached some equilibrium, each with a shared part in the creation of Jack's perceived reality. The confusion caused by the televised Babette reveals to Jack the artificial principles by which he sees his inner world. His "infantile cry" arises from the destruction of simulated security, and the realization that he does not know the real Babette. In this moment, he confronts the incoherence which the screen had covered up, and faces the fear at "the deeps of [his] soul."

After a few moments, the boundary between scene and screen, made explicit by Babette's presence in both places, once again blurs. Jack expresses his relief, "All this compressed in seconds. It was only as time drew on, normalized itself, returned to us the sense of our surroundings, the room, the house, the reality in which the TV set stood" (D. 104). He regains his conception of the "surroundings, the room, the house" as the "reality," the scene in which the screen projects its images. However, the effort required to reestablish this separation forces him to consider the reasons for his awe at seeing Babette "animated
but also flat, distanced, sealed off, timeless. It was but wasn’t her. Once again I began to think Murray might be on to something. Waves and radiation. Something leaked through the mesh" (D. 104). The irony in this TV event is that a hyperreal Babette "leaked through the" screen in all of her televised artificiality, revealing that Jack cannot locate the real Babette. On the screen, she is there but not there, real but not real. The result is the momentary awareness of "flatness," this simulation of reality which buffers the viewer against the complexity that underlies it.⁶

While the television screen presents for Jack the "unspeakable" reality of his wife’s identity, the "airborne toxic event" represents a vision of the deeper reality governing the entire universe. The white noise underlying and resisting Jack’s attempts to construct Hitler in this first section leaks from the TV screen, and fills the entire horizon. Heinrich describes the cloud as being "a shapeless growing thing. A dark black breathing thing of smoke" (D. 111). Like the televised Babette, the cloud defies description. It faces the suburban community with the "nothingness" Hitler and his followers confronted with their "aircraft searchlights," a vacuum, without order. As did Hitler’s dilemma, this disaster degenerates into a language game, an attempt to impose a coherent narrative in the void of meaning. The state deploys experts to manage the situation. Their helicopters and floodlights illuminate the cloud in
hopes of tracking its shape and understanding its behavior. The radio repeatedly broadcasts new terminology to describe the cloud and its possible effects, beginning with "feathery plume" (D. 111) and concluding with "airborne toxic event" (D. 117).

The experts' surrender to "state-created terminology" (D. 117) suggests that they cannot provide the community with coherence. Either the cloud's significance eludes them, or it represents something indescribably horrible. This explanation seems likely, considering the absence of television coverage. In the closing of the section a man carrying a portable TV with a blank screen reports to the community that the networks failed to cover their story. He rants,

'Is it possible nobody gives substantial coverage to such a thing? Half a minute, twenty seconds? Are they telling us it was insignificant... Do they think this is just television? 'There's too much television already-- why show more?' Don't they know it's real?' (D. 162)

The networks break Stompanato's rule here. They avoid coverage of a fascinating event. It could be that the story neither fascinates without horrifying the viewer, nor creates a coherent story that explains the shapeless mass. The cloud will not fit within the simulatory borders of the screen because it is far too "real" for television.

According to Murray, television can represent this "unspeakability" if the viewer chooses to look at it in a different way. Because we refuse to watch with innocence, instead of elucidating the primal mysteries of life,
technology repaints them across the horizon in the form of the airborne toxic event. Heinrich argues that the cloud has transported them back to the "Stone Age" (D. 147), stripping them of centuries of scientific progress. He asks his father to imagine trying to explain the "principle of a radio" (D. 148) to stone-age humans:

Radio waves 'travel through the air. What, like birds? Why not tell them magic? They travel through the air in magic waves... What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of every day. But nobody actually knows anything.' (D. 148-49)

The community has "'been flung back'" (D. 147) to a time in which scientific knowledge and technology no longer serve them. Heinrich suggests that even in a state of "normalcy," scientific research provides us with so much information that, ironically, we know nothing. We store it in computers, secure in the belief that we can access it when disaster strikes. In the case of the airborne toxic event, knowledge, when accessed, means very little. If anything, the scientific representation of primal chaos creates this disaster. It creates a programmatic double, a simulation of nature's sublime power.

Jack’s SIMUVAC "massive data-base tally" (D. 141) demonstrates knowledge’s failure in the face of the "airborne toxic event." The SIMUVAC operator accesses Jack’s "whole data profile" (D. 140), a synthesis of "genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychologicals, your police-and-hospitals" (D. 141). The computer organizes this data and
attempts to assess what is actually happening within Jack's body. When Jack questions the meaning of the "bracketed numbers with pulsing stars" (D. 140) that appear on the screen, the SIMUVAC man concedes "that we don't know enough at this time to be sure of anything" (D. 141) and asks Jack "'to make allowances for the fact that everything you see tonight is real' " (D. 139). This "reality" destroys the data's ability to "polish" (D. 139) up the situation. Data no longer gives shape, it only represents the shapelessness of reality. The data "just means you are the sum total of your data" (D. 141). It becomes flat and self-referential, like Murray's TV, a "timeless, self-contained, self-referring" myth.

The instruments of human understanding, no longer "subject to control" (D. 127), become objects of mystery just like the natural world they attempt to explain. The ATE, then, represents the narrative of scientific progress turning in on itself. Instead of progressing towards its goal, it gets caught in a self-referential loop, showing us "a cosmic force, so much larger than yourself, more powerful, created by elemental and willful rhythms" (D. 127), the very primal chaos it tries to explain. Rather than simulate coherence for the community, "conceal[ing] the terrible secret of our decaying bodies" (D. 285), technology reveals the complexity that destroys its own narrative basis. Like all plots, science "moves towards death." Murray describes the race between scientific knowledge and death:
'This is the nature of modern death... We can take cross-section pictures, tape its tremors and waves. We've never been so close to it, so familiar with its habits and attitudes. We know it intimately. But it continues to grow, to acquire breadth and scope, new outlets, new passages and means. The more we learn, the more it grows. Is this some law of physics? Every advance in knowledge and technique is matched by a new kind of death, a new strain.' (D. 150)

Each time the scientist attempts to represent it in data, like the "shapeless growing" ATE, death becomes more real. Its reality "grows." "New outlets, new passages and means" keep it perpetually beyond the reaches of narrative meaning.

The entry of this "shapeless growing" death into Jack’s body, in the form of Nyodene D, forces him to revise his assessment of the "outer torment:"

[O]ver a period of time it became possible to interpret such things as signs of the deep-reaching isolation we were beginning to feel. There was no large city with a vaster torment we might use to see our own dilemma in some soothing perspective... No panting mega center to absorb our woe, to distract us from our unremitting sense of time-- time as the particular agent of our ruin... (D. 176- 177)

The idea of the "outer torment" had "framed within formal borders" the incoherence of the world outside, allowing Jack to watch from a safe, "soothing perspective." When the ATE embodies the real "outer torment" and, like the TV Babette, leaks "through the mesh" of the horizon and into Jack’s inner world, he searches for a "vaster torment" to protect him. He realizes, however, that there is none, that he has come in contact with a reality that cannot be "absorbed" or made coherent within a narrative representation like that of the "outer torment." Once the shapelessness of the ATE enters
Jack's body in the form of the "nebulous mass" (D. 280), he comes face to face with the complexity at the heart of reality: the entropy that will wear him out, time, "the particular agent of our ruin."

Confronted with this postmodern apocalypse, the community collapses into "a sense of awe that bordered on the religious" (D. 127). The paralysis inspired by this awe would seem to make it impossible for *White Noise* to continue beyond this point. Narrative death has made human impotence explicit, and deterred the main characters' desires. Yet, Jack tells Murray that the airborne toxic event "marks the end of uneventful things. This is just the beginning. Wait and see" (D. 151). Though Jack begins to realize the depth of mystery underlying everything, he feels "enmeshed, I feel deeply involved" (D. 151). He has a choice; either accept this mystery and continue plotting as his contract stipulates, or collapse into a death-like awe of his condition. He accepts the former, reviving Hitler in the form of a new plot, "Dylarama," his plot to save himself and Babette from narrative death as represented by the airborne toxic event.

The opening scenes of "Dylarama," in which Jack confronts Babette about Dylar, reveal a great deal about the structure of the novel as a whole, its movement from the simulation and exhaustion of plots to a deeper sense of human suffering and tragic awareness. Chapter twenty-six begins with Jack's pursuit of the meaning of Babette's use of Dylar. He tells
Babette, " 'All this without my knowing. The whole point of Babette is that she speaks to me, she reveals and confides' " (D. 192). Jack wants Babette to conform to his perception of her, the collection of simulated identities that were disturbed during her moments on television. He needs to believe in his wife's stability. Therefore, there " 'must be something else, an underlying problem' " (D. 197), a plot distinct from the fear of death. Babette replies, " 'What could be more underlying than death' " (D. 197). She refuses to conform to his conception of her: " 'This is not the story of a wife's deception. You can't sidestep the true story, Jack. It is too big' " (D. 197) Because the story is "true," like the airborne toxic event, it is "too big" to fit neatly within Jack's desired narrative scheme. Despite the limitations of the narrative, she agrees to reveal in the only way she can; " 'The theme of this story is my pain and my attempts to end it' " (D. 192). She assures him, however, that this story only tells of her " 'getting nowhere' " (D. 192).

The retelling of her dealings with Mr. Gray "exhausts" (D. 202) the couple in the same way that the ATE brings Jack to an awareness of the entropic "vaster torment." It merely presses them into expressing their fear of death and the paralysis it inspires. Jack relates, " 'I'm too weak to move. I lack all sense of resolve, determination' " (D. 198). This exchange demonstrates the narrative's entropic tendency. It
progresses until the logic of human action comes into question, and then collapses. Jack concludes that human action "'is a result of molecules rushing around somewhere in your brain'" (D. 200). If chaos is the rule, if "'[W]e're the sum of our chemical impulses'" (D. 200), humans are powerless to shape their lives. We are flat characters created and destroyed, not by our own actions, but by some impersonal force beyond our control.

Despite this negation of desire and action, there too is a tentative affirmation of human will. Babette describes the paradox of human action:

'How strange it is. We have these deep lingering fears about ourselves and the people we love. Yet we walk around, talk to people, eat and drink. We manage to function. The feelings are deep and real. Shouldn't they paralyze us?' (D. 198)

The fact that these fears are "deep and real" requires that the characters rely on their own artificial constructions of reality. They must believe in their ability to control action, "to assert our root desires against the chaos in our souls" (D. 199). Otherwise, their narrative lives would collapse into death, which, for Babette and Jack, is a lot like white noise, "'Electrical noise... Uniform, white'" (D. 268). Though Jack acknowledges the entropy into which the scene collapses, he also suggests the purposefullness of the exchange: "We were both exhausted. But we'd come so far, said so much, that I knew we couldn't just stop yet" (D. 202). The retelling of Babette's going "nowhere," ironically, goes "so
far." The act of storytelling justifies itself here as implicitly meaningful. Though the narrative fails to overcome death, it is meaningful simply because it attempts to describe the depth of the truth. It allows the couple to arrive at "'the hard and heavy thing, the fact itself' " (D. 203), the "bigness" of death. Later Jack asks himself, "If the self is death, how can it also be stronger than death?" (D. 268). The self becomes stronger than death in the realization and acceptance of its predicament.

Focus on a new source of narrative suspense rescues the novel from collapsing completely into this "exhaustion." Jack distracts himself from the "underlying" white noise that destroyed Hitler in the first section by focusing on his plot to kill Mr. Gray. Surprisingly, the most emphatic proponent of this plan is the guru of the postmodern immersion experience himself, Murray Jay Siskind. Unlike in "Waves and Radiation," when Murray asks Jack to exchange his need for coherence for a "clear vision," here he encourages the active denial of reality. He declares, "'Pain, death, reality, these are all unnatural' " (D. 289). In response to Jack's fear of the "nebulous mass" (D. 280) within him, Murray suggests,

'We start our lives in chaos, in babble. As we surge up into the world, we try to devise a shape, a plan. There is dignity in this. Your whole life is a plot, a scheme, a diagram. It is a failed scheme but that's not the point. To plot is to affirm life, to seek shape and control.' (D. 291-292)

We live because we impose our own narrative on the chaos;
"This is the natural language of the species" (D. 289). According to Murray, we plot because the "natural" human desire for order conflicts with the chaos inherent in reality. Jack, then, should "devise a shape" out of the "nebulous mass" within him despite that its reality will inevitably kill him. Plots "'counteract the effect of any number of nebulous masses, at least for a time'" (D. 287). Murray's tone here is tentative because he also recognizes the "'inexhaustibility... [of] [T]he whole huge nameless thing'" (D. 288), the insuperable power of reality. He admits that life "is a failed scheme," and that plots last "at least for a time," hopefully the duration of a life. Murray says about the after-life plot, "'Maybe these things are justification enough for our hopes and dreams'" (D. 286). It temporarily "justifies" the belief in the power of human action.

Murray's "killer/ dier" (D. 290) scheme provides this "justification" for Jack's plot to kill Mr. Gray. It gives him a scheme in which his action becomes meaningful. Murray explains, "'You will cease to be. To be, Jack. The dier accepts this and dies. The killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life'" (D. 291). The "dier" surrenders to entropy and collapses into awe. The killer creates a narrative identity out of murder. Despite the absurdity of this scheme, "in theory," Murray argues that it is as justifiable as any religious conception of the afterlife, for it serves the same
purpose. It employs simulation to allow the individual to believe in human power.

While Murray provides Jack with the "justification," Babette's father provides him with the gun, the means to kill Mr. Gray. Jack relates the shock of holding a loaded gun, an "unreal" power:

There was something unreal about the experience of holding a gun... Was this Death's dark messenger after all? A loaded weapon. How quickly it worked a change in me, numbing my hand even as I sat staring at the thing, not wishing to give it a name. Did Vernon mean to provoke thought, provide my life with a fresh design, a scheme, a shapeliness? (D. 253)

As in his walk with Murray, Jack wonders if Vernon Dickey is some kind of "messenger" trying to push him into action. He feels as if he is being placed within a real scheme, an authentic plot scenario to kill Mr. Gray. Like the dark glasses and the rest of the Hitler get-up, the gun works "a change in" Jack. However, unlike his props, the gun represents a greater mystery. His first identification with it, therefore, is awe, a recognition of its "unreal" power that merely suggests plot possibilities, not realities.

As the third section progresses, Jack loses his ability to distinguish between the unreality of the gun and the seemingly real power it represents, the power to enact Murray's killer/dier scenario. He narrates, "The gun created a second reality for me to inhabit" (D. 297). This "second reality" represents a blurring of the boundaries between Jack's awareness of reality's complexity, the "vaster torment"
that resists the enaction of human desire, and his initial recognition of the gun's "unreal" power. The gun becomes an ecstatic tool, an instrument that erases the "vaster torment" and allows Jack to believe completely in his power to control his life. As in his shopping spree, Jack inhabits an ecstatic space in which the "air was bright, swirling around my head. Nameless feelings pressed thrillingly on my chest" (D. 297). For Jack, the gun no longer represents a foreign power. The ecstatic man, Jack plus his gun, inhabits "a reality I could control, secretly dominate" (D. 297). The gun becomes a part of him, compensating for the "nebulous mass."

Once provided with the means and justification for his plot, Jack proceeds to his goal, Mr. Gray, the object of narrative suspense. Mr. Gray, is "a hazy gray seducer moving in ripples across a motel room. Bedward, plotward" (D. 241) Not only is he Babette's seducer, but he is the seducer of the entire narrative. He teases the protagonist into action, giving the narrative its motion, "plotward" toward its final goals. Jack follows the lead dutifully because thoughts of Mr. Gray haunt him; "Gray-bodied, staticky, unfinished. The picture wobbled and rolled, the edges of his body flared with random distortion" (D. 241). The actual "grayness," the vagueness of the image Jack awakens in his mind, suggests a kind of suspense, a need for clarification. He feels Mr. Gray's "mastery and control. The dominance of his position" (D. 241). As long as the image remains "unfinished," the
mystery of Mr. Gray exerts "control" over Jack's life. Jack can retake this control, avenging himself for Babette's infidelity, and more importantly, stealing the Dylar pills, if he finds and kills Mr. Gray. Again, as with Hitler and his "nothingness," we can see this process as an attempt to define, to impose narrative meaning upon a mystery. Like a private eye, he interrogates Babette, and he consults with an informant, his colleague, Winnie Richards. When he picks Denise up from school with the intention of asking her where she hid the Dylar, "[A]utomatically I reached into my jacket for the dark glasses and put them on" (D. 211). The little Hitler returns in a new plot. Having repressed the results of his massive data tally, he collects the information that he now believes can free him. He finds out Mr. Gray is Willie Mink. He locates the hotel, and plans his scheme.

As he nears Mr. Gray, the "reality" of this scheme becomes progressively more intense for Jack: "I sensed I was part of a network of structures and channels. I knew the precise nature of events. I was moving closer to things in their actual state as I approached a violence, a smashing intensity" (D. 305). He feels that he understands why things are happening as they are, and that he is a part of an orderly progression of events that are about to conclude with a revelation of the meaning of "things in their actual state." Jack's growing awareness of the "reality" of his situation coincides with "Mink [appearing] to grow more vivid" (D.
The gray man becomes "sharply outlined against the busy air. White noise everywhere" (D. 310). Mink as the object of narrative desire becomes more defined near the expected consummation of plot. He is no longer an undefined gray, but a sharply outlined noise.

This "network of structures and channels" also recalls the networks and circuits that make up the image on a television screen. Entering Mink's room, Jack transports himself to the other side of the screen, the "unspeakable" complexity of the "white noise everywhere." By plotting, Jack advances "in human consciousness" (D. 304) to the point in which he actually does stumble upon reality, the reality which destroys narrative constructs. Jack repeatedly recites his plan in order to resist the "narrative death" this white noise works upon him. Through this recitation he hopes to maintain his subjective self as the enactor of his plot, and resist Mink's schizophrenic collapse. Despite Jack's resistance, his experience becomes increasingly ecstatic. The noise, that builds from a "faint, monotonous, white" (D. 306) noise to an intensity that dominates the room, suggests that Jack has completely given in to ecstasy:

The intensity of the noise in the room was the same at all frequencies. Sound all around. I took out the Zumwalt. Great and nameless emotions thudded on my chest. I knew who I was in the network of meanings. Water fell to earth in drops, causing surfaces to gleam. I saw things new. (D. 312)

Jack sees "things new" because his action has become programmed into the unspeakable "network of meanings."
Having followed his plot to its end, he is absorbed into the impersonal force of which events within that plot arise. He narrates, "I saw beyond words. I knew what red was, saw it in terms of dominant wavelengths, luminance, purity" (D. 312). Like Wilder, he engages the object world with a "purity" that no longer needs language as an intermediary. Jack's subjectivity no longer exists.

As with the Babette's appearance on TV, the scene returns to a state of normalcy in which Jack realizes his separation from the "networks of meaning." This moment occurs following Jack's realization that he has been wounded:

The world collapsed inward, all those vivid textures and connections buried in mounds of ordinary stuff. I was disappointed. Hurt, stunned and disappointed. What had happened to the higher plane of energy in which I'd carried out my scheme? (D. 313)

The two components of which the "world" arises "collapse inward" back into each other. The shapeless complexity, the "textures and connections," of which "ordinary stuff" comes into being, again becomes faintly perceivable. These "extra dimensions, the super perceptions, were reduced to visual clutter, a whirling miscellany, meaningless" (D. 313). We might visualize at this moment Jack's body floating back out of the screen shaken from his ecstatic trance to see the white noise of his "vaster torment" in front of him; "Colored dots appeared at the edge of my field of vision. Familiar little dancing specks" (D. 313). Outside of these "dancing specks," he no longer feels a component of a scheme. Instead, he
returns to his "familiar" position of awe at complexity.

This return of subjectivity and awe awakens Jack's compassion for the wounded Willie Mink:

With the restoration of the normal order of matter and sensation, I felt I was seeing him for the first time as a person. The old human muddles and quirks were set flowing again. Compassion, remorse, mercy. (D. 313)

However, even this act of "compassion" becomes a kind of narrative plot for Jack. He describes saving Willie Mink, "There was something redemptive here. Dragging him... into the night. Something large and grand and scenic" (D. 314). The act seems ingenuine, another attempt to make himself "feel bigger, stronger, safer." The nun's advocacy of "belief" in the unauthentic affirms this reliance upon narrative. She explains to Jack:

'It is our task in the world to believe things no one else takes seriously. To abandon such beliefs completely, the human race would die. This is why we are here... To embody old things, old beliefs... If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse.' (D. 318)

In her defence of the after-life plot, the nun summarizes the concerns of the novel. She explains that without this kind of narrative the "world would collapse" into the white noise of the hotel room. Humans would become either incapacitated by fear, as Jack was in the first section, or programmatic machines like Mink, useless terminals for information reception.

Though Jack finds it hard to accept that without fictions "the human race would die," all he has to do is look to the
sunsets to reconsider:

The sky takes on content, feeling, an exalted narrative life. The bands of color reach so high, seem at times to separate into their constituent parts... It is hard to know how we should feel about this. Some people are scared by the sunsets, some determined to be elated, but most of us don't know how to feel, are ready to go either way. (D. 324)

Jack's "vaster torment" is now a daily part of his community's life. Confronted with such a mystery, the community's awe "transcends previous categories of awe" (D. 324). This "exalted narrative life" absorbs the community, takes "on their content" and feeling. The nun warns, "'Soon no more. You will lose your believers'" (D. 319). In this hyperawe, this American vastness, America loses both its believers and its image of itself. Without the "fools" (D. 319) who "believe" in fictions, America "collapses," loses its ability to construct and use its fictions. Its "dread" of the sublime destroys the "magic" of human existence, and consequently, it can no longer believe in itself. DeLillo concludes White Noise in America's moment of self-doubt, the moment in which the "postmodern sunset" (D. 227) absorbs "the broad-ribboned modernist stream" (D. 322-323) of the American super-highway. He seems to pose the question: what next? Tabloid journals seem a surprising choice. He celebrates them not only for their depiction of magical powers that rival the sunset but, because they are narratives consumed by a vast collectivity. The collective narrative will recover the American image from the vastness of the "postmodern sunset."
One Hundred Years of Solitude: The Colonel and the plotters. Melquíades and the machine.

García Márquez’s America matches DeLillo’s vastness of people and machines. One could say, too, that the television came over with Columbus on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. Within the borders of the screen, the conquistadors attempted to contain and conquer the vast magical quality of America, and remake it in the image of their own cultural systems. At best they created a hybrid image, a "magical realism," that stands in for the Conquest plot, allowing for the history of the "New World" to occur despite its foreign origin. Late in One Hundred Years of Solitude, the first train arrives in Macondo, bringing the precursors of television, film and phonographs. These new inventions keep the inhabitants of Macondo in a permanent alternation between excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation, to such an extreme that no one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay. It was an intricate stew of truths and mirages... (G.M. 230–231).

Due to the legacy of the conquest, these "alternations" are nothing new for Macondo. From the beginning of the novel, neither the reader nor the characters seem to know "for certain where the limits of reality lay."

In an interview with Rita Guibert, García Márquez explains his intentions in writing such a fantastic story:

I merely wanted to tell the story of a family who for a hundred years did everything they could to prevent having a son with a pig’s tail, and just because of their very efforts to avoid having one they ended by doing so. Synthetically speaking, that’s the plot of the book, but all that about symbolism... not at all. (Guibert 314)
solitude "wears" down the magic upon which character action bases itself, the "programmed" belief that they might be able to influence reality. Narrative suspense, the "mystery" simulated "in the heart of the Buendía," gives way not to a revelation of meaning, but simply breaks down due to the "wearing of the axle." The result is the collection of events comprising One Hundred Years of Solitude, a self-referring "machine with unavoidable repetitions," sealed in an irremediable solitude.

Many critics have argued that Octavio Paz’s essay "The Labyrinth of Solitude" heavily influenced García Márquez’s own understanding of solitude. Paz holds:

When we are born we break the ties that joined us to the blind life we lived in the maternal womb, where there is no gap between desire and satisfaction. We sense the change as separation and loss, an abandonment, as a fall into a strange or hostile atmosphere. Later this primitive sense of loss becomes a feeling of solitude... (Paz 195)

For Paz, solitude consists of humanity’s fundamental separation from the underlying meaning of the Universe. It is the insurmountable gap between one’s desires for coherence and the satisfaction that can be obtained. Baudrillard would argue that solitude begins not "when we are born," but the moment in which we realize that things do not speak for themselves, that reality is something separate and beyond our reach. Infants, like Wilder, are "blind" to the difference between an object and its representation. They are fully integrated with their surroundings because they find
From Brooks’ standpoint, the underlying structure and purpose of *One Hundred Years*, as described by García Márquez, is not a plot, but a denotation of events. The novel tells us what happened, yet fails to satisfy our desire to understand the events. We saw the same problems arise in *White Noise*. When a narrative calls attention to its own plotlessness, it betrays that it is without narrative motive. It then may envelope itself and becomes self-referential. The data *White Noise* imparts is that it "is the sum total of its data."

*One Hundred Years*, then, holds to a careful blend of magic and reality that allows it to do the unnatural, that is, begin, develop, and end. Magic inspires the characters to desire goals, to construct impossible plots out of their lives. It allows for narrative action and momentum precisely because, in the minds of the characters, it blurs the limitations placed upon human desire. As in *White Noise*, reality represents a force that wears down this magical barrier protecting the characters. Near the end of the novel, Pilar Ternera, a fortune teller who has lived for the duration of the family’s existence, reflects:

> There was no mystery in the heart of a Buendía that was impenetrable for her because a century of cards and experience had taught her that the history of the family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spilling into eternity were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle. (G.M. 402)

At this point in the novel, readers should feel that they, too, are partial to the cards. Throughout narrative time,
satisfaction in things at their face value. They have neither the capacity nor the impulse to assemble elements of their experience and create a reality with depth. Paz's "fall into a strange and hostile atmosphere," like Jack's "outer torment," is the realization of the complexity within which we must make our lives intelligible.

Solitude, I would argue, is not only the feeling of separation from the universe, but, like the white noise of DeLillo's novel, a destructive force.⁹ Paz explains that, in order to live, the individual must defy this force, the "strange and hostile atmosphere" of reality itself. Solitude "becomes awareness: we are condemned to live alone, but also to transcend our solitude, to re-establish the bonds that united us with life in a paradisiac past" (Paz 195). This returns us to Jack's question; "If the self is death, then how can the self be greater than death?" If the self is immersed in a sea of complexity, how can it "transcend" complexity and create a coherent reality in which to inhabit? Though Paz would probably not agree with Murray's argument in "Dylarama" -- that "transcendence" may only be simulated-- he does assert something very similar; human "nature-- if that word can be used in reference to man, who has "invented" himself by saying "No" to nature-- consists in his longing to realize himself in another. Man is nostalgia and a search for communion" (Paz 195). While Paz says that the essence of humanity denies nature, Murray says that "reality... [is] unnatural" (D. 289).
Paz acknowledges the artificiality upon which human "reality" bases itself. Murray's "nostalgia" for "the maternal womb," on the other hand, calls us to create our own reality, to simulate the close of the "gap between desire [for coherence] and satisfaction." He calls us to plot.

Paz, unlike Murray, argues that there is one plot that is not "a failed scheme" (D. 291-92): the plot to love another person. He explains, "Love is a choice... perhaps a free choosing of our destiny, a sudden discovery of the most secret and fateful part of our being" (Paz 198). This "choice of destiny" gives the lovers a sense of predication provided by the end of narrative plot, for their union serves as a surrogate for the communion lost at birth. García Márquez seems to agree with Paz:

Not only is every member of [the Buendía family] solitary-- as I've repeated often in this book, perhaps more than I ought-- but there's also the anti-solidarity, even of people who sleep in the same bed. I think the critics who most nearly hit the mark were those who concluded that the whole disaster of Macondo... comes from a lack of solidarity-- the solitude which results when everyone is acting for himself alone. (Guibert 314)

However, many of his characters do attempt to create a plot out of solidarity, and to no avail. This predetermined "anti-solidarity" that forbids them to find solace in their love for each other is precisely what makes the Buendías a postmodern family. A real return to the "paradisiac past" can only be achieved through the breakdown of the self, through a collapse into schizophrenia that destroys narrative. Reality
represents something far too large for their subjective selves to encompass. Because the Buendíás’ desire for communion will never be satisfied, the narrative becomes a repetitious cycle of desire and plot construction followed by the dissatisfaction and plot destruction that "wears the axle."

The novel opens before the beginning of this process of construction and destruction. Macondo inhabits a time before time, on the verge of the "prehistoric" moment that will initiate the complex succession of events of which the narrative will consist:

At that time Macondo was a village of twenty adobe houses, built on the bank of a river of clear water that ran along a bed of polished stones, which were white and enormous, like prehistoric eggs. The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point. (G.M. 1)

Though the smoothness of the "polished stones" suggests a vagueness, as if reality has not yet defined itself, these "prehistoric eggs" portend the reality that will arise. Like Wilder, the village is still in harmony with Murray’s primal "unspeakability," the original rhythm of the universe. Because the collective human consciousness is immersed in this undefined rhythm, the villagers do not recognize themselves as separate from the object world they inhabit. This lack of distance between humans and the world, a kind of schizophrenia, makes language unnecessary. Macondo has not yet been awakened to the difference between a thing and its representation, to the idea that a thing can be represented. "[T]hings lacked names" because all objects simply are
themselves. Just as Wilder points to the television, unaware of his mother’s absence, the inhabitants of Macondo can only refer to a thing by directly "pointing" at it. The gypsies find Macondo "lost in the drowsiness of the swamp" (G. M. 10), without the impulse to define the surrounding world in an orderly way. Consequently, there is no motive for narrative.

The arrival of Melquíades awakens Macondo from the "drowsiness" of primordial stasis. Demonstrating the magic of the magnet, he explains, "‘Things have a life of their own... It’s simply a matter of waking up their souls’ " (G.M. 2). With this declaration, Melquíades opens up the gap between human consciousness and the object world, for objects "have a life of their own," distinct from human understanding. The world no longer appears sufficient to the people of Macondo, for it now withholds an underlying purpose. Along with the villager’s realization of mystery, Melquíades awakens their desire to represent the meaning of these objects, to "wake up their souls." His arrival then heralds the creation of language, the idea of substituting a metaphor for a real object. This new desire to represent the "life" of reality as a coherent system provides the village with a goal, a narrative end. Melquíades inspires "with his deep organ voice the darkest reaches of the imagination" (G.M. 6), the impulse José Arcadio Buendía passes on to all of his descendants. This spirit is "a hereditary memory" (G.M. 6), the desire to overcome the solitude.
Strangely enough, Melquíades teases Macondo out of primal harmony not with "successful" representations of reality, but with demonstrations of magic. The gypsy's demonstration of a magnifying glass tempts José Arcadio Buendía's imagination. Melquíades informs the villagers that "'Science has eliminated distance... In a short time, man will be able to see what is happening in any place in the world without leaving his own home'" (G.M. 3). But even before he presents the magnifying glass, Melquíades knows "what there was on the other side of things" (G.M. 6) the complexity of the world that no machine could ever hope to understand or represent. The invention will at best be like Baudrillard's television, a simulator of hyperreal representations. Melquíades asserts the idea of the machine's magic, not because he thinks it would be possible, but simply because the idea of it awakens action. His magic, much like the nun's "belief" at the end of White Noise, allows the characters to believe in their ability to overcome solitude.

Melquíades is both immersed in the "unspeakable" rhythm "on the other side of things," and has "a human burden, an earthly condition that kept him involved in the small problems of daily life" (G.M. 6). Like Murray, the gypsy serves as the go-between for both plot and plotlessness, maintaining the equilibrium that will allow the narrative to occur. He makes sure the characters neither trespass upon reality and collapse into schizophrenia, nor create a wholly programmatic alternate
"reality." For instance, when José Arcadio Buendía suggests that the "practical" use of the magnifying glass is to wage solar war, "Melquíades tried to dissuade him" (G.M. 3). He knows that José Arcadio Buendía will soon find this goal impossible, and action will end. To prevent the narrative from collapsing back into primal stasis due to José Arcadio Buendía’s frustration, Melquíades repeatedly provides him with new goals.

During his next experiment, to conceive of a new "notion of space" (G.M. 4), José Arcadio Buendía himself begins to exhibit symptoms of this collapse into the primal state of prehistoric Macondo:

Suddenly, without warning, his feverish activity was interrupted and was replaced by a kind of fascination. He spent several days as if he were bewitched, softly repeating to himself a string of fearful conjectures without giving credit to his own understanding. (G.M. 5)

José Arcadio Buendía cannot "give credit to his own understanding" because in his experimentation he penetrates the "other side of things," the complexity underlying the ordinary world. As does Jack upon entering Mink’s room, he goes beyond the magical limits of language created by Melquíades and stumbles upon reality. He discovers the truth that the "‘earth is round, like an orange’" (G.M. 5). Though he realizes "unspeakability" and peels off one of its layers of meaning, the experience reduces him to an ecstatic stupor. When his action is "replaced with a kind of fascination," the schizophrenic interface with complexity,
narrative momentum threatens collapse. Melquíades restores the magical equilibrium by giving José Arcadio Buendía "the laboratory of an alchemist" (G.M. 5). The gift "was to have a profound influence on the future of the village" (G.M. 5) because it will keep the Buendías occupied within the magically real realm and keep them from trespassing on the complexity that destroys the "future."

José Arcadio Buendía’s enterprising spirit, however, constantly challenges Melquíades’ magical limits. Within the first chapter, he undertakes the scientific plot, an expedition into the swamp to discover and explain the wonders of the world: "To the south lay the swamps, covered with an eternal vegetable scum, and the whole vast universe of the great swamp, which according to what the gypsies said, had no limits" (G.M. 11). Because the swamp extends "toward the other side of the world" (G.M. 24) back into the primal space of the "prehistoric eggs," the chaotic uniformity of which "the whole vast universe" arises, José Arcadio Buendía’s "directional instruments and his maps" (G.M. 11) cannot encompass its vastness. It overwhelms the expedition with its sheer immensity and disorganization. This vastness, like the "shapeless growing" airborne toxic event, represents not progress towards understanding, but a window through which to view their origin. They are surrounded by uniformity: "[T]hey could not return because the strip that they were opening as they went along would soon close up with new vegetation that
almost seemed to grow before their eyes" (G.M. 12). They trudge forward through the swamp, but ultimately, they get nowhere.

As in *White Noise*, the scientific plot here leads humanity to an awe-inspiring view of its primal origin. Instead of reaching civilization, the group stumbles upon a Spanish galleon shipwrecked far inland:

The whole structure seemed to occupy its own space, one of solitude and oblivion, protected from the vices of time and the habits of birds. Inside, where the expeditionaries explored with careful intent, there was nothing but a thick forest of flowers. (G.M. 12)

The Spanish Galleon possesses all of the qualities of Murray's television; "a primal force... Sealed off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring" (D. 51). It "occupies its own space" sealed off from the entropic "vices of time." Its presence reaches back from the time before time, of the smooth river stones and projects into the contemporary. The fact that it resides in a space of "solitude and oblivion" suggest its "self-contained, self-referring" quality, for when the villagers search the ship and try to make some sense of what happened to it, all they find is an emptiness of flowers that explains "nothing." Like objects in the "prehistoric time," the flowers do not refer. They are only themselves. The galleon serves as a magical representation of solitude within the narrative world.

As with José Arcadio Buendía's earlier experiment, this vision threatens to destroy narrative momentum. As the men
near the galleon they feel "overwhelmed by their most ancient memories in that paradise of dampness and silence, going back to before original sin" (G.M. 11). The ship represents an inertial force that pulls the men back into the time of stasis, the time before humans became conscious of desire and action. In their "speechless... fascination" (G.M. 12), they again synchronize with primal complexity. In their awe of solitude, or "unspeakability," once again they cannot act or speak, only point. The narrator describes this inertia:

The discovery of the galleon, an indication of the proximity of the sea, broke José Arcadio Buendía's drive. He considered it a trick of his whimsical fate to have searched for the sea without finding it (G.M. 12). Once "Buendía's drive" to act, to continue plotting, is broken, the narrative should "wear out." Because he realizes that all of his plans "had become enveloped in a web of pretexts, disappointments, and evasions until it turned into nothing but an illusion" (G.M. 13), he surrenders: "We'll never get anywhere" (G.M. 13). His discovery of complexity, the "web of pretexts," reveals his hopes to be based upon Melquíades' magic, artificially simulated. José Arcadio Buendía returns to Macondo and, at Ursula's request, begins to take some interest in his children, including them in his schemes.

The insomnia plague, like the ATE, serves as another magical representation of complexity exerting its power over events. Rather than "overwhelming" the characters' desires, as does the swamp, the plague provides them with an unlimited
time of action in which they can accomplish their desire. Unaware of the effects of insomnia, José Arcadio Buendía rejoices at this opportunity to build Macondo:

[T]hey were happy at not sleeping because there was so much to do in Macondo in those days that there was barely enough time. They worked so hard that soon they had nothing else to do and they could be found at three o’clock in the morning with their arms crossed... Those who wanted to sleep... tried all kinds of methods of exhausting themselves. (G.M. 46)

Though the plague provides an extraordinary opportunity for narrative construction, symbolized by the actual physical construction of Macondo, it is easily seen how this could extinguish narrative momentum. José Arcadio Buendía declares that the plague will allow the villagers to "'get more out of life' " (G.M. 45). We recall that the same man not too long ago said, "'We’ll never get anywhere.' " During the plague, we could think of the narrative as a film that is being shown faster than the normal speed. The film shows everything that can happen so fast, that the action ends early. The narrative becomes contentless like the white noise on the screen following a film.

The narrative, then, comes to resemble one of the villagers’ sleepless pastimes, storytelling. The story told is

an endless game in which the narrator asked if they wanted him to tell a story about the capon, and when they answered yes, the narrator would say that he had not asked them to say yes... and so on and on in a vicious circle that lasted for entire nights. (G.M. 47)

When all content is exhausted, all that remains is the empty
paradigm of storytelling itself. Solitude's intrusion in the form of insomnia forces narrative reality, the magically real equilibrium established by Melquíades, to fold up and close shop in a plague of memory loss. One Hundred Years begins to collapse into the "story about the capon," an infinite series of references to itself, because complexity overwhelms the element of alchemy, the magical structure that had given the appearance of organization to events, the element that allowed Buendía to believe he would indeed "get" somewhere.

The narrative of human events can no longer distinguish itself from the Spanish Galleon's "solitude and oblivion," driving Macondo towards universal schizophrenia. Visitación explains that ultimately the insomniac forgets "the name and notion of things, and finally the identity of people and even the awareness of his own being, until he sank into a kind of idiocy that had no past" (G.M. 45). As language, the medium that allows individuals to distinguish the separation between themselves and the outside world, begins to fall apart, the people of Macondo increasingly feel that they live "in a reality that was slipping away, momentarily captured by words, but which would escape irremediably when they forgot the values of the written letters" (G.M. 49). Actually, the magically real distinction between subject and object created by language "slips away," dissolving the boundaries of distinction between each character's subjective self and the complexity of the objective world from which their "self"
arises. When they begin to lose "the awareness of [their] own being," characters share in a common being, that of the reality underlying the perceived world; "In that state of hallucinated lucidity, not only did they see images of their own dreams, but some saw the images dreamed by others" (G.M. 46). Her individuality partially dissolved into reality, "hallucinated lucidity," Ursula is able to view Rebeca's real parents, an element in the complex web of mysterious events that brought her to the Buendía household.10

The characters do struggle to hold off this schizophrenia and reestablish the magical separation between Macondo and solitude through the continued use of language. For instance, in order to remember the uses of his tools, Aureliano "marked them with their respective names so that all he had to do was read the inscription in order to identify them" (G.M. 48). José Arcadio Buendía conceives of building a "memory machine... based on the possibility of reviewing every morning, from beginning to end, the totality of knowledge acquired during one's life" (G.M. 49). Though he believes this "spinning dictionary" (G.M. 49) would allow him to maintain his identity, it actually resembles Baudrillard's "programmatic perfect descriptive machine," in which the individual fuses with the monitor, the monitor dominating the viewer's perception. Because the machine completely determines content, the viewer becomes a "useless body" (Ecstasy 129). The viewer can no longer participate in Paz's
rebellion against solitude. At this point in the plague, however, without the monitor to provide an ecstatic content, there can be no content possible.

Melquíades' return to Macondo from the dead seems to refix "the values of the written letters" to the objects they describe. The last the reader hears, the gypsy and his tribe "had been wiped off the face of the earth because they had gone beyond the limits of human knowledge" (G.M. 40). Because José Arcadio Buendía lacks Melquíades' "supernatural faculties" (G.M. 50), his transgressions of these "limits" afflict him with "the forgetfulness of death" (G.M. 50), schizophrenia, solitude, the "narrative death" described by Jack Gladney. Melquíades returns to life "because he could not bear the solitude" (G.M. 50) of this death. His decision "to take refuge in that corner of the world which had still not been discovered by death" (G.M. 50) and photograph it, paradoxically, restores Macondo's magical real shield, saving it from this death:

Melquíades had printed on his plates everything that was printable in Macondo, and he left the daguerreotype laboratory to the fantasies of José Arcadio Buendía, who had resolved to use it to obtain scientific proof of the existence of God. (G.M. 54)

As the magical potion retrieves Buendía from his "forgetfulness" and allows him to recognize Melquíades, photographic representations of the object world stabilize the magical equilibrium of difference between subjects (the photos) and objects, words and things. The photos recover
things from their flat self-referring nature. The gypsy photographs "everything that was printable in Macondo," in order to reinvigorate Buendías' "fantasies" of representing the world as God's orderly system.

In order to stabilize the future of Macondo against these premature collapses into death, as he did with the present in his photographs, Melquíades must provide a representation of the future, the fate of Macondo written on magical scrolls. Save one crucial difference, Melquíades' scrolls function like José Arcadio Buendías' "programmatic descriptive machine." Though they project Macondo's history like a narrative film, "short circuiting" (Precession 2) the character's attempts to alter fate, they fail to "short circuit" the possibility that the individual characters might become aware that they exist in an indecipherable system, and then collapse individually into schizophrenia of insomnia. Despite these risks, the scrolls do allow the characters magically to retain their subjectivity. The narrative, as a whole, stabilized by the scrolls, constructs and unweaves itself depending on the sum total of the characters' remaining desire to persist plotting against solitude. Individuals are still susceptible to the process of narrative construction and destruction.

This reestablishment, however, does not mean that the individual characters will be completely protected from this collapse into ecstasy. Despite Melquíades' continued care, in his experiments to make a perpetual motion machine out of
Pietro Crespi's "mechanical ballerina," José Arcadio Buendía collapses "into a state of perpetual delirium from which he would not recover. He would spend the nights walking around the room thinking aloud... The fever of insomnia fatigued him" (G.M. 79). Buendía, having finally lost his will to plot, again stumbles upon the other side of things and begins to forget "the names and notions of things." We know that he will not return this time, for he smashes "to dust the equipment in the alchemy laboratory, the daguerreotype room... shouting... in some high-sounding and fluent but completely incomprehensible language" (G.M. 81), the very equipment designed by Melquíades to preserve José Arcadio Buendía's existence on earth. He can no longer conceive of time: "This is a disaster... Look at the air, listen to the buzzing of the sun, the same as yesterday and the day before. Today is Monday too" (G.M. 80). This uniform "buzzing" recalls a television screen's white noise, an ecstatic return to the reality of solitude, "a state of total innocence" (G.M. 81), the loss of subjectivity. Ursula, on the other hand, thinks he has "lost all contact with reality" (G.M. 109). Actually, he has trespassed again upon reality, the force that destroys his narrative life. His existence becomes like the story of the capon, a "dream of the infinite rooms" (G.M. 143).

Aureliano's life mimics his father's conflict with solitude with one crucial difference; due to his clairvoyance, he is an "expert insomniac" (G.M. 48). His clairvoyance
serves the same function as Melquíades' film. It is a magical predetermination of the future that allows him to maintain his subjectivity against the solitude underlying the object world. A narrative catalogue of the Colonel's life from beginning to end, like Melquíades' scrolls, ensures that his life will not collapse prematurely. The novel previews them, sets them down as fate, so that they will not be lost in the plagues of solitude:

Colonel Aureliano Buendía organized thirty-two armed uprisings and he lost them all... The only thing left of all that was a street that bore his name in Macondo. And yet, as he declared a few years before he died of old age, he had not expected any of that on the dawn he left with twenty-one men to join the forces of General Victorio Medina. (G.M. 106-107)

While his magical vision allows him to see certain future events, it does not allow him to foresee the meaning of the structure underlying his life: "His efforts to systematize his premonitions were useless. They would come suddenly in a wave of supernatural lucidity... but they could not be grasped" (G.M. 129). The fact that he is "born with his eyes open" (G.M. 15) serves only as an awareness of solitude. It insures that he will not collapse into his father's ecstatic fusion with reality, and repeatedly "grasp" at these premonitions, giving the narrative the momentum needed to play out the events foreshadowed in the above catalogue.

In the act of "grasping," Aureliano mimics Jack's creation of "Gladney's Hitler," adding the title "Colonel" to his name and undertaking the process of revolution
foreshadowed on the next page. He explains his action to Don Apolinario Moscote, the former Conservative civil leader of Macondo, "'Not madness... War. And don't call me Aurelito any more. Now I'm Colonel Aureliano Buendia'" (G.M. 105). The fact that he makes this declaration himself and before the foreshadowing of his future on the next page may suggest that, by freely choosing war, the Colonel created the events that follow. However, the text provides evidence to the contrary. Aureliano

facing the firing squad, would not understand too well the concatenation of the series of subtle but irrevocable accidents that brought him to that point. The death of Remedios had not produced the despair that he had feared. It was, rather, a dull feeling of rage that gradually dissolved in a solitary and passive frustration. (G.M. 98)

The "concatenation of the series of" events that lead him to the moment in which he faces the firing squad are not only "irrevocable"—which may still suggest that these events became destined the moment that Aureliano became the Colonel—but that the series of events began before his declaration, connecting his choice of war to the "dull feeling of rage" caused by the death of Remedios.

Aureliano's relationship with Remedios, whose name means "cures" in Spanish, holds the portents of his years of war. The delay in their marriage due to her age causes him such suffering that "he left his accumulated grief behind and found Remedios changed into a swamp without horizons" (G.M. 70). His separation from the child comes to personify "his
accumulated grief," a representation of the solitude of the "swamp without horizons" that encircles not only Aureliano from his birth, but the entirety of Macondo. Like Amaranta and Rebeca, both lost in the solitude of their longing for Pietro Crespi, Aureliano writes poetry in which "Remedios would appear transfigured" (G.M. 68), transformed into "the justification that he needed to live" (G.M. 90). In writing, he "transfigures" his solitude into the image of Remedios, a simulated coherence much like Jack's "outer torment." Years later, Ursula realizes that the Colonel "had never loved anyone, not even his wife Remedios" (G.M. 254). He only used Remedios as a means of denying his experience of solitude. The death of Remedios, then, like the ATE for Jack, unleashes Aureliano's "vaster torment," a horror that pushes him to more extreme levels of simulation, thirty-two failed rebellions.

Later in life, after Aureliano has returned from his rebellions, Ursula realizes the tragedy of her son's existence:

[t]he lucidity of her old age allowed her to see, and she said so many times, that the cries of children in their mothers' wombs are not announcements of ventriloquism or a faculty for prophecy but an unmistakable sign of an incapacity for love. The lowering of the image of her son brought out in her all at once all of the compassion that she had owed him. (G.M. 254)

In "lowering her image of her son," she realizes that Aureliano could never have changed his fate, and is finally able to feel "all of the compassion that she owed him." When she strips from "her image" of Aureliano all of his simulatory
attempts to overcome his solitude, the rebellions and the gold fishes, she finds that underneath them all is a helplessness. This moment is remarkably similar to the moment in which the Dylarama plot deflates and Jack finds himself feeling compassion for Willie Mink. Rather than reveal meaning, these moments allow the characters to perceive the depth of their tragic experience and then empathize with one another.

Unlike Ursula, who understands her son’s suffering and then loves him, the Colonel will never love and forgive himself. Standing in front of the firing squad, a few moments before he remembers "his father leading him into the tent" to see ice for the first time, he shouts at the soldiers, "'A person fucks himself up so much... just so that six weak fairies can kill him and he can’t do anything about it’" (G.M. 132). Because he attributes his impotence and coming death to his own action, he lives with the horrifying belief that he could have prevented his suffering had he made different choices. Remembering the young prostitute, whom he had proposed to marry, he thinks, "perhaps if he had married her he would have been a man without war and without glory, a nameless artisan, a happy animal" (G.M. 180). However, this could not have happened, for he is destined to be a loveless dictator, whose "first command" is, tragically, "the command to give him love" (G.M. 401). The presence of the ice in the Colonel’s thoughts here, and in many of the major events of his life, suggests that it represents the control solitude
holds over his actions. Like the Spanish Galleon, its mystery both exercises power over events, and then defies explanation.

The Colonel's "trails of permanent subversion" (G.M. 150) that follow his "call to general war" (G.M. 148) show the process of how the Colonel came to realize the limits within which the ice's power holds him, "the inner coldness that shattered his bones and... would not let him sleep for several months until it became a habit" (G.M. 170). While the Colonel, in his "clairvoyance," has a deeper awareness of the reality of solitude, the symptoms of insomnia that manifest themselves during his wars suggest that he is not immune to its destructive effects:

He was weary of the uncertainty, of the vicious circle of that eternal war that always found him in the same place, but always older, wearier, even more in the position of not knowing why, or how, or even when. (G.M. 171)

Like his father, he begins to lose his conception of the progressive movement of time. The "characteristics of his speech... combined to form words that were gradually losing all meaning" (G.M. 166). His inability to use language suggests the dissolution of his subjectivity, and possible collapse into schizophrenia. His friend Colonel Márquez noticed that "as the war became more intense and widespread, his image was fading away into a universe of unreality" (G.M. 166). As he begins to lose his identity, the Colonel physically and spiritually falls apart: "He had not shaved more tormented by the pain of the sores than by the great failure of his dreams, for he had reached the end of all hope,
beyond glory and the nostalgia of glory" (G.M. 180-181).

The war ends because the rage the Colonel had directed towards achieving the goal of revolution only seems to wear him out. Aureliano learns that he had not been fighting for revolution in the first place. Rather, he seeks the thing that solitude will forever deny him, power. He declares, "'The important thing is that from now on we'll be fighting only for power'" (G.M. 172-73). Having realized that he will never achieve power over the ice in his heart, he attempts to take control of his own destruction. Like Jack Gladney throwing out his household things, "During the following days he busied himself destroying all traces of his passage throughout the world" (G.M. 178), including his own physical person. He "took out his pistol and shot himself in the iodine circle that his personal physician had painted" (G.M. 182) over his heart. Solitude, having control over his destiny, however, will not allow him to die. He declares of his inability to even have the freedom to kill himself, "'That was my masterpiece'" (183).

Having accepted that "'a person doesn't die when he should but when he can'" (G.M. 248), Aureliano immerses himself in the solitude of the little gold fishes. Unlike his father's ecstatic immersion, due to the Colonel's inborn "rage" (G.M. 183), he cannot lose his subjectivity in solitude. His solitude is that of an equilibriuous awe. Rather than resist solitude, he may only mimic its rhythm of
construction and destruction in the making and melting of his gold fishes:

[j]e exchanged the little gold fishes for gold coins and then converted the coins into little fishes, and so on, with the result that he had to work all the harder with the more he sold in order to satisfy an exasperating vicious circle. (G.M. 204)

Even this "honesty pact with solitude" (G.M. 205) differs little from the process of war, in which the totalitarian act of filling "nothingness" (D. 72) yields to the realization that even in war "[N]othing ever happened" (G.M. 171). He admires Remedios the Beauty because she seems to have the same knowledge he had after coming "'back from twenty years of war'" (G.M. 202). However, like Wilder, she exists with neither José Arcadio Buendía's impulse for plot, nor the Colonel's innate "burden of hate" (G.M. 245). Her life is a natural synchronization with solitude, an ecstasy. This inborn ecstasy necessitates her ascension from the real world.

Though Aureliano's "honesty pact" slows the entropic effects of solitude, it does not prevent the slow wearing of his narrative. His seventeen sons, who created nearly "a state of war" (G.M. 221) during their visit to Macondo and signify the fruit of twenty years of rebellion, die each before his death. The Colonel is the only Buendía who recognizes the degeneration of Melquíades magic room; "[w]hile the rest of the family was still amazed by the fact that Melquíades' room was immune to dust and destruction, he saw it turned into a dunghill" (G.M. 266). Recall that Melquíades'
room holds the magical parchments, the stabilizers of the Buendía narrative. The fact that Aureliano sees it as a "dunghill" suggests that his narrative life is no longer magically shielded from narrative death.

Just before his death, the Colonel again begins to "fade away" as he did during the war. The "pact" he had established has dissolved, and now the force of solitude begins to destroy him: "Colonel Aureliano Buendía was a shadow" (G.M. 263). On the last day of his life, when the circus arrives, "he knowingly fell into a trap of nostalgia and relived that prodigious afternoon of the gypsies when his father took him to see the ice" (G.M. 272). Throughout his life, the Colonel had resisted the "trap of nostalgia," for it seems to signify the recession of plot. When the characters' desire to act wanes they resort to a reawakening of their past actions in an attempt to see them as a meaningful narrative. The Colonel's insights suggest to him that nostalgia, like plot, is vanity.

The memory of the ice, however, imposes itself here because it is his one defining memory, the limits within which solitude holds him. Following the passing of the circus,

once more he saw the face of his miserable solitude when everything had passed by and there was nothing but the bright expanse of the street and the air full of flying ants with a few onlookers peering into the precipice of uncertainty. (G.M. 273)

We might imagine the end of Aureliano's narrative like a film running out; "the bright expanse" and "the air full of flying ants" suggest a kind of white noise. Solitude has overcome
him to point that "he could no longer find the memory" (G.M. 273) of the ice, his insight into solitude.

Following the Colonel’s death, the narrative itself begins to undergo a process of destruction similar to that of the Colonel’s last moments. Ursula, on the other hand, believes that time has begun again. She recognizes in José Arcadio Segundo’s work with the labor movement "the dangerous times when her son Aureliano carried the homeopathic pills of subversion in his pocket" (G.M. 303) before his years of rebellion. She exclaims, "’Just like Aureliano... It’s as if the world were repeating itself’ " (G.M. 303). The great matriarch of the Buendías is only partially right. While José Arcadio Segundo’s actions do mirror the beginning of his great uncle’s wars of subversion, she does not realize that he is on the other side of history. The Colonel’s wars began during the youth of Macondo. The arrival of Mr. Brown’s banana company and the imposition of the police state are the "events that would deal Macondo its fatal blow" (G.M. 298).

Macondo, it could be argued, here enters upon its postmodern time, a time in which decrees such as "Decree No. 4" (G.M. 310) may establish "that the workers did not exist" (G.M. 307), brand honest "strikers to be a ‘bunch of hoodlums’" (G.M. 310), authorize their murder, and then cover it up: "The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally
accepted" (G.M. 315). The government’s report, a sign for the real, takes precedence over its actual object, the "‘more than three thousand’" murdered, the dead bodies José Arcadio Segundo actually views on the train. As Baudrillard warns, when communication can no longer be questioned, when it becomes programmatic, truth can no longer exist. The decree even replaces the history of Macondo, the material of the narrative we read. The military officers tell the relatives of the missing: "‘You must be dreaming... Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. This is a happy town’" (G.M. 316). It is this declaration that necessitates the deluge, One Hundred Year’s postmodern storm. The deluge represents the solitude of reality reasserting itself against humanity’s programmatic use of language.

Ursula compares the four year, eleven month, two day deluge to the insomnia plague because of its hours of boredom and the slipping of reality. Despite these similarities, the plague contributed to the construction of Macondo and the stabilization of language that the deluge destroys. As in the time of insomnia, words again unfix from their objects. Yet, after the deluge, they do not seem to fully refix. For instance, much of Aureliano Segundo’s time is spent reading his daughter’s English encyclopedia. It is the last representation of reality left to the characters who are cut off from the world by the rain. However, "[S]ince he did not
know any English and could identify only the most famous cities and people, he would have to invent names and legends to satisfy the children's insatiable curiosity" (G.M. 323). Because they have no connection to even the encyclopedia's reality, Aureliano Segundo creates a completely ecstatic reality. They begin to succumb to the "imaginary reality" (G.M. 49) of the insomniac, in which the meaning of language becomes arbitrary. Similarly, Ursula's recently acquired "habit of not calling things by their names made her put first things last and used "expelled" for "gave birth" (G.M. 324). In putting "first things last," she reveals the novel has reversed itself from a building narrative to that of a receding narrative. The end of the narrative is actually a return to the vagueness that it originally came out of.

Unlike in the time of the insomnia plague, when the world was still young and the characters yearned to construct Macondo, the deluge calms desires. Without these desires, the narrative machine, preserved by Melquíades' scrolls, begins to succumb to the destructive force of solitude. The two major figures of excessive desire, Aureliano Segundo and his concubine Petra Cotes, lose their ravenous appetites for food and sexual gratification: Petra Cotes' "tapered eyes of a carnivorous animal had become sad and tame from looking at the rain so much" (G.M. 327); Aureliano Segundo "had exhausted his quota of salaciousness and all he had left was the marvelous gift of being able to remember it without"
bitterness or repentance" (G.M. 322). This "quota of salaciousness" reinforces the idea that desire is finite, and once it runs out the characters are "no longer up to those things" (G.M. 327). All he has left is his nostalgia, his "gift of being able to remember" his life. Ursula has similar bouts with nostalgia, "for she was gradually losing her sense of reality and confusing present time with remote periods in her life to the point where" (G.M. 333) she believes dead relatives have come back to visit her. In response to this time of inaction and nostalgia, Aureliano Segundo echoes José Arcadio Buendía's desperation at having failed to chart the swamp when he declares that, because of the rain, "[I]t's impossible to do anything now" (G.M. 328). The soldier's proclamation has come true; "nothing ever will happen" in Macondo.

Following the deluge, the inhabitants of Macondo return to their streets to find that the rain has destroyed the reality of the past. It seems that they may only wait for the end:

Aureliano Segundo returned home with his trunks, convinced that not only Ursula but all the inhabitants of Macondo were waiting for it to clear in order to die. He had seen them as he passed by, sitting in their parlors with an absorbed look and folded arms, feeling unbroken time pass, relentless time, because it was useless to divide it into months and years, and the days into hours when one could do nothing but contemplate the rain. (G.M. 327)

This passage suggests that the narrative has begun to collapse into that timeless realm inhabited by the river stones and the
galleon. As with the interior of the galleon, "the rain was affecting everything and the driest of machines would have flowers popping out among their gears if they were not oiled every three days" (G.M. 321). The flowers that had symbolized the failure of the swamp expedition have begun to bloom in Macondo. In fact, it seems that the narrative has returned to the time when José Arcadio Buendía discovered the galleon. Only, instead of building, Macondo is now dismantling itself. Aureliano Segundo is "[O]vercome by an exploratory delirium comparable to that of his great-grandfather when he was searching for the route of inventions" (G.M. 335) through the swamp. However, while José Arcadio Buendía’s odyssey was one that, if successful, would lead to the construction of Macondo, Aureliano Segundo’s consists of tearing apart the town in order to find the gold that Ursula has hidden. At one point, he finds himself digging through the foundation of the Buendía house. This physical destruction is actually a manifestation of the narrative’s own destruction:

Macondo was in ruins... The wooden houses, the cool terraces for the breezy card-playing afternoons, seemed to have blown away in an anticipation of the prophetic wind that years later would wipe Macondo off the face of the earth. (G.M. 336)

As the passage suggests, this annihilation is "anticipated," predetermined. It reminds us that the narrative is returning to the nothingness from which it came.

Following the deluge, it seems that the characters’ desires have completely abandoned the narrative, leaving it
susceptible to solitude:

That was how everything went after the deluge. The
indolence of the people was in contrast to the voracity
of oblivion, which little by little was undermining
memories in a pitiless way... (G.M. 351)

Even memories, the objects of nostalgic desire, dissolve.
Without the characters' activity as a force, an activator of
momentum, the narrative consumes itself "from within:" The
pharmacy

was the last that remained of a past whose annihilation
had not taken place because it was still in a process of
annihilation, consuming itself from within, ending at
every moment but never ending its ending. the town had
reached such extremes of inactivity. (G.M. 409)

The only desire left is Aureliano Babilonia's desire to read
and discover the meaning of Melquiades' magic parchments, an
activity that goes along with the dismantling of narrative.
Like the reader who desires to understand One Hundred Years,
Aureliano Babilonia finds "himself off course in the tide of
a world that had ended and of which only the nostalgia
remained" (G.M. 396). Following the deluge, the novel
reveals that the family history has officially ended. The
reader and Aureliano Babilonia are in the same position.
Though Aureliano does not know it, he, like the reader,
examines the history of a dead people.

Once Aureliano Babilonia has learned to read the
parchments, he finds he is reading what happened in the past,
the sum total of the novel itself. In one

prodigious instant Melquiades' final keys were revealed
to him and he saw the epigraph of the parchments
perfectly placed in order of man's time and space: The
first of the line is tied to a tree and the last is being eaten by the ants. (G.M. 420)

This "prodigious instant," however, does not satisfy Brooks' conception of the consummation of plot. Rather than reveal the scheme underlying events, it simply retells the reader what already happened, or was destined to happen. We might imagine Jack Gladney conducting a "massive data tally" of Garcia Marquez's novel. He receives this self-referential answer: the two events and all of those occurring in between are the sum total of their data. 12

Like DeLillo, García Márquez leaves his readers in awe of his image of America. He leaves us with only the knowledge that Macondo,

the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. (G.M. 422)

If "everything written on" the scrolls is truly "unrepeatable," how do we explain the existence of the text One Hundred Years of Solitude? I would argue that each time a reader reads the novel, the characters experience a new "second opportunity on earth" in the mind of the reader. They impress the reader not with the coherence, or plausibility of their narrative lives, but with the tragic experiences they communicate. This tragic experience, the awe inspired in the reader, transcends the postmodern muddle within which narrative representation finds itself, the problems of "the
city of mirrors (or mirages)," and calls the reader to re-envision their America. García Márquez believes that, unlike the characters in his novel, human communities do have the power to overcome solitude. As Shakespeare did with King Lear, García Márquez creates characters "condemned to one hundred years of solitude." In order to awaken our empathy for the suffering of others, and to implant the desire to re-envision our society, he shows us a people who cannot overcome their condition. These feelings can neither be ecstatic or programmed. They run deeper than our perceptions of reality.
"[t]he megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred" (Libra 181).

If T.V. did in fact come over on the Mayflower, or on the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria, the Americas as a culture still have not figured out how to get good reception. Like Walt Whitman and Pablo Neruda before them, DeLillo and García Márquez attempt to clarify the image of diversity and vastness that occupies the screen and then encourage their readers to react, to see and to affirm its complexity. They repeat the same things Shakespeare and Joyce already said, "Don't sit too close, don't watch too long, but by all means watch, 'watch with the [right] attentiveness' " (D. 67).

In an interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo describes the predicament of the contemporary novel:

'[w]hen we talk about the novel we have to consider the culture in which it operates. Everything in the culture argues against the novel, particularly the novel that tries to be equal to the complexities and excesses of the culture.' (Begley 290)

As Baudrillard explains, our culture resists the image of its own reality. Rather than explore the richness and horror of its own "complexities and excesses," it denies them. It values the flat simplicity of the television news story in which all can be explained. This desire is expressed most notably by one of DeLillo's critics, independent syndicated columnist George Will, who argues that Libra's exploration of the mystery surrounding the JFK assassination destroys our faith in the real simplicity of human events. He argues that
Libra is "yet another exercise in blaming America for Oswald's act of derangement" (qtd in Lentricchia 4). Despite the mystery that has haunted America since the assassination, Will would have his country believe in a simulated history, reenacted. A bolt action rifle shot into the head of goat from the exact distance proves the lone gun simplicity of America. Will would probably agree with the following, an excerpt from Branch's daydreams about the reenactments of the murder:

'Look, touch, this is the true nature of the event. Not your beautiful ambiguities, your lives of the major players, your compassions and sadesses. Not your roomful of theories, your museum of contradictory facts. There are no contradictions here. Your history is simple. See, the man on the slab. The open eye staring. The goat head oozing rudimentary matter.' (Libra 299-300)

Contemporary writers cannot accept this type of simplification. To do so would be to condemn their readers to the ecstatic loss of reality the "lone gunman" mentality represents. As DeLillo suggests, JFK's murder is the collective tragedy of the United States. It is a tragedy that our country has not yet been able to represent in a way acceptable to our culture. America, overcome by the hysteria of this event, has collapsed into a kind of cultural ecstasy. In our inability to represent the murder, our culture has lost the image of itself. In Libra, DeLillo attempts to create a new American image that redeems our culture from denial and simulated coherence. He identifies the role of writers within their culture:

'I think we need to invent beauty, search out some restoring force. A writer may describe the ugliness and
pain in graphic terms but he can also try to find a
dignity and significance in ruined parts of the city, and
the people he sees there. Ugly and beautiful... A sense
of failed souls and forgotten lives on a new scale.’
(Begley 287)

He sees the novel as a means of matching the suffering that
has reached "a new scale," that of a collectivity that has
lost its image as a collective. It, therefore, provides the
"failed souls" of the mass society with a representation of
themselves, an object of faith that redeems them. In the case
of Libra, it is the very "reconstruction" (W.N. 322) of
complexity that redeems America, a narrative flexible enough
to include the intricacies of the individual life and the vast
activity of the collective.

DeLillo uses the word "reconstruction" to refer to his
telling of Wilder’s crossing the superhighway. The passage is
rich with description. He reconstructs Wilder’s every move.
This is the goal of the contemporary novel: to reconstruct and
represent everything, no matter how complex and disorganized.
It is a failed collection of the real. DeLillo’s Branch
describes this type of novel:

[E]verything belongs, everything adheres, the mutter of
obscure witnesses, the photos of illegible documents and
odd sad personal debris, things gathered up at a dying-
old shoes, pajama tops, letters from Russia. It is all
one thing, a ruined city of trivia where people feel real
pain. This is Joycean Book of America, remember- the
novel in which nothing is left out. (Libra 182).

"[N]othing is left out" for so long, that it begins again.
Notes

1. Both of DeLillo's major critics, Frank Lentricchia and Tom LeClair, argue that DeLillo's work has more in common with literary modernism than postmodernism. While Lentricchia does address issues of narrative structure, his main concern in his essay "Tales of the Electronic Tribe" is the explication of White Noise as a critique of postmodern consumer culture. In his study of DeLillo's work In the Loop, LeClair discusses the novel in terms of systems theory. He calls White Noise "the closing of the loop," the synthesizer of the writer's fictive system. Similarly, though criticism of García Márquez is quite diverse, the majority of his critics associate his work with modernism. For instance, Regina Janes, in Gabriel García Márquez: Revolutions in Wonderland, says that for García Márquez and other contemporary Latin American writers, the "importance of the variety of formal possibilities opened by modernism can scarcely be overestimated" (4).

2. While both Lentricchia and LeClair use the word plotlessness, neither defines it as an embodiment of an unrepresentable primal power operating within narrative events. Lentricchia uses it to say that "White Noise has no plot" (Lentricchia 97). LeClair argues that a "cosmic plotlessness" (8) is an element of postmodernism that has "had a largely deconstructive effect on fiction" (8).

3. For Lentricchia, Murray is as much a victim of American
postmodern culture as the other characters. Murray, "the habitually ironic cultural critic... believes in his own freedom just because he knows how the culture industry works" (Lentricchia 100). Although I agree with Lentricchia in that "Waves and Radiation" dramatizes the confusion of simulation and reality in postmodern America, I think it introduces Murray as a figure who is perhaps magically immune to the effects of its tragedy, a pilgrim who comes to Blacksmith, not to delude himself, but rather to explore the unmeasured depth of this new America. In an interview with Anthony DeCurtis of Rolling Stone, DeLillo concedes to a similar kind of outlook: "In White Noise, in particular, I tried to find a kind of radiance in dailiness [daily life]. Sometimes this radiance can be almost frightening. Other times it can be almost holy or sacred. Is it really there? Well, yes. You know, I don't believe as Murray Jay Siskind does in White Noise that the supermarket is a form of Tibetan Lamasary. But there is something there that we tend to miss... something extraordinary hovering just beyond our touch and just beyond our vision" (qtd-in Ferraro 30).

4. Lentricchia seems to believe that Jack does not become a plotter until the third section. He argues that Jack "prays for plotlessness, a life ungoverned by design and intention" (Lentricchia 97). The critic rightly identifies the source of this desire; "There really is a story at work in Gladney’s life, one he’d prefer not to know about because it’s a story
over which he exerts no authorial control" (Lentricchia 98). I would argue that it is the story's very lack of "design and intention" that threatens Jack and inspires him to plot his own structures (e.g. the simulations of Hitler and television).

5. In his essay "Adolf, We hardly Knew You," Paul Cantor agrees that Hitler serves as the symbol of the power Jack attempts to incorporate into his own identity. He explains, "Gladney is searching for someone who can restore significance and value to his life, and the powerful image of Hitler offers fullness to his emptiness" (Cantor 47). For Cantor, however, Hitler is only an object of fascination, not a concrete object of narrative desire. 6. Ferraro argues that Babette's appearance reveals that "the screens ultimate strategy is to destroy the distinction between flesh and image, re-presenting the image-in-all-its-fleshiness as the thing-in-itself" (26). However, according to Ferraro, the characters are not disturbed by the image. Instead, Babette's image "raises familial consumerism to a higher power. They feel exhilaration in the crossing of the boundary between substance and illusion" (27). Rather than a triumph for television consumerism, I think Babette's image is a terrifying revelation of the family's reliance upon simulation within the domestic scene.

7. Lentricchia also argues that Willy Mink represents not only the telos of Jack's plot to recover himself, but also the
condition into which Jack may lose himself. While he does not discuss Mink as a schizophrenic, he explains, "Willie Mink is what the precariously centered Jack might become, postmodern man's essence, and our culture's re-formation of the meaning of madness" (112). He goes on to explain that this may be the fate of American culture, to collectively dissolve into nonsense.

8. For both Julio Ortega and Regina Janes, the presence of magic in One Hundred Years draws attention to the narrative's own artificiality. Ortega argues that it demonstrates the ecstatic powers of language. The narrative world is, at times, dominated by "a language which has no common border with our own natural language, for it itself has no borders. That other world is not even fantastic; it is written freedom in which representations are invalidated, and the interchangeable nature of the written prevails" (Ortega 4-5). Ortega seems to argue that language itself constructs the fantastic. Janes suggests that magical events serve to remind readers that they are reading an artificially constructed representation (57). I argue that magic and language are the means by which the narrative may begin, progress, and end. Magic is not an end in and of itself. Rather, it serves to replace conventional narrative structure.

9. Both Linda Hall and Paul Hedeen compare García Márquez' understanding of solitude with Paz's. In her essay "Labyrinthisne Solitude," Hall concludes that the novel
presents "dozens of variations of solitude and... [reveals] to us what Borges and Paz had suggested: that man is always alone" (Hall 263). Hedeen writes "Gabriel García Márquez's Dialectic of Solitude" in reaction to Hall's article, suggesting that she neglected the redeeming aspects of Paz's philosophy, the rebellion against solitude. Hedeen identifies the character's lives as being a kind of Camulian rebellion against solitude. However, he suggests that communion and solidarity, the ends of Paz's rebellion, can be found within the narrative world. I argue that the characters' failures are fated in order to leave the reader in awe of their tragic experience. Mary Pinard defines solitude in "Time in and out of Solitude," in terms of two kinds of time, real time and clock time. She explains, "Solitude is a place of unconscious, non-spatial being, a world of shadows, a simple unharrowed, nonconforming juxtaposition to the world of spacial time" (Pinard 67). She also argues that this "place" often serves as a refuge from the real world. I argue that rather than a place of refuge, solitude is a force which resists the character's desires for refuge.

10. Janes defines the insomnia in similar terms: "the insomnia plague is the loss of language, the loss of memories personal as well as political, the loss of history, of literature, of reality itself" (56). While Janes makes the important connection between the loss of language and the loss of reality, she fails to describe the process by which the
characters individually lose their subjective selves and, consequently, their perceived separateness from the object world. The plague represents a return to primal reality, a communion with nature in which human subjectivity no longer exists.

11. Though he does not use the same terminology, I think Ortega would agree with my assessment of Macondo's postmodern time. He says, "In the last stage, irreversible deterioration begins with the exploitation and violence introduced by the banana company with its new order of information (the simple object of the banana initiates an exploitive exchange). The end of representation is the last function of the letter--to erase itself" (10-11). This "new order of information" not only oppresses Macondo economically, but subjects it to the government and banana company's programmatic representations of reality.

12. In "The Myth of Apocalypse and Human Temporality in García Márquez," Lois Zamora argues that the novel does, in fact, consummate itself like a conventional plot: "[T]ime is neither aimless nor endless: it is successive and purposeful, moving toward a meaningful end" (Zamora 341). While I agree that "time is neither aimless nor endless" in One Hundred Years, I do not agree that the narrative moves toward a meaningful end which gives "significance and shape to our temporal existence" (Zamora 341). Janes identifies the self-referential nature of the ending; "At the end of the novel, then, a book that seemed
to be holding the mirror up to nature (though some very odd things appeared in that mirror) turns out to be holding the mirror to itself" (Janes 57). For Janes, the end affirms imagination as "the only means by which the world is ever transformed" (Janes 69). While I agree that this self-referentially sealed narrative does call the reader to imagine a transformed world, I think this inspiration has more to do with the readers' perception of the characters' suffering than simply their experience of the fantastic world of Macondo.
Works Cited


Morton, Thomas. *The New English Canaan.* Amsterdam: Jacob Frederick Stam., 1637.


