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The Convergence as a Transgressive Space in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*

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Abstract

Don DeLillo's *Zero K* envisions a dystopian world where late capitalism extends its reach to the most fundamental aspects of existence – commercializing life, death, and the very spaces people inhabit. This essay analyzes the novel through Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space, exploring how the cryopreservation facility known as the Convergence operates both materially and symbolically as a site for the production and reproduction of capitalist ideology. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates spatial theory with postmodern and posthumanist literary criticism, the study reveals how the Convergence embodies the paradoxes of technological capitalism. While promising transcendence over mortality, the facility ultimately reinforces existing social hierarchies and deepens alienation. The disruption of conventional narratives about life and death within the Convergence signals fractured identities and a diminished sense of authentic experience. Ultimately, *Zero K* uses the Convergence as a powerful metaphor to expose the pervasive influence of capitalist structures on human subjectivity and the commodification of life in contemporary society.

Keywords: The Convergence, Don DeLillo, Capitalism, Commodification, Subversion, Spatial triad

Don DeLillo's *Zero K* follows Jeffrey Lockhart, whose billionaire father Ross is preparing to have his terminally ill wife Artis cryonically frozen at a remote, secretive compound called the Convergence. He then decides he wants to join her, even though he is still healthy. Jeffrey wanders the compound's eerie corridors, wrestling with what it means to choose death, or the promise of a future life, over the messiness of the present.

The cryopreservation facility is portrayed by Jeffrey as "buried somewhere on the map in the old U.S.S.R. hemmed in by China, Iran, Afghanistan and so on" (139). This locates the facility at the crossroads of former Soviet territory, emphasizing the historical struggle between communism and capitalism that defines much of the 20th century. Like Oswald in *Libra*, whose restless movement between communism and capitalism exposes the inherent failures of both systems to provide meaningful direction for humanity, the Convergence in *Zero K*, a facility established by capitalists on the site of a former Soviet nuclear test ground, serves as a powerful illustration of the defects of both ideologies. When communism and capitalism become entwined with technological utopianism, they ultimately yield not genuine progress, but a profound sense of emptiness and alienation.

The Convergence embodies the shifting spaces and identities shaped by the prevailing ideology that permeates postmodern social life. Capitalists attempt to construct a new social space as a refuge from the perils of capitalism and the destructiveness of postmodern existence. However, in doing so, they inevitably reproduce the same capitalist, consumerist ideology, resulting in no genuine transformation. As a result, the Convergence becomes a fragmented and commodified space – devoid of authentic purpose and reduced to a mere product of capitalist reproduction. Laura Barrett observes that DeLillo's Convergence facility in *Zero K* is "a prototypical uncanny space" (109), where the boundaries between life and death, human and machine, are blurred. The labyrinthine, windowless architecture externalizes existential estrangement, rendering individuality

effaced and bodies reduced to art objects or products – “heralds” in pods, stripped of agency and identity. For Barrett, the uncanny is not a departure from the world but a heightened awareness of its instability; the pursuit of immortality, marketed as a solution to existential dread, only intensifies alienation and underscores the futility of existence when commodification permeates even the most intimate aspects of life. Our argument departs from Barrett’s by shifting focus from existential estrangement to the historical and ideological forces at play: we interpret the Convergence not just as a site of ontological ambiguity, but as a spatial product of late capitalist reproduction, showing how attempts to transcend market logic inevitably reproduce emptiness and commodification, rather than escaping them. This reflects the nature of space in postmodernism, which has adapted to the era’s fluidity and is no longer a static backdrop. Instead, space is dynamic, fragmented, and subjective – its form and meaning continually influenced by the social experiments and experiences of individuals, as spatial theorists have observed. This idea is elaborated in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1974), where he offers a profound framework for analyzing how capitalist society is structured and reproduced. He introduces a spatial triad – a set of three interrelated concepts that reveal the complex ways in which space is socially produced and experienced. According to him, each society produces and appropriates space according to its own mode of production (53).

In this sense, space is a medium of economic exchange, a mechanism of social control, and the surface of social processes in progress. Urban planning, architectural design, and everyday life thus become arenas where hegemonic power relations are enacted, but also where different, oppositional forms of action may emerge. Indeed, the Convergence commodifies every aspect of life, diminishing the individual’s genuine experiences within the lived space that is continually shaped by the diverse experiences people generate through their daily lives, as seen in how Jeff Lockhart’s experience was affected by the labyrinthine halls of the Convergence. Lived space refers to the direct experiences of space

as expressed through the perspectives of its inhabitants, who describe and interpret their environments in unique and personal ways (Lefebvre 42).

DeLillo, often regarded as a second-generation postmodernist, provides a compelling lens for examining how his sixteenth novel, *Zero K*, engages with contemporary anxieties about technology, mortality, and the nature of human identity. This postmodern perspective is crucial for understanding the novel's intricate relationship with the cultural and philosophical dilemmas of the present era. While much attention has been given to the novel's engagement with technology and transhumanism, the role of space as a form of subversion remains relatively unexamined. The analysis presented by Erik Cofer reveals that the Convergence facility in *Zero K* is far more than a mere backdrop; it is a driving force within the narrative itself (5). Rather than serving as a passive setting, the Convergence functions as a disjunctive and disruptive space; one that systematically dismantles conventional understandings of life and death (Cofer 5).

Nathan Ashman extends the discussion of space in *Zero K* by arguing that cryonic freezing does not circumvent death but instead institutes what he terms an "eternal death." According to him, the process of cryonic preservation creates a regime in which individuals are suspended in a perpetual threshold – neither fully alive nor truly dead (235). This state is not merely metaphorical but is materially embodied in the architectural design of the facility itself. The trajectory of spatial politics in DeLillo's work, as traced by Peter Boxall, reveals how the rebellious energy of counterculture – exemplified in Great Jones Street – is ultimately absorbed into the mechanisms of capitalist culture (36). The unruly persona of Bucky Wunderlick, once a symbol of aesthetic anarchy, is commodified and repackaged as a marketable trait, transforming the subversive into a lucrative brand of celebrity (Boxall 36). This process illustrates how, when literature itself is appropriated by capitalism and reduced to a tradable commodity, genuine artistic originality can only persist through failure – by refusing to succeed on capitalism's terms, art preserves its capacity for authentic

meaning. Building on this idea, Laura Alejandra Alvarez-Trigo explores the persistent challenge of establishing spaces untainted by market forces – spaces where true subjectivity might emerge (136). She argues that such efforts are consistently thwarted by the pervasive logic of the market, which imposes a panoptic regime of power. In this system, corporate ownership extends its reach into even the most personal and creative domains, regulating and commodifying them. The result is a landscape where the possibility of uncolonized, autonomous space is foreclosed in advance, and the market's surveillance shapes not only public but also private and artistic life.

In all his novels, DeLillo weaves together the themes of spatial disruption and the commodification of identity, both of which interrogate and embody the fragmented reality of late capitalism. These currents are vividly illustrated in Sanja Matkovic's reading of Jack Gladney in *White Noise*, where Gladney becomes acutely aware that his identity is a product shaped and marketed according to the demands of the marketplace. Thus, he recognizes the artificiality of this persona, yet feels compelled to perform and sell it in order to support himself and his family. As a result, his sense of self fractures into unstable identities, each marked by alienation and existential anxiety (Matkovic 164). DeLillo's work thus captures how, under the pressures of late capitalism, both space and self are destabilized, leaving individuals adrift in a world where even identity is reduced to a commodity.

The commodification of the self intensifies the fear of death and underscores the futility of life once market logic pervades every aspect of existence. In *Zero K*, the intersection of spatial and self-critique prompts a meditation on posthuman subjectivity. The novel's isolated settings serve as sites for reimagining human evolution, yet often reinforce technological determinism and revive old Cartesian divisions rather than dismantling them. What appears as posthuman development is actually a continuous cycle driven by the relentless quest for a unified self-image. Genuine posthuman

thought remains elusive unless it embraces the fluidity of embodied consciousness, moving beyond simple binaries of body and mind.

Overall, DeLillo's work explores postmodern shifts in time, space, and narrative structure, using fragmented settings and nonlinear storytelling to mirror the disorder and entropy of contemporary life. His spatial arrangements become aggressive interventions, revealing all-encompassing infringements of capitalism, establishing territories of impoverishment, and technological redemption. The disruption of conventional space-time by the Convergence facility operates on two distinct yet interconnected levels. On the one hand, it provides the physical setting where the narrative unfolds, shaping the characters' experiences within its boundaries. On the other, it serves as a symbolic framework, illustrating how technological capitalism molds the modern individual. The facility itself becomes a diagram of the contradictions and possibilities that define life in late capitalist society, embodying both the tensions and the latent potentials of contemporary existence. Grounded in Lefebvre's triad of space as perceived, conceived, and lived, the novel critiques how late capitalism commodifies mortality, the body, identity, and space. Through Jeffrey Lockhart, it becomes clear that the facility's design and rituals embody Lefebvre's insight that space is never neutral but shaped by prevailing power relations. The Convergence exposes capitalism's contradictions, revealing that technological attempts to transcend death ultimately reinforce existing hierarchies and reduce individuals to soulless forms. By treating the facility as both a material and imaginary site, the narrative shows how utopian capitalist projects are inherently unstable, maintained by spatial practices and technologies that undermine the authenticity of place.

The Production of Cryogenic Space

Lefebvre highlights the relationship between people and the spaces they occupy, claiming that social spaces are not just physical locations; they are shaped by human actions, experiences, and interactions. In his book *The Production of Space*, he asserts that

“in reality, social space incorporates social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act” (33). Therefore, within the social space, individuals and communities express themselves, grow, and face challenges. At the same time, it holds the memories and dreams of those who have lived there, serving as a place where life unfolds and eventually ends. This emphasizes the idea that space contains both vitality and mortality, suggesting its central role in human existence. It is where people create meaning, face limitations, and leave traces of their presence. This view encourages us to see space not as a neutral backdrop but as an active force that shapes life and preserves history. The Convergence, as a postmodern environment, exemplifies the prevailing mechanisms of sign creation and exchange characteristic of late capitalist society. Its essence is not rooted in any underlying reality or material substance, but rather in the continuous circulation and interplay of signs. Within this space, everything is mediated through representations, and meaning is generated solely through the relationships between these signs. As a result, the Convergence lacks any external reference point or objective reality beyond the system of signification itself, embodying a world where surface and simulation have supplanted depth and authenticity (Smethurst 56).

Lefebvre offers a dynamic triadic framework for understanding social space, dividing it into three interconnected types: “spatial practice,” “representations of space,” and “representational space” (Lefebvre 38-39). The first element, spatial practice, or perceived space, refers to the physical and material dimension where everyday human activities and interactions take place (Lefebvre 38). The second element, representations of space, also known as conceived space, refers to the mental and abstract constructions of space, often formulated by planners, architects, and those in positions of authority (Lefebvre 38-39). This type of space tends to reflect dominant ideologies and serves as the hegemonic way of organizing and understanding the environment (Lefebvre 39). Finally, Lefebvre outlines a third type which is representational space or lived space. It is experienced

directly by inhabitants and users through images, symbols, and emotional associations. This lived space is shaped by the personal and collective experiences of social agents, reflecting the ways people infuse their environments with meaning in their daily lives (Lefebvre 40).

The Convergence, as a perceived space, is a microcosm of postmodern capitalist American society. It embodies the hallmarks of late capitalism, notably the relentless drive toward commodification, privatization, and the pervasive influence of financialization. DeLillo foregrounds this ethos through the novel's first line, "everybody wants to own the end of the world" (3); capitalists, like Ross Lockhart, seek dominance over goods and industries across many sectors, displaying a persistent desire for ownership and control. Jeffery notes that his father's reputation and wealth came from commodifying the future and selling dreams: "he was a man shaped by money. He'd made an early reputation by analyzing the profit impact of natural disasters" (14). The connection between Ross Lockhart and the 'Ross Dress for Less' slogan serves as a sharp, ironic critique of consumer culture and the commodification of death. While 'Ross Dress for Less' democratizes access to fashion by making designer goods affordable to the masses, Ross Lockhart, a billionaire profiting from disaster, represents the opposite extreme – exclusive control over mortality itself. DeLillo uses this contrast to highlight the absurdity of hyperconsumerism, where the ultimate luxury becomes ownership of death rather than escape from it.

In the post-Cold War era, scarred by war horrors and nuclear threats, capitalists even sought to own the afterlife or reserve a place in it. A pilgrim at the meeting said, "catastrophe is our bedtime story" (DeLillo 66), showing how capitalist views were shaped by apocalyptic fears, which led them to create the Convergence as a social product. Another sign of postmodernism is the blurred line between real and artificial, reflecting a society of simulations, commodified immortality, and trauma. Jeff, back in Manhattan, lived in a world dominated by TV and news: "I lived in a room-and-a-half rental in upper Manhattan. One evening there

was my father on TV, an obscure channel, poor reception, Ross in Geneva, sort of double-imaged, speaking French. Did I know that my father spoke French? Was I sure that this man was my father?" (14). Jeff's encounter with his father on a distorted broadcast – blurred and speaking an unfamiliar language – captures how media can warp reality and undermine trust in what is real. This aligns with Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where mediated images seem more authentic than actual people. The clash between the broadcast and Jeff's memory highlights how media simulations twist truth, leaving him uncertain and reflecting the broader postmodern condition of doubt and confusion shaped by screens. The facility's founders installed screens everywhere, showing disasters, violence, and chaos as hyperreal tools that blur reality and simulation, to normalize fear of death and push residents toward cryogenic suspension. The name Geneva, where Ross often travels, powerfully reflects the ideology behind the Convergence. Geneva's meaning as a meeting point – where Lake Geneva and the Rhone River converge – mirrors the Convergence's aim to unite diverse cultures and religions in a single transformative space. Its etymological link to the juniper tree, symbolizing rebirth and regeneration, aligns with the facility's promise of renewal and a new beginning for its participants. Additionally, Geneva's historical role as a neutral ground and its reputation as a discreet financial center for the world's wealthy parallel the Convergence's function as a sanctuary for global capitalists, offering privacy, exclusivity, and the ultimate commodity: the chance at immortality.

DeLillo's story builds the Convergence, a cryogenic center in the Kyrgyzstani desert, as a complex symbol of modern American society. The site's material traits hint at the negative results of the process. The Kyrgyzstani desert extends America's colonial imagination, seeing Central Asia as empty land for technocratic experiments, a homogenized zone stripped of local traits to serve dominant powers. Jeffery Lockhart describes the area as "there was nothing else, nowhere else" (DeLillo 4). This shows capitalism's habit of creating empty spaces for profit, openly discussed by the founders: "we have remade this wasteland, this

secluded desert shit-hole, in order to separate ourselves from reasonableness, from this burden of what is called responsible thinking” (DeLillo 71). DeLillo’s *Convergence*, a cryogenic center in the Kyrgyzstani desert, symbolizes modern American society’s colonial and capitalist impulses. The desert, described as “there was nothing else, nowhere else” (4), becomes a blank slate for technocratic and profit-driven experiments, echoing capitalism’s tendency to erase local identity for gain. The founders openly admit transforming this “wasteland” to escape ethical constraints (71). The choice of setting carries deep historical resonance. The nearby Kazakh desert, home to the Semipalatinsk Test Site, witnessed 456 nuclear tests between 1949 and 1989, leaving it among the world’s most polluted places and exposing over 1.5 million people to radioactive fallout (Mikhailova et al. 869). This legacy of environmental and human disregard echoes the destructive ambitions of the Soviet military-industrial complex. The narrative draws a parallel to Manhattan, where Jeffery once lived – the birthplace of the Manhattan Project and the military-industrial model that subordinated science to military and economic imperatives. Both sites exemplify how capitalist and technocratic forces harness technological progress for destructive ends rather than human well-being.

The reality of perceived space emerges from the repeated, everyday actions of its inhabitants, exemplifying what Lefebvre terms *Spatial Practice*. According to Lefebvre, physical space acquires its structure and meaning through the routines and daily activities performed within it. In DeLillo’s narrative, this concept is illustrated by the habitual behaviors of people in the building, such as the monk’s ritualized role. The monk’s purpose is clear: he engages with those seeking refuge in the shelter during their final moments, offering conversation and presence (86). These consistent routines and interactions do not merely occur within the space – they actively produce and sustain it, making the environment both real and socially constructed through collective practice.

Lefebvre’s second dimension, conceived space, refers to the dominant mental representation of space shaped by ideology

and belief. In *Zero K*, this is embodied in the Convergence's vision: a utopian afterlife, techno-utopian immortality, and a "faith-based technology" that Ross Lockhart calls "another god" (9). Here, technology replaces the traditional higher power, and the pursuit of escaping death becomes the new spiritual goal, blending the American Dream's faith in innovation with religious hopes for eternal life. DeLillo draws on references from religions like Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, all of which imagine an afterlife and seek to conquer death. This is evident when Ross claims, "there will be a time when methods are available to reverse the conditions that caused the end. Both mind and body will be healed and brought back to life" (8), showing their total faith in technology. The multinational billionaire founders, calling themselves "pilgrims," resemble a cult devoted to technology and capitalism. Through Artis Martineau, who becomes a posthuman relic after being frozen, DeLillo critiques this techno-utopianism and exposes the darker side of the dream and capitalist ideology. In DeLillo's narrative, Artis's diagnosis of multiple sclerosis (MS) serves as a powerful metaphor for the dismantling of systems in postmodern society. Just as MS causes the immune system to attack the body's protective myelin, disrupting communication between brain and body, postmodernism reflects cultural disorder where traditional meanings, identities, and connections break down. The demyelination and lesions symbolize the fragmentation and scarring of social and cultural continuity, mirroring the fragility and randomness of postmodern life marked by disconnected narratives and the loss of universal truths. Artis's experience also highlights the gendered dimensions of alienation in a technological, capitalist society, where human connection deteriorates amid overabundance and mechanization. Rather than being saved, Artis becomes objectified – stored like a museum artifact – underscoring how technological progress can dehumanize subjects. Artis's body underscores the irony at the core of the Convergence's promise to transcend human limits. Rather than overcoming mortality, her preserved form stands as a stark reminder of human vulnerability and death, raising profound ethical questions about the

commodification of life. As an archaeologist, Artis embodies history itself, reflecting Lefebvre's idea that the living body both shapes and is shaped by its environment, highlighting the dynamic interplay between self and space. By reducing her to a mere object, the Convergence not only commodifies the individual but also history itself. Ultimately, for the Convergence to achieve a posthuman, deathless future, it demands the sacrifice of human authenticity, lived experience, and historical continuity.

The idea of the Convergence itself is a conceived space, aligning with Lefebvre's description of social space as the domain of scientists, planners, technocrats, social engineers, and certain artists with scientific minds, those who see what is lived and perceived as what is conceived. Conceived space belongs to those who imagine, design, and organize environments from above, using abstract knowledge, codes, and technical expertise to shape space for specific goals or ideologies. Ross captures this in his explanation: "Individuals, foundations, corporations, secret funding from various governments by way of their intelligence agencies. This idea is a revelation to smart people in many disciplines. They understand that now is the time. . . . Another way to think and live" (33-34). Here, Ross makes clear that the Convergence is not just an experimental lab or tech project – it is a major initiative backed by powerful individuals, secret agencies, corporations, and multinational interests. This diverse support highlights the broad coalition of capitalists and investors behind the project, emphasizing its status as a space conceived and constructed by those with the power to shape the future.

Louis Pierre Althusser argues that "ideology has a material existence" because ideology always exists within an apparatus and is enacted through its practices (112). These practices – such as rituals and everyday behaviors – are how ideology manifests itself, being "inserted into practices" (Althusser 114). This understanding parallels Lefebvre's view of perceived space, illustrating that the social production of space is shaped by ideology. As Lefebvre notes, "the rank of mental space by epistemology implies and embodies an ideology: that of the primacy of abstract unity" (355). This

perspective reveals how capitalist systems construct spatial hierarchies that privilege uniform and commodified frameworks over authentic human experiences, much like the founders of the convergence plan, who seek to control bodies, stating that “they will be subjects for us to study, toys for us to play with” (DeLillo 72). Lefebvre argues that conceptual space is fundamentally shaped by the dominant knowledge systems of its era, which he sees as inherently ideological (355).

In capitalist societies, this conceived space is organized around the principle of abstract unity, transforming diverse social practices and spatial production into standardized, measurable, and exchangeable units. Urban planners, for instance, often reconfigure city neighborhoods into grids defined by property values to maximize profit, effectively reducing lived environments to calculable assets (Lefebvre 355). Similarly, in DeLillo’s *Zero K*, the Convergence’s cryonics project exemplifies how technoscientific logic reduces human bodies to mere data and biometric information, commodifying life itself as something to be preserved, quantified, and traded. One participant at the facility asks: “Do we see ourselves living outside time, outside history?” (DeLillo 49). This question shows the goal of the facility: to protect its members from the chaos of a falling-apart world. The Convergence operates as a hyper-capitalist center where the wealthy treat time itself as a commodity, viewing their own lifespans as assets to be managed and preserved. By undergoing cryogenic freezing, they aim to guarantee a future in which they can reclaim not only their physical lives but also their accumulated wealth and social status. This process reflects a belief that, through technological intervention, both time and life can be owned, suspended, and eventually restored for those with the means to afford it.

Lefebvre argues that, to truly understand space in its historical and social dimensions, we must focus on how human labor and social practices alter natural rhythms and inscribe these changes into spatial forms. As he puts it,

the departure point for this history of space is not to be found in geographical descriptions of natural space, but rather in the study of natural rhythms, and of the modification of those rhythms and their inscription in space by means of human actions, especially work-related actions. It begins, then, with the spatio-temporal rhythms of nature as transformed by a social practice. (170)

This perspective reveals that space is not a static backdrop but a living product of ongoing social activity. In *Zero K*, the Convergence facility exemplifies a radical transformation of natural space-time rhythms. Here, the normal cycles of life and death are interrupted by cryogenic technology: bodies are frozen, biological decay is halted, and the natural progression of death is suspended. This act of pausing life's rhythms is itself a social practice, shaped by the capitalist ideology and a profound faith in technological mastery. The result is a new temporal order imposed on space – a timeless, sterile environment where the natural rhythms of life are artificially frozen, highlighting how social practices can fundamentally reshape both time and space.

Representational space, according to Lefebvre, is the directly lived and experienced dimension of space, rich with images, symbols, and emotional resonance that reflect the everyday practices and memories of its inhabitants (39). Unlike conceived space, it is “alive: it speaks,” containing an “affective kernel or centre” and embracing the places of passion, action, and lived situations, making it inherently dynamic and fluid (42). This space is not just physical but is continually shaped by social rituals, personal memories, and interactions. Lefebvre emphasizes that representational, conceived, and perceived spaces are interconnected, allowing individuals to move between them in daily life. Building on this, Edward Soja's Thirdspace concept expands the understanding of space by integrating both its material and mental aspects, surpassing conventional binaries and highlighting its complex, multifaceted nature (11). In *Zero K*, the lived space of the Convergence serves as a pointed critique of capitalist domination, functioning as a microcosm that exposes the alienation embedded in such systems. The inhabitants are depicted as passive

participants, stripped of agency and resistance – exemplified by Artis, whose husband, Ross, speaks on her behalf: “She’s completely ready. There’s no trace of hesitation or second Thoughts” (DeLillo 8). Artis’s compliance, despite her awareness of her fate and her reduction to another inert element in Ross’s collection, underscores the erasure of individual will under oppressive power structures. This passivity is complicated by a moment of vulnerability, when Artis expresses a longing for the sensation of “water droplets covering her body” (17), signaling her desire to reclaim bodily autonomy and experience renewal. The imagery of immersion in water suggests a yearning for rebirth and control, highlighting the depth of her alienation. Through Artis, DeLillo critiques the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, embodied by Ross, who not only enforces conformity but also commodifies power itself, silencing dissent and reducing human experience to an object of ownership and manipulation.

The statement, “the paintings had a kind of spiderwork finesse, a delicacy that intensified the ruin” (DeLillo 257), highlights the complex link between art and power. DeLillo shows how art’s delicacy can intensify themes of decay and loss, allowing it to serve as both beauty and critique. In the *Convergence*, however, art is commodified and stripped of its transformative power, reduced to lifeless decoration that pacifies rather than challenges. Ross’s patronage of young artists – “encouraging them to use the studio he’d built on his property in Maine” (54) – further commodifies creativity, turning authentic pain and resistance into manageable, decorative objects. Even the name of Ross’s wife, Artis, and her literal freezing, symbolize art’s subjugation to control and preservation. By contrast, Lauren Hartke in *The Body Artist* uses her art to process and transmit trauma, making her body and performance inseparable from her mourning, thus retaining art’s power to confront and transform. In *Zero K*, art is emptied of such agency, functioning only as ornament. Lefebvre observes that dominant powers shape spaces to suppress resistance, forcing differences into abstract forms that reflect only the interests of those in control: “the dominant form of space . . . endeavors to

subdue the spaces it dominates. . . . Differences, for their part, are forced into the symbolic forms of an art that is itself abstract” (49). This process strips art of its critical potential, making it a tool for maintaining the status quo and limiting its role in expressing local identity or resistance. Thus, within the Convergence, art’s commodification integrates it into systems of power rather than challenging them.

Art is not the only commodified item in this space; bodies are as well. As Lefebvre argues, the body “is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (26). Within a highly capitalist facility like the Convergence, the body’s very existence becomes commodified, transformed from subject to asset. At the Convergence, clients such as Ross pay enormous fees to freeze themselves, wagering on future technologies to resurrect them – faith-based transactions where the body becomes collateral in a bet against time. Jeffrey, as he navigates the facility, encounters a variety of residents, beginning with the heralds. He enters an arched, grey, and gloomy interior, where the walls contain recesses holding bodies, partial corpses, and mannequins dressed in worn, hooded robes, each occupying its designated space (132). The description of these pods and frozen individuals evokes an underground archive or museum collection, reminiscent of Ross’s own assemblage of souvenirs and artifacts. This parallel underscores how capitalists envision the future as a conquest over death, with bodies treated as collectibles or investments. The commodification of bodies is further emphasized in the pilgrims’ sermon: “We will colonize their bodies with nanobots” (71), reducing humans to mere investments – “mannequins,” lifeless dolls stripped of personality, language, and social interaction. The protagonist’s confusion deepens as he observes the waiting bodies: “I began to think I’d blundered my way into a half-empty warehouse of bodies, barely an eye blinking or a finger twitching” (92). Through this imagery, DeLillo critiques the postmodern condition, depicting individuals trapped in a simulated reality marked by profound alienation and the reduction of both art and the body to passive, commodified forms.

Commodification manifests in the breakdown of language: Jeffery encounters a boy whose speech is reduced to “random noise . . . somehow broken,” echoing the artist’s fading ability to speak (94). Deprived of language, people lose their sense of self, as language is both an “instrument of veracity and a structure of accumulated truths” (Lefebvre 138) and a core of identity shaped by cultural and personal histories (Pandey). Jeffery’s identity is further fragmented by his estrangement from his father – whom he calls a “simulated man” (82) – a rupture intensified by the Convergence. Language in the novel is unstable and detached from meaning, especially as Jeff learns his father’s name is constructed, destabilizing his self-perception and making him feel “someone (he) was not supposed to be” (82). The act of naming fractures identity, since “meaning is not a one-to-one relationship . . . but is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier” (Jameson 15). As these links break down, Jeffery feels alienated and excluded by his name, “the name excluded me” (DeLillo 63), becoming a stranger to his own life and family. This profound alienation parallels Meursault in Albert Camus’s *The Stranger*; both characters confront the absurdity of seeking meaning in a senseless universe, which drives Jeffery’s obsession with stabilizing language.

Language in *Zero K* repeatedly fails to capture real experience, as seen when Jeffrey, puzzled by his father’s use of “fishwife” for his mother, spirals into an endless loop of dictionary definitions that never resolve into clarity (25). This episode highlights the gap between words and meaning: Jeffrey’s search for understanding through language only leads to confusion, with signifiers disconnected from their referents. Later, this linguistic emptiness mirrors Jeffrey’s drifting identity – labels and roles fail to provide a stable sense of self. His tendency to assign names and imagined histories to strangers is an attempt to impose order, but it also underscores his alienation from genuine connection. For example, rather than ask his new neighbor’s name, he cycles through possible spellings, reflecting on how each might alter his perception of her (DeLillo 43). Jeffrey’s struggles echo Oswald in *Libra*, whose dyslexia and chaotic diary entries symbolize a

fractured self and a troubled relationship with reality. In both novels, language is unstable and unreliable, mirroring the protagonists' fragmented identities and their struggle to find meaning in a disjointed world.

Jeff's identity grows increasingly unstable amid the confusion and alienation of the cryonics facility. Immersed in a world of screens and artificial images – “a digital weave, every fragment manipulated and enhanced . . . visual fictions” (113) – he is surrounded by simulations designed for control rather than genuine experience. This technological environment erodes his sense of self, culminating after the Convergence in a disintegration of language and memory: “For a long, bare moment, I could not think of my name” (250). The process strips individuals of uniqueness and authenticity, as seen when Jeff observes his father's body “stripped of everything that might mark it as an individual life . . . fallen into anonymity” (251). This loss of identity parallels Althusser's view that ideology conditions individuals through established identities (22–23), echoed in the frozen bodies – deprived of sensation, voice, and agency – who become models for the postmodern subject. Society's frameworks of language, identity, and interaction, though abstract, shape lived experience and desire (Lefebvre 139). The workers at the Convergence, confined to nameless, windowless rooms, exemplify dehumanized, disposable labor. Tasked with maintaining the pods but denied their use, they mirror social inequalities, and their lives are reduced to repetitive, identity-erasing routines. Jeff describes their quarters as “a place where time seemed to have stopped, a place without history or future” (DeLillo 176), underscoring their existence in a liminal, suspended state.

The Convergence as a Hyper-Consumerist Artefact

In DeLillo's *Zero K*, the pervasive influence of death and consumerism is inextricably linked to the omnipresence of mass media, shaping and constraining the lives of its characters. Hyperconsumer capitalism, as described by Gilles Lipovetsky, is

characterized by the relentless expansion of the marketplace, infiltrating nearly every facet of daily existence (25). This expansion results in what Lefebvre terms “passively experienced space,” a dominant societal arena where imagination strives to intervene and redefine its boundaries (39). Lefebvre further contends that the production and regulation of space – making it both an instrument and an outcome of control – are largely propelled by technological innovation. Contemporary examples, such as concrete structures and sprawling highways, illustrate the tangible reality of these controlled spaces in the modern world. Historically, the manipulation of space has always been intertwined with the exercise of power, as seen in the construction of fortifications and the development of engineered infrastructure, practices that date back to the earliest forms of political authority, as Lefebvre demonstrates (Lefebvre 164). According to his framework, dominant spaces are thus the product of entrenched power structures and prevailing ideological systems, whereas appropriated spaces emerge from the lived experiences and personal meanings inscribed by individuals and communities. Appropriated space refers to environments transformed for personal or communal use, imbuing them with unique significance. Unlike spaces dictated by formal authority, appropriated spaces – such as community gardens or urban parks – stand apart from dominant spaces. These environments reflect the identities and experiences of their users, who actively reinterpret and repurpose them, transforming original functions into sites of belonging, expression, and empowerment. In this way, appropriated spaces exemplify how everyday experiences can contest and reshape established notions of place, affirming the agency and aspirations of those who inhabit them (Lefebvre 164).

Windows in the Convergence function as both physical and symbolic boundaries, separating dominant from appropriated spaces and mediating the relationship between interior safety and exterior uncertainty. As Gaston Bachelard notes, the window is “a mystical gate linking protective home boundaries with world exploration” (212), transforming a practical frame into a portal for

imagination and connection. However, this potential is restricted: only elites like Ross Lockhart have windows, while others are denied them to enforce isolation and control, as highlighted when the monk tells Jeff, “What’s on the other side of a window? Pure dumb distraction” (DeLillo 43). This architectural exclusion reflects Lefebvre’s argument that capitalist “representations of space” (38-39) subordinate lived experience, turning inhabitants into passive subjects and imposing a sterile, consumerist order. Ross’s act of gazing out the window – contrasted with the facility’s windowless, sealed spaces described as “buildings in hiding, agoraphobically sealed . . . invisibly windowed” (DeLillo 4) – underscores the disappearance of Bachelard’s “dialectics of the inside and the outside” (211). Instead of mediating intimacy and vastness (Bachelard 5), the facility’s glass walls enforce separation, reversing the intended psychological function. Within this context, the founders seek to create an appropriated space as an alternative to the collapsing, commodified outside world, shifting focus inward in search of meaning and security. Yet DeLillo critiques this, showing how such conditions destroy genuine social interaction and commodify bodies meant to embody both space and agency. A parallel appears in *The Body Artist*, where Lauren Hartke’s view through the window – filtered by isolation and grief, as she hears the “sound of birds humming outside the window” (22) – demonstrates how perception and experience are shaped by these architectural and psychological boundaries.

Don DeLillo’s *Zero K* draws a stark contrast between the founders’ inner sanctuary and the harshness of the world outside. Within this artificial refuge – described as “a walled garden, trees, shrubs, flowering plants” (120) – those facing death find comfort, as the space becomes both a physical and symbolic escape from chaos. Jeffery’s journey into this “inner Eden” uncovers a meticulously crafted haven, representing a longing for hope and clarity beyond sterile rooms and the anxiety of mortality. Yet, the garden’s allure is deceptive: its “tree bark, blades of grass, every sort of flower, all seemingly coated or enameled” (120) reveal that the founders’ sanctuary is an illusion, masking reality behind a

vener of beauty. This artificiality echoes a broader American tendency to seek comfort in dreams rather than truth. As DeLillo observes in *Americana*, “to consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream” (270), exposing how consumerism sells fantasies that rarely align with reality – a pattern deeply rooted in the mythology of the American Dream. Deception also surfaces through alcohol in the narrative. Ross’s gesture of offering Irish whiskey to Jeff is not merely social; it is a calculated act, symbolically drawing Jeff into a worldview shaped by illusion. The word “whiskey” derives from the Gaelic “uisce beatha,” meaning “water of life,” which directly translates from the Medieval Latin “aqua vitae,” imbuing whiskey with cultural significance as a life-giving force (Osar 33). By handing his son whiskey, Ross is not only sharing a drink but also imparting an ideology of rebirth, suggesting that the Convergence promises a new beginning.

The manipulation of perception through alcohol is a recurring motif in postmodern literature. In Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa attempts to dull her reality with wine amid the chaos of a “Tupperware party,” only to find herself unmoved, her logic dulled by the “dull greenish eye” of a broken television (1). Wine becomes a tool for fantasy, a means to escape the fractured world she inhabits. This cycle of consumption and illusion – whether through artificial gardens, intoxicants, or media – underscores the anesthetizing effects of postmodern life. A similar pattern emerges in the habits of Jeff’s mother, Madeline, who is often “speaking in her mild documentary voice as she sat watching TV without the sound” (DeLillo 61), even during significant family conversations. Her retreat into televised simulations exemplifies society’s broader tendency to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths, relying instead on temporary escapes and artificial comforts.

DeLillo’s works are profoundly shaped by post-war culture, which is marked by a pervasive fear of death and disappearance – central concerns that mirror the skeptical tendencies of the postmodern era. In *White Noise*, this anxiety is embodied by Jack Gladney and his wife, who repeatedly ask, “Who will die first?” (DeLillo 118), underscoring the gravity of their existential

predicament. Both characters grapple with the inevitability of mortality, a struggle that becomes evident through their “magnetic fixation with televisual representations of violence and disaster, all of which operate to anaesthetize them against the power and terror of their ultimate demise” (Ashman 1). Jeff, another character, encounters disturbing films in hallways that depict apocalyptic scenarios, observing, “Bodies: slaughtered men in a jungle clearing, vultures stepping among the corpses. It was awful and I watched. I began to think of others watching, other screens, other halls, level after level throughout the entire complex” (260). Such moments illustrate how death is mediated by simulations, as the constant stream of televised catastrophe dulls emotional responses to change and fosters acceptance of a bleak cultural reality.

The process of cryopreservation further distorts the participants’ longing for renewal, transforming it into cultural stagnation and severing them from the core of life. This results in a unique form of “deathless death” (Ashman 2). Rather than prolonging life, cryopreservation produces a lifeless copy, stripped of authenticity and identity, echoing Baudrillard’s assertion that “it is no longer really the real because no imaginary envelops it anymore” (91). This scenario raises profound concerns about the erosion of identity. Moreover, the technological control and hypnotic qualities of the era reshape not only perceptions of death and life but also alter experiences of time, space, language, and ultimately, the self. Lipovetsky argues that contemporary families are deeply intertwined with consumerism and find it nearly impossible to escape its influence, as they are shaped by the transient, individualized, and contractual nature of modern consumption (34). This dynamic is evident in the relationship between Jeff and his father, who bond over their shared fascination with consumerism’s triumphs, particularly the unsettling yet captivating cryogenic process involving Artis. When Jeff and his father return to the United States, their relationship is revealed as more complex and distant than it appears, with their interactions often resembling the passive act of watching television rather than creating a genuine familial connection. This disconnect fosters

emotional distance, as their engagement with mediated images supersedes authentic interaction. The episode of Artis's cryogenic preservation exposes the underlying issues in their relationship, demonstrating how consumerism shapes and complicates their lives. While it provides a shared narrative, it also amplifies their struggles. Jeff, his father Ross, and his mother Madeline constitute a dysfunctional family, as evidenced by a traumatic incident in which Jeff's mother attacks his father while he is sleeping. This act of violence exposes the deep-seated tensions within the family and illustrates how the illusory promises of consumerism can mask unresolved emotional conflicts.

Conclusion

Analyzing the Convergence through the lens of Lefebvre's theories exposes a fundamental contradiction at the heart of its design: although the facility is conceived as a sanctuary from death, it simultaneously imposes profound restrictions on human freedom. The Convergence's imposing Gothic architecture and its omnipresent disaster screens serve as stark reminders of how capitalism transforms spectacle into a means of normalizing fear and anxiety. Within this environment, human life itself is commodified – epitomized by Artis Martineau, who is reduced to the status of a "posthuman relic." In stark contrast, the daily experiences of residents like Jeffrey reveal the deep psychological consequences of inhabiting a space saturated with media and simulation. This environment fractures personal identity, underscoring Lefebvre's assertion that space always mirrors the social conditions from which it emerges. The Convergence's ultimate failure to deliver on its promise of immortality becomes a metaphor for the hollow assurances of capitalism, perpetuating endless cycles of consumption and social isolation. By commercializing humanity's most profound fears, the facility paradoxically reinforces the very capitalist systems it purports to resist. It demonstrates how capitalist structures are adept at absorbing and monetizing even those forms of resistance that claim

to stand outside them, turning utopian aspirations into yet another commodity. In this sense, *Zero K* reveals that utopian ideals, when filtered through a capitalist framework, are inevitably commodified, entrenching existing hierarchies and processes of dehumanization. Lefebvre's concept of lived space becomes especially relevant here. The Convergence can be seen as a heterotopic site – a space that exists outside conventional norms and offers the potential for alternative forms of social organization. However, the text suggests that true freedom requires a radical reimagining of space: it must be collectively experienced and actively resist capitalist appropriation. Only then can heterotopic spaces serve as genuine arenas for creative agency and the transformation of social relations.

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