

“[A] real defector posing as a false defector posing as a real defector”: The Historical Narrative in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*

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ABSTRACT

Don DeLillo’s *Libra*, published in 1988, reconfigures the intriguing historical event—the JFK assassination, featuring the paradoxical social situations, the tense political milieu, and the indeterminate self-identification. What the novel aims at is not to recap the significant historical event but to reveal the incessantly bifurcating and detouring routes comprising the intriguing twists and turns of the major historical event. The semi-biographical exposition of Lee Oswald’s life experience and political engagement marks not only the juxtaposition of conspiracy and contingency, the connections and hinges between the political and the individual, but also reveals the relationship between place and self-identification.

The paper will take Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of rhizome to expound the historical narrative in *Libra*. The rhizomatic idea of history employs the botanical image to designate how history constantly sprawls and re-configures itself in a multi-dimensional framework, from the political, the social, and, most of all, the individual. To probe into the notion of rhizome embedded in DeLillo’s historical narrative, the paper will delve into the idea of coincidence and the relationship between place and self-identification. The former refers to how conspiracy and contingency interweave. The latter aims to explore how Lee Harvey Oswald, going between the individual and the political, family and society, America and Russia, agitatedly situates himself in proliferating and heterogeneous connections. These confrontations and coincidences reveal the provisional and unstable im-placement. It is found that the constantly metamorphic self-identification in place corresponds and contributes to the idea of rhizome in DeLillo’s history.

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I. Introduction

It is out of question that the idea of history has been configured and demonstrated in the writing of history. As the former tends towards diverse subjective interpretations, history is blended in different kinds of writing. Fictional writing of history then accrues its significance, conveying various ideas of history. Don DeLillo's *Libra* (1988) is a novel on one of the most important incidents in American history—the JFK assassination. With the emphasis on Lee Harvey Oswald's confrontations in the major political incident, DeLillo reconfigures the recognition of history by not merely juxtaposing but also interweaving the political and the individual, the conspired and the contingent. He neither means to indicate the limits of the so-called grand historical narrative nor underscores the significance of any singular historical perspective. Instead, his alternative historical perspective is established upon a more complicated meshwork between contingencies and coincidences, individuals and politics, time and space, etc. The historical contour disengaging itself from the historical dichotomy is a dynamic process rendering constant connections and divergences. Not a single and causal historical standpoint but the unpredictable and immanent historical potentialities are revealed.

In "Author's Note" at the end of *Libra*, DeLillo states that "this book makes no claim to literal truth, because it is only itself, apart and complete, readers may find refuge here—a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities, by the tide of speculation that widens with the years" (458). His writing offers a consoling haven from the disturbing plethora of evidence, speculations, theories, and reports, etc., which are meant for the so-called "historical truth." DeLillo presents a way to think about the unresolved event and simultaneously remaps a new possibility to access history. As the title of the novel indicates, history implicates a dynamic balance between the opposites, between central and marginal, official and individual, macro and micro. Yet, he does not mean to be eclectic or encompassing, taking in every possible detail or angle in history. DeLillo's *Libra* has several storylines, including Oswald's mother's narration of her family situation and accusation of the U.S. government's domestic intervention, the political conspiracy, Nicholas Branch and a considerable number of documents about the JFK assassination, Oswald and the political intrigue and assassination. Instead of rendering a

complete picture, they make an assemblage which features the intersections and divergences of these aspects. The assemblage marks the ruptures or lacunae in history in one aspect. More importantly, it shows where the historical divergences emerge and reveals that history is an ever-disseminating process. Although DeLillo's writing manifests the hinges from the individual situation or decision onto the significant historical event, from one social or political situation to another, the twists and turns in his historical narrative do not base itself on a sensible reason or clear cause. Instead, the historical writing in *Libra* demonstrates a rhizomatic nature which marks a-signifying connections or nexuses and contributes to an incessant proliferating process.

These a-signifying connections or intersections among people, events, and places result from the interweaving meshwork of conspiracy and contingency. JFK's assassination happened in the period of the cold war, the age of conspiracy. Quite a few historians and critics see the assassination as the essential part of a deliberately-schemed political intrigue. Nonetheless, *Libra* simultaneously highlights the contingencies already embedded or effective in the historical framework. The historical contingency emerging from the political, the social, and the individual accounts for the bifurcation and oscillation in history. History is neither an objective fact nor subjective perception but a dynamic mechanism which is void of an axial center or superimposing domination. Most of all, the historical writing demonstrates various non-causal or decentered connections which make the epochal historical event a never-ending narrative. It is a narrative embodying the fluctuation or dynamic interaction between conspiracy and contingency as continuous proliferation.

Thus, to rewrite JFK's assassination, DeLillo doesn't mean to solve the inexplicable historical enigma but presents an alternative idea of history. Making a parallel narrative of Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone gunman in the historical event and his family relations, schooling experience, military service, and marriage to a Russian woman, the novel deliberately highlights Oswald's coincident involvement¹ in the political intrigue, revealing a sprawling perspective of history. The historical writing takes shape in the intertwining relationship between the individual and the political, responsible

¹ Coincidence is a concept employed to account for DeLillo's juxtaposition of conspiracy and contingency in his historical narrative. It will be further elaborated in the following parts.

for the divergent perspectives or dimensions. Moreover, JFK's incident is portrayed as a mapping process, founded on the intercepting meshwork of places and dates, conspiracies and contingencies, individuals and politics. The process behind the incident actualizes a history constructed by how the historical agent (re-)positions himself in place—a kind of history corresponding to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizome. The following will be divided into three parts: the first is on Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizome and its relation to history. The second part is to elaborate how DeLillo's re-writing the JFK assassination corresponds to the tree-rhizome nature of history—the juxtaposition of conspiracy and contingency. The third section mainly elaborates on the relation between place and self-identification which contributes to the mapping process in the history of rhizome.

II. Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome vs. History

A. The idea of rhizome

A rhizome to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is a botanical metaphor for the generation of ideas and the perspective on how things happen. What makes it distinct from the generally-recognized concepts or ideas is that it does not presuppose a root or axis accounting for what happens or evolves afterwards. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that “[t]he rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers” (7). In the extension to all directions, what features rhizome is connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity. Rather than a concentric structure or matrix which regulates everything, a rhizome is a multiplicity, a perpetual connection with the outside which derives from the lines of flight. In addition, it follows a principle of a-signifying rupture: “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 9). A rhizome allows for contingent connections that introduce something new by getting over to the heterogeneous, the unknown, and the new.

Besides, what Deleuze and Guattari particularly highlight in a rhizome is a map rather than a tracing. The idea of the map refers to the future-oriented

nature of history, which is distinct from that of tracing stressing the retrieval of the past.

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it [the map] is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. . . . It fosters connections between fields, a removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. . . . The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 12)

The map foregrounds an on-going proliferating process—connections with something new, while a tracing designates a genealogical approach to what had been thought.² A map hence is a concept for the new potentialities, the new assemblage of the nexus.

Deleuze and Guattari's idea of a rhizome does not imply a random or chaotic connection or expansion. There is an intertwining mechanism between a rhizome and a root. "There exists tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome. The coordinates are determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 15). The idea corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the incessant and dynamic interrelation between territorialization and deterritorialization in *Anti-Oedipus*. In addition, "the tree-root and canal-rhizome are not opposite models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the

² Ever since the second half of the twentieth century, history as an accessible truth or facts has been greatly challenged. Among the critique on the grand narratives or state historiography are the efforts to present the blurred boundary between fiction and fact, the subjective and the objective, the universal and the singular, etc. Christopher M. Mott views such historical writing as postmodern historiography which mainly falls in two trends. One is that of Hayden White, foregrounding the narrativization of history and emphasizing "the structures, especially the linguistic structures such as rhetorical tropes by which we organize and give meaning to the flow of human events." The other, that of Michel Foucault, "focuses more on the construction of subject positions initiated and maintained through the power of ideological imposition and manifested in discursive practices" (231). These two approaches to history tend to be genealogical, aiming to trace back to the inevitable manipulation of language and ideology in historical narratives. History is thus inspected under a larger context. Furthermore, more delicate historical sentiments are revealed as different interpreting possibilities or possible social factors are taken into consideration.

second operates as an imminent process that overturns the model and outlines a map . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 20). Hence, the points or nodes and the lines of flight alternate with each other. This is a canal-rhizome mechanism, which makes things always in the middle and ready to change. To be in the middle is not a static situation but the process which gives rise to the condition for the ruptures, lines of flight, and connections with the outside. Most of all, it is never an end or a closure.

Another significant aspect about the middle in the rhizome is not the balance where everything is at the right place. “The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but . . . a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 25). The speed, indicating the discrepancy or imbalance of the situation, is an urge to propel unexpected escapes or eruptions. It is the ruptures activating the lines of flight, which makes the nodes of a rhizome. These nodes are the transitional points that give way to the divergences and lead to the disseminating multiplicity and heterogeneity.

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of rhizome provides a different perspective to approach historical events and their related connections. Breaking away from the presupposed structures or frameworks, their approach designates a contingent and future-oriented historical perspective, stressing the ever-emerging possible divergences, ruptures, indeterminacies, and novelty. Most of all, the rhizome indicates how Deleuze and Guattari reconfigure the history which underscores contingencies and the lines of flight. Nonetheless, to understand how the contingencies lead to the lines of flight, it should not be ignored that history as a mapping process is closely related to place.

B. The geo-history

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of rhizome is embedded in their notion of history. The map of history is not merely geographical but also dynamic. The geographical stresses the spatial variations more than the diversity in space. The variation designates the process to confront and interact with the inevitable and diverse intensities or dimensions within place.³ The pragmatic

³ Place here does not mean only the physical conditions. Instead, it also refers to the social and political situations that one is situated in. From the idea of rhizome to the close relation between

contingencies play a great part in the unique notion of history. In *What is Philosophy*, a geographically-related idea of history is brought up by Deleuze and Guattari:

[H]istory is a geohistory. . . . Geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. (95-96).

Deleuze and Guattari's association of history with geography indicates several significant meanings. First, geography in history is not merely a physical milieu in which historical events take place. They are also concerned with the individual or personal perception, feeling or even decisions. Nonetheless, these social and political dimensions do not presume a coherent setting for one to identify with. Instead, the collisions and ruptures have one disoriented and rushed to inevitable confrontations of contingencies. Secondly, it is the individuals' experiences in place that make contingencies an inevitable part in history. Individual confrontations and reactions have the irreducible effect on historical construction and development. History has its geographical nature and takes place in places where events happen and individuals are involved. However, it is worthwhile to detect how geohistory comes into being as a dynamic and divergent historical process.

C. The state vs. the nomad

From the idea of rhizome to that of geohistory, Deleuze and Guattari delineate a dynamic and contingent map of history. To have further understanding of geohistory, we may have to probe into Deleuze and Guattari's argument on the differentiation between the history of the State and Nomadology. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the history of the State "is always written from the sedentary point of view and in a name of a unitary State apparatus What is lacking is Nomadology, the opposite of a history" (*Thousand* 23). More specifically, "[i]t is the constructed sequence of significant events that seemingly obliterates geography, the earth, and the

history and place, Deleuze and Guattari actually intend to present an alternative contour of history—a multiple and heterogeneous process instead of a logical and causal narration.

non-historic presignifying and countersignifying regimes” (*Thousand* 394). In other words, the emphasis on geography which involves unexpected variations and contingent interactions unravels the restraints implicated in the State-oriented history. Opposing Nomadology to the grand narrative of history, Deleuze and Guattari contend that the latter is built on the authoritative perspective without taking the possible disseminating or dispersing factors into consideration. That is, in face of the State-manipulated or dominated history, some *othered* historical factors are silenced or *displaced*. Deleuze and Guattari unravel the hidden power or voices of alternative history—Nomadology. However, what does Nomadology refer to? What does the concept of Nomadology reveal about those historical variations? What difference does it make to historical writing?

The nomads invented a war machine⁴ in opposition to the State apparatus. History has never comprehended nomadism, the book has never comprehended the outside. The State as the model for the book and for thought has a long history The war machine’s relation to an outside is not another “model”: it is an assemblage that makes thought itself nomadic, and the book a working part in every mobile machine, a stem for a rhizome. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 24).

Nomadology is compared to a war machine eluding the sovereign manipulation over thought and writing. It undermines the pre-designated meanings of social phenomenon and historical process. Most of all, it is a connection with the outside, corresponding to the lines of the flight in the

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari consider the war machine rather distinct from the State as it is “irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere” (*Thousand* 352). More specifically, they use the contrast between Chess and Go Pieces, two kinds of games, to illustrate the difference between the State and the war machine. While the former has Chess pieces coded and equipped with “an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations and confrontations derive,” the latter marks a Go Piece as having “a milieu of exteriority, or extrinsic relations with nebulas or constellations, according to which it fulfills functions of insertion or situation, such as bordering, encircling, shattering” (353). More interesting is the contrast of space in these two games. In Chess, “it is a question of arranging a closed space for oneself . . . occupying the maximum number of squares with the minimum number of pieces.” In Go Pieces as the war machine, “it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space . . . maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point: the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival” (352). That is, the war machine denies any presupposed trajectory or strategies resembling the unruly dimension and unpredictable possibilities generated in the working process.

rhizome. Yet, the divergence, the eruption of the rhizome, does not presuppose an underlying guidance for action or thought; instead, it is an assemblage of nomadic, contingent, and decentered situations. To make manifest how the war machine functions as the potential and indeterminate forces, Deleuze and Guattari further delve into the relation between nomads and places. First, the nomads' path, different from that of migrants, "is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 380). That is, the destination or the other end is neither presupposed nor treated as a purpose. What marks the path is the autonomous impetus as the path is taken. Second, the path does not serve any definite function or meaning but functions as the space in which the nomads are dispersed unpredictably. The nomadic trajectory "*distributes people in an open space, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating.*" To apply the concept of Nomadology to the idea of history, Deleuze and Guattari make concrete a rhizomatic configuration of history. Contingencies and connections with the outside emerging in the interaction between places and individuals play an essential role in a non-determinate but autonomous historical process. What is worth noting is that the autonomy is not merely driven by personal intention but precipitated by the bodies without organs. More specifically, the autonomy comes from the speed picked up in the middle—from the collisions or interactions of various intensities.

In short, Deleuze and Guattari undermine *authorized history*, the writing of the State, by associating history with the idea of nomads. Referring to Nomadology, history for Deleuze and Guattari is geographically related and even termed as "geohistory." It is regarded as a dynamic process as the formation of the rhizome reveals how geographical conditions and historical agents contribute to the lines of flight and make the indeterminate and undefinable historical contour.

Owing to the *autonomous* nexus with the outside as the lines of the flight, the rhizomatic configuration of history is a process of becoming, implying an on-going mechanism. As the irreducibility of contingency gives rise to the unpredictability and new possibilities, the rhizomatic history is both "intensive and dynamic, nomadic and universal-contingent. . . . It is not opposed to becoming—both promote a differential composite of history and becoming—both together for the production of another" (Lundy 145).

However, the becoming or new possibilities are not random consequences. The turns and twists of the historical situation are the composite of the agent and the physical conditions involved. Paul Patton maintains that the line of flight in the rhizome is precisely “the source or condition of the emergence of the new” (50). Hence, while an idea of rhizome accounts for its relation between history and place, the rhizome makes concrete Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of history configured in dynamic relation with place, while the historical agent, like a nomad, makes the connections and ruptures coexist on the assemblage.

The conditions of the new emerge at the intersection of the political, the social, and even the personal. As a historical agent, one is not only politically concerned or historically motivated but influenced by the social ambience, personal aspirations, parental relationship, and marital problems. And the line of flight occurs when the person, positioned among different intensities, is oriented to a certain direction, corresponding to his personal need and intention. The evolving process in a rhizome keeps revealing the conditions for new connections—elusive and indeterminate.

However, to explore the ruptures or the lines of flight in the rhizome, it is necessary to know how the agent embodies or actualizes the rhizomatic configuration of history from the interwoven factors. The rhizomatic or spatially-conceptualized history, that is, will reveal how necessity and chance, human and non-human, conspiracy and contingency are integrated. Rhizome as manifested in Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of history is found corresponding to DeLillo’s work, *Libra*. The novel presents DeLillo’s attempt to rewrite the Kennedy assassination, an event which is still being explored or rewritten by historians and authors. In reading DeLillo’s historical writing, the significance of rhizome lies in unfolding how the assassinator, Lee Harvey Oswald, described as an ordinary social subject, steps into the intriguing political conspiracy and becomes the focus of an epochal historical event. The intersections among the social, political, and personal factors manifest the process which accounts for his connections with the assassination. The following is to apply Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of rhizome to examine the presentation of the Kennedy assassination in *Libra*, centered on Lee Harvey Oswald, and see how the social and political factors (dis-)places him in the historical framework.

II. Don DeLillo's Rewriting the JFK Assassination

DeLillo's writing on the historical issues is not merely shrewd but compelling in terms of both form and content. History, especially, has been one of the inspiring sources in his works like *Libra* (1988), *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Falling Man* (2007),⁵ etc. Among them, *Libra* is an obvious attempt to reflect on the Kennedy assassination—"the seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" (181),⁶ which provokes continuous and diverse narratives and criticism during these decades.

The unsolvable historical event still haunts people in America as the ever-proliferating archive shows. The Warren Commission Report, the official archive, comprises

the almost archeological detail . . . the 26,550 interviews and re-interviews conducted by FBI and Secret Service, the 30,000 pages of reports submitted to the Commission, the encyclopedic twenty-six volumes of Commission testimony, and the four million pages of documentary evidence still to be released by the government. (Melley 137-38)

The event itself is still a controversy, an on-going narrative. "[B]y 1992, over 2,000 books had been written about the assassination" (Thomas 107). The event is inevitably and persistently espoused to fictionality owing to the inexhaustible room for (re-)writing. DeLillo, in "American Blood," contends that "what has become unraveled since that afternoon in Dallas is . . . the sense of a coherent reality most of us shared. We seem from that moment to have entered a world of randomness and ambiguity" (22). All the books and reports in totality present the paradox of the historical event. The more

⁵ While *Libra* is DeLillo's conspicuous attempt to rewrite the JFK assassination, *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* are also salient responses to the 9/11 event, which was shattering not only to America but the rest of the world. Being a contemporary American writer, DeLillo does express his consistent concern and shrewd observation over the effects of these major historical events.

⁶ Norman Mailer also has a novel on the JFK assassination. Titled *Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery* (1995), the novel, different from DeLillo's, is like a historical biography. There is an attempt to "unlock the one true secret to the assassination and construct a linear narrative that seeks to close the case by presenting a single individual's perspective on the event" (Parrish 6). Such writing is done in a way to put a fictional story in a historical framework. Though DeLillo and Mailer mark the involvement of the individual in history, their difference is while Mailer takes a more definite angle to interpret an historical enigma, DeLillo aims to reveal a distinctive historicity by means of relating how the individual and the historical are interwoven.

information it gathers, the harder it is to grasp the whole picture. The only thing for certain is that the assemblage of the event designates an incessantly generating historical process.⁷

DeLillo's configuration of history demonstrates new possibilities of historical writing. *Libra* is marked by the boundary-transgression which "allows DeLillo to deploy the fictional as a way of exploring the historical, as well as the inverse: to deploy history as a way of exploring the nature of fiction and fictionality" (Johnston, *Information* 86). This is another way to write history in the novel by blending these two kinds of writing. In "Author's Note" to *Libra*, DeLillo contends that this is "a work of imagination. While drawing from the historical record, I've made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any question raised by the assassination" (458). In the later reflection of *Libra*, DeLillo, assuming the perspective of postmodern historiography, reveals his deliberate intention to conflate history with fiction via the character, Lee Harvey Oswald, saying

Lee Oswald was a man who fell out of history and into fiction. . . . He was in fiction and he was in it. . . . But I wanted to find the real Oswald, not create some higher visionary myth. And I thought it was important to allow the enormous documentation of the case to seep into the texture of the novel. ("Fictional" 91)

Such a historical writing underscores the singularities in history, marking the significant and inevitable involvement of the individual. It reveals the sinuous process of history in which personal confrontations and determinations play a

⁷ Three major state efforts and reports of the investigations on the JFK assassination accumulated an overwhelming and excessive amount of evidence but each of them has its own approach and focus. The Warren Commission, established in 1963 and turning in the 889-page final report in 1964, aimed at collecting the testimony of the event to make an objective analysis. In 1976, the United States House Select Committee on Assassinations was established. They turned to scientific evidence as they argued that "some witnesses had died and the passage of time has caused the memories of the remaining witnesses to fail and caused other problems affecting the trustworthiness of their testimony" (Select Committee 65). Their final report was issued in 1979. Scientific approaches are what they emphasized to avoid the possible inaccuracy of witnessing or memory. From 1994 to 1998, the Assassination Records Review Board was founded to collect and preserve the evidence of public scrutiny. It is "a shift from the empirical to the ontological: rather than discovering new information or trying to resuscitate old data with new technologies, the government decided to collect. . . . While the Warren commission recognized the public's right to an objective report, the ARRB granted the public the facts themselves" (Herbert 300-01).

significant part. These individual encounters, aspirations, and decisions which used to be omitted in history are the significant hinges for writers like DeLillo to transmute historical texture. DeLillo's historical writing attests to what Mark C. Cranes contends: "the fragmentary and fossilized facts of the historical record are reanimated with imaginative meaning and aesthetic truth. Novel history, like alchemy, is an inaccessible science and elusive art . . ." (24-25). Incidents and details about the individual and the historical singularities override any possible focal or causal inferences. And, thus, new possibilities and prospects keep emerging in the historical re-writing.

It is obvious that DeLillo blends in real historical figures and considerable historical facts and at the same time brings to the fore the singularities and contingencies of Oswald's personal confrontations. Critics like Shannon Herbert and Theo Finigan contend DeLillo's writing is either overwhelmed by the massive archive or marked by the chaos of historical narration. Centering on DeLillo's presentation of the relationship between the archive and the event, Herbert contends that "*Libra* is both a critique and a symptom of the empirical apparatus" (290). He suggests that DeLillo simulates Nicholas Branch's position, presenting a "postmodern impotency"⁸ as the excessive haul of testimony transcending the attempt of interpretation and speculation. *Libra*, to Herbert, is "a refuge for the facts from analysis, from the insistence on transparency. It offers a way of seeing the things without seeing through them" (312). Finigan foregrounds the inexorable and inevitable process about how the event turns out to be the subsequent result of the archive-reading, using Derrida's idea in *Archive Fever*. Finigan contends that "the event itself is *already* 'archival' in origin. . . . *Libra* . . . reveals the brutal murder of a president to be one more scripted and collected signifier in an increasingly mediated, postmodern world" (189). Andrew Radford commented on how historical evidence or reports are integrated in the novel. He maintains that the chaos theory of history features *Libra* as "the seemingly random pattern of coincidence in DeLillo's paranoid fiction produces an event that is ungraspable and also replete with multiple meanings" (225). In Radford's critique, DeLillo, presenting the chaos theory in history makes the

⁸ "Postmodern impotence" is a term that Herbert adopts from Stuart Hutchinson's article, "DeLillo's *Libra* and the Real." According to Herbert, Hutchinson "describes Branch as a symptom of 'postmodern impotence'" as on the one hand, "the excess of material limits Branch's interpretive agency" but, on the other hand, Branch "has also abdicated that agency in order to preserve the chaste fact from the corruption of interpretation" (296).

event perpetually inscrutable and contradictory and fails to assert a trenchant political stance or enact any political protest or appeal.

From the inevitable archival nature to the inexplicable coincidence and contradiction of the event are the efforts propelled to explore the configuration of DeLillo's historical writing. In an interview with Kevin Connolly in 1988, when asked about "the mythical presence of coincidence," DeLillo replies, "[y]ou used the word mythical. And that's what it is to me too. It's a kind of accidental holiness, a randomness so intense and surrounded by such violence that it takes on nearly a sacred inexplicability" (Connolly 35). DeLillo's association of the coincidence with the mythical cluster—the holiness, a randomness, a violence and the sacred inexplicability, baffles an easy attempt to account for his historical presentation.

Having been at the historical moment of the JFK assassination, DeLillo knows quite well about the prevalent unrest and persistent aftershocks seeping into American daily life. He blends the individual into the political, the imaginative into the real, simultaneously renewing and re-mapping the historical event. It is a writing "connecting events with participants' intentions while eschewing any model of those intentions as deliberate, purposeful, or necessarily connected with their outcome" (Millard 214). The connection does not focus the historical event on any specific perspective but on the complicated connections. The historical narrative effectively alters our presumed recognition and perception of the historical event, as what is emphasized is the singularities in which the connections are made. However, they are not the answer to the historical enigma or the justification of any specific narration. Then, what idea of history does DeLillo mean to convey? Where are the singularities which reveal the new possibilities? How are they contrived to present an alternative sense of history?

With the interweaving of fiction and fact, the social connection and the political intrigue, DeLillo's historical writing demonstrates the paradoxical compatibility between conspiracy and contingency, connection and coincidence. The paradigm tends to mirror a paradoxical and elusive nature of history, as "there are times when small inconsistencies and obscure motivations drive a character's actions" (Don DeLillo, "Fictional" 91-92). DeLillo "attempts to establish a different kind of relationship between the historical material and the fictions that surround it and give it form" (Johnston, "Superlinear" 325). John Johnston uses the idea of "intensive system" to

account for the convergence of coincidence and conspiracy in *Libra*, implying history is an open system in which the intersection and interaction among different forces have situations “emerge outside the bounds of cause and effect” (338). The “intensive system” makes the Kennedy assassination a superlinear event, which “arises conceptually out of the distinction between a plot (as a sequence of events linked by cause/effect) and coincidence, and concretely in the resonant series of devices” (Johnston, *Information* 193). While Johnston takes DeLillo’s *Libra* as a superlinear event, David T. Courtwright contends that DeLillo presents a nomothetic history in *Libra*,⁹ since DeLillo’s characters “are caught, not in the linear, cause-and-effect determinism of classical naturalism, but a looping pattern of interconnected systems” (87). Characters like Oswald are obviously influenced by different forces in the personal, social, and political situations. To Johnston and Courtwright, the resonance or effect of different or conflicting systems or intensities contributes to the uncertainty and inexplicability in *Libra*. The historical event is more like an inevitable coincidence instead of a well-contrived outcome. Yet, what needs more exploration is how the complicated process takes effect, as these forces have their intensities at different moments and places. Their interwoven relations deserve closer examination to see how the forces or systems converge or diverge from each other.

The rhizomatic history portrayed by Deleuze and Guattari is found suitable to understand the historical process in *Libra* which foregrounds the juxtaposition of coincidence and conspiracy. On the one hand, in the age of cold war, conspiracy has been regarded as the keynote of the intriguing political events and everything is easily associated with and can be derived from the political strife. On the other hand, DeLillo’s writing starts with how the historical agent emerges as an ordinary social being. And, it is the turns and twists of his life that coincidentally involve him in the prominent historical event. The contingent is either embedded or blended in the conspirational.

⁹ David T. Courtwright differentiates two kinds of historians—idiographic and nomothetic. Idiographic historians “try to understand unique and nonrecurring events by focusing on particular historical actors and emphatically reconstructing the choices confronting them at a given moment in time.” As for nomothetic ones, they “explain things in lawlike terms, identifying the forces that govern human affairs and incorporating them into their explanation sketches . . . [They] subordinate the individual to powerful physical, biological, economic, social and psychological forces that they believe are the keys to understand the human past” (86). The former lays stress on the historical agents while the latter manifests the inevitable influences of the surroundings contributing to the historical consequence.

The connections between contingency and conspiracy are conspicuous and inevitable. However, various connections are neither linear nor separate; they sprawl in various directions, featuring a-signifying relation. That makes a history of rhizome which marks both the connection and the rupture in story. It seems that contingency and conspiracy engender one another in singularities, and lead to historical complexity and ambiguity.

The interweaving zigzag between contingency and conspiracy corresponds to the arrangements of the chapters in *Libra*. These chapters are alternatively titled the places and the dates respectively. They designate Oswald's transitions in life and the important moments and places crucial to the political intrigue and Kennedy's assassination. More specifically, in weaving Oswald's life into the political conspiracy is DeLillo's intention to foreground the contingent and the aleatory rather than to excavate the actual intention of the cabal. *Libra* has renewed the historical narrative with the convergence between the political conspiracy and Lee Harvey Oswald's life, sprinkled with indeterminacies and coincidences.

However, if we think DeLillo's historical writing merely pivots on the blending of the counterparts, it is to reduce its profundity. Such a dichotomous argument of history may be misleading, as these two forces are simultaneously pulling toward and against each other. Implying that every individual is positioned paradoxically in society, DeLillo demonstrates how the historical agent, though set in the well-contrived framework of the political conspiracy, embodies the disrupting contingencies as the lines of the flight. Such is the case when Win Everett,¹⁰ one of the main conspirators in the JFK assassination, endeavored to "script a gunman [H]e wanted a figure to be slightly more visible than the others, a man the investigation might center on, someone who would be trailed and possibly apprehended" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 50), they then coincidentally found Lee Harvey Oswald fit the role. However, even though recruiting a gunman like Oswald is the consequence of their meticulous efforts, implementing such an agent in the political scheme is where the contingencies start rolling in.

¹⁰ Win Everett and one of his partners, Larry Parmenter, belonged to a group called SE Detailed in *Libra*. The group was "one element in a four-stage committee set up to confront the problem of Castro's Cuba." The four-stage committee includes the Senior Study Effort, SE Augmented, SE Detailed, and Leader 4. Win Everett was the only person in both the third and the fourth stages (20). His major work was to collect and analyze information and secretly scheme to deal with Castro's regime in Cuba.

Contingencies prevail in the novel. From Oswald's personal background to his being chosen as the lone gunman for the JFK assassination, all went beyond the plan and prediction. The conspirator, Win Everett, told his partners that the purpose was not to assassinate JFK but to target another political end—" [w]e know Cuban intelligence has people in Miami. We want to set up an event that will make it appear they have struck at the heart of our government. . . . We want to set up an attempt on the life of the President. . . . But we don't hit Kennedy. We miss him" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 27-28). However, whatever the conspiracy is, the contingent can never be predicted or ignored. The most conspicuous and ironical one is the description of the shooting moment.

[H]e fired some shots from the window. But he didn't kill anyone. He never meant to fire a fatal shot. It was never his intention to cause a fatality. He was only trying to make a political point. Other people were responsible for the actual killing. They fixed it so he would seem the lone gunman. (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 418)¹¹

Though Oswald was the person who did the shooting, his shooting did not aim at killing. Inevitable contingencies, including Kennedy's death, contribute to his elusiveness as he was paradoxically in and out of the political scheme. His legend then derives less from his sophisticated or politically-obsessed character than the aleatory and the unpredictable confrontations.

By means of the coexistence of conspiracy and contingency, DeLillo actually wants to stress coincidences in his historical writing. Yet, how coincidence differs from contingency is that the latter stresses the random or provisional conditions, but the former underscores the conflation of the intentional and the incidental. Specifically, coincidences refer to the amalgam of conspiracy and contingency; it is an unpredictable pattern out of indeterminacy, as Win's partner, David Ferrie,¹² who was the investigator, bag man and spiritual adviser, commented on Oswald's role in the event,

¹¹ Although there are debates about whether Oswald was the person who shot President Kennedy, DeLillo stresses the contingent aspects based on the general recognition of the assassination.

¹² In *Libra*, David Ferrie had been a senior pilot in Eastern Airlines but he quit his job because of a certain disease and his sexual sport with boys. Moreover, he had an interest in the communistic menace and Cuba (29). This might be the reason he became one of the members in Win Everett's political intrigue. From David Ferrie's example, another thing to be added is the characterization of

Lee Oswald matches the cardboard cutout they've been shaping all along. You're a quirk of history. You're a coincidence. They devise a man, you fit it perfectly. They lose you, here you are. There's a pattern in things. Something in us has an effect on independent events. We make things happen. The conscious mind gives one side only. We're deeper than that. (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 330)

Coincidence presents the paradoxical nature of history, referring to the elusive and the unconscious. Significantly, these coincidences are not randomly arrayed or chaotically conglomerated. The definition of coincidence helps shed light on the relation of these events, seemingly taking place in a way which cannot be known in advance. According to the Oxford dictionary, the word coincidence originally meant "the occupation of the same place" in the seventeenth century, and, in the contemporary age, it means to designate "a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection." These coincidences suggest the juxtaposition of the events which *take place* in an unpredictable and uncontrollable way. The remarkable idea of coincidence in DeLillo's historical writing echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizome which consists of the root or tree structure and the root division or tree branches—rhizome-root assemblages. Firstly, the root or tree structure resembles the planned, while the division or branches refer to the provisional or contingent. Secondly, it illustrates Deleuze and Guattari's plane of consistency which "is not simply a series of loosely connected reflections on disparate themes and topics What ties the diverse chapters together is the idea of a concrete assemblage and an abstract machine that produces it" (Crockett 63). Most of all, it is a plane of consistency, an assemblage formulated in a process of self-organization and multiplicity.

To understand the plane of consistency in the assemblage, the rampant coincidences should be further probed into. First of all, coincidence lies in Oswald's inexplicable relationship with Kennedy. The coincidences between them serve as the prelude of their fatal relation—the assassination. For instance, both Oswald and Kennedy did military service in the Pacific, always read more than one book at a time, and had poor writing. Their wives were

David Ferrie. It is like DeLillo's rhizomatic historical narrative; that is, the characterization does not rest on the same focus but blends in divergent descriptions blurring possible interpretation of the characters.

pregnant at the same time. Both of their brothers were called Robert. While there was barely any relevance between Oswald and Kennedy, these corresponding situations made them counterparts at two ends. Their life processes unflinchingly drew them to the point where they converged. In addition, on his twenty-fourth birthday at the Paine house before the assassination, Oswald watched two movies which happened to be related to the assassination. One was *Suddenly*, a film about the attempted assassination of President Eisenhower. The other, *We Were Strangers*, depicted an American revolutionary in Cuba in the 1930s who plotted to assassinate the dictator, known as the President of a Thousand Murders (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 369-70). The coincidences insinuate the connections behind these seemingly irrelevant facts. Besides, coincidences are not only related to the situations but the time in which these events occurred. He found October and November “were times of decision and grave event” in his life (370). He was born in October. He shot himself in the arm in Japan in October. He arrived in Russia, and even attempted to kill himself in October. In November, Marina, Oswald’s Russian wife, left him. In November, Oswald decided to take a shot at General Walker. In November, Oswald had last seen his brother. And, as we all know, in November, he assassinated President Kennedy and was killed by Jack Ruby. Coincidences occurred in some more details of his relation to the historical event. While Guy Banister, a former FBI working with Win Everette, was trying to find Oswald but had no clue where he was, Oswald walked into their office at 544 and asked for an undercover job. Then, Oswald was informed that Castro’s guerrilla name was Alex, which was derived from his middle name, Alejandro. Another thing is that he ordered the revolver and the carbine six weeks apart but they arrived on the same day (336). These details imply the inexplicable intensity embedded in the historical episode.

All these coincidences transcend logical reasoning and elude the possible predictions; however, it reveals a plane of consistency which demonstrates the autonomy of its own. David Ferrie, contended, “[t]here is no such *thing* as coincidence. We don’t know what to call it, so we say coincidence. . . . There’s something else that’s generating this event. A pattern outside experience” (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 384). That is why in the wake of the shooting, certain aspects of the victim were on the endless journey to be uncovered. Seemingly being DeLillo’s spokesman of the alternative historical perspective, Ferrie added that “[c]oincidence is a science waiting to be discovered. How

patterns emerge outside the bounds of cause and effect. I studied geopolitics at Baldwin-Wallace before it was called geopolitics” (44). For one thing, DeLillo intends to see how the feature of coincidence renders a different historical narrative. For another, coincidence is self-regulating and place-related.

To have a better understanding of how coincidences emerge or how conspiracy gives in to contingency, it is necessary to delve into the idea of place—the social, the political, and the physical condition. The socio-political milieu helps unravel how the idea of coincidence contributes to the rhizomatic nature in DeLillo’s historical writing. This can be done by examining how the historical agent situates himself in place—how he re-positions himself in different places or environments. Hence, the following analysis will focus on how the self situates and de-situates himself in place to manifest the coincidence in the history of rhizome—how he connects himself with *the outside* to reveal the emergence of the lines of flight in the historical process.

III. Place and Self-identification

Switching from one role to another, from one place to another, Oswald is indeed a character hard to identify, especially being the inscrutable assassin. Focusing on the mediated Oswald after the assassination, Andrew Radford observes that “DeLillo chronicles how Oswald gradually fades into the lurid and misleading media accounts of himself. Oswald is from the outset a permeable entity and a blank screen upon which other people project their corrosively cynical conceptions” (228). Not only to the audience but to Oswald himself, the mediated Oswald blurred and even uprooted any possible recognition since it started to incorporate various conflicting associations and inferences. The characterization of Oswald, to Michael James Rizza, is both contingent and performative. In “The Dislocation of Agency in Don DeLillo’s *Libra*,” Rizza argues that Lee Harvey Oswald, “lacking a sense of authentic self, possesses postmodern subjectivity. . . . Decentered, not fully present in the scene or connected to himself, Oswald becomes an emblem for a postmodern condition” (172). Critiques like these do point out the inexplicability and changeability of Oswald’s identity. However, it is worth further exploring Oswald’s difficulty to be located or situated. Though blended in the intriguing political scheme, he did have his own aspiration and make his personal decision. With DeLillo’s emphasizing the dates and the

places in the novel, delving into how the individual reacts to different occasions should be a clue to his ostensibly protean identity.

Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizome may first of all shed light on how DeLillo takes the names of the places and peculiar dates as the titles for the chapters of the novel. First of all, in *Libra*, place includes the social, political, and historical aspects, in addition to the physical environment. According to Edward S. Casey, "[t]o exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or objected) event is to have a place—to be implaced, however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily" (13). The significance of place is not merely an objective or neutral living domain. Instead, place becomes an essential condition and component of one's existence, since "[p]lace as we experience it is not altogether natural. . . . Place, already cultural as experienced, insinuated itself into a collectivity, altering as well as constituting that collectivity. Place becomes social because it is already cultural. It is also, and for the same reason, historical." (31). Hence, with the cultural, social and even historical dimensions, one's relation with place, influencing one's identification, is multivalent and dynamic, depending on how one adapts himself to place.

Half of the chapters in *Libra* are entitled with the places Oswald had been to: Bronx, New Orleans, Atsugi, Fort Worth, Moscow, Minsk, Dallas, and Mexico City. Each represents different encounters and social relations, simultaneously demonstrating his desperate aspiration and necessity to adequately place himself in certain social and political context. Nevertheless, to Oswald, the intertwining relationship between the political conspiracy and the personal aspirations is conspicuous. While Oswald aspires to be historically situated to evade the frustration and failure in social relations, the political situation gave him an escape to anchor himself onto a different plane of life. Among the personal, the social, and the historical lies his constant struggle for reliable or substantial im-placement. And, it is the failure of his *im-placement*, the incapability to be rooted in certain place, that leads to the ruptures and the connections with *the outside*.

At the beginning of the novel, Oswald as a social outcast had a hard time adjusting himself to the social milieu. Coming from a single-parent family, Oswald had great challenges in learning. He was bullied because of his speaking like a Yankee. The maladjustment to such a society keeps forcing him to seek some other refuge to ensure his personal value. In an age with the

ideological dichotomy framed in the *us-them* mentality, his opting for America's power counterpart is understandable. The reading of Marxist books effectively intensified his grudge against the American government and society. However, contingent twists are conspicuous in his self-identification. His aspiration for communism and decision to defect to Russia did not last long. Being rejected by the Russian government compelled him to turn back to America only to find acute the difficulty to be re-placed in his motherland. The oscillation between places becomes the incessant divergences in his life plan. The actual situations outran his expectations. He could not help finding a way out and justifying his constant transitions. Following a predetermined track was impossible as the contingent connected him with something outside the plan. The connections with the "outside" hence are the lines of flight which make the conditions for new possibilities.

In addition, the recurrent lines of flight in the history of the rhizome designate the rupture between the personal and the historical. They are manifested as the clash between the ideal and the practical. Oswald's connection with history has been construed and particularly marked by the coincidences in various personal confrontations. These recurrent coincidences come from the conflation of what is plotted and what is contingent. While Oswald was a marine in Atsugi, an American marine base in Japan, he met Konno, a member of the Japanese-Soviet Friendship Society, the Japanese Peace Council, the Japan-China Cultural Exchange association, who "believed in riots . . . [,] believed in the U.S. had used germ warfare in Korea and was experimenting with a substance called lysergic acid here in Japan." And, most of all, he "was able to argue Lee's own position from a historic rather than a purely personal viewpoint" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 87-88). Konno's words demonstrating certain political sensitivity and historical connection convinced Oswald to see himself in a larger scope. Konno guided Oswald to peep in the on-going political and historical conspiracy. That was a point for the line of flight which erupted from his previous life conditions and decisions. Especially after he shot himself accidentally in the marine base and was imprisoned in a brig, he became confident of his relation to history. With his acquaintance with the cellmate, Bobby Dupard, a slim Negro, Oswald witnessed the unjustifiable violence in the brig and perceived the absurdity of the martial court. He, in a sense, felt obliged to take certain historical missions. Moreover, his reading of George Orwell's literary works ensured his role in

history. “He tried to feel history in the cell. This was history out of George Orwell, the territory of no-choice” (100). With these episodes justifying his connection with history, he believed “[t]he purpose of history is to climb out of your own skin. He knew what Trotsky had written, that revolution leads us out of the dark night of the isolated self. We live forever in history, outside ego and id” (101). He was then able to lay anchor onto another plane, the historical. Yet, to be connected with history implicates him in various and complex confrontations.

There are indeed different forces converging in one’s life. They contribute to the default of the im-placement and the inevitable emergence of the lines of the flight—the possibility for the new. Oswald was confronted with the antagonism between the individual and the historical, America and Russia, family and society. The fissure of the im-placement pushes the historical agent to break away from the political or social boundary that is supposed to confirm his identity. While Oswald as a marine decided to move to Russia, he thought Russia was the ideal choice as it served as a prominent force to act against American consumerism or capitalism. Oswald’s intension was reinforced by Konno, who had a belief that “[l]ife is hostile. The struggle is to merge your life with the greater tide of History” (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 87). That is the solid reinforcement to verge on the historical framework. Oswald then justified his defection from America by saying,

I do think there is something unique about the Soviet Union that I wish to find out for myself. It’s the great theory come to life. . . . Capitalism is beginning to die. It is taking desperate measure. There is hysteria in the air, like hating Negroes and communists. . . . I am sincere in my ideal that this is what I want to do. This is not something intangible. I’m ready to go through pain and hardship to leave my country forever. (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 110)

Personally and historically motivated, Oswald’s decision demonstrates the relation between place and self-identification. The political milieu at that time happened to anchor him anew, giving him the feeling that “[h]e was a man in history now” (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 149). Being hinged onto a historical plane to resume his life pursuit seemingly helped him avert his personal problems. That was also revealed in Oswald’s persistent attempt in historical writing and

later in the way he played the role of a lone gunman assassinating the President—he set up a heroic image for himself by taking the picture in which he held a rifle by wearing a black pullover shirt and a pair of dark chinos. He felt sincere and honored in re-constructing a heroic and historical image of himself.

However, the contingent giving rise to the lines of flight keeps activating conditions for other possibilities and connections. To build up a new identity in Russia, Oswald re-emphasized that he was a communist, believing he could remold his sense of belonging there. But, without friends or adequate language ability, he found himself a perpetual outsider or a foreigner. While temporarily being detained in the city of Minsk, he was still seen as an American, even a representative of America—“someone interesting, an American, a stranger with a story. America was a rumor down the street, a gleaming place people didn’t quite believe in, and they wanted to hear what he had to say” (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 190). He had not expected that being in Russia made his American identity even more apparent.

Moreover, the vital influence of the contingent in place is demonstrated in Oswald’s interaction with the Russian officer, Kirilenko, in his detainment. The officer came to understand why Oswald wanted to reveal the secrets in the American military and renounce his American citizenship. In the midst of their talk, Oswald felt Kirilenko was like his high-school classmate and had a sense of trust towards him. He shared his future plan in Russia with Kirilenko—to write short stories on contemporary American life. In addition, while Kirilenko wanted him to offer the military-related information such as Atsugi (the military base in Japan), the four-hour watch in the radar bubble, the U-2 (the weather plane), and MACS-9 (the radar unit) in California, etc., Oswald pretended to appear he knew everything in order to get the permit to stay in Russia. Paradoxically, Oswald’s talk with Kirilenko revealed the embedded mechanism not previously intended, as he felt that “[t]here is time for everything Time to recall the smallest moments, time to revise your story, time to change your mind . . . [,] to help you clarify the themes of your life” (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 162-63). The talk activated various potentials which he could apply as a prelude for his following story. Their conversation obscured his original intention. He then thought about contacting American Naval Intelligence, an institution to search for information about the conditions of other nations’ navies. “It was easy to believe they knew about

his pro-Soviet remarks and Russian-language newspaper. He would tell them he was trying to make contact in his own way. They'd trained him intensively. He'd be a real defector posing as a false defector posing as a real defector. Ha ha" (162). The other variable for the talk with Kirilenko was that he sometimes reserved certain information not merely for political concerns but for personal reasons—to see how his friendship with Kirilenko was developing. His oscillation between the U.S. and Russia, the personal and the historical, the real and the false effectively attests to how the lines of flight come into *place*.

The political or social conditions in place enabled him to be connected with different options in history and his personal life. After his application to stay in Russia was rejected, he looked for an undercover assignment in Guy Banister's office in New Orleans; yet, his up-rootedness from his motherland compelled him to turn to another place—Cuba, which, to his disappointment, prohibited his entrance, too. The planned and the contingent, either alternating or mingling with each other, unsettled him in place with his identity perpetually suspended.

The incessant failure of im-placement indicates that the planned is never able to correspond to the contingent. The discrepancy is where we see the lines of the flight. A radical situation is his playing both sides in Cuba—he attempted to do undercover work for the anti-Castro movement but actually was a Castro partisan (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 316). What makes it so difficult to adequately place himself is the ruptures of the im-placement, emerging from the contingencies. As his intention to become a Russian citizen was deemed suspicious, he could not help but be sent back to America. However, the rootlessness in America urged him to turn to the underground work contrived by Win Everett and Guy Banister. At the same time, he was hinged onto a larger political intrigue in which Cuba was taken as a significant variable in the rivalry between America and Russia. However, his failure in forming a clear social and political identity is intertwined with his evasion from his personal problems, from the family relations to marriage confrontations, prompting his nomadic drifting from one place to another, from one position to another. As the real situations were often much more complicated than what Oswald thought, the line of flight did not presuppose any certainty or definite place for him to turn to.

As we know, his connection with Cuba originated from his reading in Russia about the right-winged extremist and racist, General Walker.¹³ After he was sent back to America, his antagonism against General Walker accrued as George de Mohrenschildt took Oswald into underground work. George told him about Walker's political inclination and the risk he might set for America. What followed was Oswald's determination to kill General Walker. It was a decision made after his meeting with his cellmate, Bobby Dupard, in the army. Bobby, a black earning his living as a worker in a speed wash as well as some other menial part-time jobs, was much provoked by the way blacks were ill-treated in American society. Oswald told Bobby about his underground job and the elusive relations with his family. Spending a few nights sharing their ideas on politics, race and Cuba, they decided to "put a bullet in General Walker's head" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 272) and set the day on April 17 for the assassination, the second anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, marking its historical significance.

His involvement with Cuba and then the Kennedy incident was further intensified by another man, Agent Bateman, who was familiar with Oswald's participation in Fair Play for Cuba and the Socialist Workers Party. He wanted Oswald to go to Guy Banister and join the false defector program. However, while everything seemed to be drawing to the moment of assassination, his purpose in taking the gunman's role was obscured. With more forces streaming in, it became difficult for him to be sure of his exact position. Personal predicament, social relationships, and political concern made a whirling entanglement. That was why he became "a real defector posing as a false defector posing as a real defector" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 162).

The lines of flight coming from a series of singularities entangle his personal life and increase the historical complexities. He either stood in-between or headed for new possibilities. He was pushed towards a threshold identity as John M. Crafton says, "[t]he condition of the outsider is not necessarily to be out of one place and in another, but to be between places, to be as it were utopian, no place. . . . [I]t is the outsider in the journey either pioneering a path towards the promised land or places yet to be imagined" (3).

¹³ General Edwin Walker was an out-spoken communist and was in opposition to racial integration. Historically, Oswald was much suspected as the assassin responsible for the shot fired through the window of Walker's residence in Dallas, Texas. General Walker had a narrow escape in this event. However, the event occurred on April 10, 1963, different from the date Oswald and Bobby set in the novel.

The situation is that he was shifting from one position to another, confronted with incessant indeterminacies and inadequacies. Importantly, the process represents the coincident in which the contingent intervenes and the line of flight emerges.

In addition to Oswald's going from the personal to the historical or the political, the line of the flight in the rhizome can go from the opposite direction—from the historical or political to the personal, as in Win Everett's case. Win was in semi-retirement owing to "motivational exhaustion"—a judgment given by three levels of specialists. They gave him a teaching post in a women's college and paid him a retainer to recruit potential students as junior officer trainees. It was a position which he could only "appreciate in a bitter and self-punishing way" (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 17-18). He was still occupied with the secret work related to major historical and political situations. To plan the JFK assassination for the retrieval of Cuba secretly, Win Everett needed a man to fit into the historical scenario. For the political purpose, Win Everett had to create a figure for the political intrigue. But, whatever conspiracy, there is always something personal intervening, like Win's purpose in reclaiming his political significance. That is, while the personal ambition is blended into a greater framework, another line of flight erupts. Larry Parmenter is another example. Being one of the conspirators who worked with Win Everett, he had his own personal concern in preventing Cuba from leaning towards communism, since "[h]e had interests there. He had rights, claims, hidden financial involvement in a leasing company that had been working toward a huge land deal to facilitate oil drilling" (30). The personal interest was apparently embedded in the political act—an inevitable effect on the historical process. The economically- and personally-related political conspiracy is illustrated as George was asked by one Pentagon fellow to offer "cover for an anti-Castro operation centered in Haiti" which had a large amount of capital, oil surveying, resorts as well as a weapons shipment (288). The personal advantage coalesced with the political cause increases the inevitable variables of the historical agency and the potential divergences in the political conspiracy. Politics was never the only factor. Win Everett's intention to maintain his political significance, Parmenter's investment in Cuba, and Oswald's searching for a way out of his own life predicament contrive to intensify and complicate the political tension. DeLillo's presentation of the historical event implicates the political and personal

concerns and situations. Most of all, they contribute to a rhizomatic process of history which features the lines of flight and the a-signifying connections. In addition, DeLillo's historical writing foregrounds coincidences and unravels how the rhizome-like history is presented in the transience of one's placement as well as the indeterminacy of self-identification—an access to see the nature of coincidences, the conflation between the conspired and the contingent.

IV. Conclusion

DeLillo disengages historical writing from the dichotomies between fiction and novel, conspiracy and contingency, and the individual and the historical. He does not follow the genealogical tracing nor present a historical narrative featuring some specific perspective. Instead, *Libra* features the provisional and multi-layered interconnections of these seemingly contradictory aspects. DeLillo foregrounds the “in-the-middle” historical position, presenting a self-regulating historical process which conflates and oscillates between the conspirational and the contingent, the personal and the historical, the social and the political. History is presented as a proliferating and dynamic process defying the presupposed signification and causal logic. It echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of rhizome in which the lines of flight give rise to the divergences from the schemed or intended. The sprawling historical configuration resembles what the title, *Libra*, suggests, incessantly generating the conditions for the connections with the outside. It was like how David Ferrie described the situation of Oswald in the case of the JFK assassination:

One is the life of Lee H. Oswald. One is the conspiracy to kill the President. What bridges the space between them? What makes a connection inevitable? There is a third line. It comes out of dreams, visions, intuitions, prayers, out of the deepest level of the self. It's not generated by causality, cuts across time. It has no history that we can recognize and understand. But it forces a connection. It puts a man on the path of his destiny. (Don DeLillo, *Libra* 339)

The third line not only bridges the two ends of the *Libra* but creates the conditions for unpredictable possibilities. Yet, the unpredictable routes contributing to the coincident in history designate the vital and perplexing connections and relations between place and self-identification.

As the history in *Libra* corresponds to Guattari and Deleuze's idea of rhizome, it particularly underscores the crucial relationship between place and self-identification. The historical perspective prominently falls on how the individual gets in and out of history. As a social being, the individual cannot help but situate himself in place. With different social and political factors, place consists of numerous inevitable contingencies while the planned and predetermined are to be actualized. More often than not, while the contingent is blended in, the causal relationship no longer works and the conditions for new possibilities take form. In addition, the rhizomatic history unfolds intensities not focusing on or deriving from any single character. Lee Harvey Oswald is never the only impetus to make Lee Harvey Oswald in history.

DeLillo's rewriting of the JFK assassination surely demonstrates that history indeed cannot be interpreted in any single logic or unity. By blending the individual dimension into the political framework, DeLillo presents a Libran configuration of history featuring coincidence. It is to juxtapose conspiracy with contingency, marking a rhizomatic mapping of history. The presentation of the rhizomatic history on the one hand reveals an ongoing connection and process and on the other forms a plane of consistency rather than random association or combination. Most of all, in rhizome-like historical writing, DeLillo details the relation between place and self-identification to mark the eruption of the lines of flight and designates how the writing on the JFK assassination becomes an ever-growing assemblage. DeLillo's writing, being *in the middle* of the historical narrative of the JFK assassination, not merely provides a unique perspective of history but potentially presumes other possibilities in the coming future.

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