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 **Genre and Gender in Don DeLillo's *Players* and *Running Dog***

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Genre and Gender in Don DeLillo's *Players* and *Running Dog*

Anne Longmuir (bio)

Critics have often regarded DeLillo's fifth and sixth novels, *Players* (1977)

and *Running Dog* (1978), collectively. Both Tom LeClair and Bill Mullen write about the novels together, while Mark Osteen refers to *Running Dog* as the "companion novel" (*American Magic and Dread* 144) of *Players*. This association is understandable given the close publication dates of the novels (only a year apart), and the similarities in their content and form. I intend to argue, however, that *Players* and *Running Dog* should not only be regarded as companion novels, but also as a continuous project. *Players* begins an exploration of a perceived shift in American culture, from the stability and certitudes of the 1950s to the epistemological uncertainty and indeterminacy of post-Vietnam America, that *Running Dog* continues and resolves. Furthermore, DeLillo's employment of genre in each novel indicates that this is a continuous project, with the thriller genre adopted by Lyle Wynant in *Players* as a means of escaping the uncertainty of late twentieth century America, abandoned by Glen Selvy in *Running Dog*, when it proves inadequate to the task. But unlike other explorations of DeLillo's deployment of genre, such as John Johnston's "Generic difficulties in the novels of Don DeLillo" and John Frow's interrogation of *Running Dog* alongside the thrillers of Robert Ludlum, I also demonstrate the connection between genre and gender in these novels. I argue that the disruption of gender in *Players* and *Running Dog* is a [End Page 128] manifestation of the same phenomenon as the disruption of genre: namely, the indeterminacy of the sign in the age of late capitalism. While adherence to the masculine codes of the thriller and Western results in the eradication of the subjectivities of DeLillo's two male protagonists, his female characters in *Running Dog*, at least, succeed in maintaining some autonomy by manipulating generic conventions for their own ends. This argument has profound implications for any critical assessment of DeLillo's work, indicating that gender plays a more central role in his interrogation of subjectivity and generic codes that critics have previously considered.

Of course, DeLillo's use of the conventions of genre fiction is not limited to *Players* and *Running Dog*. Rather, as John Johnston recognises in "Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo," DeLillo's interest in genre is a significant feature of his early novels: "In a period of fourteen

years, from 1971 to 1985, Don DeLillo published eight works of prose fiction that appropriate visible aspects of a wide range of subgenres of the novel" (261). *Players* and *Running Dog* are preceded by a bildungsroman, *Americana* (1971), a sports novel, *End Zone* (1972), a rock novel, *Great Jones Street* (1973), and a piece of science fiction, *Ratner's Star* (1976). The number of different genres that DeLillo employs has epistemological implications, indicating his interest in how genres function as discourses that determine our construction of reality. However, while DeLillo has employed a wide range of styles, he has returned to the thriller more often than any other genre. Besides *Players* and *Running Dog*, elements of the thriller can be detected in Jack Gladney's trip into Germantown to shoot Willie Mink in *White Noise*, in the final revelations of secret CIA involvement in *The Names* and, of course, in *Libra* (1988). Strong similarities can also be detected between the thriller and another of DeLillo's favourite themes, the conspiracy theory, as Patrick O'Donnell's article "Obvious Paranoia: The Politics of Don DeLillo's *Running Dog*," which interrogates both, illustrates. In other words, DeLillo's fiction has displayed a persistent interest in the codes of the thriller, and as such, his deployment of this genre demands special attention.

The thriller is a notoriously difficult genre to define, partly because it has sprouted multiple and diverse variants, from the hard-boiled detective novels of Dashiell Hammett to the psychological thrillers of Patricia Highsmith and the espionage novels of writers such as Ian Fleming, John LeCarre, Robert Ludlum and Len Deighton. However, certain key features **[End Page 129]** of the genre can be identified. The thriller's designation...

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Genre and Gender in Don DeLillo's *Players* and *Running Dog*, they offer clearly and fully reflects the gyroscopic stabilizer.

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