# Simulations, Narrativity and (Post)Modern Historiography: Patterns of Ambivalence in Daniel Silva's *The Unlikely Spy*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims at locating complex patterns of ambivalence in the narratology of Daniel Silva's Second World War thriller, *The Unlikely Spy*, published in 1996, by contending that it recreates a historically justifiable picture of the 1940s in a manner that highlights the typical historicist episteme of the 1990s. This is because its plot retains an apparent structural wholeness as far as the atmospheric evocation through archival research is concerned in spite of the fact that its narratorial focus is informed by characteristic postulates of postmodernist historiography. The argument's theoretical exposition of the latter depends, through an emphasis on notions of simulations, evasions and self-deconstruction, on Jean Baudrillard's proclamation that history is no longer possible. The paper employs techniques of qualitative discourse analysis for studying the novel's narratological patterns and historicist constructs. It shall be seen how, along with narrativity that combines motifs of linearity and temporal-spatial chaos, the text philosophically problematizes the 'reality' of the War through an ambivalent intermingling of confrontation and evasion by metonymically representing the entire War-dynamic – completely dispensing with any first-hand account of the uniformed soldiers' battlefield – in devious circles of executive offices and spies stalking the streets during the blackout. It is further contended that the novel's historicist vision draws attention to, and even symbolically represents, the ambivalent nature of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism.

**Keywords:** *The Unlikely Spy*, historiography, ambivalence, (post)modern narratology, simulations, Jean Baudrillard

## Introduction

This paper aims at analyzing Daniel Silva's espionage thriller *The Unlikely Spy* (1996/1997) to

trace patterns of ambivalence between its strand of treating historicity in traditional narratorial style and that which subverts it through a focus on postmodern notions of liquidation of reality.

As a late twentieth century publication set in the times of World War II, the poetics of its narrativity shall be seen as a comment on the problematic epistemological relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Apropos of the truism that postmodern fiction challenges "traditional ideas of narrative construction, verisimilitude and historical truth" (Malpas, 2005: 101), *The Unlikely Spy* (hereafter TUS) subtly subscribes to this dictum in "treat[ing] history ironically as a site of fragmentation rather than a progressive structure" (Malpas, 2005: 101) like typical postmodern fiction, but achieving this irony through subtexts rather than a categorical rejection of historicity.

Before proceeding with this analysis, a condensed listing of TUS's most significant characters and events seems pertinent for the sake of refreshing the reader's memory: An exceptionally gifted German spy Anna Steiner, entering England before the War, is inert for years as a "sleeper" (329) with a fabricated identity as Catherine Blake, until she is ordered by Vogel, her Berlin-based control officer, to steal the secret of the site of the Allies' invasion of France in 1944 by seducing a widower American naval engineer, Peter Jordan. While her mission could have changed the War's ultimate outcome, Alfred Vicary, a history professor appointed as a spymaster by Winston Churchill to serve under an enigmatic officer named Boothby, ingenuously tries to catch her, before she smuggles her findings to Berlin through a fellow German agent Horst Neumann. But while Vicary tracks her down, it is only in the last pages, after having been declared persona non grata by his own office, that he realizes his role as an unknowing pawn in the Allies' deception plans that, from the very beginning, monitored and subverted the apparently covert interaction between Catherine and Jordan by disseminating false clues through it. These plans included a simulated projection of MI5's inefficiency through Vicary's ignominious dismissal from his post.

## Methodology

This paper qualitatively analyzes the narratology and historicist constructs of Silva's TUS, treating the novel as a classic illustration of what may on the simplest level appear to be the paradoxical category of fictional-historical discourses. It locates the strain of modernism in the novelist's configuration of its historical setting on the basis of verifiable non-fictional accounts of World War II, and that of postmodernism in the fact that some of its most central ideological concerns can be explicated in the light of a theory of the influential postmodernist philosopher Jean Baudrillard. An argument establishing the ambivalent relationship between modernism and postmodernism will contextualize the ambivalence traced later in the novel's modernist historical content (i.e., the elemental facts constituting the story's setting) and postmodernist historiographical (i.e., ideological-narratological) approaches.

## Research Questions

- How does Daniel Silva's Second World War thriller TUS ambivalently represent the vindication of archival research for the reconstruction of a dated time period and, at the

same time, bring into the limelight postmodernist notions of historiography that challenge narratorial coherence?

- How can one systematize the ambivalence noted in the preceding question by seeing it as a dimension of the ambivalence inherent in the relationship between modernism and postmodernism itself?

## Review of Literature for Situating the Modern-Postmodern Continuum in the History of Western Ideas

The tiered complexity of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism is evident in the inconclusive debates on whether the latter is an extension or a reaction against the former (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2007: 208). Hollinger, to cite one example, presented an extreme version of the isms' assimilation by holding a fallacious transformation responsible for arbitrarily relabeling anti-Enlightenment thought as postmodernist instead of modernist (2001: 10—12). Such a view makes it imperative that Silva's (re)presentation of modernism should include elements of postmodernism, rendering any further attempt to probe the issue superfluous, because the two are, it asserts, only superficially different. But Hollinger's case against the term 'postmodernism' is both reductive and ambiguous; his argument goes on to recognize modernism's two versions with opposing attitudes to the Enlightenment (2001: 12—13), thereby sanctioning the logical ground that postmodernists like Ihab Hassan develop along different lines by contrasting modernism and postmodernism in their focus on "dehumanization of Art . . . [and] of the Planet . . ." respectively (Selden, Widdowson, & Brooker, 2007: 208).

The present study is developed around the partial synthesis of two positions, postulating that the relationship between modernism and postmodernism is ambivalent. The availability of this position within the 1990s' critical canon can be illustrated through the example of a book that, after analyzing the motif of intoxication in mid-nineteenth century American authors, juxtaposes it with a contemporary trope of "modern and postmodern artistic tendencies" (Warner, 1997: 225), noting in the process "complex lines of continuity and change" (Warner, 1997: 225). Such ambivalence provides the epistemological warrant for a comprehensive understanding of a spy-thriller like TUS because the temporal-spatial uncertainties that result from this implied ideological conflation of two historicities is complemented by the fact that "epistemological turbulence" (Glover, 2003: 138) has been noted as one of the definitive traits of the thriller as a genre.

Two years before the publication of TUS, Jean Baudrillard, generally famed as a prototypical postmodernist, proclaimed the view that "reality" had succumbed to "hyper-reality" (1994: 8) in contemporary western sensibility, thereby making history impossible. It is contended here that TUS is a philosophical illustration of his summation of postmodernism that "[e]very political, historical and cultural fact" propels itself "into a hyperspace where . . . it loses all meaning" (Baudrillard, 1994: 2).

With reference to the modern-postmodern ambivalence, Baudrillard's own rejection (like several other eminent contributors to postmodernism) of both 'modern' and 'postmodern' as titles for his writings (Zurbrugg, 2000: 124) necessitates a brief defense for the deployment of his

ideological identit(ies) in this paper. One strand in Zurbrugg's erudite analysis (2000) of the issue begins by contrasting the poetics of Baudrillard and some of his contemporaries with those of the surrealists from the 1920s but, as the argument proceeds, implicitly registers the ambivalent relationship between high modernism and Baudrillard's postmodernity by admitting that the concluding remarks of his 1994 book (*The Illusion of the End*) voice a "kind of seemingly anti-Baudrillardian . . . possibility of escaping the neutrality of fractal culture and of fractal theory . . ." (2000: 149).

Drawing on this suggestion of ambivalence, this research contends that Baudrillard's book, rather than being only an embodiment of the sequestered iconoclasm of the post-theory era, simultaneously signifies a break with modernist tradition as well as being the product of a later stage in western letters' evolutionary continuum. This is because books like Horkheimer & Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947/2002) and Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (1963/1995)—to mention only two—foreshadowed several of Baudrillard's concerns, probing, as WW II's immediate aftermath, what later crystallized into postmodern problematizations of reality and history. This provides the essential ground of theoretical viability from the existing canon for the connection between Baudrillard and Silva's well-researched 1940s on which this whole analysis depends.

## The Ambivalent Fusion of Postmodern Narratology and Traditional Archival Research

The loss of meaning, as expressed in Baudrillard's afore-quoted words, is implied by TUS' complex patterns of ambivalence through its almost exclusive focus on technology-based simulations in the layered structures of espionage and counter espionage. But this argument should not be mistaken for the claim that Silva has anachronistically superimposed thought patterns of the 1990s on his representation of the 1940s. Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate how processes of historiography are always inevitably shaped by the relocation of emphasis issuing from one age's portrayal of another.

Therefore, Silva's strikingly deep archival research will be the counterbalancing perspective repeatedly foregrounded throughout this paper with references to books on the Second World War by famous or well-reputed authors/publishers. Consider, for example, the theatrical monumentality of Catherine Blake's venture since her success could have altered the eventual outcome of the entire War. Notwithstanding hyperbolic suggestions, the scenario is absolutely plausible on one level in the tradition of classic-realist historical fiction, as would be evident from the following facts reported by established historians: The D-Day, described by an American general as "the greatest invasion of history" (Stafford, 2004: 59), potentially determined the outcome of the War and the world's subsequent history (Gilbert, 2004: xiv—xv), and intelligence officers who "controlled the double agents in Britain through whom the essential deception plans were promoted" (Gilbert, 2004: xii) played an indispensable role in its success. And this is how, to quote just one example, a famous historian has portrayed an obscure individual's stakes while pondering over the reception of a radio message by the head of the only Allied counter-intelligence team on the invasion front of the D-Day: "The defeat of the Allied invasion, the lives of hundreds of thousands of his countrymen, the very existence of his country

would depend on the speed with which he and his men monitored the broadcast and alerted the front" (Ryan, 1959/1962: 34).

## Narratological Norms of Ambivalence in TUS

The first chapter of TUS is important in several respects for setting up norms of ambivalence as its objective correlatives. One of them is initiation into the unexpected through a sustained pattern of intermingling male-female identity markers and how they assimilate the identities of a spy-assassin and her victim. Beatrice Pymm is introduced as an overly enthusiastic landscape artist who inherited her father's physiognomy, has "unladylike" (3) hands, and wears "a mannish cotton shirt" (4). Her appearance is paralleled by her assassin's, who is first seen wearing thick workman's leather gloves contrasting sharply with the girlish skin of the wrist momentarily visible from beneath it (5). Introduced to the reader as "a soldier – a major in the secret service" (6) and dressed, along with those gloves, in a "workman's overall" (5), leather boots and a "black woolen mask" (5) over the face, the spy-assassin kills expertly and purposefully. It is therefore with a mild shock that the reader shares the dying Beatrice Pymm's last realization two pages later that the killer sings in German in a woman's voice (7). Thus the gendered basis of the representation of both characters shows a marked affinity in concealing femininity under a veneer of masculinity. Even more importantly, the killer markedly shares Beatrice's professional stance by treating her task of killing with an artist's circumspection and precision. Thus, in order to stab Beatrice with a stiletto, she probes her flesh not with "the hand of a molester or a rapist" (6) but with one that "was skilled, like a doctor's, and curiously gentle" (6). Moments later, the spy-assassin appraises the surgical exactitude of her accomplishment with a self-congratulatory sentiment ("An excellent kill . . ." (6)) that positively evokes an artist's self-reflection if one chooses to emphasize the fact that Silva centralizes the analogical equivalence between an artist and a killer in the very title of another of his novels: *The Kill Artist* (2004). To conclude, the first two human beings presenting the apparently opposite poles of the espionage dynamic as spy-assassin and victim, as well as English and German, emphatically converge in their ambivalent masculinity/femininity and artistic professionalism. In building the text's intricate and baffling postmodernist value system, the whole sequence functions as a prologue to the "psychic and epistemological turbulence" (Glover, 2003: 138) that has been referenced above as a definite hallmark of thrillers.

Temporal linearity in any narrative is challenged by several ontological limitations of fictionality and narrativity, one of which is that "a fictional event will often have a complex temporal structure in which one time locus is embedded inside another" (Currie, 2007: 36). However, TUS markedly problematizes these difficulties through flagrant inconsistencies in the textual world's supposed linearity, thereby asserting its postmodernism while showing that the chronologically coherent and systematic temporal-spatial schema of 'real' world is at variance with the conundrums of illusionary hyper-realit(ies). This is because the narratorial angle that captures the historically recreated scenarios of the Second World War is fused throughout with

the anarchic potential of disrupting one's apparently coherent reception of represented time and space.

On the one hand, the text incorporates innumerable references to names of places, routes leading to and from them, and many times even an overt or implied perspective on distances between them. The novel opens with Pymm's act of reading the timetable of buses at a bus-stop near Ipswich (3), denoting both temporal and spatial specificities. Another significant example is of the secret agents' clinical precision in following temporal-spatial guidelines for a rendezvous since the slightest deviation can turn success into failure (e.g., refer to situations on pages 279 and 425). Collectively, the overwhelming number of these concrete references to time and places, especially in the chase sequences, creates the impression of a symmetrical, civilized and modern, man-made schema of a represented world whose historical wholeness is transparent and self-evident.

On the other hand, this sense of temporal-spatial holism is strongly interrupted repeatedly through incorporation of juxtapositions that defy linearity of experience: the Second World War symbolizes primeval chaos that overtakes defined and predictable categories of reference. The very first of the examples cited above can drive the point home: Just before being murdered, Pymm studies the timetable at the bus-stop in the light of a lamp that "[i]n a few months . . . would be extinguished to conform with the blackout regulations. Beatrice Pymm would never know of the blackout" (3). Here the concretely historical constructs of the subject's physical world are narrated through referencing a hypothetical future that she would "never" experience. In other words, contingency dictates the narrative's temporal-spatial constructs as the reader is introduced to the constructs of the here (space) and the now (time) through the lens of a change that would only materialize in a future totally and eternally outside the subject's apprehension and experiential grasp.

The ambivalence of the plot's temporal-spatial constructs is invigorated emphatically with the chapter break in spite of the fact that the timeline advances with theoretical linearity from "November 1938" (3) of chapter 1 to "August 1939" (11) of chapter 2. The scene of action is abruptly replaced: Self-indulgence and moral inertia are the ruling norms in the "stately" (11) mansion of Lauterbach, one of America's wealthiest bankers, in complete contrast with the sinister and secretive environment of the war-threatened Europe of deadly spies and assassins. The suddenness of the change in the narrative's tenor accompanying the spatial shift across the Atlantic invokes an apparent temporal regression to the early twenties of the kind most typically Americanized by Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925/1995), creating the illusion of a collage in which historiographical coherence recedes into a merely theoretical concern.

The parallels between the atmospheric setting of TUS' chapter 2 and Fitzgerald's masterpiece are many and of vital importance for the present argument on narratology and time explorations. Descriptions of the Lauterbach mansion's magnificence supplement the affluent life style characterized by daily domestic rituals of "inactivity" (11), as in Gatsby's morally and materially wasteful world, and contextualize "the two parties the Lauterbachs threw each summer" (11), which carry an echo of Gatsby's famous parties. In short, a critic's comment that Gatsby's house is to Fitzgerald's narrator "a place where the rules of conduct are more

appropriate to an amusement park than a sedate residence of the established rich" (Lehan, 1990: 91) very aptly describes the collective sensibility of the Lauterbachs' world.

According to Lyotard (1984), the principal aim of postmodern theories is to disrupt the grand narrative whose aim in traditional discourse was to provide, to quote a critic's summarization, "coherence by covering up the various conflicts, the differends, that arise in the history of a society" (Skordili, 2001: 165). The temporal-spatial shift under discussion in TUS follows this code: In this world, a discussion on Hitler's momentous invasion of Poland and "the looming war in Europe" (18) assumes the status of self-centred entrepreneurial gossip by ambitious rich men at the breakfast table, interspersed with comments on "the opera, theatre, and new books and films" (17). While Catherine Blake in the first chapter models her notions of the "necessary" (6) in relation to momentous impending international events, this emphasis on self-indulgent private lives in chapter 2 effectively deflates the totalizing grand narratives of history. Most importantly, even a direct reference to very consequential espionage is transformed by the ethic of this collective sensibility into banter of camaraderie. The reader is disarmingly told in passing that Lauterbach's top lieutenant Walker Hardegen was "affectionately" (18) known among his colleagues "as Our In-House Nazi" (18). His "excellent [business] contacts in Washington" (18) and frequent visits to Berlin hint at a strand of historicized narratives' intrinsic plurality by directing attention to the grimly ironical fact that Germany and the US enjoyed exceptionally good relations "[a]t the beginning of the 1930s" (Weinberg, 1995: 182), which were actually responsible for keeping Roosevelt detached from the War for as long as was possible (Weinberg, 1995: 185—187).

At the end of the novel, the impression of temporal, spatial and ideological incompatibilities between TUS' first and second chapters gives way to another level of ambivalence since Boothby's final revelations *re*-present and radically relocate the element of the Lauterbaughs' affluent pre-war American world from that of detached moral inertia into a dynamic seedbed for highly sensitive counter-espionage. As such, on a very limited but definite scale, they point to the grand narrative's reassertion.

## The "Blackout" as a Symbol of Temporal-Spatial Disruptions

The preceding section has briefly introduced the 'blackout' as an important image in TUS; chapter 3 (in which the timeline moves ahead to the point where the War is shown to have started a considerable time ago) significantly reinforces the importance of its role in constructing the text's objective correlatives. The emphasis here, as in its initial dislocation of the perceived world's linearity, is on how it undermines the possibility of a lucidly systematic Newtonian world. Professor Alfred Vicary is firstly introduced in this chapter, the bland details of his uneventful academic life-giving way to changes brought in his world by the War, especially through the blackout. Objective and subjective narratorial approaches to temporal-spatial apprehension intermingle in the said passage at the same time as the ambivalent cohesion of primeval past and modern present. This is because it starts by collectivizing temporal-spatial defamiliarization in the blackout's impact on London, but is later absorbed in Vicary's interior

monologue as the *history* professor imagines himself transferred across millennia to ancient London: "Time had dissolved, the centuries retreated, man's undeniable progress brought to a halt by the threat of Goring's bombers" (28). The reference to time's dissolution represents the blackout as a virtual black-hole that irredeemably eradicates the linearity of historical developments.

The impact of this ambivalent intertwining of incompatible time-scales achieves remarkable holism in the plot's structure when, as the story approaches its racy denouement, an identical thought figures in the interior monologue of the German spy whose event apprehension is on several levels the opposite of Vicary's. As the British Intelligence Service frantically chase Catherine and Neumann to intercept them before they communicate their revelations about the deception plans to the enemy, Neumann considers how the darkness of the surrounding countryside suggests "as if the clock had been turned back two thousand years. Neumann would scarcely have been surprised to see a Roman legion encamped along the banks of the River Cam" (458).

These objective correlatives are reinforced with other passing images of disrupted temporalities; an illustrative example being the invocation of Medieval atmosphere in Vicary's mind on beholding huge piles of papers and files in the damp archive of his office since he "half expect[s] to turn a corner and spot a pair of monks reading an ancient manuscript by candlelight" (95).

The total purport of the blackout in the novel is two dimensional: While the preceding discussion has presented its constitution of TUS' objective correlatives only by supplying poetic atmospheric evocations of wartime chaos, equally important is its simultaneous role as a physical motif used by the novelist as a crucial instrument for plot development. Silva has drawn upon a vital historical facet of civilian life during the War as the story's several significant events are literally made possible because of the blackout's utter transformation of landscape. An historian has noted that its alarming results included the way "[p]edestrians tripped over kerbstones, twisted ankles, or crashed into one another on the pavement" (Healey, 1993/1994: 14). Accordingly, Catherine is able to contrive her apparently accidental introduction to Peter Jordan by colliding with him on a dark street when such an event appears natural (209—210); in their second meeting in a restaurant she playfully proposes a toast to the blackout, saying that she "would never have bumped" (264) into him without it. At a later stage, she is able to easily kill and abandon the dead body of an acquaintance from her remote English past in Hyde Park, which the blackout turns into as sequestered a place as "Sherwood Forest" (285). The world of the novel is suspended in a realm in which recent and distant history co-exists with pre-history (i.e., absence of history), and these examples prove that the instability of the novel's temporal constructs defined by the blackout has a practical role in shaping its events rather than being only an abstract narratorial issue for poetical evocations.

The above discussion has, it is hoped, illustrated the naratological norms that were essential to contextualize TUS's postmodernist historiography in the following sections through its complex unfixing, erasure and reinvention of reality and truth.

## The Problematization / Effacement of Reality and Truth through Technologically Driven Simulations

Alfred Vicary regards his switch from the tranquil university professor's "sanctuary of academia" (61) to his nerve-wracking engagement with imminent crises as a spymaster in the War Office as his "rebirth" (61), a change that has made him "an actor in the theatre of the real" (61). The image denotes that "reality" in TUS is not a taken-for-granted opposite of the fake or the artificial, but a condition involving a theatrical performance – a performance, moreover, that paradoxically distances a protagonist from the (academic) life that has been, until its experience, his apparently natural element. So Vicary's rebirth signifies the problematization of the concept of reality in his consciousness.

This trope reaches its logical denouement when certain revelations in the second to last chapter awaken Vicary to a complete reformulation of the real role he served for his masters. Sickened by the calculated ruthlessness of his bureaucratic overlords, he protests to his superior officer Boothby, who imperturbably responds that deep in his heart he must have "liked the manipulation and the deception" (554), and that his return to an academic's life would be unappealing after his realization that everything he "ever believed in is a lie and my world, this world, is the real world" (554). Here Boothby – the antagonist – almost exactly repeats the foundational narrator's earlier comment by again making reality oxymoronic through its link with "deception." However, Vicary – the protagonist – counters Boothby (and by implication the all-knowing narrator) by stating, "You're not the real world. I'm not sure what you are, but you're not real" (554). This expressed conviction and uncertainty is self-demolishing and, while the ultimate extent to which Vicary is right or wrong is an open-ended matter of speculation, the discussion proves that the novel centralizes the deconstructionalist repression of any clear-cut binary division between reality and its opposites. The intrinsically ahistorical plurality of the past comes into the limelight as reality's subjection to revisionism – which is a truistic "part of the climate of postmodern thought" (Sim, 1998/2001: 304) – defines TUS' historiographical mode through a sweeping reconfiguration of all narrated events at the very end of the novel.

World War II initiated the miraculous amalgamation of reality and science fiction, which came to be celebrated decades later by Baudrillard in postmodern problematics of reality, by shifting focus away from a battlefield's raw bloodiness to simulacra. A supreme example in TUS is the technological sophistication in the Allies' preparations for the D-Day, indexed in the incredulity with which Silva's Hitler speculates about Operation Mulberry with the question, "Is such a thing possible?" (344). But the ground for ambivalence lies in the fact that the historicity of TUS' content so thoroughly invokes the Baudrillardian vision by centralizing the role of mechanized, technology-based illusions in warfare that it completely dispenses with even a single scene set on an actual battleground. From first to last, it only shows a vast machinery of Intelligence personnel frantically engaged in the mission of thinking ahead of the enemy and infiltrating and eventually manipulating his mind. So all its protagonists measure their success or failure without exception in terms of either strategies of deception, or manipulation of propaganda through modern media, or both.

It needs to be emphasized here that deception mechanisms and the role of propaganda, as presented in TUS, are the deeply secret and exclusive nucleus of the War rather than merely one of its features. The single most important discussion on virtual reality in the novel figures in chapter 6, in which Boothby gives Vicary a detailed overview of deception plans regarding the Allied invasion of Europe. The volatile range and gigantic state-sponsored apparatuses involved in the fabrication of intended trickery suitably staggers Vicary (and the reader not already familiar with a detailed history of the D-Day), who continually expresses his incredulity. Boothby quotes Churchill's famous words, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies" (66—67). The statement inverts the relationship between truth and lies so subtly that it invites a redefinition of its epistemological basis and morality. If wartime makes truth intrinsically variable, historiography that attempts to record its convolutions should likewise be shrouded in uncertainty.

In the fateful choice between Calais and Normandy as the site of the invasion, Boothby explains, the Allies select the latter, not just in spite of, but actually because of its obviously disadvantageous route. The benefit they intend to reap from it depends on their successfully getting across the rumour to the enemy that the invasion is to take place in two parts: a diversionary attack on Normandy followed by a full-scale invasion of Calais, which the Germans would be apparently supposed to have left undefended while rallying to Normandy. By accepting this cue, they intend the enemy to keep the major part of their armies deployed at Calais and make the most of putting everything at stake against the minimum defenses at Normandy (67). It may be said that this deception strategy operates more through centralizing the half-truth of attack on Normandy than by a complete fabrication. But it is more important that, once activated, such a half-truth inevitably supersedes reality and attains self-referentiality since the schema it relates to is of its own making. This is because it works through the virtual which, to quote Baudrillard, "puts an end to all negativity, and thus to all reference to the real or to events" (1994: 55). So (Boothby continues) the illusion of the impending attack at Calais necessitates "creating an army of a million men, completely out of thin air" (68), whereby simulations emphatically displace and replace reality. The success of the invasion and the eventual victory in the War depends on flooding "the airwaves with wireless traffic, some of it in codes . . . [the British] know the Germans have already broken, some of it *en clair*" (69) to drop clues about the assemblage of a vast military machinery where in fact there is nothing. To Vicary's question about how such a stupendous fabrication may be possible, Boothby says: "The US 3103 Signals Service Battalion. They're bringing quite a crew with them – Broadway actors, radio stars, voice specialists . . . They'll record the false messages in a studio on sixteen-inch records, then broadcast them from trucks circulating through the Kent countryside" (69). These auditory simulations, he adds, would be suitably supplemented by visual ones. Installations of faked aircrafts, tanks, tents, etc., would be built of "plywood and canvas" (70) to deceive the enemy's surveillance planes. It is obvious the moment Broadway actors supersede actual soldiers, the domain of war is transferred from the world of experience to one of illusionary projections, in which references to the real are no longer relevant in spite of the retention of half-truths. Rather, this domain designs what may be called a self-referential system which craftily manipulates

"traces" of the real. Thus according to Baudrillard, a television, as the "strategic space of the event . . . [is] a deadly self-reference . . . The real object is wiped out by news – not merely alienated, but abolished" (1994: 56).

TUS may be read in these terms as an allegory of coding and decoding cryptic messages and manipulating them through the radio, the most potent symbol in the text for the reliance of the combatants on deception mechanisms for determining the outcome of the War. At one point, for example, Vicary, rather than simply fabricating the report of one of his imaginary spies for the enemy, really undertakes the journey to the assumed sensitive site for the sake of lending utter plausibility to his concocted observations, and gets his report "encoded into an Abwehr cipher" (212) and transmitted in person by Becker, a real turned agent under Vicary's command. Witnessing the transmission, Vicary exults in "*deceiving* the enemy" contacted intimately through "an electronic beep amid a vapour of atmospheric hiss" (219). The power of this image derives, on the one hand, from the metamorphosis of the enemy through simulations into an easily controlled electronic beep and, on the other hand, from the experience of defying temporal-spatial dimensions of the here and the now.

The enemy, on the other hand, is equally vigilant about the radio's pivotal role. Vogel's exceptional effectiveness lies in his wariness to use it very "sparingly" (432) to communicate with his special agents like Catherine Blake because he understands his success depends positively on using it without interception at the most critical times. The secret radio messages are the English's only means of invisibly interfering with and manipulating the sensitive information sent to the German High Command through Catherine's maneuvers. As Catherine and Neumann attempt their desperate escape from England, they feel handicapped by their inability to freely use the radio (432). Later, the most consequential misfortune that hinders them is that they both lose their radios accidentally, and, at the end, they are overpowered only because the boat they steal does not have a radio while their pursuers' does. The testimony of all these facts shows how the radio, by creating alternative evaluations of space, warfare, power, and most importantly, even human identities, is a major instrument for revising the concept of reality in the novel. It should therefore be best described as an archaic form of virtual reality because it facilitates the same brand of presence-in-absence.

This realization directs deeper attention to the text's other, more literal facets of virtual reality and their role in allowing simulations to usurp history, narrativity and truth claims. Historically, this was just the time that first realizations of the potential of modern mass media to be used as a weapon surfaced exuberantly; an entry in Goebbels's diary emphasized the role of state-governed education "with the aid of films, radio and the press" (Welch, 1993/2001: 49). Accordingly, it is important that mechanisms of simulacra do not only inform the spirit of the headquarters of intelligence officers and their political overlords, which constitute the setting for much of TUS's actions, but also play a significant background role in inscribing a general sense of uncertainty and insecurity in the wartime cityscape. The English War Office's propagandist warnings ensure that an enemy spy has to contend against a society in which the suspicion of the danger s/he poses has been advertised "everywhere: the newspapers, on the radio, in the movies" (285).

However, the very ubiquity of such propaganda and the random inclusiveness of its effects deconstruct its advantages by overdramatizing the actual danger into an overwhelming illusion. Therefore, the novel's first elaborate reference to these objective correlatives of danger and uncertainty denotes extreme authorial skepticism through an implied identification with Vicary's scholarly analytical skills: "Constabularies were being buried by reports of *strangers*, *odd-looking fellows*, or *German-looking gentlemen*. Citizens were eavesdropping on conversations in pubs, hearing what they liked, then telling the police" (24). Thus the notion of reality or truth suffers massively in a world whose ruling norms include endless probabilities precipitated by random application of suspicion. A historian has noted this by stating that the government's worry about the leakage of sensitive information through the general public's stray conversations backfired in "suggesting that the Germans possessed vast spy networks in Britain, a notion wildly out of scale with reality" (Healey, 1993/1994: 38).

In this connection, apart from Vicary's clear-headed skepticism, the text also incorporates very overtly self-contradictory comments about propagandist warnings against spies. Catherine recollects finding a cautioning poster with the hypothetical picture of a markedly seductive woman spy "the most ridiculous thing she had ever seen" (208). The reason for this, told in the foundational narrator's own apparently authentic account is that "she did not know about" (208) about any actual women who may exploit their sexual appeal for espionage. But the fact is both she and her trainer purposefully deploy her beauty and feminine charms for accomplishing her mission and the Abwehr target the widower Peter Jordan in the first place primarily because he is supposed to be sexually vulnerable. The argument's self-contradiction becomes even more inescapable as Catherine's dismissal of the poster as ridiculously unrealistic is coupled with her worry about how such "indoctrination" (208) would have made Jordan "distrustful of a beautiful woman suddenly vying for his attention" (208). It is difficult to rationalize this attitude to propaganda except through the assumption that it distorts TUS' value systems to an extent that makes even the foundational narrator's impersonal commentary encode contradictory truth-claims.

Several meaningful direct references to the phenomenon of films scattered in the novel involve the re-definition of the characters' world owing to the impact of virtual reality. The following three are particularly helpful in deepening the epistemological appreciation of the replacement of binary divisions of illusion / reality and truth / deception with ambivalences.

Firstly, there is the situation in which the wife of an Irish nationalist who hosts and aids Horst Neumann in England is appalled by the extent to which her husband's actions necessitate their permanent displacement. When she confronts the direness of the only possible options open to her, she feels "as if she were listening to someone else's conversation or watching it in a film or reading it in a book" (436). The images, focusing on the fuzziness that synthesizes lived experience and imagined narrative, make one question reality through self-estrangement and self-defamiliarization.

Secondly, as the German spies speed away during their attempted flight from England, Catherine asks Neumann how things are in Berlin. He responds satirically with nationalistic zeal whose superficial idiom makes it spontaneously recognizable as propagandist distortion of

reality, making her quip, "You sound like one of Goebbels's propaganda films" (498). In response, Neumann at once changes his tenor and summarizes the sobering horrors of bombardment on civilian population and low morale in literal terms. In this instance, the reality-illusion interchangeability has two tiers: It is obvious that Goebbels's films are the official means of installing lies as truth even though the extent to which they actually befool people is deeply ambiguous. But it is equally noteworthy that this comment on films' inversion of truth is expressed in a satirical remark, i.e., an idiom that by definition reveals its meaning only when it is inverted.

The third instance figures in Vicary's last interview with Boothby in which he learns the "real" truth behind all the tiers of the deception plans. Boothby magisterially sums up his revelations with a passing remark on fate's sense of designed denouement in Jordan's tragic and accidental death, "I rather liked it, I must admit . . . That's how Hollywood would have done it. And that's what the Germans think really happened" (554). This is the absolute culmination of intermingling patterns of cinematic reality-illusion continuum and the urge for victory that depends on successfully deceiving the enemy. The holistic closure of a Hollywood ending has an ultimate cathartic value but Boothby reverses its connotations of resolution by affirming that it was merely an illusion that cheated the Germans just as he had preplanned. Thus the film metaphor is employed here in an utterance in which the final significance of what "really happened" (554) is trapped by its very syntactic structure in illusions.

### "An Accomplished if Reluctant Chess Player": The Espionage War as a Game of Evasions

Now we turn our attention to the ideological repercussions of TUS' focus on espionage as a game of evasions for another perspective on its liquidation of reality. The Second World War reportedly played a significant role in recognizing the spy's "dark arts of assassination, kidnap and sabotage" (Moorhouse, 2006/2007:158) as "distasteful necessities" (Moorhouse, 2006/2007: 159). Accordingly, when a subordinate assisting Vicary in the maneuvers of evasion expresses a longing to participate in direct battlefield confrontation, the latter admonishes him thus: "When you do your job right you save lives on the battlefield" (190). But taking this a step further, TUS' mode of war completely subverts the traditional view that wartime restricts communal consciousness to "less time, less tolerance, less imagination, less curiosity, less play" (Connolly, 1991: 324-325); both Vicary and Vogel are goaded into incredible feats of "imagination" and "play" by war. Not surprisingly, Baudrillard uses the metaphor of sport in the elaboration of his theory of postmodern evaporation of real warfare; phrases like "the game of deterrence" (1994: 62) and "a miniature war-game" (1994: 62) recur in his comments on the triumph of simulacra over reality.

Similarly, TUS centralizes the metaphor of game / sport to explore the working of deception and espionage strategies – in which success is calculated through the ability of avoiding direct military confrontation – from the beginning to the end. Vicary is firstly introduced in chapter 3 as "an accomplished if reluctant chess player" (24), whose physical appearance, owing to permanent injuries sustained during World War I, likens him to a

dysfunctional "toy soldier" (26). As the crisis builds, Boothby uncharacteristically patronizes Vicary by admitting him to "the next level of the game" (374). To Vicary's protest to the word's usage, he reemphasizes that it is "[n]ot just *a* game, . . . [but] *the* game" (375), and also repeats the same metaphor in another conversation at a far later stage (431). To complete the picture, the enemy spies are equally cognizant of this approach to their (un)real war: Neumann, wisely resisting at one point the expediency with which he could have killed an enemy tracking him, opts for evasion because he realizes "the old rules [of the battlefield] didn't apply to this game" (429), and Catherine also looks at her whole adventure as "a big game" (501). Finally, Vicary's epiphanic realization after the War about the way he has been used metaphorically transforms the entire landscape around him as truth seems to him to be "played out on the hillsides, like the solution of a chess problem . . . Nothing had been as it seemed" (545).

Baudrillard's exegesis of the 1991 Gulf-War as "an orgy of simulation, the simulation of an orgy" (1994: 62) that he claimed to explain with the German word "*Schwindel*, which means both giddiness and swindle, loss of consciousness and mystification" (1994: 62), offers an enlightening commentary on these dynamics. In TUS, the conversion of the most unlikely soldiers into the most promising ones indicates the enormity of overturned rules in the game of giddiness and swindle. At the onset, were it not for enormous pressure, we are told Vogel could have imagined how "funny" (59) the sheer unconventionality of his assembled team of spies, constituted of "a woman, a cripple, a grounded paratrooper and a British traitor" (59), was. But the convoluted norms of espionage vindicate its practicality as it is almost successful in making a monumental difference to the War's outcome.

Baudrillard's use of the term "war-game" (1994: 62) to describe the (un)reality of simulated warfare is especially relevant to the manner in which Vicary is inducted into Intelligence service by Churchill himself. The game metaphor is skillfully integrated into the episode on two levels: as a topic of discussion in the characters' dialogue and as the meta-narratorial evaluation of the situation being played out. On reaching the prime minister's wartime office with its markedly typical atmospheric setting of rattling telephones and "hushed, confessional tones" (32), Vicary is summoned into the totally nonofficial and indecorous privacy of his bathroom. It is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which this scene subverts Vicary's (and the reader's) expectations, with Churchill smoking, drinking, and frolicking in his bathtub throughout the conversation. The two exchange witticisms about their common interest in playing chess and Churchill recruits him a spymaster to work under the command of his apparent antagonist, Sir Basil Boothby (34). The implied inversion of the archetypal historical image of Churchill as an authoritative statesman in this scene can be productively contextualized by a distinction between traditional and postmodernist historical novels: while the former strives to avoid "contradictions between their versions of historical figures and the familiar facts of these figures' careers" (McHale, 1987/2004: 17), the category of the latter "foregrounds its ontological seams by systematically transgressing these rules of its genre" (McHale, 1987/2004: 17). However, Silva's Churchill is ambivalent in the sense of potentially threatening his historical archetype without being anachronistic: This dimension of Churchill's personality can be deduced from comments by his contemporaries in non-fictional historical accounts, who asserted that he

used "every possible dialectical and emotional weapon to ensure" (Roberts, 2003/2004: 129) compliance to his decisions, his tactics including "persuasion, real or simulated anger, mockery, vituperation, tantrums, ridicule, derision, abuse and tears" (Roberts, 2003/2004: 129). As such, it is simply Silva's selection of non-archetypal historical data that jolts the reader's sense of historicity and vindicates postmodernist historiography's principle that "no historian can cover and thus re-cover the totality of past events because their 'content' is virtually limitless" (Jenkins, 1991/2004: 13—14).

Still more complex problematization of reality and representation in simulated warfare is explored in the extraordinary precautionary measures Vicary takes to ensure that his network of turned and fabricated agents presents a seamless semblance of reality to its supposed controllers in Berlin by fabricating convincing personalities for each of them and accounting for "every aspect of their lives" (94). But this very urge for extremely realistic simulations paradoxically also necessitates self-demolition of the entire phenomenon as "Vicary even allowed himself to arrest a couple of them . . . [for] the Abwehr would never believe none of their agents had been lost" (94).

## Conclusion

Daniel Silva's novel TUS can be regarded as a classic literary resource for probing complex debates about postmodern narratology because of its the intertwined tropes of verifiable archival research, discordant temporal-spatial constructs, thematic fusion of binary oppositions like reality and simulations or conflict and evasion, and, most significantly, the dialectical invocation of modernism and postmodernism in its historiographical approaches.

## Acknowledgment

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