



American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture (Penn Studies in Contemporary American Fiction)

Mark Osteen

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Don DeLillo once remarked to an interviewer that his intention is to use "the whole picture, the whole culture," of America. Since the publication of his first novel *Americana* in 1971, DeLillo has explored modern American culture through a series of acclaimed novels, including *White Noise* (1985; winner of the American Book Award), *Libra* (1988), and *Underworld* (1997).

For Mark Osteen, the most bracing and unsettling feature of DeLillo's work is that, although his fiction may satirize cultural forms, it never does so from a privileged position outside the culture. His work brilliantly mimics the argots of the very phenomena it dissects: violent thrillers and conspiracy theories, pop music, advertising, science fiction, film, and television. As a result, DeLillo has been read both as a denouncer and as a defender of contemporary culture; in fact, Osteen argues, neither description is adequate. DeLillo's dialogue with modern institutions, such as chemical companies, the CIA, and the media, respects their power and ingenuity while criticizing their dangerous consequences. Even as DeLillo borrows from their discourses, he maintains a tenaciously opposing stance toward the sources of collective power.

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