



## **Valparaiso**

*Don DeLillo*

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## Valparaiso Don DeLillo

A man sets out on an ordinary business trip to Valparaiso, Indiana. It turns out to be a mock-heroic journey toward identity and transcendence. This is Don DeLillo's second play and it is funny, sharp, and deep-reaching. Its characters tend to have needs and desires shaped by the forces of broadcast technology. This is the way we talk to each other today. This is the way we tell each other things, in public, before listening millions, that we don't dare to say privately. This is also a play that makes obsessive poetry out of the language of routine airline announcements and the flow of endless information.

## Valparaiso Details

Date : Published April 1st 2004 by Pan MacMillan (first published 1999)

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Author : Don DeLillo

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## From Reader Review Valparaiso for online ebook

### Cody says

Testing my theory about novelists normally being lousy dramatists (the McCarthy-DeLillo Axiom), I read this to see if it was an exception. It wasn't. Don't get me wrong, there are some double-and-triple threats out there (the Samuel Beckett Exclusionary Act of 1960), but this is just horrific. An absolute diamond of what problems tend to plague later period Don: pretension, stilted dialogue, and a disconnection from human rhythms staggering in its chasmal gap. By the time the Chorus of airline personal is intoning "Please check your masks/Seats in upright position" in unison and pantomime, one begins to look around for Robert Hays and the rest of the cast of *Airplane!*. I love you, DeLillo, but stick with the books, fella.

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### Eric T. Voigt says

Deadpan bonkers social and metaphysical satire.

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### LunaBel says

#### What Media Has Made Me Become

"Valparaiso" is another deeply satirical work. It is funny, ironic and sad at the same time. In this play, DeLillo focuses on the joke that media makes of us. It follows Michael Majeski a business man who is supposed to go to Valparaiso, Indiana, but instead finds himself going to Valparaiso, Chile. This mistake, or the succession of supposedly innocent mistakes, has led him on a journey he never thought he would live. What is funny is that we do not know much about the travel itself. The scenes are formed as successions of interviews with Michael about the mistake. The issue becomes bigger and bigger, but it also loses its meaning. Interviewers no longer want to know about the mistake itself but about the man who made it, a man who becomes the object of the media which absorbs his identity and leaves him an empty shell...

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### Christopher says

Loved the first act, hated most of the second except for the very end.

The first act is complicated and brilliant. A man who had a silly experience (though there is something dark hiding in the corner) tells his story to the media in a never-ending series of interviews. Over the course of several days of repeating the same words, he starts becomes unable to say anything else; he is a scratched record frantically jumping between the same sentences getting more and more lost in the process. It is devastating.

The second act completely changes structures. The whole act is an Oprah-esque talkshow in which the man and his wife are told to say something that doesn't bore the host. infidelities are cliché, the man's stated story

has been said, she wants something deeper. This part doesn't really come together. The host seems to be too much of a parody to really get into the deepness she is seeking. Maybe that's the point? That people are so willing to be a part of what is expected of them that it doesn't take a particularly savvy interviewer to get the darkness into the light, just as long as a camera is watching and an audience is listening. I know that this sounds like a great idea, and it is, but for me it wasn't fully coming together.

When the fullness of events finally come out in the end, it is rather effective, though I don't think the action on stage is the best solution, it still manages to be powerful.

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## **Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says**

I started reading this while listening to the soundtrack to *Synecdoche, New York*, a film that is centered around a theater director/playwright named Caden Cotard, and as such incorporates his work into the narrative (and features it in a prominent and mind-fuck meta-narrative fashion in the latter half of the film). I felt like there was some kinship between DeLillo's strange play and something this fictional playwright, cooked up in the mind of Charlie Kaufman, would have involved himself with.

The similarities are rather superficial and mainly consist of a general strangeness at moments and a dialogue that, for the most part, is thoroughly unrealistic, though purposely so. DeLillo is well-known for writing in a manner that comes off as cramming the personal musing of nonfiction essays into the the format of a literary novel. Characters appearing more as the chess pieces rather than the players. Et cetera. I have no problem with this approach myself. To me it's just another medium on the rack of media, styles, formats, fonts, colors, tricks, gags, time-weathered techniques, and so on. Just another messenger that I won't shoot on sight, rather, I'll wait to hear what message they bring and then decide.

So, here I find DeLillo ultimately pulls off something interesting. This play has elements of Beckett almost too obvious to mention. It deftly wields that holy trinity of absurdity, hilariousness and seriousness. It keeps a sense tingling within that DeLillo's up to something Bigger than you realize. Leads you along, has you playing detective out of the corner of your eye. Keeps you doubting, buying it, doubting, buying it. Vague and silly one moment, a big serious slap in the face the next.

Oh, the play's mostly about this guy who ends up flying around the world by accident while simply trying to get to Valparaiso, Indiana from Chicago. An event which becomes the centerpiece for what mostly feels like DeLillo's meditations on the Information Age, celebrity culture, how these things shape a sense of self, etc, meditations which are mostly something worth beholding.

There's a Greek Chorus in the role of "television commercials" which are recited in the form of poetic rhyming couplets. E.g.:

*"Cappuccino in a foaming cup  
Anonymous sex with the armrests up  
That's your overnight flight on Air Reliance"*

or

*"A video screen attached to your seat  
Another pacifying baby treat  
That's platinum class on Air Reliance"*

I think that the motif of the exercise bike symbolizes the quasi-paradoxical sense of having traveled far but having not traveled at all. And this naturally segues into some vague ideas about televisual culture.

There's another televisual notion that crops up which is that life is only verifiable if it's on camera. Clearly a comment of sorts on the mass delusions/promulgations of an almost axiomatic connection between fame and self-worth. For the more philosophically inclined, it can get one's engines humming about a variety of epistemic quandaries...

DeLillo certainly gives one some breathing room to figure some of this out on their own without being led by the hand to and/or bludgeoned over the head by a list of opinions chiseled into stone. But every so often he'll throw down a blunt exclamation like "**What's more dramatic than the struggle to become a man or woman in the world? What's more rife with danger and pain?**" and then he'll high-tail it right back to letting you play detective, while still poking your brain, tickling your belly and tugging your heartstrings from backstage.

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### Andrew Shipe says

"It was OK" is a pretty good summation of my thoughts. There are a few premises of this play I liked: the chorus made up of flight attendants and the protagonist seeking to make the most of a mistaken flight. I'm ambivalent about the whole failing-to-find-identity-through-display-on-modern-media: yes, it's a point that is worth making, but it seems like it's been made quite often before, and better. Valparaiso reads like a play written by an acclaimed novelist--probably not even one-tenth the length of DeLillo's normal novel, but still sounds like cold text on a page rather than a script actors can make come alive. Apparently there was recently a production in New York that succeeded--after several other troupes failed--so I guess it can be done. But to me it came off cold.

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### ZaRi says

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### Gavin says

The mood of this book was difficult to grasp. Watching this YouTube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdFC1H...>) of scene clips from a French production of Valparaiso made me realize I was really underestimating the dreaminess at first.

I think one of the main points DeLillo is trying to emphasize is the amplification of the minutiae of our

human experience in today's world of mass communication. Delfina's bit especially. This poor guy made a flight plan error and he becomes a worldwide superstar. But the masses don't care about him. They want short, easily digestible tidbits about his mistake. They bore quickly. They care about what he thought while he was screwing his wife the morning before, or the kind of floss he used to tie a bag around his head in a pseudo-suicide attempt ("Waxed or unwaxed? Because this is what we need to know").

The message is even more apropos in 2012 than it was in 1999. Facebook, Twitter, and mobile phones document every day, practically every second, but only the surface stuff - rarely do they add to the feeling of a man or do they contribute to the sum of a man's life. That deeper stuff doesn't sell as well, and plus "off-camera lives are unverifiable." With so many trivial details ready for rapid consumption, why would anyone bore themselves trying to truly understand a person? "...we can't stop needing. Everything is disposable." Delfina claims that "each life [is] so dense and rich", but I don't think she truly understands what Livia understands - that knowing a person goes far beyond the face-value interview questions or the small-talk. I didn't really enjoy reading this book. I'm not even sure if I really get it. The last fifty pages were positively Out There.

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## **Andrew Schoonover says**

my sparknotes™ review: mixed feelings overall. It is avant garde, and has a very dreamy mood. Theme c Definitely funny but not "HaHA-funny." TW: suicide

I think this play was generally skewed to be read rather than performed. A performance would be stationary and probably confusing. Also, right of the bat, all the quotes from random book reviews on the cover said the play was funny. I didn't realize they meant funny in a grand theatrical sense. I suppose overall the play was funny but it has its own sort of unnerving humor.

That being said, it was very interesting allegory to people (or things) that become famous for no real good reason, e.g. the Kardashians, pepe, Monica Lewinsky, essentially die inside and sell their souls to the social machine! Very applicable to today's meme culture and just social media in general.

I don't feel as though I'm overreaching or "misreading" because DeLillo's dialogue begs this intense, psychological, and critical interpretation. He demands that you internalize these characters and feel what they feel. The same way Real Housewives is so entertaining to some people.

It explores suicide from a very interesting angle as well. \*double spoiler alert\* The juxtaposition of Livia's pregnancy and Michael's suicide is another one of those slightly unnerving, but genuinely interesting dynamics in this book. The play refuss to acknowledge Livia (woah!! she has live in her name!!) and her clamours for attention. She declares her illegitimate baby on live TV and is pretty much dismissed. She represents those who have intentionally sold their souls to the media.

\*tw suicide\*

Searching "famous suicide" on google will render these lists of people who are known because they've killed themselves. Articles from Buzzfeed and trashy gossip pages, to Suicide Prevention websites. Wikipedia has a list of every person who has committed suicide and also has a wikipedia article about them. You can scroll down and read the a description of the life of anybody who was anybody who killed themselves. \*still spoilers\* Henry is in the public eye after his airline escapades, and everything he only deals with his suicide through the lens of a camera. He just repeats these choice phrases over and over again to deflect any inquiry. He even says "I remember dying" (in what I assume to be saying in a dramatic ironic sort of way) to deflect Delfina's inquiries. And it is here at the end that Delillo works his magic with choice quotes like "How do you tell the difference between identity and desperation?" and really chilling monologues equating martyrdom to submitting to the "soulful exposure" of the media.

That's something I can mess with honestly. Delillo talks the talk and also walks the walk.

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## **Shannon says**

This is horrifyingly insightful. Since it is a play, and there is no narration, all the insightful things are said out loud by the characters. Which is part of why it's kind of horrifying, I think. Also, for the first.. about half of the play, i really couldn't figure out what exactly happened with this man (i think the author was intentionally vague), and it made the story seem cryptic and mysterious which was cool. Then when you figure out what happened, you're like "uh.. okay". But the point isn't what happened to him. It was the reaction of everyone. His desire to be interviewed/looked at. Like I said, fucking creepy. I like the (obviously sarcastic) idea that something that isn't recorded doesn't count: it's unverifiable. Overall, this was a brutally accurate comment on the weird-ass world we live in. I really badly want to see this performed live, because, if done well, I think it would be amazing.

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## **David Debacher says**

Best play I've read in a while, although I think I liked the first act a little better than the second. The first act took the (now almost cliché) concept of leaving the reader guessing about the central actions that the plot is based upon to an entirely new level, which made it very hard to put down (I couldn't help finishing the play in an afternoon). The main protagonist spends most of the first act talking to a sea of reporters (all of whom are played by the same two people), repeating the same things over so many times that he starts to lose and confuse himself amidst the endless repetition of his story. Another funny part about the first act is that the reporters continually ask the protagonist to take things back to the beginning, telling the story almost in reverse and infuriating readers, who just want to know what happens next rather than before.

In the second act, the couple at the center of the play are guests on a very strange talk show. Unlike other reporters, who wanted the same story repeated the same way every time, the talk show host wants different and more shocking things. It seems all the media exposure has made the couple drop all their inhibitions, making them all too eager to share things with the host that they have never shared with each other or even with themselves. The ending gets a little weird, but it's still really good and it gives the play a great deal of finality.

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## **Waleed says**

Just about readable because most of the dialogue is a classic DeLillo disquisition on air travel. As a play it must have been torture to sit through. The blurb on the back cover makes the remarkable claim that "This is the way we talk to each other today." It's really not, as anyone who has even a passing familiarity with DeLillo's work would know. One for purists only.

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## **Manasvi mudgal says**

Given that this was a play DeLillo's best abilities of crafting conversation were on display. Other than that it was alright, nothing wow, but the conversations were really amazing. Read it to learn how people talk.

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## Jorge Almeida says

Um engano ao apanhar um avião desvia um homem de Valparaíso, Florida para Valparaíso no Chile. Este incidente insignificante vai coloca-lo à mercê da máquina mediática, sem pronta a explorar os acontecimentos mais irrelevantes e em torna-los temas centrais, que o acabará por destruir.

Uma peça inquietante sobre a busca da identidade, sobre o vazio da alma humana que se descobre para lá do que pensamos superficialmente ser e de como os média se transformaram numa gigantesco aparelho de prospectar o interior das pessoas acabando por descascar camada a camada a personalidade das pessoas e por revelar um enorme vácuo quando o último véu, atrás do qual nos escondemos, é levantado. Neste sentido este é um texto profundamente impregnado de filosofia budista.

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## sologdin says

Dude wants to fly to Valparaiso, Indiana, but ends up in Chile by accident, “a business traveler who blundered into an epic adventure” (38). The play is a series of interviews that follow upon this event, which is presented as though worthy of attention: “a self-commenting super-verite in which everything that goes into the making of the film is the film” (36).

Some cool concepts: a xenological effort insofar as “some stranger had crept inside” the protagonist (34); an implosion of the philosophy of the subject with “Because this is the subject. This is the object” (37).

Some *archival* undecidability in the premise of dude’s travel to the extent that “I don’t know whether it’s the ticket or the itinerary that’s wrong. The ticket has more authority” (54).

Along with this normal DeLillo focus on *douchebag-abroad*, there’s also the cocked up marriage: “[spouse] found new levels of openness since Michael made his breathtaking journey” (30); trauma is transformative insofar as “sex is more intense since [he] made his journey” (77).

Dude tells interviewer to interview parcels of his spouse:

Interview her uterus. That’s where all the plots intersect. Talk to her nipples. Her nipples are sensitive to messages from orbiting satellites. You’ll get some stimulating quotes. Talk to her clitoris. You’ll have to submit questions in advance. The clitoris doesn’t always speak to me. But it will speak to you. It speaks in codes. It speaks in tongues. (48)

Despite this, dude contends that “there are no facts in a marriage” (56). Otherwise characterized as “the squeezing of spaces,” marriage involves an “enforced intimacy” (77).

Nevertheless: “I have orgasms that last all day. I take them to the dry cleaner and the shoe repair” (79)—an indication that the orgasm is quiritary, mortmain, or allodial property in the sense that it cannot be alienated



for the purposes of transfer to another. Text otherwise however insists that “everything’s disposable,” “everything’s replaceable” (97), implying a fungibility of persons that is violative of every ethics I know.

Second Act shifts gears from interview to television talk show presentation. Show’s host enjoins audience:

I am here to declare your specialness. I am here to separate you from the grim business of your nonaudience lives. I summon you to a hyperlife. (63)

He wants them to “cross the critical divide into some plane of transcendence” (64). (This sort of talk should place us back into Derrida’s solicitation of Heidegger in *Aporias*.) Stage direction makes plain “the eerie fluorescence that suggests the hyperreality of a filmed TV commercial potentially viewable in a thousand cities, at twenty-second intervals, day and night, for an indefinite period of time” (68), all the standard indicia of postmodern rootlessness. (“Off-camera lives are unverifiable” (83).)

Key undecidability of the text is whether dude’s fairly pitiful misadventures & cross accidents constitute “self-recognition” or “self-knowledge” (74)—the confrontation of *anagnorisis* with the *gnothi seauton*. The outcome: “We barely recognize ourselves as being whoever we are” (78). Or the other way: “This is a man so deep in self-estrangement he conceals his own actions from himself” (87).

Recommended for those who think the purpose of day is to interpret the night, wearers of erotomaniacal undergarments, and readers who wake in the morning undifferentiated.

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