Event title: A tribute to Don DeLillo: a literary vandal and bad citizen (F123)
9:00am - 10:15am on Friday February 9, 2024
Room 2209, Kansas City Convention Center, Street Level

Event description: A master storyteller, Don DeLillo has engaged American culture with prescience, writing about terrorism, white men with guns, a culture saturated by images and capitalism, and the necessity of the artist on the margins. Despite critics who complain that he is “woefully influential” (James Wood) or guilty of “literary vandalism and bad citizenship” (George Will), the panel will interrogate how DeLillo’s novels perform cultural critique and what we can learn from his craft as teachers and writers.

Event category: Tribute

Event organizer and moderator:
Michael James Rizza is the author of the novel Cartilage and Skin and a monograph about Jameson, Baudrillard, and Foucault, along with various works of short fiction and academic articles. He is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing and the department chair at Eastern New Mexico University.

Event participants
Ted Pelton has authored five fiction titles, numerous articles and reviews, and over 50 published stories, including in BOMB and Brooklyn Rail. He is a Professor of English at Tennessee Tech University specializing in fiction writing, the novel, and American and world literatures.

John Domini has eleven books in print, including novels, short stories, a 2021 memoir, and an earlier selection of criticism. He's written extensively on contemporary fiction, for Lit Hub, LA Review of Books, Brooklyn Rail, and elsewhere. Awards include an NEA; he’s taught at Harvard and elsewhere.


Joseph D. Haske is a writer and critic whose debut novel North Dixie Highway was released in October 2013. His fiction appears in journals such as Boulevard, Fiction International, the Texas Review, the Four-Way Review, Pleiades, and in the Chicago Tribune's literary supplement, Printers Row.

Housekeeping Announcements
Welcome to A tribute to Don DeLillo: a literary vandal and bad citizen.

A few reminders before we begin:
- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, (identify moderator), know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
• Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
• Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
• Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs reserved for those with disabilities.

OPENING MODERATOR REMARKS
• Introduction of all speakers in the order in which they are sitting.
• Brief overview of Don DeLillo biography and books (4 minutes)

PARTICIPANT OPENING REMARKS
• Each person 2-4 minutes

MODERATOR QUESTIONS
1. **Bad Citizen:** Despite the critical and popular success of *Libra*, DeLillo’s 1988 novel about the events leading up to JFK’s assassination, some conservative pundits attacked it, along with the author himself. George Will notoriously calls DeLillo a bad citizen and literary vandal who blames America for Oswald’s actions, while the novel itself offers a “lunatic conspiracy theory.” Jonathan Yardley laments DeLillo’s influence and reputation and charges that DeLillo’s fictive depictions of actual people “are beneath contempt.” In a 1997 New Yorker interview, DeLillo embraced the title of “bad citizen,” saying it is “a compliment to a novelist… That’s exactly what we ought to do. We ought to be bad citizens. We ought to, in the sense that we’re writing against what power represents, and often what government represents, and often what the corporations dictate, and what consumer consciousness has come to mean.” Can you provide an example of where you see DeLillo’s work engaging in bad citizenship or, in other words, how and where do you see his work performing cultural critique?

2. **Literary vandal:** Jonathan Yardley says that *Libra* “is notable for its lack of interesting prose, its deficiency of wit and -- this, perhaps, most surprising of all -- its failure of the imagination.” Can you point to an instance in DeLillo’s work what impressed you about his craft, such as a sentence, a scene, the overall structure of a novel?

Q&A SESSION