

LIVING IN A SIMULACRUM: HOW TV AND THE SUPERMARKET REDEFINES REALITY IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

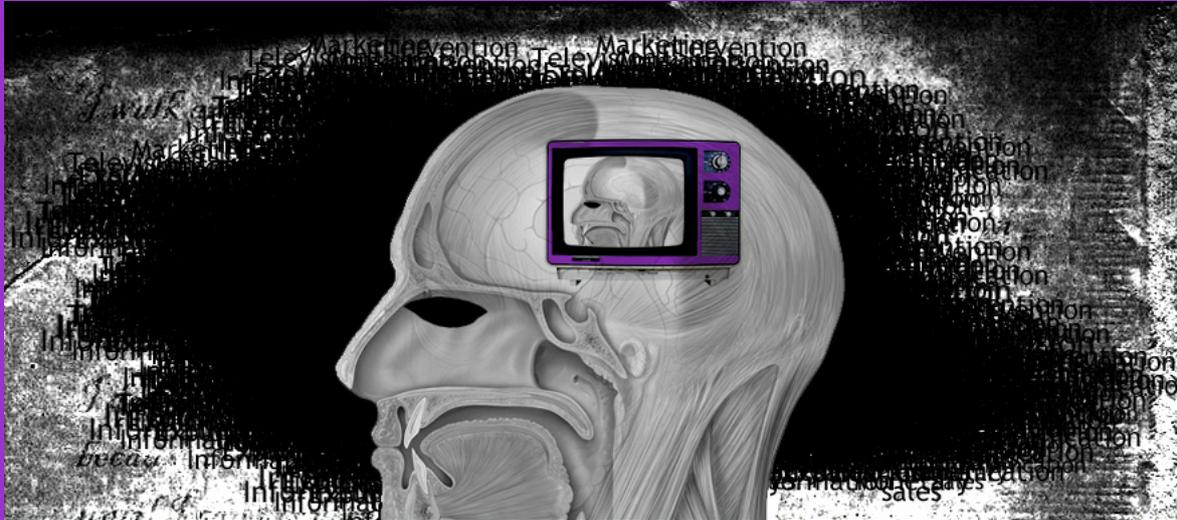
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Recommended citation || GHASHMARI, Ahmad (2010): "Living in a simulacrum: how TV and the supermarket redefines reality in Don DeLillo's *White noise*" [online article], 452°F. *Electronic journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 3, 171-185, [Consulted on: dd / mm / yy], <<http://www.452f.com/index.php/en/ahmad-ghashmari.html>>.

Illustration || Juan M. tavella

Article || Received on: 15/02/2010 | International Advisory Board's suitability: 22/04/2010 | Published on: 07/2010

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Summary || This paper examines the impact of simulation, hyperreality, and consumerism on Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. It discusses how the novel pictures technology and mass media as an empire of signs and codes that erase or implode meaning. TV, radio reports and tidbits, and medical imaging devices are intertwined with many aspects of people's lives in this late capitalist culture. Furthermore, the paper will shed some light on the issue of hyperreality which is generated by simulations. We will see how this new type of reality becomes more real than reality itself. Then, the influence of the supermarket and the emergence of consumer culture will be discussed. We will see how production and consumption have gained a new different meaning in this new «superficial» society and how it reshapes people's understanding and interaction with reality.

Keywords || Postmodernism | Don DeLillo | 20th Century American Fiction | Simulacrum.

If a work of art can picture the scene of postmodern America in the eighties, with the impact of technological mediations and the role of the shopping center in the emergence of consumer culture, it is undoubtedly Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. This novel can simply be described as a postmodern critique of contemporary American life. It is no wonder that this novel won the National Book Award immediately after its publication in 1985, and it also marked the increase of DeLillo's fame and readership. The novel skillfully tackles the major aspects of postmodern life; it depicts the electronic and technological effects on the meaning of everyday life in the postmodern age. It also sheds light on TV as an essential icon of this era. People are shown to be living their lives, behaving, believing and disbelieving according to TV. The supermarket—or the hypermarket—is also shown as a new place that controls people's lives and gives them a new meaning in the post-industrial, consumer culture.

To begin with, TV, as shown in the novel, is one of the most influential technological devices in contemporary life. It plays a tremendous role in the life of individuals, to the extent that it has changed the criteria of reality and truth. TV has become the new reality—or more real than reality itself. In *White Noise*, TV is as important and influential as the protagonist of the novel, Jack Gladney. It fills the world of the novel with its buzzes and fragments and it pops up every now and then to interrupt the actions of the novel. TV seems to control all people; they believe nothing but TV. As Leonard Wilcox in his essay, «Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise* and the end of Heroic Narrative», puts it, «*White Noise* is bathed in the eerie glow of television» (Wilcox, 2003: 355). Murray Siskind, Jack's friend and colleague at College-on-the Hill, a lecturer on living icons, is one of the characters who embraces TV as the new source of knowledge and a generator of contemporary life, he describes his experience:

You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth. It welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound...look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles...the medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently. (DeLillo, 1985: 51)

Murray's description of this experience shows how the hyperreality of TV, generated by «the network of little buzzing dots,» though unreal, is considered something more real than the real, and how the viewers have to surrender all their senses to this source of information. But why do the masses have to succumb? And where is the role of the recipient in this process?

Responding «innocently» or passively, according to French theorist Jean Baudrillard is a kind of receiving information and rejecting

meaning, or what he calls «non-reception.» He describes this as «the strategy of the masses» which, he explains, «is equivalent to returning to the system its own logic by doubling it, to reflecting meaning, like a mirror, without absorbing it» (Baudrillard, 1988: 59). Baudrillard argues that privatizing individuals is the main function of the media, and this happens through making the recipients live in the simulacrum, especially that of TV. In this way, they have no choice but to refuse meaning and accept the images as mere signifiers. This means that meaning is absorbed and devoured by the media, or it is «imploded» by the media. This idea of «the implosion» of meaning and the social in the media was first proposed by Canadian theorist, Marshall McLuhan. In his book *The Medium is the Message* (1967), McLuhan believes that the media are not a source of socializing in which we have interaction between the medium and the subject; on the other hand, the message is imploded in the medium. Accordingly, all contents of meaning are absorbed in the medium, and only the medium or the form is what matters regardless of the content. In this way the medium becomes the message.

Like Baudrillard and McLuhan, DeLillo believes that TV is the medium and the message, and that is due to the process of simulating images from models and codes that refer to nothing in real life. Murray Siskind takes TV as a fetishistic object; he tells Jack how his life changes when this device enters it, «I've been sitting in this room for more than two months, watching TV into the early hours, listening, taking notes» (DeLillo, 1985: 50-51). Murray doesn't deny that TV is a hyperreal simulation, and that it doesn't go beyond the picture pattern of its screen. Though he describes the experience as «Close to mystical,» he knows, deep inside, that it is, «sealed-off, timeless, self-contained, (and) self-referring» (DeLillo, 1985: 51).

What is more striking, as it is clearly described in *White Noise*, is that TV transforms death and catastrophes into spectacles. People watch scenes of horror and devastation and feel excited and thrilled by them. The Gladneys gather around the TV set to watch disasters, and they excitedly call out for each other to come and watch. They watch plane crashes and volcanic destructions, and they feel intrigued. Jack once questions the «ecstasy» people feel when watching disasters transmitted on TV; he wonders «Why is it, that decent, well-meaning, and responsible people find themselves intrigued by a catastrophe when they see it on TV?» (DeLillo, 1985: 65). DeLillo describes this feeling as natural and he ascribes it to the viewers' desire for a break-up with «the incessant bombardment of information» (DeLillo, 1985: 66).

It is worth mentioning here that the narrative style of the novel is, in one way or another, similar to the narrative of TV. Like TV, the novel provides an influx of information, especially those contained

in the dialogues of the Gladneys, but the meanings of which are imploded. Those dialogues, most of the times, seem endless and out of context; they are totally meaningless; they don't intend to give meaning or exchange it, but they are misleading and self-reflective. An example of this is a dialogue between the Gladneys about «Dylar», an experimental drug which Babette, Jack's wife, used to take in order to forget about her fear of death:

«What do you know about Dylar?»
«Is that the black girl who's staying with the Stovers?»
«That's Dakar,» Steffie said.
«Dakar isn't her name, it's where she's from,» Denise said. «It's a country on the Ivory Coast of Africa.»
«The capital is Lagos,» Babette said. «I know that because of a surfer movie I saw once where they travel all over the world.»
«The Perfect Wave» Heinrich said. «I saw it on TV.»
«But what's the girl's name?» Steffie said.
«I don't know,» Babette said, «but the movie wasn't called The Perfect Wave. The perfect wave is what they were looking for.»
«They go to Hawaii,» Denise told Steffie, «and wait for these tidal waves to come from Japan. They're called origamis.» (DeLillo, 1985: 81)

This dialogue—which doesn't end here and goes on to include other irrelevant topics—is similar to the experience of zapping or switching between TV channels, where one faces a chain of floating signifiers without reaching the final meaning. It is similar to «the implosion» of meaning in the media, where the spectacle of the dazzling medium, and the way the message is delivered are more important than the meaning of the message, which becomes marginalized or «imploded» in the process. Where is meaning in the above-quoted dialogue? And is the first question about «Dylar» answered? Jack comments on this loss of meaning in the sum of information released by the media, saying that «the family is the cradle of misinformation» (DeLillo, 1985: 81). This shows the great influence of TV on the traditional myth of the family. After the emergence of TV as an essential part of every house, families, like the Gladneys, have been disintegrated. All the dialogues and exchanges of information among the family members have started to be similar to that of TV, where meaning is always «imploded.»

Another similarity between the diegetic technique of *White Noise* and that of TV is the fragments that appear every now and then in the novel and which resemble the ads on TV. The novel is filled with an influx of fragments with abandoned meanings that interrupt the course of the actions in the novel. There are so many examples of these scattered throughout the novel. Some of these fragments come from TV interrupting the actions. Others appear as advertisement-like phrases, which find their way to the body of the text as expressed by Jack. Murray calls these phrases «chants» and «mantras,» and it seems that in this contemporary consumer

culture such phrases do not only control the conscious but also the unconscious of consumers. DeLillo's use of them through his narrator aims at showing how people like Jack become haunted with the «mediaspeech» and the advertisements, to the extent that they might utter them unconsciously. For example, Jack once suddenly says «MasterCard, Visa, American Express» (DeLillo, 1985: 100). Though this phrase seems out of context, it comments on consumer signifiers that only float in a chain of signification that does not refer to any substantial signifieds. Another example is Steffie's uttering of brand names in her sleep, «Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida» (DeLillo, 1985: 155). This also shows how consumer objects might influence consumers' dreams and unconscious. (This episode will be discussed in detail later in this paper). A third example of these phrases is «Random Access Memory, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, Mutual Assured Destruction» (DeLillo, 1985: 303). These seemingly out of context phrases are uttered by Jack when he sees the other face of America, which is characterized by sheer chaos, in his journey to kill Mink, the scientist who created Dylar and manipulated Babette.

If we bear in mind that DeLillo, here, is imitating TV narrative, this use of fragments is, then, justified. These fragments can serve as the equivalents of TV commercials. According to McLuhan, this is an essential part of the role of the medium in imploding the message and the meaning it bears. He believes that these «seconds sandwiched between the hours of viewing» allow no chance for the narrative form. He affirms that the nature of TV commercials is «influencing contemporary literature» (McLuhan, 1967: 126). At some early stages of TV's emergence as an essential part in everyday life, it was bombarded with sly criticism for this very issue, i.e. the interruptions of commercials. McLuhan argues that the reason for such criticism is people's failure to understand that TV is a different reality—hyperreality—«which demands different sensory responses» (128). John Fiske, in his book *Television Culture* (1987), also comments on the TV narrative. He believes that advertisements are moments that interrupt the narrative and help to implode the meaning. He asserts that, «the inevitable sequence of cause and effect that marks the progression of traditional narrative to its point of resolution is constantly interrupted in television by advertisements, promos, spot announcements, and so on» (Fiske, 1987: 145).

Through the processes of simulations and their tremendous impacts on the superficiality and depthlessness of contemporary life, technological devices, like computers, start to prioritize hyperreality and make it more real than reality itself. The «SIMUVAC» event in the novel supports this idea. When Jack and his family evacuate their home due to the «Airborne Toxic Event,» they were tested by a team of technicians in a process called «SIMUVAC,»—a short

form for «simulated evacuation.» Jack later finds out that though the accident is real and the evacuation also is, this team is doing the real evacuation «in order to rehearse the simulation.» Using reality as a secondary testing for hyperreality means that hyperreality has the priority and that it is the new order of reality, i.e. more real than the reality we know. The real evacuation that is caused by the horrible «Airborne Toxic Event» is dealt with as a mere rehearsal for something more important, which is the simulated evacuation. What is more interesting is that this real evacuation seems chaotic and disorganized, whereas, later in the novel, when the team carries out the simulated evacuation, it looks organized and very orderly.

The «SIMUVAC» team explains this process of simulation as the new rescue measure, through which future disasters would easily be prevented. It is simply the fear and the violence of the real that make people wish for simulations and hyperreality to take over their daily lives. One of the team technicians says, «The more we rehearse disaster, the faster we'll be from the real thing» (DeLillo, 1985: 205). He also uses an example of people's daily worries and suggests that simulating hyperreality would be the solution, «Life seems to work that way doesn't it? You take your umbrella to the office seventeen straight days, not a drop of rain. The first day you leave it at home, record-breaking down pour.» (DeLillo, 1985: 205) Baudrillard in *Simulations* offers a detailed explanation of the process of simulation and how simulacrum is generated out of codes and models into the realm of hyperreality:

Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all models around the merest fact –the models come first, and their orbital (like the bomb) circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events. Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation, this precession, this short circuit (no more divergence of meaning, no more dialectic polarity, no more negative electricity or implosion of poles) is what each time allows for all the possible interpretations, even the most contradictory –all are true, in the sense that their truth is exchangeable, in the image of models from which they proceed in a generalized cycle. (Baudrillard, 1983: 32)

The simulacrum is what people willingly want to believe; they rely on it to explain everything in their contemporary lives. In *White Noise*, the Gladneys refer to what is seen on TV or said on the radio to interpret the daily events. Heinrich refuses to trust his senses in observing the weather and chooses to believe the radio instead. He believes that all what is broadcast on the radio is true. Heinrich says:

«It's going to rain tonight.»
«It's raining now,» I said.
«The radio said tonight.» (DeLillo, 1985: 22)

Here, Heinrich hypothetically surrenders to the media message, which he believes to be truer than the fact that it is actually raining at this moment. This dialogue shows Jack's dilemma as a late modernist (dis)placed in a postmodernist society. He tries and struggles to cling to the beliefs and metanarratives of science and common sense. He comes into clash with a world dominated by the image and ruled by the simulacrum; a world characterized, in Lyotard's motto, by «the incredulity towards metanarratives» (Lyotard, 1979: xxiv). This is what postmodernity is all about. Jack tries to defend what he believes in, based on the empirical evidence of his senses that it really is raining right here and right now, and that, according to him, it is unacceptable and not commonsensical that «just because it's said on the radio... we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses» (DeLillo, 1985: 22-3). Heinrich, from the perspective of a postmodernist, answers his father that this contemporary life of simulacra has found human senses wrong most of the times, it is the image, the broadcast, the computer that we have to believe. Heinrich concludes this by saying, «this has been proved in the laboratory» (DeLillo, 1985: 23).

Though a late modernist, Jack is not able to escape the influence and the hyperreality of the simulacrum. There is a considerable difference between Jack's life before and after his computerized checkup during the «Airborne Toxic Event» by the «SIMUVAC» team. Jack's life changes according to the data on the screen, especially when these data ensure his exposure to the poisonous gas, «Nyodene Derivative,» and that his death becomes impending. Jack wonders how this happens, and the technician answers him that, «I didn't say it. The computer did. The whole system says it.» (DeLillo, 1985: 141) The way the technician says this is as if he is referring to something that is all-true and all-knowing: It is the simulacrum; it is the surrogate omniscient god. To Jack, it is something he doesn't accept easily, and it stirs in him great fear and restlessness, but deep down, he starts to believe that this hyperreality «just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that» (DeLillo, 1985: 141).

The simulacrum, which becomes the dominant feature of contemporary life, expands to include people's feelings of illnesses. People have come to believe simulacra more than their direct personal perceptions even about the symptoms of illnesses. Steffie and Denise suffer from *déjà vu* after the «Airborne Toxic Event», and Babette suggests that the solution to this is to keep the radio turned off,

«So the girls can't hear. They haven't got beyond *déjà vu*. I want to keep it that way.»
«What if the symptoms are real?»
«How could they be real?»
«Why couldn't they be real?»
«They get them only when they are broadcast,» she whispered. (DeLillo, 1985: 133)

We may refer here to Baudrillard's three orders of simulacrum. This event is an example of the third-order simulacrum in which the image precedes the origin or effaces it. Baudrillard differentiates between «feigning,» which belongs to the first-order simulacrum; and «simulating,» which belongs to the third-order simulacrum. Interestingly enough, he also gives an example of illnesses; he says, «Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms.» (Baudrillard, 1988: 168) He argues that feigning only masks reality but the difference is there, while in simulation it is rather impossible to know what is false and what is true. He also adds that, «Psychology and medicine stop at this point, before a thereafter undiscoverable truth of the illness.» (Baudrillard, 1988: 169) Psychology and medicine only deal with reality, but when it comes to simulated symptoms of diseases, they stop to function, and medicine loses its meaning because it only knows how to cure real and true illnesses.

So we have seen that symptoms of diseases can be simulated, and since they are simulated, they too belong to the realm of hyperreality; therefore, they cannot be falsified. To go back to *déjà vu*, it is interesting to note something important about this symptom, which also can be simulated. *Déjà vu* itself is a simulacrum since it is a mental image that precedes the original event. If we later come across a resemblance to the simulacrum in real life, we measure how much this real resemblance is real according to the pre-generated simulacrum, which proves then to be more real. The best example of this is the aforementioned «SIMUVAC,» in which the real is marginalized when compared to the simulation, so the real works as a rehearsal to the simulated which, in turn, becomes more real than the real. In the same way, *déjà vu* is a simulacrum generated in the brain long before the real thing happens; when the real thing happens later, we measure its reality according to the simulacrum: *déjà vu*.

One of the most important aspects of postmodernity is the failure of signification, the endless chain of signifiers that do not reach transcendental signifieds or final meanings. In *White Noise*, and in the episode of *déjà vu*, DeLillo draws a very significant image of the floating signs and the endless chain of signifiers. We know that it is normal that people have *déjà vu* about things in their daily lives, but

DeLillo gives an intelligent example which I call «the *déjà vu*-ing of *déjà vu*.» This happens when Jack and his wife Babette talk about the *déjà vu* their kids have, at that moment Babette notes that,

«This happened before,» she said finally.

«What happened before?»

«Eating yogurt, sitting here, talking about *déjà vu*.» (DeLillo, 1985: 133)

Babette here has a *déjà vu* of *déjà vu*, which is like having a dream of having a dream. Images, which refer to images ad infinitum, explain the superficiality and depthlessness of postmodernity. The postmodern atmosphere is filled with a proliferation of images and codes, and any traces of originality are out of question. When Murray takes Jack to visit a place known as «THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA,» they couldn't experience the real existence of the barn, as if the real barn has disappeared and is replaced by signs of it. Murray tells Jack, «no one sees the barn...once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn.» (DeLillo, 1985: 12) The postmodern era, according to Baudrillard, is characterized by a clear triumph of the image over originality; he even describes the process as «the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real» (Baudrillard, 1988: 170). He thinks that in the past, this «murderous capacity» of images was preceded by a capacity of representations as mediation to the real that «a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange,» (Baudrillard, 1988: 170) but now the whole system of signification has collapsed and become weightless, «it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum» (Baudrillard, 1988: 170).

In the episode of the barn, it is the same thing; the image and the sign have declared their triumph over the real, and they even have effaced it. DeLillo, in his description of the barn, focuses on images, signs, cameras, photographs, and photographers more than the real barn itself, and he also describes how people come to this place not intending to experience the real but rather to capture images. Images of the barn are what tourists seek not the barn itself, to the extent that they take pictures of people taking pictures, and this supports the idea of the floating signifiers and images that don't intend to go beyond the surface, and which only refer to other images. Roland Barthes in his book *S/Z* (1974) comments on postmodern photography that it is characterized by the lack of originality. He argues that in this era all art is a copying, and he sees also that the process does not consist of copying the real but in copying what is already a copy. In a reminiscent nostalgic moment to the lost reality, Murray says:

What was the barn like before it was photographed? he said. What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can't answer these questions because we've read the signs, seen the whole people snapping the pictures we can't get outside the aura. We're here, we're now. (DeLillo, 1985: 13)

Murray's final words «we're here, we're now» can be interpreted as that the main impact of the era of simulation on everyday life is that it eradicates any sense of past or future. According to Baudrillard in his famous book *America* (1986), people, especially in contemporary America, live in «a perpetual present...in a perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs» (Baudrillard, 1986: 18).

One of the major issues that DeLillo depicts in *White Noise* is the emergence of the consumer culture in the postwar, postindustrial society. Consumption, in this new culture, has gained a new different meaning. People no longer buy goods for their use-value, or because they are in need; on the contrary, as we see in the novel, people shop because they feel an ecstasy caused by the spectacle of the goods. The supermarket, the mall, and the hypermarket have become a Mecca for consumers in postmodernity.

In the new consumer culture, the experience of the real has faded away and reality is struggling to death. The supermarket offers open spaces, meticulous designs, bright colors, all goods of all kinds, and all these create «the spectacle» which seduces or entices the consumer into buying even if they don't have any intention to buy. According to Baudrillard, the supermarket «goes far beyond consumption, and the objects no longer have a specific reality there: what is primary is their serial, circular, spectacular arrangement» (DeLillo, 1985: 55). In the opening pages of *White Noise*, Denise and Steffie argue about Babette's habit of buying things she doesn't need or even eat. Denise says that, «she thinks if she keeps buying it, she'll have to eat it just to get rid of it. It's like she's trying to trick herself» (DeLillo, 1985: 7). In consumer culture, it starts to be «shopping for shopping's sake,» and this is exactly what we hear from Jack when he shops with his family at the mall, when he felt so «expansive» because he shops. He says, «I shopped for its sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandize I had no intention of buying, then buying it» (DeLillo, 1985: 84).

Like the TV screen, the supermarket is the venue where the image and the simulacra have declared their triumph over reality. Shoppers are attracted to colors, sizes, and the packaging; the surface is what draws and grips their attentions and ignites their desires to buy items regardless of their need for them. While in the supermarket Murray notes that:

Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material. But it's psychic data, absolutely...All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases. It's just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability. (DeLillo, 1985: 39)

The consumer culture creates a world dominated by commodities, advertisements, and consumption. The supermarket, with its spectacle of goods has effaced reality and replaced it with a hyperreality in which the surfaces replace the real products. It puts the consumer in a vertiginous or delirious state. The ecstasy which consumers feel while shopping make them perceive this «emptiness» or, what Jack Gladney describes while shopping, as «the sense of well-being, the security and the contentment these products brought...it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being» (DeLillo, 1985: 20).

In the supermarket, the main arena for consumer culture, goods tell the shoppers who they are, and shoppers try to search for answers to their daily lives' questions in the things they buy. Suffice it to say, they search for identity; the new consumerist identity. In an essay entitled *Living for Ethics: Responsible Consumption in Everyday Life*, Nil Ozcaglar-Toulouse observes:

It seems difficult for a responsible consumer to develop and maintain a coherent sense of being in a consuming society. The consuming society has gradually turned out to be a constraint, a moral or an institution imposed upon the consumer. In this societal model, individuals seem to be or feel uniformed. The search for uniqueness and «self» becomes difficult because of the anguish and awkwardness related to the risk of marginality. In the consuming society, consumers express their extended self through their purchases. (Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2007: 423-24)

In contemporary America, TV culture and consumer culture are indispensable. Multinational corporations have manipulated TV and other mass media to turn the whole world into a consumer globe. TV advertisements, as shown in *White Noise*, have a great impact on consumer behaviors. According to Christopher Lindner this «shows consumer objects hijacking the thoughts and driving the imaginations of a mesmerized spectator. It speaks of a mind turned into consumer practices and desires.» (Lindner, 2003: 139) TV advertisements have turned the consumer consciousness into a commodity-saturated one. In *White Noise*, Steffie is the epitome of the internalization of the whole consumer culture, to the extent that her unconscious has become colonized by commodity. We see the first symptoms of this when Jack sees her sitting in front of the TV set, looking attentively and moving her lips, «attempting to match the words as they were spoken» (DeLillo, 1985: 84). Later on, all this consumer invasion of Steffie's unconscious is shown when she utters

brand names in her sleep. Jack watches her in amazement, «She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise.» (DeLillo, 1985: 155) But here, is the internalization of the consumer culture an integral part of every child's brains only? Or is it that of the unconscious of the whole consumer society? I think DeLillo's use of the word «child» here is either ironic or metaphorical. It can be ironic, when the first reading might be understood as that the society is not invaded by the consumer fetishism and that only children are influenced by it. Another example of irony is that when Jack notices Wilder «trying to grab items whose shape and radiance excited his system of sensory analysis» (DeLillo, 1985: 167). Do only children, like Wilder, feel mesmerized and intrigued by the colors and patterns and packaging, which make them want to shop for shopping's own sake? I think he is cynical here, for we have seen the whole society behaving this way in the supermarket, in which reality and meaning are lost in the play of surfaces and only colors and shapes can grip the consumer's attentions.

On the other hand, if we consider DeLillo's use of the word «child» as a metaphor, we have to consider his use of the word «old.» In the same episode when he describes Wilder's attempts to grab the items in the mall, he also mentions that «elderly» people look lost in the dazzling «hedgerows» of the mall. I think DeLillo, here and in other places in the novel, is using the word «child» to refer to «postmodernists» and the word «old» to refer to «modernists.» Jack says, «Older people in particular were susceptible to news of impending calamity, as it was forecast on TV by grave men standing before digital radar maps» (DeLillo, 1985: 167). He, more than once, shows old people as puzzled, afraid and lost in this new postmodern society. Mr. Treadwell, the blind old man to whom Babette used to read tabloids, is an example of those old people DeLillo describes. Treadwell and his sister get lost in the mall and stay there for several days, until they are found confused and frightened. Being lost in a vast shopping center can be interpreted as late modernists' inability to cope with the tremendous changes that occurred with the coming of the era of postmodernity.

White Noise is a novel which takes you in a tour into the postmodern world of contemporary America. DeLillo has succeeded in presenting a work of art that portrays America as a fully fledged postmodern culture. For DeLillo's characters, contemporary American reality has become completely mediated and artificial, and that is due to the intrusion of the mass media, especially of TV and radio. These technological devices have turned reality into hyperreality. People start to feel estranged by the real, and they seek refuge in the simulated. TV, with its glowing images and endless buzzes, intrudes

in every aspect of human lives. The mass media have contributed to the emerging of the consumer culture. People feel dazzled by the delirium and the simulacrum of vast shopping malls and supermarkets. Such spaces create a virtual reality in which people have different perceptions of everything. As long as they leave this hyperreal place, they start to feel sad. People start to feel estranged from reality. Jack, after coming back from shopping says, «We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone» (DeLillo, 1985: 84). To Jack, this hyperreality, which is based on surfaces, images, codes and signals, is still impossible to explain because it has no origin and bears no resemblance to reality. Jack expresses his anguish over this when he says, «What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second. But nobody actually knows anything» (DeLillo, 1985: 148-49).

To conclude, technology offers people the chance to float deliriously in a hyperreal simulation leaving behind them any reminder of the violence and the horror of real death. Murray describes the supermarket as a place that recharges people spiritually; he says, «It prepares us, it's a getaway or pathway» (DeLillo, 1985: 37). The supermarket is a «getaway» from the real. People also try to eliminate the sense of death through buying and consumption; they feel an ecstasy when they practice excessive shopping. Deep down, people know that this sense of ecstasy and euphoria created by technology is short-lived, and soon after they are through with the delirium of TV, the cinema or the supermarket, they return to the real, which is, for them, dreadful.

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