**Introduction**

Contemporary American fiction enjoys a prominent place in the literary world today. Over the years, American fiction as a genre has gradually progressed from the periphery to the centre, making itself as the most popular and most critically acclaimed genre in the contemporary literary world. It reflects America’s distinctive cultural and political life and the metamorphosis of its specific concepts like American Exceptionalism and American Dream. Throughout its history, American fiction has perpetually reinvented itself with the changing political, social, and cultural factors. But it was in 1960s, a period that marked the apparent end of anxiety and paranoia following the two World Wars with the rise of John F. Kennedy as the president of the United States of America and his subsequent assassination that was captured live on television, American fiction reached a new level of complexity. The product of the changes that took place since the decade of the forties and showed its strong prominence in the sixties was Postmodernism which emerged in response to postmodernity. Postmodernism attempts to lay bare the rationale behind the socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and political transformation that the American society has undergone since 1960s, philosophically. It is the reordering and revaluation of art, music and literature.

The trends in contemporary American fiction are the result of these tumultuous changes. The writings that ensued reflect significant link that was developing between intellectual life and political power. As the times went on to be more intriguing by happenings like Cuban missile crisis, assassination of Kennedy in Dallas in 1963, Vietnam War, rise of civil rights movement, free speech, women-empowerment, anti-war protests and the campaign to replace official politics with a radical, and revolutionary New Left agenda, the alliance between the writers and politics seemed to be growing. The literature produced during this phase, accordingly, captures the contradictions and conflicts of its culture. Various writers kept experimenting with form and content of the fiction. Postmodernism constructs a discourse of deconstruction and reconstruction, creating a fiction that indulges in the same process as well. While recording the changing spirit of America, Vladimir Nabokov writes, “Men have learned to live with a black burden, a huge aching hump: the supposition that “reality” may not only be a dream. How much more dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being aware of reality’s dream-like nature
were also a dream, a built-in hallucination.” In other words, the neo-realist spirit and existential anxieties were being supplemented by new forms like black humour and absurdism. Nabokov, a modernist like Beckett and Borges, built a platform for his postmodern successors with his writings that reflected anti-realist scepticism, a sense of absurdity and self-awareness.

The new American fiction aims to present a panorama of history and reality of American society which showed it not a home of opportunity, hope, and humanity but a matrix of altering power play, vast network of technological systems and conspiratorial structures and colossal threat to the notion of self. Malcolm Bradbury captures the mood of that phase by quoting two prominent novelists, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow, of that time in his book *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction* as:

In a famous essay of 1961, “Writing American Fiction”, Philip Roth declared that American realities were now growing so absurd and incredible that they were the envy of any novelist and his fiction, like that of others began exploring the unreliable borders between the outward world of history and the imaginary life of fiction. In 1963 Saul Bellow observed in an essay, Some Notes on Recent American Fiction”, that the forces of public power and energy were becoming so massed in American life that they drove private self back into hiding, causing fiction to lose touch with its humanistic and moral function.

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The writers used history in a parodic and disruptive spirit, rewrote historical figures imaginatively in their novels, playing with the fluid boundaries of fact and imagination thereby undermining the concepts of realism. Fiction writers believed that since the world outside was over-written and over-plotted, the novel could only deconstruct this world. In other words, postmodern writers break the conventional boundaries by mixing the genres of fact and fiction, real and imaginary thus making the text a mixture of various possibilities. The novels became self reflexive; treating fiction’s subject as fictionality itself. The fixed, authoritative, chronological text was exhausted and instead plurality reigned the writings.
The radical experimentation done in postmodern literature is an extension to the modern focus on form. Among the critics, postmodernism is commonly understood as a reaction against the Modernist movement, but in terms of literature, it was not a reaction but an extension of many modernist movements. Malcolm Bradbury in *The Modern American Novel* notes that postmodernism has been regarded as an end as well as continuity of modernism. The postmodernism, Bradbury writes, assumes that

\[ \ldots \text{the arts retain an avant-garde duty, but that the duty now has a lack of definition; these are the arts of those who come after, but also look before} \ldots \text{avant-garde revival was as behavioural as it was aesthetic. It celebrated youth, the momentary event, the instantaneous cultural experience, dropping out taking drugs. It disturbed established forms, genres and cannons and all official structures of power. It also provided a lively environment for serious artistic experiments, and from it grew a new approach to all forms of writing. (198)} \]

It has revived the spirit of avant-garde by using random techniques, mixed and merged styles, and provisional methods like hippie movement, black arts, performance and fringe theatre, bob prosody etc. Postmodern writing, however, was also the critique of the rigid art ideology of modernism. The existential crisis in the absurd modern world was replaced by more self-examining and open ended form of fiction. It discouraged the idea that the world could be represented through word, and questioned the authority of the narrator. The writers challenged the conventional codes of representation and found the necessity of new modes of experimental expression. It facilitated a new mode of experiment with new experiences, a new consciousness, and, above all, new playful possibilities for the imagination unaffected by the frustrations of existential alienation and over-serious devotion to awareness. For this reason literature produced during this period is also known as experimental literature with its roots dated as far back as 1910. With its origin in Europe it spread its roots as far as America with writers pushing the boundaries to new horizons. Experimental literature has close associations with historical avant-garde as it majorly contributed to the development of experimental literature.
Being a key word in the topic of the thesis, it is imperative to draw the history of avant-garde from its genesis to its various phases of evolution. Borrowed from the French military jargon, “avant-garde”, means advanced guard, or vanguard. It aims to create works that are experimental in the sphere of art, culture, and politics. European in nature, it spinne from modernism and yet was different from it in pattern; it was loosely termed as historical avant-garde in its nascent stage (by Peter Bürger). In the twentieth century, it travelled as far as America and transformed into neo or contemporary avant-garde. The term avant-garde was primarily pertinent to cutting-edge works of art and literature during the nineteenth and twentieth century. David Cottington in *The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction* quite aptly defines and distinguishes between avant-garde artists and art as such:

> The qualities of the arts that we call ‘avant-garde’—art practice (in its broadest sense) that sought to say something new in its time, to acknowledge the implications and potential of new (including popular, mass) media, to stake a claim for aesthetic autonomy, or to challenge prevailing values—emerged . . . in the mid nineteenth century, and were bundled up in an attitude and an aspiration that we call ‘avant-gardism’, before there were enough aesthetically radical artists to make up that community which we call ‘the avant-garde’. (4)

Cottington, quite efficiently attempts to study a related distinction between the noun ‘the avant-garde’ and the abstract noun ‘avant-gardism’, which condenses those qualities to form an attitude. To sum up, such qualities in art that sought to say something new, to acknowledge the significance and potential of emerging media, to declare aesthetic autonomy, to challenge the status quo materialized in the mid-nineteenth century and were studied under avant-gardism and created distinct groups of artists called avant-gardes.

Though avant-garde is a hallmark of modernism, yet there is a major difference between the approach of their works. While the avant-garde was a formation, a network of identifiably distinct social groupings based on common cultural attitudes and practices, modernism referred to the ways in which artists of all kinds have articulated their experiences of modernity, whether they have been in avant-garde groupings or not. Another difference is that while the avant-garde used
drastically new ideas to express and reinforce dramatic political and social changes and implored on associating art with the praxis of society, modernism, on the other hand attempts to celebrate modern society without connecting art work back to life. In fact, modernism insisted on the autonomy of the art work and was radically separated from the culture of everyday life, programmatically distant from political, economical, and social concerns.

Cultural historian, Matei Calinescu in *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, published in 1987 notes that the journey of the term avant-garde was started as a result of the French Revolution, when it acquired undisputed political overtones. Although the first periodical which held this specific word in its title was a military one (*L'Avant-garde de l'armée des Pyrenées orientales*, a journal that appeared in 1794), it didn’t deny its revolutionary political stance. This journal was committed to the defence of Jacobin ideas and was intended to reach, beyond military circles, a broader audience to make them patriots. The French revolution of 1789 was a major event in European history that brought a rupture with the past on which the consciousness of change and modernity were founded. This event shaped the consciousness of many thinkers and artists who then imagined a society modelled on state-technocratic socialism. In arts, the earliest use of the term avant-garde is recorded in 1825 essay by a French social reformer, Benjamin Olinde Rodrigues “The Artist, the Scientist, the Industrialist.” He was the follower of Comte de Saint-Simon, French socialist theorist and one of the chief founders of Christian socialism, who propagated the idea that artists possess the power to be the leaders and shapers of the society. It is, in this context, Rodrigues, in the essay, consigns the artists, the scientists, and the industrialists to serve as the avant-garde of the society:

> It is we, artists, who will serve you as an avant-garde [in the struggle toward socialism]: the power of the arts is indeed most immediate and the quickest. We possess arms of all kinds: when we want to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marbles or canvass... What a magnificent destiny for the arts is that of exercising a positive power over society, a true priestly function and of marching in the van (i.e. vanguard) of all the intellectual faculties! (210)
Used in a non-military context for the first time, avant-garde, as a group of conscious artists were implored to employ their faculty of imagination rather than reason because it is the latter that had brought the society to its present impasse. Olinde Rodrigues believed that artists, through their art, hold the power to any social, political, and economic reform. By apprehending the role of artists as being way ahead of all the other agents of change, he paved a way for the artists of the future generation to break the barriers of conventional thinking and apply their genius to create new works that help the society to get better. Hence, the initial approach of avant-garde in the society was utopian. Over the centuries, avant-garde that started as a utopian project went through its metamorphosis and became a buzzword in cultural field. It eventually gave rise to a plethora of sub-movements like Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism and so forth during the early twentieth century and, later on, got mingled with pop culture, earning itself a new terminology called neo or contemporary avant-garde.

Two seminal books that study the origin and evolution of avant-garde art vis-à-vis historical art are *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968) by Renato Poggioli and *Theory of Avant-Garde* (1984) by Peter Bürger. Both the thinkers consider newness and radical experimentation to be the dominant features of the avant-garde. However the two differ on certain grounds. While Poggioli considers avant-garde as simply having experimental dimensions, Bürger makes the political edge in such art an imperative feature. Bürger believed that it is important for art to break away with the institution and its status of being autonomous. Poggoili placed the rise of avant-garde art with romanticism where as for Bürger it commences with movements like, Dadaism and Surrealism and terms it as “historical avant-garde.” Whereas, Poggioli doesn’t believe that avant-garde is dead. Bürger announced its demise with the finishing of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, hence declares it historical.

Avant-garde first appeared in the field of fine arts, and began to be associated with radicalism on account of its up-to-datedness and its essentially critical to existing conditions; thus, it acquired political nuances. In his 1968 *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Renato Poggioli reviewed the development of avant-garde and described two major phases in the development of the avant-garde. According to his study the first stage is anchored in the leftist politics of the 1840s and 1870s, where the notion of advanced guards serves to authorize the political and underground activities that helped trigger
the revolutionary events of 1848 and the Paris commune. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the baton of the avant-garde is transformed from politics to aesthetics, as manifested in the new stridency and shock value possessed by the art movements as Dadaism, futurism, and surrealism. By 1968 the avant-garde had become a theoretical movement fiddling with the concerns like the extent to which and how far, would the historical avant-garde keep shifting between political and aesthetic and the possibility of its success in achieving its goals in these two fields. In simpler words, Poggioli summed up the stages of avant-garde as thus—the “political” moment of the 1840s and 1870s, the “aesthetic” moment of the 1920s and the “theoretical” moment of the 1960s.

Other than the French Revolution that fortified avant-garde, there were other factors like, decline in religious belief, and social changes following the Industrial Revolution that led to its proliferation. Due to the impingement of commercial values in every sphere of life, followed by entrenchment of capitalism, many artists felt a deep sense of alienation in a materialistic bourgeoisie society and began to reflect critically upon it. Ironically, the avant-garde claimed to be recognised in terms of autonomy: complete independence freedom from the mainstream, whether aesthetic, political or social. The cultural capital of Europe, Paris, particularly witnessed the ambivalent character of the autonomous avant-garde art as it reflected an absolute confrontation between art and society. The artists resisted against the conventions, the commodification, and the complacencies of established art forms. In 1863, Napoleon III, on receiving complaints from various disappointed artists, who were rejected by the French government and the Academy of Fine Arts sponsored Paris Salon, decided to give a respectable place to the art work that was rejected by the jury of Exhibition in another part of the Palace of Industry. Thus, Salon des Refusés (Exhibition of Rejected Artists) was established to offer an alternative to the standards of the Academic-run, ‘establishment’-oriented official annual Salon, comprised of paintings that the jury had rejected. However, the initiative was affronted with collective resistance and ridicule from the conservative tastes of Salon’s clients and the public. Thus, driven to the periphery of the art world, these artists sought alternate ways for acquiring fame and recognition by performing in informal groups. These groups comprised of artists, writers, and musicians who worked together to promote and contest new ideas and practices, about which the writers then wrote in a flourishing
gamut of petite magazines. In this context, David Cottington in *The Avant-Garde: A Very Short Introduction* notes:

Thus, by default as much as by intention, through government commercial policy as much as in rejection of commercial values, a community of non- or anti-establishment artists, writers, writers, and musicians gradually cohered in Paris towards the end of the nineteenth century, making works in the respective media that reflected their aesthetic marginality—that were in consequence often experimental and . . . expressive of . . . alienation. (8)

Subsequent to all these developments informal and coherent community of radical artists was formed which aimed to articulate the facets of modernity. Such works not only reflected the discomfort of the artists in the materialistic and profit driven society but also their assertion for a public role of painting, in defiance of its steady market-led privatization thus making their work political. One such attempt was made by Georges Seurat’s friends, whose painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886) was avant-garde, articulating the experiences of modernity and clearly standing in contrast with the conventional Impressionist paintings of that time. This painting was not exhibited in up-market private galleries polished with the tastes of the privileged ones or in the annual salons of art establishment, whose juries often rejected the most innovative entries. The painting was rather exhibited in the makeshift temporary shelters of the new, juryless and populist *Salon des Independants*, created for the purpose in the Tuileries Gardens. As the name implies this group resisted the mainstream academic art and conveyed its anti-establishment stand.

Peter Bürger and Andreas Huyssen observe that the historical avant-garde of the 1920s was the first movement in art history that turned against the institutionalized art and mode in which autonomy functions. In this manner, historical avant-garde as an art movement differed from the previous ones whose mode of existence was determined precisely by an account of autonomy. Andreas Huyssen in *The Great Divide* notes:

The most sustained attack on aestheticist notions of the self-sufficiency of high culture in this century resulted from the clash of the early
modernist autonomy aesthetic with the revolutionary politics arising in Russia and Germany out of World War I, and with the rapidly accelerating modernization of life in the big cities of the early 20th century. The attack goes by the name of historical avant-garde, which clearly represented a new stage in the trajectory of the modern. (vii)

Between 1910 and 1914, using the interpretation of art as a radical movement to challenge the status quo of artists and their established art, historical avant-garde manifested itself in various art forms. The artists thus created a network of unconventional ideas and propagating them through their art. Fauvism arose in 1905 as an art movement led by the painters, Gustave Moreau, Henri Matisse and André Derain in their expressionist works. In 1907 artists like Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso experimented with the surfaces of geometrical planes in their paintings promoting the artistic movement of Cubism. Developed in Italy in 1910, by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, Gino Severini, and Giacomo Balla, Futurism was an artistic and social movement of Italy which aimed to demonstrate the calibre of the machine-age. Traces of the movement of Futurism are witnessed in the poetry distinguished by discordant medley of images and by minimalism. Till now these cardinal avant-garde movements were confined to art but with the rise of the Great War, even literature began to change. Then in 1916, an anti-establishment manifesto, Dadaism, rose in Zurich and New York in reaction to the World War I, as a cultural movement which influenced not only visual arts, but literature (mainly poetry), theatre, and graphic design too. The movement was strengthened by the works of Marcel Duchamp, Hans Arp, Max Earnest (in sculptor), Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, and Tristan Tzara (in literature). The Dadaist works are anti-bourgeois that defy logic, reason and aestheticism of the modern capitalist society and translate nonsense and irrationality of the times. Branched out of Dadaism, Surrealism is a twentieth century cultural movement developed in Paris but spread out to other parts of the West due to the First World War. The term is coined by French poet, Guillaume Apolinare in his play Les Mamelles de Tirésias. André Breton hailed the movement as a revolutionary one. In order to present the colossal damage of the World War I on the world, surrealists employed discordant juxtapositions and fantastic images to represent the unconscious of the humans as they found that realism and rationalism were the reasons behind the breakout of the Great War.
These movements were liquidated by the rise of fascism and Stalinism and its remnants were later retrospectively absorbed by modernist high culture to the extent that modern and avant-garde became synonymous terms in the critical discourse. David Cottington traces the evolution of avant-garde as thus:

Where the years before 1914 had been ones of consolidation, those between, roughly, 1917 and 1933 were ones in which the formation was shaped by the triangular field of economic, political, and social dynamics that led to what we might describe as its institutionalization. One such dynamic was the widespread determination to reject the values that had led to the recent catastrophe, to build a new and better world in which its repetition would not be possible. A second was the momentum of a rapidly developing international and monopoly capitalism, on the model of which cultural avant-gardists developed the informalities and rudimentary procedures of the pre-1914 network into a more formal set of protocols. The third dynamic was that of the Russian revolution of 1917. For network of self-consciously technically radical artists in all media, whose alienation was . . . aesthetic, institutional, and social at one and the same time, the example of the Bolshevik revolution opened a political dimension to their situation and their aspirations. (18-19)

It was the rise of Nazism that forced many artists to flee Europe as early as 1930s and nestle in New York that was already a melting pot of cultural assimilation. The modus operandi and strategies adopted by avant-garde movements during the first quarter of the twentieth century in America became the insigne of the aesthetics of modernity vis-à-vis European modernism. However America’s avant-garde community restructured itself by adding new dimensions with the changing world. America’s thriving control of global capitalism encouraged the growth of a network of wealthy collectors of modernist art and patrons of modernist culture. In the initial years their inclination was towards European art as it had already earned a reputation which encouraged the art collectors to see a secure financial investment. But gradually they began to sponsor home grown culture the result of which was the foundation of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929 primarily by Abby Aldrich Rockerfeller, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan where they collected modern art. It came to be
identified as one of the largest and most influential museums of modern art in the world. It collectively raised the status of both European and American contemporary art, producing a lineage for distinct possibilities of experiment that would prove quite significant in years to come.

After the Second World War, the opulent classes in America which were unable to find good investment markets in wartime found newly expanded consumer market manufacturing Cadillac instead of cruisers. Such development gave rise to the market for contemporary American art which, consequently, consolidated New York avant-garde, also known as neo-avant-garde. American avant-garde proved to be an important tool for a dominant social class for whom the patronage of aesthetic innovation, bereft of any political connection, was a mark of cultural distinction. In this context, the Museum of Modern Art played a significant role. With the help of a few critics, other galleries and government policies and organisations, it promoted and supported the work of the American avant-garde artists. American avant-garde in comparison with the shackled political art of the Soviet, apparently enjoyed depoliticized aesthetic freedoms but aided America’s programme of ‘Cold War’ propaganda. Here it is worth referring to David Cottington who notes:

[I]ronically, it used for political purposes an Americanized modernism whose apparent autonomy, or independence from politics, was central to this very consecration. The co-option of the avant-garde, and of avant-gardism, seemed then complete. It was a co-option summarized, in a way, by the Pop Art movement in America, which in the 1960s seemed, with few exceptions, content to share consumerism’s values, and to borrow its sometimes tawdry glamour, blurring or testing the boundaries between modernism and consumer culture . . . and its artists were rewarded by the ready patronage of nouveau-riche collectors who delighted in such art. (20-21)

Moreover, the avant-garde also re-emerged as a political and critical tool on account of various happenings in the second half of the twentieth century like the students protest movement of 1968, rise of modern art school, brewing anger of the women’s movements and expressed itself in art that subverted its own status quo by different means.
The utopian avant-garde of Saint-Simonian sociologists restyled into radical iconoclastic cultural movements of the first half of the twentieth century and eventually fell into the clasp of capitalism as, it took over the entire West and during twentieth century it excelled in various phases. Various critics like Perry Anderson, Matei Calinescu, and Andreas Huyssen perceive that avant-garde died in the second half of the twentieth century. Peter Bürger in the *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, published in 1984, pronounced avant-garde ‘historical’. By doing so he wanted to state that the calibre of the avant-garde has reduced to just another historical term. The escalating growth of consumerism that defined western capitalism included the burgeoning of its commercialised culture which produced popular culture because of its technological and socio-economic factors. David Cottington outlines these factors as such:

Technologically, the new cafe-cabarets that lined the new boulevards, the new music-hall entertainments, soon to be followed by cinemas, that nightly drew huge urban crowds, were lit by modern gas, electric, lighting and were promoted colour-lithographed posters and notices in new mass circulation newspapers that were themselves funded by such advertising. Socio-economically, the new populations flocking to the cities to find work found their lives shaped by the demands of production schedules and work discipline, their leisure time regimented by the factory clock, their leisure pastimes driven by the profit motives of a developing culture industry and policed . . . by the state. (77)

Cottington’s observation also reveals that because capitalism has high financial involvement in popular culture and thus the new social order which came into being in a newly urbanised society because of capitalism had to undergo the “process of re-education of its workforce to acquiescence in its highly unequal social relations, if obtaining of its bread could be left to the people, the provision of its circuses needed to be ensured” (77). In other words, capitalism strengthened consumer culture to grind its own axe. But it was done in such notorious way that it didn’t seem that the commercialised popular culture was being imposed on the society and as such it (the society) took an active part in shaping the popular culture. In bourgeois society what this field of cultural production manufactured was purely aesthetic which focussed
more on the form of the art and the specific institutionalization of the commerce with art.

Opposing this phase of aesthetic intensification, Futurists like Bruno Corradini and Emilio Settimelli in their 1914 manifesto, “Weights, Measure and Prices of Artistic Genius,” insist on the need for “the state to create a body of law for the purpose of guarding and regulating the sale of genius” (146), as surprisingly, even “in the field of intellectual activity fraud is still perfectly legal” (146). They attempted to dispose off all the market based valuations of artworks as aesthetics that could be amassed by the collectors. They propose a neoteric concept of what art can be when measured in terms of value that goes beyond artworks’ aesthetics. Both of them believed that the work of art is capable of communicating a social effect. They questioned the aesthetic value of art and asserted that artworks have the potential of generating social movement. By convening this neoteric basis for appraising art the authors of the manifesto were implicitly repudiating the thriving capitalist system which was the parent cause of development of the demesne of aesthetics. For this reason they rejected entire system of productive forces that reduced art to aesthetical and cultural capital. They profoundly established their stance against art’s autonomy from other spheres of productive enterprise. Hence, evolves the avant-garde’s primary slogan, ‘art into life.’

Peter Bürger, in the essay “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-Garde,” points that in order to discard art’s autonomy it was imperative to bring art into life. According to Peter Bürger, avant-garde worked on two principles: the attack on the institution of art and the revolutionizing of life as a whole:

Both principles go hand in hand, indeed they mutually condition each other. The unification of art and life intended by the avant-garde can only be achieved if it succeeds in liberating aesthetic potential from the institutional constraints which block its social effectiveness. In other words: the attack on the institution of art is the condition for the possible realization of a utopia in which art and life united. (696)

Avant-garde explored the ways to revolutionize the world by dissolving the distance between art and life. However, as Peter Bürger notes, this version of avant-garde
culminated with the rise and tour de force of culture industry. The avant-garde still works on the concept of “art into life” but within the confines of capitalism. Hence, he notes, that the journey of the twentieth century avant-garde is the story of decadence: from radical and revolutionary movements to simulacra, from épater la bourgeoisie (to shock the bourgeoisie) to a tool of capital market. The distance of the artists from the productive forces is de rigueur for avant-garde and it is the lessening of that distance that motivated Bürger to proclaim the death of avant-garde.

Art critic, Clement Greenberg in his Marxist influenced essay “Avant-garde and Kitsch” written in 1939 had aptly argued about the rise of a phony, fake, and mechanical culture that he calls as ‘kitsch,’ a German word to describe the low, concocted form of culture. In the essay, he asserts that the only chance for avant-garde to survive kitsch culture was to assert its autonomy, i.e., to make art about art. His aesthetic views gained prominence in 1940s and 1950s when advertisement industry was flourishing. In the post-war American society when the pent-up wartime savings were invested in advertisement industry. Eventually, avant-garde collapsed into commodity culture thereby producing another ‘ism’ called postmodernism for whose supporters the alliance of commerce and culture was a new prospectus for saving art from the ghetto of self-referentiality of high culture. David Cottington sums up the co-option of avant-garde into commodity culture as thus:

The original idea . . . of art itself as in the vanguard of the society, showing it the way forward by the light of its imagination, as . . . the Saint-Simonians conceived it, had declined into either a ‘high’ culture whose necessary self-referentiality insulated it from contamination by ‘kitsch’ at the expense of social relevance, or a dystopian caricature of those hopes of an integration of art and society. (93)

As the grip of postmodernism strengthened in the western world, the above mentioned faces of avant-garde culture fused into another concept of ‘creative industries’ which has been reviving national economies since then. Postmodernism blurred the boundaries of art and kitsch, opened the market for cultural creativity. It became clearer that the attempts of avant-gardist to dodge the commodification were ineffectual but also that avant-garde culture had gained a reputation that attracted the industries of popular and commodity culture. The market in New York was also
affected by the changing political scenarios like the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the rise of the women’s liberation movement, the murder of two Kennedys and Martin Luther King. As a result, art forms with political connotations emerged. This period witnessed not only the moment of the collapsing of avant-garde art into commodity culture but its reassertion as an ideology—“a war-cry against a capitalist society and its culture that were perceived to be rampant, callous and complacent” (Cottington 97).

As power and social accessibility of commodity culture escalated, its capacity to shape the art and the role and character of the art of avant-garde also grew. For the avant-garde artists this was a major concern as they didn’t want their art forms to disintegrate into popular culture. Avant-garde art sought to create a space between high culture of the dominant classes and low culture of the dominated ones. Gradually, avant-garde artists “raided popular idioms and conventions, and incorporated them into their experimental works, as a means of harnessing that vitality without simply capitulating to it” (Cottington 81). Many art forms gained momentum in opposition to the marketization of contemporary art and its coming under the sovereignty of private museums. Minimalist artists like Robert Morris, Donal Judd, ‘land art’ of Richard Long and Robert Smithson, conceptual art of Sol Lewtt, institutional critique of Hans Haacke and a thousand women artists such as Judy Chicago, Mary Kelly, showed enough capability for bringing commotion in the smooth running of capitalist culture.

In a seminal essay, “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts” (1983) art historian Thomas Crow suggests that avant-garde should be seen as a ‘resistant subculture’ which he defined as a class of “certain members which attempts to resolve difficult and contradictory experience common to their class but felt more acutely by the subculture recruits” (20). Borrowing from the low-brow culture for the creation of avant-garde art was corresponding to symbolic resistance—a message from the margins not only in the inclusion of its intruder material, but in the manner of its use in their work as well.

Against this notion, French cultural sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979) thought that
borrowing of motifs from popular culture, avant-garde sought to gain power and status within mainstream society and not against it. He observed:

Intellectuals and artists have a special predilection for the most risky but also most profitable strategies of distinction, those which consist in asserting the power, which is peculiarly theirs, to constitute insignificant objects as works of art or, more subtly, to give aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art, but in another mode, by other classes or class fractions (e.g., kitsch). (282)

These artists belong to the dominated class of the society and borrowing motifs from the very class which detests those qualities and experience is their way to assert themselves as artists to raise their social status.

Whether gaining power and status within mainstream society or against it, in the second half of the twentieth century, avant-garde was perpetually shifting between avant-garde culture and commodity culture. Avant-garde culture was torn between “a retreat behind the stockade of ‘high’ art and a capitulation to the seductions, and the dynamism, of a ‘low’ commodity culture that now had the cultural upper hand” (Cottington 90). It is in this context, that Crow later in his essay suggests that the moment of borrowing “is followed by retreat—from specific description, from formal rigour, from group life, and from the fringes of commodity culture to its centre. And this pattern marks the inherent limitations of the resistant subculture as a solution to the problematic experience of a marginalized and disaffected group” (29). His essay concludes with the observation that avant-garde has reduced to a kind of research and development tool of cultural industry and thus stops being oppositional.

**Avant-garde in Literature**

Because of technological revolution, which introduced printing on both sides, economical methods of producing paper from wood pulp rather than expensive rags, the number of novels, poetry, and plays published saw a tremendous increase. What followed was the blooming of the culture of ‘little magazines’ in Europe in the first quarter of the twentieth century. They functioned as mouthpieces for various political ideologies and provided training, work and some financial assistance to the upcoming writers as well. In 1905, Lenin wrote an essay, “Party Organisation and Party
Literature” in which he chalked out a programme for the vanguard of the revolutionary forces in Russia. He asks:

What is this principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, “a cog and a screw” of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.

As capitalism gained momentum, artists and their professions began to be watched over and weighed by a thriving hierarchy of qualifications and accolades. Renato Poggioli in *The Theory of Avant-Garde* points out that the bourgeois capitalist society stimulated commercialisation and dequalification of language and resulted in the degeneration of language. This degradation of language stimulated a critical conscious as a revolt that gave rise to the “cult of novelty and even of the strange” (50) in avant-garde art. Avant-garde writing developed as a reaction to the flat, opaque, and prosaic nature of the public speech, “where the practical end of quantitative communication spoils the quality of expressive means.” (30). The language of modern fiction, according to Poggioli, had a social task of functioning as cathartic and therapeutic in respect to the common language that was on the curve of decadence through conventional habits “in bourgeois, capitalistic, technological society” (107). It focussed on linguistic creativity, aesthetic principles opposed to those of the mainstream. Avant-gardists, however, were primarily sceptical towards the language itself.

Jochen Schulte-Sasse, however, apprehends Pioggioli’s historical and theoretical criteria too unspecific and says that “. . . his arguments cannot accomplish what must be the primary task of a “theory of the avant-garde”: to characterize with theoretical accuracy the historical uniqueness of the avant-garde of the 1920s (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, the left avant-garde in Russia and Germany)” (x).
There was a critical consciousness towards this degeneration of language that Jochen Schulte-Sasse in the “Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde” captures as thus:

...the degeneration of language are pervaded by an awareness of the interrelation of various sociohistorical developments: bourgeois-capitalist society, mass culture, the poet’s stance against this development, the consciously esoteric character of “high” literature, and the like. Rousseau in France Karl Phillip Moritz and Schiller and the Romantics in Germany, and (somewhat later) Wordsworth and Coleridge in England discussed the division of labour and its influence on literature; the experience of alienation of reason; and the domination of social interaction by exchange value, expressed by the terms “self-interest,” “interest,” “amor-propre,” and “economic egotism.” (ix)

This trait can be identified in the late eighteenth and the entire nineteenth century. Jochen Schulte-Sasse stipulates that the reason that these sociohistorical themes influenced literature and aesthetic theory is that the book market was an important part of the eighteenth century national economy. Writers also voluntarily became a part a part of this system on account of their need to compete with the mass appeal of popular literature.

Many writers picked up from the outer world to create complex meta-texts of political and social satire to express the major concerns and problems of their society manipulatively approved by those that run the system. Such concerns drew together a wide and disparate variety of experimental and innovative legion of writers like Thomas Pynchon, Philip Roth, Paul Auster, Cormac McCarthy, and Don DeLillo. Their works also reflect the voices of surfiction: the blurring of distinction between the fact and fantasy, the past and present, the conscious and the subconscious language crisis of the age; the loss of exterior referent and human subject etc.

Of all these writers, Don DeLillo has taken the enduring power of literature coupled with the explosion of new media technologies and his avant-garde art producing an oeuvre of literature that projects issue of global terrorism, rampant consumerism, environmental catastrophes, and covers subjects as diverse as nuclear
war, politics, economics, sports, Cold War, the advent of digital age, death, power of violence, influence of mass media on the society, expansion of US military and economic power etc that have collectively transformed the production of fiction. With sixteen novels, and three plays to his credit he has acquired a status of a quintessential American novelist. Winner of National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner award for Fiction, PEN/Saul Bellow, the Jerusalem Prize, Don DeLillo was born on November 20, 1936 as Donald Richard DeLillo, in an immigrant Italian family living in the Bronx, New York. Don DeLillo had little interest in literature until he was 18, when he describes being carried away by the power and beauty of language. Studying Communication Arts and working in advertising helped him develop a range in his novels. Besides this, modernist fiction of Joyce, Faulkner, Hemmingway, and O’Conner; jazz music of Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, Mingus, and Coltrane and post war cinema of Antonioni, Godard, and Truffant affected his way of thinking and the way he writes. In an interview titled, “A conversation with DeLillo: Has Terrorism Become the World’s Main Plot?” DeLillo mentions the European and Asian cinema of the 1960s playing a major role on his writing:

European and Asian cinemas of the 1960s shaped the way I think and feel about things. . . . I went to the movies a lot, watching Bergman, Antonioni, Godard . . . the American films I saw as works of art. Perhaps, in an indirect way, cinema allowed me to become a writer. In *Americana*, my first novel, the main character ends his journey with a camera on his shoulder, making home movies. There's a phrase in a Godard movie that refers to the young people of 1968, “the children of Marx and Coca-Cola.” In *Americana* a character refers to the “children of Godard and Coca-Cola.” (95)

DeLillo’s fiction extensively reflects upon his concern about a writer’s relationship with his or her contemporary culture that is in the grip of hyperreality, mass consumption, global terrorism, cybercapitalism etc. To capture all this in his fiction DeLillo employs the avant-garde techniques as a means of resistance against the commodified culture. Just in the tradition of avant-garde, drawing upon avant-gardist techniques provocatively juxtaposed with his writing style, his work shocks the readers into a new awareness and stand on a fluid relationship between his politics
and his aesthetics, between modernism and postmodernism, between the historical avant-garde and mass culture.


DeLillo’s work attempts to represent the contemporary culture and constitute regular subject matters which are made provocative and complicated by his innovative ideas. He believes that in American milieu which runs on the wheels of capitalism and rampant consumerism it becomes imperative for the artists to make their art a weapon against the consumer consciousness and other socio-economic and political structures. The main threat for the contemporary novelist, according to DeLillo, would be to lose the sight of vantage point from where he observes and to be assimilated in the system. In an interview published in *Vogue* titled “Seven Seconds” DeLillo states:

The writer is a person who stands outside society, independent of affiliation and independent of influence. The writer is the man or woman who automatically takes a stance against his or her government. There are so many temptations for American writers to become part of the system and part of the structure that now, more than ever, we have to resist. American writers ought to stand and live in the margins, and be more dangerous. Writers in repressive societies are considered dangerous. (45-46)

Only by distancing himself from his society can a writer offer a meticulous account of it. Through his work DeLillo undertakes to create a discourse on the role of writers in the society. He has expressed his belief in fragmented, yet artistic way in his novels
and public statements. To sum up the corpus created by the author projects that the duty of the novelists is that of a watchman who is in charge of observing reality of the society and denouncing its failures.

In another essay, “The Artist Naked in a Cage,” published in the New York in may 1997 DeLillo draws parallels between three men in cages: Russian performance artist Oleg Kulik, Franz Kafka’s hunger artist, and Chinese nonconformist Wei Jingsheng because all three of them lived in cages, willingly or forcefully. By proposing this analogy, DeLillo tries to realize his belief that art can be used as a tool to confront the established exploitative and repressive structures and systems. In this context, he writes about the consequences of Chinese rebel’s imprisonment by the state as this—“The deeper they control him—the more remote the cell, the smaller the cell, the colder and stonier the walls of the cell—the more vivid and living is the writer” (7). It is DeLillo’s irony of this juxtaposition, a living writer opposing the state that is simultaneously killing him, that tries to accomplish what Wei, locked in a cage, could not: to use art as a way of confronting the public with Wei’s incarceration. Philip Nel in the article, “A Small Incisive Shock” reacts to the essay as such:

DeLillo’s language [is] a kind of performance art that functions in apparently opposite ways. In the tradition of the avant-garde, it can shock the reader into a new awareness of the material world; however, just as any avant-garde invariably gets absorbed by the culture it strives to critique, so DeLillo’s style can at times replicate the structures of power that it wants to oppose. And DeLillo realizes this. His comments . . . indicate an awareness of how fine a line there is between shock and complicity…. It . . . offers a “small, incisive shock” and registers the anxieties and repressions of the world in which he lives. The ambiguities in his writing are both provocative and merely representative, actively shocking and passively matter-of-fact. (725)

In other words, DeLillo believes that it is only art which can absorb and neutralise the threats of the established system. His novels like Cosmopolis (2003), Falling Man (2007) and Point Omega (2010) are either populated by performance and conceptual arts or artists who attempt to subvert the patterns of conventional system.
On the same lines Peter Bürger in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* examines the importance of art as an institution which is associated with the praxis of the society. He notes that in order to engender in the audience a “critical cognition of reality” (50), it is important for avant-gardists to reintegrate art into life. From this perspective, DeLillo’s fiction, by merging with the praxis of life, opposes the system while he himself stays away from socio-economic and political structures. This aesthetic marginality that he attempts to achieve helps him to fulfil the avant-garde duty that Saint-Simonians had propagated as early as the nineteenth century. By becoming what futurists called a “social outcast” DeLillo measures the failures of the society he is part of. His fiction demonstrates that writing is as good as performance art that is capable of provoking the readers. He makes use of sharp ironic juxtapositions to depict how language can have psychological effect on the readers towards which a writer and performance art aspire. DeLillo’s language aspires to achieve the status of formalist perfection and performance art. For DeLillo, it is the alienation of the writer that can construct an opposition to the forces of consumer culture. The subject matter chosen by DeLillo in his fiction remain connected to postmodern culture paving the way for the contemporary writers to create a space in their works that act as a counter force to the manipulation of consumer culture.

Peter Knight in “DeLillo, Postmodernism, Postmodernity” quite aptly describes the how and why the artists lose the radical experiments to cultural demands of the contemporary world. He notes:

> When the once-shocking paintings of the impressionists or Picasso end up on the towels, when the writings of Joyce, Stein, Eliot and Woolf end up as standard cannon-fodder for first-year English majors, when the utopian architectural plane of LeCorbusier end up as the high-rise nightmares of postwar housing estates, and when the music of Stranvinsky becomes the sound track for a commercial, then there really is nowhere left for aesthetic experiment to go to as artists lose their special claim to authenticity, uniqueness, and resistance to the status quo. (28)

It is writers like DeLillo that quite skillfully make a way out of this impasse by playing self-reflexivity in their fiction. The major shift from modernism’s “art for
art’s sake” to the culture of commodification transformed the forms of authentic expressions into cultural wallpapers of contemporary life. In the face of this transformation modernist art became just one more commodity in the marketplace. DeLillo through his novels like, *Mao II*, and *White Noise* has been warning that mass culture is synonymous with totalitarianism, fascism, and communism.

Since the main objective of this research thesis is to attempt to study DeLillo as a contemporary avant-garde, one way of understanding such oeuvre, that resists any unification, is to study it through the critical prism of postmodernism, something that arises from artists and writers who were disillusioned of radical promises of the avant-garde modernism to change the world, as noted by John Barth in “The Literature of Exhaustion.” That DeLillo has a great affinity with the early twentieth century avant-garde in particular and modernism in general than with other contemporary postmodernist writers is examined by critics like Philip Nel who argue that “DeLillo’s work is not so much a rupture with the modernist world as it is a continuation of the modernist avant-garde, applying its critical potential to contemporary American life” (99). The critics have analysed his recurrent interest in modernist writers such as Joyce and Faulkner and in artistic techniques such as cinematic montage, conceptual art, and Ekphrasis. Although much water has flown down the bridge, critics still fail to decide whether to read Don DeLillo as an exemplary of American literary traditions or as a radical postmodernist. Glen Scott Allen in “The DeLillo Dilemma” contests:

> Neither placements seems quite right, as clearly DeLillo’s work is too stylistically innovative and thematically sophisticated to be comfortable among the vast majority or mainstream American fiction, even American modernist modernist fiction; yet it is too stark, streamlined, and more often than not primarily concerned with American landscapes—urban as well as suburban—to be quite typically postmodern.

In his view DeLillo fits quite uneasily in the category of postmodernism. Christopher Douglas studies DeLillo’s fiction under the thematic focus of postmodernist styles like historiographic metafiction, fascination with popular culture and its incorporation into his fiction, simulacra and hyperreality, and so on (106).
Various researchers and critics have extrapolated their views regarding the facets illustrated by Don DeLillo vis-a-vis metaphysical issues and consumer culture. The genesis of such concerns is the ramifications of technology in postmodern American society. As an avant-garde, DeLillo recognised the consequences of rising technology and electronic media in his society and reflects the dehumanising effects of technology on postmodern man where reality is forged as hyperreality. Reviewers, worldwide, have applauded DeLillo’s knack for explaining the metaphysical implications of everyday matters. He possesses the visionary focus whereby he flashes sudden revelation which critically raises the level of self-awareness of his fictional characters. In an article, “Financial Frenzy: Don DeLillo’s Cosmopolis” (2009), Alisa Harris remarks that the novel is about a suicidal mad pursuit of knowledge of the protagonist of Cosmopolis Eric Packer and draws parallels between Eric Packer and Faustian hero. In Faustian story the protagonist exchanges his soul for inexhaustible knowledge which he believes is the modus for immortality. Eric Packer too feels the moment people are soaked up in streams of information they no longer remain mortals. Blake Morrison in his article, “Future Tense”, (2008) labels Eric Packer, the protagonist of Cosmopolis, as “a hubris visionary, a mix of Icarus and Faust.” Laura Barret in an article, “How the Dead Speak to the Living: Intersexuality and the Postmodern Sublime in White Noise,” (2002) says that the obsession to defeat death is quite visible in the characters of the White Noise. They are not ready to acknowledge the inevitability of death. Rampant consumerism is their defence of death. Writing for the Wall Street, Alexandra Altar in “DeLillo Deconstructed” described Point Omega as a meditation on time, extinction aging and death; subjects that DeLillo seldom explored in much depth as a younger writer. The two characters, Richard Elster and Jim Finley while in desert begin to think of time in a different way. DeLillo’s novel takes its title from Jesuit theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s concept of the Omega point, a final stage in the evolution of consciousness. Charles McGrath in his article, “Don DeLillo a writer by Accident Whose Course Deliberate” (2010) observes that the slowness of the film in Point Omega is the way to notice things that one might otherwise have missed in a more conventional format. Mundane details of daily life often take on heightened significance in his works. Michiko Kakutani writing for the New York Times, in his article, “A Man, a Woman and a Day of Terror,” (2007) checks out that DeLillo’s novel Falling Man is thematically concerned with the symbolic nature of terrorist violence and its accomplice, the mass
media. In addition DeLillo’s narrative examines the possibilities of reinventing individual identity as well as the tendency of individuals to construct their identities through a group mentality.

In order to capture the concerns of contemporary America vis-a-vis their social, familial, cultural and economic condition, the theoretical framework and insights from postmodern thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, and Giles Delueze have been taken. Baudrillard’s seminal book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) is significant in understanding the complex and shifting relationship between simulation and the symbolic that is quite visible in the contemporary American society. In the book he offers his observation on the effect of technologies of communication on culture. He believes that there exist only the ideas and the language that one uses to describe not the reality but simulacrum because the substitute for actual reality is simulacrum; simulation produces reality what he terms as ‘hypereality.’ Therefore, humans don’t live in reality but in a simulation of it represented by reproducible modes of reality. His concepts of simulation and hyperreality reach their crucial conclusion in his book *The Gulf War Did Not take place* (1995). Here argues that the proliferation of spectacular images of the war in Kuwait transmitted by the world media generated a vast masquerade of contradictory signs that transformed it into a virtual game instead of providing reality about it.

Fredric Jameson in his book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) finds the effacement of the difference between high culture and mass culture as a common denominator in various postmodernist art forms—from architecture to pop music. He constructs the Marxists account of society and infers that postmodernism is synonymous with ‘late capitalism’ which has become its cultural logic. The cultural superstructures of postmodernism are determined by a transformed economic system of the western world in the late capitalist postmodernity. The rampant consumer culture has led to a ‘new depthlessness’ in which each commodity is just another interchangeable image to be consumed by the society. This depthlessness, on account of social experiences being reduced to interchangeable flow of commodities where everything can be sold and bought, gives birth to schizophrenia producing loss of reality which is at once petrifying and ecstatic.
In order to understand DeLillo’s congruity of Ekphrasis, Deleuze’s theory and philosophy on abstract time and cinema is applied in one of the chapters. He elaborates his views on cinema in his books *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema II: The Time-Image*. In these two books he distinguishes between the movement image and the time image. Just like in the Greek understanding of time which concluded that time was subordinated to movement; the cinematic tradition of movement image only gives the direct expression of movement and presents time indirectly. In the years post- World War II, cinema experienced the transition from the movement image to the time image reflecting apposite articulation of the lately developed philosophy of time independent of movement.

DeLillo’s fiction also turns to what Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction,” a poetics that blends the reflexivity of metafiction with ironized sense of historical production, a pastiche that foregrounds a distinction between “brute events of the past and the historical facts we construct out of them” (57). Through his work DeLillo attempts to think the present historically and to manage postmodern reality.

The project is an attempt to study DeLillo’s artistic ethics through avant-garde techniques which he employs to resurface major concerns running in American society through his selected novels.

**Chapter 1: Unmasking of the Virtual in White Noise**

The first chapter focuses on the effect of pervasive consumerism, media, technology and popular culture on the daily lives of contemporary American population. It studies the exploration of the novel as a critique on the contemporary American society which is preoccupied with the rise of technological and scientific advancements, man’s slavish dependency on machines and media and power of images. Creating a fictional town called Blacksmith DeLillo portrays the life of a dysfunctional family of Jack Gladnays; his wife, Babatte, and their children from previous marriages. Woven in this intricate web of technology, media and images is the perpetual fear of death imbedded in the consciousness of the fictional characters which keeps looming like a white ghost throughout the novel. They resort to various ways to defeat their perpetual fear of death.
With growing scientific and technological advancements myriad cultural and industrial sounds seeped through the matrix of American society, making their presence ubiquitous and effect unavoidable. The title of the novel, *White Noise*, reflects the heterogeneous mixture of those sound waves that is constantly playing in the background surrounding the characters without their being aware of it. DeLillo skillfully fits the narrative of the sounds of TV, radios, traffic noise supermarket buzz in the narrative of the novel. The effect of the white noise on the characters is perceived by the readers when he characters don’t realize the negative effect of technological advancements on their immediate surroundings, when they want to turn away from basic facts of life like death and wish for miraculous drugs that could curb their fear of death.

The characters let themselves get carried away in the buzz of mass media and mass consumption. Jean Baudrillard in his book, *Simulacra and Simulations* asserts that the contemporary society moves on the chains of production and consumption and everything in this society has an exchange value. In the society where there is no reality but only simulacra and where identities are created by images and codes Jack debunks his own reality for a new one. He believes that his own personality is too weak for a professor of Hitler Studies. He always wears a black robe and black glasses as soon as he enters the vicinity of his college. When the town is under the fatal threat of toxic spill he assures himself as well as his family that his stature forbids the possibility of being affected by such a catastrophe. He watches documentaries of Hitler which has transformed the historical figure as the symbol of death. DeLillo creates a fictional society, synchronous with the factual society, which is governed by signs or referents with no reality and origin behind them. In other words, in such society the distinction between the real and fantasy has been effaced and as such for the inhabitants of such a society there is no reality but what Baudrillard calls as ‘hyperreality.’

**Chapter 2: Aesthetics of the Hyperreal in *Cosmopolis***

The second chapter, *Cosmopolis* (2003), is DeLillo’s critique on cyber-capitalism, globalization, and terrorism. Written in 2003, this novel foresaw the great recession that hit the western world in 2008 making DeLillo an ‘artist-prophet’. The revolutionary movements and protests against the financial crisis, known by the term
Occupy Wall Street, in 2011 is meticulously portrayed in the novel. This dystopian novel captures the life of 28 year old cyber capitalist and billionaire financier, Eric Packer, and his journey on a day in the month of April in New York. His can be figuratively paralleled with exploitative American capitalism, as he is a personification of cyber-capitalism of America that rules the Wall Street and the virtual global market space. The self destructive tendencies in Eric’s character, vis, borrowing huge amount of money against the rising yen, killing his own chief of security, and chasing his own killer—suggest the qualities of an anti-hero. He is a capitalist turned anarchist who thrives on capitalist culture, obsessed with profitable development. The narrative of *Cosmopolis* suggests that the union of cyber-capitalism and consequent hyper-reality have destroyed, for human beings, the scope of forming meaningful relationship in the society. Same is true of Eric who always surrounded by e-connections and therefore, lacks the understanding of human connection. He fails to achieve the domestic bliss that American Dream apparently ensues. Married only twenty two days ago, he fails to recognize his wife when he comes across her while the traffic has come to a halt. The historical American dream that guaranteed a decent life style for the citizens of America has altered with time. The scope of American Dream changed, from accomplishment of the higher status in the society and attainment of domestic bliss to insatiable hunger for the products and gadgets in the new consumer culture. The people from the major cities of the States, because of bewildering consumer experience caused due to the constant rise of new products in the market, broadened their scope of the American Dream. Eric’s unfaltering faith in technology leads him to harbour a desire of attaining salvation and eternity by transcending his corporeality and digitalizing his consciousness.

Chapter 3: Aesthetics and the Terrorized Mindscape in *Falling Man*

The chapter highlights DeLillo’s attempt to bring to surface the trauma Americans went through after the event of 9/11 by employing the rhetorical device of Ekphrasis. Just when America revelled in its digital revolution a group of men aboard in one of the American planes hit the towers on the morning of the ninth of November 2001. A vast opus of works has piled up in response to the event. DeLillo’s novel as a novel on 9/11 is an account of his reflections on terror, media as well as the role he assigns to artists in a world which is absolutely depended on the constructed stories by
the media. The chapter also explores DeLillo’s attempt to understand and to show why a catastrophe like 9/11 befell seemingly invincible America.

The novel revolves around Keith Neudecker, the protagonist, and survivor of 9/11, his dysfunctional family and a couple of terrorists who execute the attack on the twin towers. The writer evocatively weaves a pathetic narrative of loss and grief experienced by the fictional characters. By employing the device of Ekphrasis DeLillo puts forth the traumatic impact the characters are experiencing because of the event. The devise of ekphrasis offers the reading of the novel where the visual representations through the medium of Giorgio Morandi’s *Natura morta*, the Italian term for still life paintings, and the performances of the performance artist, David Janiak, is set against the gamut of authentic mediatized images of 9/11 and responses attached to it. Juxtaposed against the images transmitted by television in an incessant loop the art re-presented through still life paintings of Morandi and performances of David try to puncture the stories constructed by the mass media. DeLillo, it is imperative to note here, borrowing heavily from mainstream culture creates an art that becomes a tool of symbolic resistance, the same way avant-garde artists of 1980s did. Thus by employing the device of Ekphrasis and conceptual art, the writer achieves an esoteric purpose but at the same time the fictional characters are shown to be going through a therapeutic process as they witness the images of 9/11 in a different light as being produced by mass media.

The novel, apart from being an illustrative work of aesthetic acumen, is also a DeLillo’s deliberation on what America did to incite such a catastrophe. DeLillo seems to recognize the dilemma of an American fiction writer to respond critically to such a catastrophe while maintaining an unbiased and objective approach. He believes that a writer has a moral responsibility while understanding such an event. He seems to recommend that these acts of terrorism are a way of resistance against the pervasive cultural and political influence of the west over rest of the world, the Middle East, particularly. By studying the novel from the perspective of theorists like Baudrillard, Slavoj Zizek, the chapter attempts to study the attack of 9/11 as an act of resistance to the cultural imperialism through western media, technology, and capitalism.
Chapter 4: Pendulum of Consciousness: *Point Omega*

The final and fourth chapter, Pendulum of Consciousness: *Point Omega*, analysis post 9/11 American society and studies the metaphysical subjects such as the meaning of “true life”, extinction, consciousness, relationship between perception and reality, and time and space which the writer investigates in his novel. Having witnesses a colossal event like 9/11 American society realized that it is as vulnerable as any other country. As many thinkers and writers were still introspecting on the reasons of the attack American government announced its invasion on Iraq, camouflaging and justifying its ulterior motives behind the terminology of “War on Terror.” The title of the novel refers to the writings of Jesuit scholar Teilhard de Chardin, which he wrote on ‘omega point’ which explains the evolution of human race. He describes evolution as a process that motivates complexity—from unicellular organism to a multicellular thinking being. He speaks of the end of the world as phenomenal, an end point of maximum organized complexity beyond which nothing can be known; it’s the final point of human evolution. However, DeLillo inverts the original title making it *Point Omega* as his protest against America’s invasion on Iraq. The reading of the novel from such perspective suggests that the writer believes that the Iraq war is an ironic example of Teilhard’s theory.

DeLillo creates a character, Richard Elster, as an academician and war planner who assisted the war strategists at the pentagon. He shares his experiences of Iraq War with an amateur film maker, Jim Finley and it looks like he regrets his participation in a war like this which he believes was only a created reality by the government. Disillusioned of the false glory of American Exceptionalism, Elster escapes from the city life where in the words of Jean Baudrillard, objects perpetually proliferate and thereby dominate the subjects. Subsequently, he states that the objects move toward their ecstasy accompanied by inertia of the subjects and when a society is saturated with ecstasy of the objects it implodes and creates entropy. Entropy is a realm of excessive information and media messages bombarded with images that lead to the meaninglessness and deapthlessness in a society. Such a society, states Baudrillard, in which all the references of the real are lost, is hyperreal and what one encounters in hyperreal is the spectacle. The desert offers them a space where they can delve into metaphysical issues like time and consciousness.
The novel has another character whose identity remains anonymous yet is of significant importance to understand the relationship between time and consciousness. In a museum that displays conceptual video-work, *24 Hour Psycho* by Douglas Gordon which is a slowed down and soundless version of Alfred Hitchcock’s classic movie, *Psycho* the unnamed character becomes a mouthpiece of DeLillo to explore the critical ways of thinking about perception and consciousness in liaison with time and image. The concepts of Ekphrasis and conceptual art also prove handy in doing the scene. DeLillo is able to penetrate into the interstices of everyday phenomenal happenings and unravel the consciousness of ‘pure time,’ something diagonally opposite to the accustomed perception of time. This chapter draws upon Bergson’s concept of time as well as Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema, particularly his idea of ‘time-image’ to understand the relationship between time and consciousness as depicted by DeLillo in *Point Omega*. 