Chapter 1
Unmasking of the Virtual in *White Noise*

Published in 1984, *White Noise* is DeLillo’s eighth novel that won him the National Book Award, and brought him in the view of the wide reading public from the literary circles—the academics and the reviewing press. Through this novel DeLillo came to be regarded as a serious critic of the contemporary American society. He wrote *White Noise* in the vein of a cultural critic, explaining at length the effects of media, technology and popular culture on the daily lives of contemporary American population. The novel aims to offer a critique on the contemporary American society which is preoccupied with the rise of technological and scientific advancements, man’s slavish reliance on machines and media and the power of images. While applauding DeLillo’s *White Noise* for its exploration of postmodern culture in America of 1980s, Cornel Bonca in an essay, “Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*: The Natural Language of the Species” asserts that:

[Yet] the novel seems to draw out a certain buried awareness in my students that the most familiar aspect of their lives—supermarkets, televisions, families and the language of these things—harbor deep and resonant mysteries. It affects them, I think, as a sustained defamiliarisation of their own lives. After reading it, it is (or should be) impossible to shop in a supermarket in the same way, to watch a televised disaster the same way, even—and this is crucial—to listen to a baby’s cry the same way. (25-26)

The novel is successful in altering the complacent worldview into a more aware and conscious living from the slumber of mechanized and robotic life. DeLillo portrays his fictional characters trapped in the intricate web of contemporary bourgeois world, hyperreality, advertisement, media stimuli, machine, and consumer culture. Interwoven with the intricacies of technology, media and images is the perpetual fear of death imbedded in the consciousness of the fictional characters which they try to abate beneath the escalating consumer culture. The writer attempts to deal with the philosophical subject of death by juxtaposing it with consumer culture of the twentieth century. With this breakthrough novel, he effectively exposes the aspects of
the rhetoric of advertising, the media, and consumer culture with his parodies of formulations such as the “Airborne Toxic Event”.

Comprising of forty chapters, the novel has a chronological plot, first person narration and is divided into three parts: ‘Waves and Radiations,’ ‘The Airborne Toxic Event’ and ‘Dylarama.’ Since the novel is written in first person, and has been narrated from single perspective; hence it raises the questions of reliability and authority. It also slips into digressions which are only an extension of the themes the writer tries to explore. The three parts narrate the life of the protagonist, Jack Gladney and his family, the reaction to a dangerous toxic spill and how Gladney responds to the discovery that Babette, his wife has secretly been taking a drug, Dylar, that claims to treat the fear of death, respectively. Jack Gladney, a university professor and H.O.D of Hitler Studies, is married four times and is happily staying with Babette, his fourth and current wife. Gladney and Babette share everything with each other except their obsessive fear of death. Both of them try to repress their fear every now and then but eventually they fail miserably. Gladney hides his vulnerability behind the power of his adopted name, J.A.K. Gladney and his status as a professor and HOD of the department of the Hitler studies. On the other hand, Babette, in order to gain access to a highly sophisticated and efficient drug, Dylar, gives herself away to the eccentric project manager of Dylar named Willie Mink. The drug, however, turns out to be a “fool’s gold” (240) as it does not repress the fear of death but on the contrary infests her with some serious side effects. Meanwhile, Gladney’s fear transforms into reality when, a tank containing a toxic chemical explodes, causing ‘Airborne Toxic Event’ and he gets exposed to the toxic exposure. Later, when he learns Babette’s secret of her consuming Dylar, he gets tempted to get hold on the drug. On fearing that Gladney might kill the manager, Willie Mink, Babette hides his identity but he, nevertheless, succeeds in tracking him down, not so much as to kill him as much to seek the drug for himself. He ends up not only in shooting Willie but himself and both of them survive. On the very next day, Wilder, Babette’s youngest three year old son, is miraculously saved when he has an accident on the highway. This event changes Gladney’s attitude; he decides to let go of his fear of death and obsession with health. DeLillo closes the novel by Gladney’s narrating to the readers the rearrangement of aisles in the shopping mall that throws everyone into the state of confusion.
The title of the novel, *White Noise* alludes to the term of physics which Merriam Webster Dictionary defines white noise as:

a) a heterogeneous mixture of sound waves extending over a wide frequency range; a constant background noise, especially one that drowns other sounds.

b) meaningless or distracting commotion, hubbub or chatter.

In other words, white noise can be understood as a fusion of various types of sounds traveling with uniform intensities and covering a wide range of frequencies. Because white noise travels with same wavelength, its individual constituents become difficult to be distinguished by human ears. Likewise, in the novel, DeLillo brings in various kinds of electromagnetic sounds American society is surrounded and occupied with and fits them in as part of the narrative. The writer ties it to crony capitalism, extreme consumerism, and blind dependence of media technology. The blend of endless sounds—fragments of TV shows, radio, commercials, traffic noise, supermarket buzz, weather forecasts, etc percolate through the narrative of the novel. As America entered the age of Capitalism myriad technological, cultural, electrical, industrial sounds began to seep through the social matrix of American society, making their presence ubiquitous and effect unavoidable. It thus became imperative for contemporary writers to bring the presence of noise as one of the themes of their works. English novelist, Aldous Huxley in his 1946 essay, “Silence” described twentieth century as the Age of Noise. He opines that twentieth century society “holds the history’s record of them all” (149). In the novel as well, various sounds are played in the background of the narrative to create a semblance of white noise.

Many critics have focused on the theme of death in the novel and observed that white noise is the electric sound of death. David Cowart in *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* clearly observes that DeLillo has attempted to transcend the metaphorical status of death by juxtaposing it with electromagnetic white noise of the surroundings (73). In other words, the white noise is the electric sound of death, as mentioned in the novel in the conversation between Gladney and his wife:

“What if death is nothing but sound?”

“Electrical noise.”

“You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful.”
“Uniform, white.”

“Sometimes it sweeps over me,” she said. “Sometimes it insinuates itself into my mind, little by little. I try to talk to it. Not now, Death.”

(228)

Another critic, Diane Johnson in the review, “Conspirators,” infers, “White Noise is a mediation on themes of whiteness—the pallor of death, and white noise, the sound, so emblematic of modern life, that it is meant to soothe human beings by screening out the other, more irritating noises of their civilization” (web). While working on White Noise, DeLillo confirms that he came across Ernest Becker’s 1974 Pulitzer Prize winning non fictional work, The Denial of Death. David Cowart notes that Becker’s book “not only discusses a culture-wide failure to come to terms with death (since we no longer have the spiritual wherewithal to keep it at bay) but also argues that our dread is the powerful motivating force within modern culture” (Physics 78). DeLillo employs the same idea in his novel, as suggested by Becker, that at the bottom of everything man does there is a deep seated struggle of his to avoid facing death since man is an avoider of death. The fear of death keeps haunting the fictional characters of the novel constantly and they avoid it by getting completely engrossed in myriad noises around them. The fear of death underlines everything and permeates everywhere in the novel as a subtext.

Jack Gladney, the narrator of the novel who betrays his compulsive fear of death from the very beginning but he does not disclose his fear to his wife, Babattele nor does she until the last part of the novel. “Who will die first?” (17, 35, 115, 118) is the question that keeps popping up in the narrative highlighting the significance of the issue in the novel. This fear has instilled in Gladney the feeling of incompetence and insecurity which leads him to feel that his life is superficial and insignificant. He attempts to camouflage such weakness in his personality by choosing a different avatar and building his personality on the aura of the historical figure of Hitler. He informs the readers that he was warned by his then-chancellor against the possibility of appearing as a weak personality and had suggested him to take up an extra initial “J. A. K Gladney” (19) which according to Gladney is like “a tag that I wore like a borrowed suit” (19). He wears a pair of glasses with “thick black heavy frames and dark lenses,” (19) which starts affecting his sight badly as he keeps seeing colored
spots at the corner of his eyes. Even at Babette’s imploration he doesn’t remove them. His fear pushes him to a space where he is no longer comfortable in revealing his true self. For Gladney, Hitler ceases to be a dangerous figure responsible for the merciless massacre of Jews, but becomes a protective shield to ward off death. Whereas the name of Hitler is closely connected to the massacre of numerous people, in this case he gets transformed into a figure that is not larger than life but larger than death, a figure with the capacity to absorb death. Gladney likes to watch documentaries on Hitler on television, which has transformed the tyrannical figure of Hitler into an image, a mere representation. The repetitive airing of Hitler’s documentary has turned Hitler into a mere spectacle. Paul Cantor in “Adolf, We Hardly Knew You,” writes, “In particular, this situation results in the distinctively postmodern attitude toward history as a kind of museum, or better yet, a supermarket of human possibilities, where people are free to shop around for their values and identities” (41). Gladney’s attitude towards the figure of Hitler is noteworthy as he becomes more than a utility chosen from an antique shop with a pure end of meeting his needs. He shows these documentaries to his students in College on the Hill with the sole aim of being identified as somebody virtually akin to Hitler. In one such documentaries of Hitler, he perceives:

Many of those crowds were assembled in the name of the death. They were there to attend tributes to the dead. Processions, songs, speeches, dialogues with the dead, recitation in the name of the dead. They were there to see pyres and flaming wheels, thousands of flags dipped in salute, thousands of uniformed mourners. There were ranks and squadrons, elaborate backdrops, blood banners and black dress uniforms. Crowds came to form a shield against their own dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone. Crowds came for this reason above all others. They were there to be a crowd. (87)

This excerpt from the text reveals Gladney’s need of hiding himself behind others, be it Hitler or any other brutal historical figure like Genghis Khan or Atta, the Hun. He, in fact, identifies himself with the crowd in the documentary, each individual of which is hidden as the unidentifiable part of the mass crowd. Since death is an inevitable phenomenon that happens to every individual an individual, becoming a
part of the crowd becomes a natural choice to lose one’s individuality and thus avoid death. This excerpt also alludes to the contemporary mass society in which the individuals have lost their personal sense of being and become of an indiscriminate whole.

Gladney feeds upon the image of Hitler as he has no access to the real Hitler, the latter being a historical figure. This suggests the power of image that works upon the contemporary human beings and changes the entire perception about life. Adolf Hitler, a dead warmonger, has been metamorphosed into a demigod that wields immensurable power, by the agency of media by filming documentaries related to his exploits in World War II on television repeatedly. It becomes mandatory to refer to French theorist Jean Baudrillard who in *Simulacra and Simulations* (1994), asserts that while modern societies are arranged around the production and consumption of commodities, postmodern societies, in addition to this, also revolve around “simulation” and the play of signs and images. He notes:

Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real; murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity. To this murderous capacity is opposed the dialectical capacity of representations as a visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course . . . Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (170)

In such a state a new social order has emerged that is entirely governed by simulacra where identities are constructed by images and codes that dictate the perception of individuals about them as well as others. He claims that in the era of postmodernism, societies have undergone the process of simulation whereby images gain a kind of a “murderous capacity” (170). In the societies preceding postmodernism, “a sign could
refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange” (170). But in the contemporary societies, the entire system of signification is absorbed by the matrix and what remains behind, is “gigantic simulacrum” (170). Entertainment, information and modes of communication provided by television, advertisements, magazines, and radio have paved a way to the creation of a world of hyperreality that appeals man more than his monotonous but real everyday life. DeLillo, through the character of Jack Gladney, highlights the power of media to transform the signified into just another image or representation. We are thrown into a world of images that have no value or meaning. The reason he is fascinated with Hitler is because of his association with death, which, for Gladney, is all commanding and powerful. Gladney makes an effort to maintain the status he has created for himself since 1965 when the department of Hitler Studies was inaugurated. He admits, “I am the false character that follows the name around” (20). He has interiorized the aura of a head of Hitler studies that he feels exposed and rather vulnerable when one of his colleagues from the college who comments on his personality outside college. Seeing him without his black robe and thick framed dark glasses his colleague blurts out, “You look so harmless, Gladney. A big, harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy” (98).

As observed by Cowart that DeLillo transcends the metaphorical stance of death (73), it is through the incident of ‘Airborne Toxic Event’ that the death explicitly manifests itself in the novel. The incident occurs when a tank car carrying a toxic chemical, identified as “Nyodene Derivative or Nyodene D” (129), gets derailed and the toxic smoke escapes the tank. While evacuating the town Gladney gets exposed to the toxic smoke which intensifies his previous anxiety of death. In the rehab where all the inhabitants of the town are taking shelter, he meets a SIMUVAC technician who shows him the computer readouts depicting the presence of toxic chemical in his system. The following conversation between the two reflects the power of hyperreality generated by the computer which tries to establish Gladney’s death:

“You’re generating big numbers,” he said, peering at the screen.

“I was out there only two and a half minutes. That’s how many seconds?”
“It’s not just you were out there so many seconds. It’s your whole data profile. I tapped into your history. I’m getting bracketed numbers with pulsing stars. . . . I didn’t say it. The computer did. The whole system says it. It’s what we call a massive data-base tally. Gladney, J. A. K. I punch in the name, the substance, the exposure time and then I tap into your computer history. Your genetics, your personals, your medicals, your psychological, your police-and-hospitals. It comes back pulsing stars. This doesn’t mean anything is going to happen to you as such, at least not today or tomorrow. It just means you are the sum total of your data. No man escapes that. (163-165)

The technician feels no need to refer to the physical phenomenon as he totally relies on the abstract threat of data given out by the computer. As a result of too much reliance computers and abstract data Gladney feels the loss of control of his body. After witnessing this, Gladney feels that the network of symbols and zero-oneness are breaching his corporeality.

Babette, on the other hand, believes that no one would completely understand her fear and, therefore, she plays sly on her family. Her fear, unlike Gladney’s, manifests slowly but strongly over the time. She confesses, “I’m afraid to die . . . I think about it all the time” (225). Like Gladney too she finds it difficult to face the reality. She instead creates an alternate identity by changing her lifestyle so that she can ward off death because she believes, “We seem to believe it is possible to ward off death by following rules of good grooming” (31). She buys yogurt and wheat germ in order to improve her health but she never consumes them and as a result it often goes bad. She likes to teach old folks correct posture, benefits of eating healthy etc, as she believes that this can cure her of the fear. Babette is looking for solutions all the time to get rid of her fear. She finally comes across a solution in an advertisement on a tabloid, National Examiner, in which a company wanted volunteers for a secret research on eliminating a fundamental condition of human brain—the fear of death. Since, Babette suffers from compulsive fear of death she participates in the trial of this new drug, Dylar. The project, however, is stopped in the middle as the scientists working on the drug realize its inefficiency in curbing the fear. To continue its consumption she approaches the project manager, Willie Mink, who offers her the supply only if she complies with his carnal desires. The drug,
however, proves unproductive to cure her anxiety. Dylar, as a cure to curb the fear of death, represents the absolute commodification of the contemporary society where even death is made a product by which profits can be generated. Like any other commodity it makes false promises and proves unproductive. When Gladney learns about the drug, he wants to try it as well despite knowing how it has disappointed his wife and has reverse effects. When his daughter suggests against it, he replies, “We are talking about death . . . In a very real sense it doesn’t matter what is in those tablets. It could be sugar, it could be spice. I am eager to be humored, to be fooled . . . This is what happens . . . to desperate people” (288-89). Through this conversation the novel depicts that in a society which is absolutely saturated with consumerism, the people are ready to give up the banal realities for consumer ecstasy. The contemporary human gladly gives up the ‘desert of the real’ for the ecstasies of hyper reality, a theory on which French critic and philosopher Jean Baudrillard elaborates in his *Simulacra and Simulations*. He writes:

> When the simulation wins a new kind of autonomy, the territory disappears behind the map: “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it.” Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself. (166)

He maintains that we believe that our secondary simulated reality is more real than the first degree reality. The media with advertisements have created a map for the contemporary humans superseding their reality. It is the iniquitous union of the two which plays upon the insecurities and fear of the people and simultaneously promises them a better life.

The obsession with the fear of death creates a deep sense of insecurity in the characters, which subtly yet solidly gets consolidated in their psyche. Babette and Gladney dwell in a world where supermarket tabloids, advertisements and commercials and the media have fabricated a matrix of consumer culture that compels
them to consume not only what is needed by them but also what is made to sell them regardless of their requirements. They believe in instant gratification and consumption. The visit of the Gladney’s to the supermarket is a frequent one. They feel a sense of security and completeness by purchasing various commodities. Gladney recounts to his readers:

Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plentitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight the size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls—it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening. (26)

Consumerism not only manufactures products but illusive power and comfort to the people. The people start believing that consumer products can give them identity and help them in their hopeless situation. The market creates the needs and then guarantees to satisfy them thereby bringing about a sense of completeness. Gladney feels a sense of empowerment when he is able to buy the products available in the supermarket, regardless of his needs.

The concept of commodification is central in White Noise, and DeLillo opens the novel by offering a glimpse of a consumer society. The novel opens on a day of September noon, when the students of the College-on-the Hill are seen arriving in the station wagons. The students of the college belong to the middle and upper middle class families carrying a plethora of commodities that accompany them which apparently make them feel secure and united in the society driven by rampant consumerism. The narrator describes the scene as thus:

As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprang out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; the stereo sets, radios, personal computers; small refrigerators and table ranges; the cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows
and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags—onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut creme patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints. . . . The parents sun-dazed near their automobiles, seeing images of themselves in every direction. . . . Their husbands content to measure out the time, distant but ungrudging, accomplished in parenthood, something about them suggesting massive insurance coverage. The assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation. (3-4)

The writer depicts how mass advertising and consumption have become part of the ordinary lives of people and the homogenizing role they play in the formation of identity by foregrounding the phenomenon known as the consumer society or the culture of mass consumption. Parents send their children to boarding schools as they get busy in their professional lives. The lives of their children are further controlled and driven by consumer culture. Consumer culture, therefore, has colonized the consciousness of the people and created a homogenous environment. In the last few decades of the twentieth century, consumerism and commercialization had consumed the whole of America. It was an era of exceptional consumerism, where previously unseen creativity in package design and advertising, enthralled America. Many Americans welcomed a new conservatism in social, economics, and political life during the 1980s characterized by the policies of Ronald Reagan. Since he was a Hollywood actor, his style seemed charismatic and optimistic to many Americans. The era of Reagan was also reflected by the popular culture of the decade. Commenting on the condition of American society Nathaniel Rich in “How DeLillo Nailed Us in White Noise” comments:

Exhausted by the paranoia of Watergate era, and the panic of the oil embargo and the Iran hostage crisis, the nation sought the comforts of old-fashioned Hollywood movies, delivered by an old-fashioned Hollywood actor. White Noise was published two months after Ronald Reagan’s second inauguration, which followed the most effective
marketing campaign in American political history, sounding visceral notes of hope (It’s morning again in America”) and terror (“There is a bear in the woods”). In “Supermarket” the narrator asks Americans to judge the state of the country by the contents of their local supermarket—a tactic, incidentally, followed by DeLillo, who ends White Noise with a nightmarish scene inside of one. Walter Mondale, who had tried to make the election about the budget deficit and interest rates, soon realized his mistake, releasing ads with horror-movie music and images of nuclear warheads, but it was too late.

The novel reproduces collective anxieties, hope, and optimism of Americans generated by the innovative ways of campaigning by Reagan through advertisements. It is one of the reasons consumerism and popular culture thrived in this decade. This condition has become dominant in the contemporary society where advertisement, the media, mass communication, and information rule the society and the previous exchange value of commodities, as described by Marx, has been replaced by codes, spectacles, simulations, and hyperreality as noted by Baudrillard. As mentioned earlier, the exchange value has been replaced by what Baudrillard terms as sign value. In his two seminal books, The System of Objects (1996) and Consumer Society (1998), Baudrillard explores the possibility that production has been replaced by consumption. In other words, commodities are sold and bought irrespective of their utility. This is the age of simulacrum where there are only copies of copies, with no reality to refer to. Advertising assigns signs to the products, so that when a customer buys any product he/she looks beyond its utility and buys the sign instead. The novel abounds with instances which show how commodities signify social status and power.

Murray Siskind, Gladney’s colleague elaborates on this postmodern condition as:

In a town there are houses, plants in bay windows. People notice dying better. The dead have faces, automobiles. If you don’t know a name, you know a street name, a dog’s name. ‘He drove an orange Mazda.’ You know a couple of useless things about a person that become major facts of identification and cosmic placement when he dies suddenly, after a short illness, in his own bed, with a comforter and matching
pillows, on a rainy Wednesday afternoon, feverish, a little congested in the sinuses and chest, thinking about his dry cleaning. (45-46)

Consumers are manipulated through advertisements and led to believe that they are in dire need of the products that are being manufactured exclusively for them. Since, DeLillo had worked in an advertising agency before becoming a writer, he knows how advertising manipulates a person’s unconscious and creates desires in them to possess everything that the market has to offer. So while corporations generate needs, advertisements create desire in the people. Emilse B. Hidalgo in “The Iconic and the Symbolic: The Consumer Society in Don DeLillo’s White Noise and Andy Warhol’s Serigraphies” argues that commodification has entered every sphere and has been restructuring reality on market model. He further notes:

It has to do with the construction of a mega market where everything is for sale according to the customer’s needs, and with the construction of the identity of the consumer, who may assume a passive role as the mindless or unconscious “target” of advertising or, who may assume an active role as a discerning consumer aware of his “needs”. (21)

The narrative of the novel is disrupted by brief advertising jingles and slogans such as, “Dacron, Orlon, Lycra Spandex.” (62), “Try an Audi Turbo.” “Try a Toyota Supra.” (96), “MasterCard, Visa, American Express.” (119), “Krylon, Rust-Oleum, Red Devil.” (186), “Dristan Ultra, Dristan Ultra.” (193), “Leaded, unleaded, super-unleaded.” (229). The way these jingles, names, and slogans try to get adjusted in the narrative of the novel also depict their power to impinge upon the subconscious of the people. The brand names that are interspersed in the narrative might be surfacing from the unconscious of the fictional characters breaking its continuity. A clear example of the influence of advertisements on the unconscious gets manifested in the second part of the novel, when Gladney and his family are taking shelter in the camp in the wake of toxic spill. As Gladney is watching his daughter Steffie sleep he listens to her uttering something. He observes:

Steffie turned slightly, then muttered something in her sleep. . . . She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.
A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. But how could this be? A simple brand name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? 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, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence. (180-181)

The brand names are such that they can be pronounced easily even though they are in different language. These jingles and slogans play repeatedly in the background which has a deep effect on the subconscious of the people. Although it is Steffie who is the uttering the words, she is not the source. The words are spoken through her, by her unconscious that has been fed by the unconscious of her culture. DeLillo, in an interview, throws further light on it by commenting that:

There’s something nearly mystical about certain words and phrases that float through our lives. It's computer mysticism. Words that are computer generated to be used on products that might be sold anywhere from Japan to Denmark—words devised to be pronounceable in a hundred languages. And when you detach one of these words from the product it was designed to serve, the words acquire a chant like quality. (Begley 97)

DeLillo delineates, through the Gladneys, the culture of rising popularity of television in American homes in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The lives of the Gladneys, as portrayed by DeLillo, buzz with fragmented yet pervasive noise of television. Whatever they do, television keeps running in the background making its
place secure deep in their psyche. Gladney’s college professor, Murray Siskind insists to watch television without searching for any meaning. He says that television:

[W]elcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound. I ask my students, ‘What more do you want?’ Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. ‘Coke is it, Coke is it, Coke is it.’ (61)

Television offers its receptors a world of information devoid of meaning. Baudrillard contends that while watching television its viewers passively receive information and surrender meaning. This process, says Baudrillard, is known as non reception. The images offered by television become signifiers that float around leaving the signified way behind and thus are devoid of meaning. Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan, in his book *The Medium is the Message*, elaborates on how meaning gets lost in this process. He clarifies that since television does not offer a scope for interaction between the medium and the subject, the subject, by default, gets absorbed by the media which he terms as “the implosion.” So, what is left behind is the image. The viewers acquire the status of the subjects who are captivated by the hyperreality created by the media through the process of simulations. The subject, having been seduced by the hyperreality, fails to pay attention to the content which is “imploded” in the medium. Since television offers dazzling spectacles, the concern of the subject shifts from the meaning of the message to the chain of floating signifiers. Murray Siskind is cognizant of this malicious circle and voices it as:

This is what comes from the wrong kind of attentiveness. People get brain fade. This is because they’ve forgotten how to listen and look as children. They’ve forgotten how to collect data. In the psychic sense a forest fire on TV is on a lower plane than a ten-second spot for Automatic Dishwasher All. The commercial has deeper waves, deeper emanations. But we have reversed the relative significance of these things. This is why people’s eyes, ears, brains and nervous systems have grown weary. It’s a simple case of misuse. (79)
Murray suggests Gladney to understand the difference between the signifier and the signified and to take the image completely for the real. Because television offers so much information, bombarded with images, codes and models, people suffer from, what Murray terms as “brain fade” (79). Murray believes that the representations and images take the place of the real in our sub-conscious, hence influences us more than the signified. As a result of what Murray calls ‘brain fade,’ people get transformed into passive sadists. The Gladneys gather in front of the television set every Friday night, as per the family rule, to devour the disaster scenes whenever they are transmitted on television, feeling excited by them. In a particular episode the Gladneys are watching news of policemen carrying a body bag out of someone’s background. The reporter reveals the possibility of mass grave in the same backyard. The way the reporter dramatizes the information creates a deep interest in the family. Glued to the television sets they look forward to see the dead bodies. But even after digging the earth for three days, they find nothing which disappoints the family. This episode depicts that nothing is authentic in the contemporary society and everything has been reduced to pure spectacle. The contemporary humans surrounded with all kinds of lenses and cameras are akin to Plato’s cave men who believed in the world of shadows cast on the cave wall. The media has turned them into devouring machines to such an extent that they even find gruesome stories entertaining. The characters believe that the disasters and catastrophe transmitted on television are unreal and they can enjoy the unfortunate scenes as long as these are distant from them.

Baudrillard asserts that in the postmodern society media simulations of reality, amusement parks, supermarkets, TV sports etc control our thoughts, and thus behavior. John Duvall in Productive Postmodernism: Consuming Histories and Cultural Studies writes that pervasiveness of media made young men take up guns and committed act of violence other than politics. He calls such men as “media saturated.” Tommy Roy Foster, with whom Heinrich plays chess through mail, is such a character who is driven berserk under the influence of the media. The man is convicted for mass murder and he has preserved their recordings. The readers are informed that he had been hearing voices on television, “telling him to go down in history.” And this was reason enough for him to kill innocent people; those who were total strangers to him. Talking about lone gunmen, murders, and terrorists, DeLillo says:
They have such power, they actually change the way we look at the world. There isn't such a difference between violence and popular culture—they are blended together, mutual. People are attracted by violence . . . the media attention around the execution becomes more important than the event itself. Personally, I’m convinced that television and the continual repetition of murder that is shown there has a direct connection with the arrival of the serial killer. Technology and violence are interdependent. (Web)

In this technologically saturated society the behavior of the people is altered and driven by the power of the mass media. Also, people flee from the “desert of the real” (166) to ecstatic hyperreal life stimulated by computers, media, and technology. As a result, subjectivity enters a realm of simulations and starts living in utmost confusion and illusions inducing schizophrenia. An exemplary product of this condition is Willie Mink, project manager of the drug Dylar. When Gladney meets him in a dingy hotel room, he finds him in an utter state of bewilderment. He is dazed and fixed in front of soundless television, muttering and blabbering phrases from old shows and commercials. Apparently, he has been affected by the drug. Babette had informed Gladney of the side-effect of Dylar as:

The left side of my brain could die but the right side could live. This would mean that the left side of my body would live but the right side would die. There were many grim specters. I could walk sideways but not forward. I could not distinguish words from things, so that if someone said ‘speeding bullet,’ I would fall to the floor and take cover. (222)

Mink suffers from the same causality where the signifiers have replaced the signified. For him the concrete walls between real and artificial have collapsed entirely for he can no longer differentiate between the two. Gladney, aware of Mink’s condition due to side effect of the drug takes advantage of it:

I said, as a test, “Falling plane.” He looked at me, gripping the arms of the chair, the first signs of panic building in his eyes. “Plunging aircraft,” I said, pronouncing the words crisply, authoritatively. He kicked off his sandals, folded himself over into the recommended crash
position, head well forward, hands clasped behind his knees. He performed the maneuver automatically, with a double jointed collapsible dexterity, throwing himself into it, like a child or a mime…The drug not only caused the user to confuse words with the things they referred to; it made him act in a somewhat stylized way. I watched him slumped there, trembling. (356)

Mink identifies Gladney’s language as the real signifier. He suffers from the inability to perceive the boundaries between signifiers, a condition what Fredric Jameson calls as schizophrenia. Alluding to Lacan, Jameson in “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1983) defines schizophrenia as “the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language” (Jameson 118). He further maintains:

Schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the “I” and the “me” over time (119).

Just like a schizophrenic, Mink unable to differentiate between self and world, and is incapable of experiencing continuity through time. It is in this episode that the power of language to induce fear and anxiety is explored and established.

DeLillo as an avant-garde reads language as a system of signs and therefore hyperreal. Throughout this work, DeLillo exposes and critiques the ways in which rhetoric and manipulations of language can create versions of reality. Semiotics, a science of signs, explores the ways in which meaning is created and interpreted through language. In other words language, words or speech replace the thing or object in reality, which Baudrillard calls the signifier and the signified, respectively. Baudrillard contends that in postmodern society the objects are replaced by the referents completely pushing the humans in the world of simulacrum. There remains no place for their respective signified, and as such there is a clear triumph of referents over the objects or things. The novel illustrates how language has given way to what Baudrillard calls hyperreality through the episode of feared plane crash. While Gladney is waiting for his daughter, Bee, at Iron City airport, he comes across a crowed of disturbed passengers who have just arrived. A passenger from the same
flight narrates him as to how their plane had lost power and repeated what he had heard in the flight himself, “We are falling out of the sky! We’re going down! We are a silver gleaming death machine!” (107) due to which hell broke loose in the airplane. Passengers became restless as they all saw their death round the corner; whispers of apprehension spread around. Later someone from the crew suggested to pretend “that it was not a crash but a crash landing that was seconds away” (108). The idea of adding just one word would change their entire reality. They grew calmer and started chanting “crash landing, crash landing” (108) like a mantra for survival. This episode is quite evident of the fact that language as a system of signs blurs the boundary of the real and hyperreal in human consciousnesses. Reality is no longer a self evident state but a simulation. This condition of the postmodern society where simulation is empowered to create its own version of reality, later on leads the passengers to gather around the narrator so that they can be sure whether what they went through was real or not.

In the contemporary society distinction between the real and the unreal has been imploded by the impingement of simulacra ad technological determinism. This gives rise to the world of hyperreality. Baudrillard defined hyperreality as “sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences” (2). In such a condition the real is produced like theme-parks, and supermarkets. This condition gets depicted in the novel when the Gladneys are made to abandon their home in the wake of Airborne Toxic Event with the help of a team of technicians known as SIMUVAC, a shortened form of simulated evacuation. One of the technicians informs Gladney that the team has taken the Airborne Toxic Event as an opportunity to rehearse the simulation. The real event and evacuation becomes a kind of demonstration, a mock event to practice so that it becomes easier to tackle the future disasters of similar nature. “The more we rehearse disaster, the faster will be from the real thing (236). They fail to perceive the depth and threat in the reality of the Airborne Toxic Event. Later in the novel, after the Airborne Toxic Event, when Gladney is going to the mall, he happens to see his eleven year old daughter, Steffie as a SIMUVAC volunteer for a simulated evacuation program in the neighborhood. This evacuation program is organized by a private counseling firm, Advanced Disaster Management. Gladney hears the technician say:
The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we’ll be from the real thing. 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 home, record break downpour. Never fails, doesn’t it? This is mechanism we hope to employ, among others. (237)

Through this example, the author presents the fact that the distinction between the real and imagined, fiction and reality, depth and depthlessness has disappeared.

The impact of the power of image on human mind has been aptly illustrated by DeLillo in this novel through the episode of “The Most Photographic Barn of America.” It also reflects how tourism industry works in tandem with the media. The barn is just like any other regular barn yet the place is seen crowded with all sorts of photographers, tourists as well as locals. DeLillo focuses the attention of the readers on the fact that more than the barn itself, the image of the barn seems important to its visitors. Before reaching the barn, Gladney and Murray spot five sign boards flashing “THE MOST IMPORTANT BARN” and forty cars with a tour bus parked in the parking area. There is also reference of a man who sells post cards and slides of the barn in a booth. Ronald Barthes in the book S/Z (1974) advocates that postmodernism is the age of copying; but, unfortunately, what gets imitated is not the real but a copy of what is already a copy. Hence, according to Barthes, the modern photography is identified with the lack of originality, where the status of original art has been reduced to that of an imitation. Likewise, in the novel, people apparently come to the barn to see the real barn but instead get involved in capturing the substitute of the real without even realizing it. Murray observes:

“No one sees the barn,” he said finally. . . .

“We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies.” . . .

“They are taking pictures of taking pictures,” he said.

He did not speak for a while. We listened to the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons, the rustling crank of levers that advanced the film.
“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 people snapping the pictures. We can’t get outside the aura. We’re part of the aura. We’re here, we’re now.” (14-15)

The photographs sold and clicked acquire the status of the sign or the referred and the real, but the existing barn becomes its referent. The signs (the photographs) dominate and even displace the referent (the actual barn) and thus everyone loses the capacity to see the real barn. The power of image on the contemporary psyche has transformed an ordinary barn into an object of desire to be seen by everyone. The author depicts that the image has a deeper impact on human mind than the reality.

The society depicted by DeLillo in the novel is the one which is knitted by strong fabric of simulacra, where everyone constructs one’s own set of truth with the help of language, books, media, magazines, supermarkets etc. The truth has no firm ground and is largely fleeting and fragmented. This is most evident in thirteen year old kid, Heinrich’s conversation with his father, Jack Gladney. Heinrich says:

“It’s going to rain tonight.”

“It’s raining now,” I said.

“The radio said tonight.”

“Look at the windshield,” I said. “Is that rain or isn’t it?”

“I’m only telling you what they said.”

“Just because it’s on the radio doesn’t mean we have to suspend belief in the evidence of our senses.”

“Our senses? Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they’re right. This has been proved in the laboratory. Don’t you know about all those theorems that say nothing is what it seems? There’s no past, present or future outside our own mind. The so-called laws of motion are a big hoax. Even sound can trick the mind. Just because you don’t hear a
sound doesn’t mean it’s not out there. Dogs can hear it. Other animals. And I’m sure there are sounds even dogs can’t hear. But they exist in the air, in waves. Maybe they never stop. High, high, high pitched. Coming from somewhere.” (25-26)

This is the impact and overreliance of the media over people. Heinrich believes that we are the sum total of our chemical impulses and hence, our senses cannot be trusted most of the times.

White Noise, as critics like Michael Valdez, Paul Cantor, and Elise Martucci, argue, is a novel that portrays postmodern America. While the debate remains if DeLillo himself is a postmodernist writer or a pathologist of postmodernism (Cantor 58), DeLillo by attempting to destroy the barrier between high and low culture in the novel complies with primary feature of postmodernism as articulated by Fredric Jameson in Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. Jameson in the book argues that this feature of effacement “between high culture and so called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern” (2) is quite fundamental to the postmodernism. In the novel this fusion is illustrated through the juxtaposition of two departments, namely Department of Hitler Studies and Department of popular culture, in the same building. The department of popular culture, also known as American environments, comprises of the teaching staff that

. . . is composed almost solely of New York émigrés, smart, thuggish, movie-mad, trivia-crazed. They are here to decipher the natural language of the culture, to make a formal method of the shiny pleasures they’d known in their Europe-shadowed childhoods—an Aristotelianism of bubble gum wrappers and detergent jingles. (10)

Murray Jay Siskind, the visiting professor to the department of popular studies, observes two primary things in this regard. First, he articulates his astonishment about the research topics of his fellow scholars. He contends, “I understand the music, I understand the movies, I even see how comic books can tell us things. But there are full professors in this place who read nothing but cereal boxes” (11), to which Gladney reacts, “It’s the only avant-garde we’ve got” (11). Second, he is immensely
impressed by Gladney’s efforts to have transformed Hitler’s identity. He commends Gladney by saying:

You’ve established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own. Nobody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction, literally or metaphorically. This is the center, the unquestioned source. He is now your Hitler, Gladney’s Hitler. It must be deeply satisfying for you. The college is internationally known as a result of Hitler studies. It has an identity, a sense of achievement. You’ve evolved an entire system around this figure, a structure with countless substructures and interrelated fields of study, a history within history. I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly preemptive. It’s what I want to do with Elvis. (13)

The reason the pop icon of the twentieth century, Elvis Presley, is kept on the same plane as the historical mass murderer, Hitler is because both of them have been reduced to images. Murray realises the transformation the image of Hitler has undergone with his affiliation to the department and the way he has been read and taught makes him as interesting as Elvis, the pop star. By juxtaposing the two radically opposite department together, DeLillo underscores the ironic state of the contemporary avant-garde has reached. In order to live up to its expectation of being ahead of its time, avant-garde kept recreating its relation to what Adorno calls as culture industry until the two expressions became indistinguishable in terms of their application. This kind of homogeneity, between culture and commerce in culture industrial society as illustrated by DeLillo in the novel, is articulated by Bürger’s Theory of the Avant-Garde. The book offers the course of evolution of various forms of avant-garde from the beginning of the twentieth century. The avant-garde which revolted against the institutionalization of art and categorical separation of art and life was corrupted by culture industry. Culture industry works on the profit motives, resulting in the emergence of pop art which challenged the traditional role of art and art in life. Bürger perceived pop art as an apolitical and ahistorical form of the historical avant-garde and, thus, declared that the neo-avant-garde institutionalises the
avant-garde as art and thus severs from what avant-garde proclaimed (58). However, Gerd Gemunden in *Framed Vision: Popular Culture, Americanization, and the Contemporary German and Austrian Imagination*, doesn’t share Bürger’s observation. He, with regard to DeLillo, iterates that the

. . . insistence of the historical avant-garde to close the gap between high and low by rejecting the elitism of modernism and its hostility to mass culture has survived the demise of the avant-garde. It can be seen as the most important feature for defining today’s postmodernist art. Andreas Huyssen, for instance, agrees with Bürger’s assessment of the failure of the historical avant-garde but insists that the increasing blurring between high art and mass culture that we presently witness in a variety of cultural manifestations cannot be seen exclusively in terms of the commodification and reification of art, as Bürger claims; instead, it has to be seen as an opportunity rather than a loss of quality. (67)

The novel attempts to illustrate pertinent descriptions and interpretations of the postmodern. However, the novel also manifests as to how modern order is engulfed by the postmodern world. While critics like Paul Cantor observe DeLillo’s working within the framework of postmodernism by offering “a vision of the inauthentic” (61), by portraying the world of what Baudrillard calls a postmodern world of simulacra and simulation, Elise Martucci contests that DeLillo creates a character, Jack Gladney, who “struggles against his postmodern existence” to give the “vision of the authentic” (76). In other words, it can be safely suggested that DeLillo creates within postmodern world a modern character who is still trying to get adjusted in the postmodern world. Critics like, Tom LeClair, John Duvall, and Leonard Wilox discern Jack Gladney to be a modernist living in a postmodern world. In this context, Leonard Wilox asserts:

. . . DeLillo sees a new form of subjectivity emerging as the modernist order is eclipsed by the postmodern world. Indeed, an older modernist subjectivity is in a state of siege in the information society. Jack Gladney, the narrator of *White Noise*, is a modernist displaced in a postmodern world. He exhibits a Kierkegaardian “fear and trembling”
regarding death and attempts to preserve earlier notions of an authentic and coherent identity by observing the tribalistic rituals of family life.

(347-48)

In the postmodern world of information and simulacra, DeLillo places a character like Jack Gladney whose subjectivity doesn’t easily comply with the bombardment of information and signs and looks for the prominence of corporeal world. Elise Martucci aptly observes that it is no wonder that the satirical elements of the novel are offered by the first person perspective of Gladney (76). In Gladney DeLillo creates a character within whom modernism and postmodernism are in a state of flux. He likes to stick to the old notions of subjectivity—he believes more on material reality than hyperreality, and metanarratives of humanity than elusive meanings and fragmented identities. When Denise inquires about his fixation with German culture, Gladney’s response is as:

It has a kind of authority . . . it’s not a question of greatness. It’s not a question of good and evil. I don’t know what it is. Look at it this way. Some people always wear a favourite color. Some people carry a gun. Some people put on a uniform and feel bigger, stronger, safer. It’s in this area that my obsessions dwell. (75)

Gladney’s beliefs are placed in contrast to Heinrich’s ‘brain theories.’ While Gladney seems quite baffled by the loss of referent and too much intrusion of media, his children, wife and others seem at home with the new phase of technology.

Gladney believes in old and apparently solid concepts like American Exceptionalism. He feels proud to be a part of a society that has progressed by leaps and bounds due to the advent of technology. Stuck at the camp during the Airborne Toxic Event, Heinrich and Gladney have an interesting conversation about the practical utility of contemporary technology. Heinrich, a kid of mere thirteen years sees his society cynically and says, “We think we’re so great and modern. Moon landings, artificial hearts. But what if you were hurled into a time warp and came face to face with the ancient Greek” (172). Heinrich focuses Gladney’s attention on the fact that though we have achieved impossible with the help of technology yet our knowledge about the world around us and its working has considerably reduced. He continues, “What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer
to computer. It changes and grows every second of every day. But nobody actually knows anything” (173). Here lies Gladney’s displacement. Being someone who likes to preserve his modern notions, he is working in a world where knowledge has been replaced by information.

DeLillo chooses the name ‘Blacksmith’ for the town where Jack Gladney resides with his family, “We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name” (133). It is time and again projected in the novel that Blacksmith, a small town, is quite unlike the city. Murray Siskind often voices out his immense liking for the town of Blacksmith, as it offers him to think profoundly on metaphysical issues like “death, disease, afterlife, outer space” (42) without offering any distractions. According to Murray, the city emits huge amount of heat from everywhere that makes it hotter than rest of the places. The town, however, resonates with the postmodern elements like supermarket, shopping malls etc. Elise Matucci in the book, The Environmental Unconsciousness in the Fiction of Don DeLillo writes, “It is obvious that the town’s name, not its physical environment is what offers Murray Siskind pleasure. Blacksmith despite its removal from the city, is not rural and seem to project very little of the natural” (78). The name of the town is signifier that does not corroborate with the conditions it presents. The name has a magical effect on the people who live there. The small town of Blacksmith, as Gladney tells his readers, was once a forest where ravines used to flow. He adds:

Babette and I and our children by previous marriages live at the end of a quiet street in what was once a wooded area with deep ravines. There is an expressway beyond the backyard now, well below us, and at night as we settle into our brass bed the sparse traffic washes past, a remote and steady murmur around our sleep, as of dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream. (4)

Gladney, the narrator, apathetically informs us, that beyond their backyard now there runs no more ‘deep ravines’ but traffic on the expressway. The sense of safety Gladney thinks he is experiencing is only imagined by him. He fails to perceive that it is the sound of bellowing horns, though remote yet steady, and not “deep ravines” (4) that falls him to sleep. New advancements in technology and scientific world in the age of postmodernism claims to have made the lives of the humans easier and much
efficient, but seldom does our rationality pay attention to the fact that our environment has also got affected by such developments, that too adversely. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-Francois Lyotard identifies the postmodern as an era in which:

> It is no longer possible to call development progress. It seems to proceed of its own accord, with a force, an autonomous motoricity that is independent of us. It does not answer to demands issuing from human needs. On the contrary, human entities - weather social or individual - always seem destabilized by the result and implications of development. (77-8)

Gladney’s thirteen year old son, Heinrich’s receding hairline is a matter of concern for Jack. He keeps pondering over the source of this problem more than the solution and feels guilty at times thinking if he is the man responsible for his son’s condition by raising him in the “vicinity of a chemical dump site” (25). Gladney is not unaware of the repercussions of living in such an environment. He knows that the toxic from the factories not only affects the health of the living beings but is the sole reason behind the “glorious sunsets” (25) of the town. Heinrich too spells this fact by saying that “there is something ominous in the modern sunsets” (72). DeLillo’s oblique but a very strong indictment of the blind fixation with development gets depicted in the way he describes the sunset ironically referred to as glorious sunset. The sunset has appeared to be more beautiful and appealing due to the presence of pollutants in the air and people appreciate this spectacle without having the inkling behind its so called glory. The rapid transformation of the society at the hands of technology is a gradual death of environment, as believed by Gladney too, “Man’s guilt in history and in the tides of his blood has been complicated by technology, the daily seeping falsehearted death” (25).

DeLillo in the novel creates a town like Blacksmith which is still holding on the last shreds of subjectivity. This town is in a state of transition with its forests and rivers being extensively replaced by shopping malls and highways, with the invasion of a new pharmaceutical drug, Dylar that promises to cure the anxiety of death. DeLillo, through a character, Winnie Richards, a lab assistant, asks if it is wise to eradicate this fear completely. She comments:
I think it’s a mistake to lose one’s sense of death, even one’s fear of death. Isn’t death the boundary we need? Doesn’t it give a precious texture to life, a sense of definition? You have to ask yourself whether anything you do in this life would have beauty and meaning without the knowledge you carry of a final line, a border or limit. (262)

The author, almost like a seer, impresses upon the readers to accept the finitude of life and dissuades from being escapist from the inevitable and imminent. Whatever meaning or sense life has, can only possibly be reached at by living it within its boundaries flanked by birth and death.

From analytical discussions held on various aspects of this novel, one can safely conclude that Don DeLillo qualifies as an avant-garde writer who encapsulates the life of a common American in the contemporary times. His major concerns remain the rise of technology and its immeasurable interference in the lives of common American in the form of media, advertisements, television and radio. Amidst this, the contemporary human has come to be engulfed by a culture based on exploration of natural resources and blind profiteering. This culture of consumerism has rendered the denizens of cosmopolitan cities insensitive and impervious to the exploitative designs of the multinational companies that have created an artificial environment of insecurity and fear, something which they promise to cure if the products launched by them are purchased and used. DeLillo has veritably depicted the postmodernism as a cultural logic of capitalism, to borrow a phrase from Jameson, that has created a virtual world, very aptly termed by Baudrillard as simulacrum. The novel depicts an environment that abounds in floating signifiers without any signified, thereby, reflecting the drastic shift in exchange value in any human transaction. The contemporary economic structure has reduced human beings to mere consumers, so much so that ‘the fear of death’ has also been commodified and it is made to believe that the fear can be alleviated by the use of a drug called dylar.