

## Chapter One

### An Introduction to Dello's *White Noise* in Postmodern Light

The novel *White Noise* is about American novelist Delillo version of telling us about how to live and survive in the contemporary period. Novelist has presented the condition of character or the 'self' as a literary entity which is supposed to be dead in postmodern. Certain kind of 'self' of the writer sees the world as a passive landscape against which a writer can work out. The postmodern is a condition in which capitalism and mass media combine. They saturate physical and ideological space that leaves little or no space for the enclaves of nature on free consciousness which is taken as an intrusive, potentially determinative force on the individual. That words and phrases like "freedom", "unitary consciousness," "self determination, "choice" and the like are dismissed by postmodern critical discourse as traditional notions and illusions.

But then again novelists – particularly American novelists like Don DeLillo– take these issues critically in their novels. For better or worse, they continue to deal with phenomenological, subjective consciousness: what it feels like to operate inside a mind that experiences the world as other. It means that they felt to reflect the social reality in literature as completely difficult. They talk for the all of "inter-subjectivity", "transpersonal," "circulation," etc. – the popular terminologies which is also called poststructuralist revolution of consciousness. American novelists are still telling us that, except for those epiphanic moments when we feel we break free from subjectivity, we are still stuck with our measly, alienated selves, and that given this state of things, we need strategies to help us cope.

Novelist has two reasons–Delillo has represented the highly developed macrocosmic vision of the postmodern world, an intense imaginative interest not just

in the local problems of the individual, family, and community, but in the massive form of power that effects the individual in ways he sees only vaguely and mysteriously. A second reason is that the ground his work a passionate concern for how the individual makes out in such a world. Don DeLillo is interested, in other words, in exploring strategies of self in the postmodern era.

In this study the researcher draws the attention to some discussions of terminologies like “postmodern” and “self”. The literature on the nature of the postmodern is already vast. It is basically experimental for version of literature. It talks about the perception of literature in a more subjective way. It enters in a specialized way of taking the reality itself. It also looks at how the postmodern, as a dominant culture condition, affects the individual. Particularly interesting issues in the research are the concepts of “man”, “self”, and “transcendental ego” has been one of the central objects of attack by poststructuralist theorists. These issues appear in the novel *White Noise* by DeLillo. It’s common now to accept the motion of the “death of the subject” or the “death of the Anthon”, but what Foucault, Derrida, and Barthes have called for obviously, is not the death of man but the death of a particular idea of man: one which, as Foucault puts, “gives absolute priority to the observing subjects, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity- which in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness” (12).

Here by the term “postmodern,” then, indicates a cultural condition, beginning in the America during the time of 1960s. In this context a discourse evolved to the point where it became possible to reject the self as an authentic presence.

The postmodern signifies for the individual a condition in which immediate or unmediated experience appears to be out of reaches, where there no longer seems to be any “signifies space”. A Jewish American writer Saul Bellow takes postmodern in

that way. In it, the individual can situate herself as an autonomous being. In this context, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is one of the best examples as the "most photographed barn in America" episode in (Picarn 12). Early in the novel, Jack Gladney and Murray, Jay Siskind visit a "tourist attraction" noted for nothing but the fact the people take picture of it. The barn that's photographed has no special significance in itself: in the fact Murray tells us the barn isn't really what people come for: they are talking pictures of talking pictures. He says:

Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender. We see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future we've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision . . . what was the barn like before it was photographed? . . . What did it look like, how was it different from 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've part of the aura. (12-13)

The experience of the postmodern is about the feeling that we cannot get outside the aura. We can't see the traditional structure anymore because we have become part of the postmodern situation itself; it has become part of us. In this particular example, Murray, "seemed immensely pleased" by "this feeling of embeddedness in collective signification, in this thoroughgoing mediation by culture, and thus might be called a postmodern man" (2). Other characters in DeLillo aren't quite as happy about it, since they sense in that entire signification, powerful and mysterious forces manipulating them, sometimes literally, to death.

To ask why the individual feels so mediated, so doubtful of the authenticity of her own experience, leads us to the specific features which comprises the postmodern

condition. Such things have been analyzed in the research. They have been discussed here: the cluster of problems created by “late capitalism,” the threat of nuclear annihilation, by capitalist and totalitarian powers alike, of extraordinary technologies which have been developed and implemented largely within the last fifty years and in combination have been responsible for the radical shrinkage of the individual’s “significant space.”

The first of these positions and situations have been examined by Fredric Jameson. For Jameson, we now live in a period that he, borrowing from economist Ernest Mandel, calls “late capitalism,” the third and most purified stage of capitalism, which is characterized by a decent red, postindustrial, multinational corporate economy which arrived with first economical use of the computer and accelerated with the dizzying growth of worldwide networks of communication system such as the internet. Late capitalism has gone beyond the “instrumental rationality,” as Adorno called it, which depersonalized and commoditized the individual in pervious stages of capitalism. Now, because of capital’s appropriation of new technologies – namely that of the mass media and of the computer, which produce images and information rather than products – it has found a new and more effective way to exploit and control the individual. It has managed to mobilize the charismatic power of image and of then communication devices in order to invade the individual’s private enclaves of subjectivity. “This purer capitalism of our time”, James says:

Thus eliminates the enclaves of pre -capitalist organization it has hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way one is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically originally penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious.

Capitalism has reached a kind of apotheosis: in the U.S. at least, it now

largely produces images and information (in the form of advertising, web site pages, computer banks of personal, credit and consumer information, software for finance industries, packaging, television shows, movies, videos, news papers and magazines) which are sold as products, but at the same time these images are expressions of capitalist propaganda. Late capitalism, therefore, is in the curious business of selling itself, a self-reflexivity that reproduces itself in the realm of culture. (13)

In such situation, as Jameson points out, the individual loses critical distance on her culture, becomes disaffected toward anything that isn't reinforced by a consumer ethic, and become morally disoriented, even paralyzed by her implication in schemes of power so vast and ethically conflicted that the ideas of "choice" seems an existential nostalgia.

Don DeLillo is a writer of *White Horse* which is published in 1985. He was born to Italian immigrants on November 20, 1936 in the Bronx Borough of New York City. His father was an author at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Although he abandoned his family's Roman Catholic beliefs by the end of adolescence, he retained affection for its rituals and disciplines. He was a lackluster student in high school life however he only began to read seriously around the age of eighteen when he had a summer job as a park attendant. He majored half-heartedly in communications, Arts at Fordham University, but he spent most of his time in the bohemian world of Manhattan in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He went to Jazz Club and art-house cinemas instead of studying.

After his graduating from college in 1958 he became a copy writer for a major advertising agency. He quit after five years and he started on his first novel,

Americana (1971), he earned money writing feature articles for national magazines. He wrote more than six novels in 1970s. In 1975, he married Barbara Bennett, an investment banker who switched careers to become a landscape designer, than in the 1970s he lived in Greece, where he wrote *The Names*, which was published in 1982 and *White Noise* was published in 1985. The Novel won the National Book Award and established his reputation as a serious mainstream American novelist. His first play, *The Room*, an exploration of anxiety about death, was produced. Delillo was awarded the Jerusalem prize in 1999 and his play *Val Paraiso* was produced. The play *Love-Lies-Bleeding* was produced in 2005 and his third play was, *The Word for Snow*, saw its first production in 2006.

Delillo's next novel was *Underworld*, which was judged in a 2006 *New York Times*. It was survey among the best American novels. His work, like *White Noise*, continues to reflect the contemporary world,. The writer (Delillo) tried his hand at writing for film with the screen play for *Game 6* in 2005, and he published *Falling Man* in 2007, a book centered on the destruction of the world Trade Center in 2001. He has continued to write and live near New York City.

Delillo's curiosity here about simulation and iteration as "a world of primary representation which neither precede nor follow the real but are themselves real ..."

Bruce Bawer has gone so far as to claim that Delillo merely presents "one discouraging battery after another of pointless, pretentious rhetoric –(Delillo) does not develop ideas so much as juggle jargon" (quoted 313)

Lou F. Caton argues that character of Jack Gladny is a traditionally united character: a romantic who questions society but all long deeply values his personal relations and family. He is communal person who desires to tell a simple story about a man trying to understand the eternal human creations of life. His is, as Delillo

describes him, “a reasonable and inquiring voice – the voice of a man who seeks genuinely to understand some timeless human riddle.” (314)

Delillo counters this deadness with a brief, almost hidden recognition of the possibility of a mysterious, spiritual unknown. As the express way traffic speeds by, it develops into “remote and steady murmur around our sleep, as of dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream.” (315)

In 1889-1945 Adolph Hitler was leader of Germany’s National Socialist German Worker Party (Nazi Party) became Chancellor of German in 1933. The following year, he consolidated his power through terror and by murdering his opponents. In 1938 Hitler annexed Austria and the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. With the German invasion of Poland in 1939, World War II and Hitler’s quest for world domination began in earnest. Emblematic of the evil of the Hitler regime were the concentration camps and death camps establish for the incarceration and extermination of people abhorrent to the Nazis. More than ten million people –

Gypsies, communists, homosexuals, and Jews- were tortured and exterminated by the Germans in these camps. When Ronald was inaugurated in January, 1981, as President of the United States and was reelected in 1984, in the years of his Presidency are reflected in *White Noise*. The Regan years were characterized in general by a feel good consumerism of the sort Delillo depicts along with a media infiltration of consciousness that allowed appearance to become more compelling than reality.

Regan, for example, told a story about how a brave pilot behaved during World War II when in fact, he was recalling the plot of the 1944 film *A Wing and a Prayer*. In the mean time, there have been people who spoke over the radio. Talk Radio however, usually refers to a specific genre. Talk radio of the kind that Bebette

habitually listens to involves a regular host who takes calls from listeners about a number of subjects, although most often about politics and cultural issues or psychological and international issues. This format became dominant in the 1980s and has continued to grow until many radio programs adhere to it. Another industrial accident was on the December 3, 1984, a Union Carbide pesticide plant located in the Indian city of Bhopal released forty tons of methyl isocyanate gas tank overheated and exploded in the wee hours of the morning. There were over 2,500 people were killed and more than 100,000 people's health was affected. On the April 26, 1986 at 1:23 a.m. , a nuclear reactor at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Ukraine, than part of the Soviet Union exploded. The explosion sent highly radioactive material into the atmosphere in a plume like the one Delillo describes in his novel. More than 330,000 people in the immediate area of the Chernobyl Plant were evacuated. This disaster had an immediate death toll of 56 with nearly 10,000 believed to have died due to radiation exposures. The toxic radioactive material was spread by wind over the Soviet Union, Eastern, Northern and Western Europe and possibly as far as eastern North America. This was not the first nuclear accident in the world. On March 28, 1979, at about 4:00 a.m., a meltdown occurred at the Three Mile Island.

Unit and nuclear power plant near middle town, Pennsylvania. While there were several operation errors that exacerbated the accident, the core meltdown did not breach the containment building's walls, some radioactive gases were believed to have escaped, however not deaths have been linked to this incident with certainty. A different, but no less compelling, disaster occurred on March 24, 1989 around midnight, when the oil tanker Exxon Valdez struck a reef in Prince William Sound. The tanker spilled nearly eleven million gallons of crude oil into the sea in Alaska that



was home to salmon seals great White sharks, palters, and sea birds. The remoteness of the spill's location severely hampered the cleanup effort. These are but a few the disasters that have marked and continue to mark the course of recent industrial and social history.

Don DeLillo's subject matters are so many but I have been taking few of them like death, his techniques and mass media's role are indicated here. He focus on death, fear of Death and attraction to death a present theme throughout the novel, is first introduced in Jack and Babette's conversation about who will die first. Later, both confess their terrible fear of death after Wenise discovers Babette's Dylar pills and Jack finally learns that Dylar is supposed to suppress the fear of death. The toxic event brings death into the foreground of the town's land scope and to the foreground of Jack's consciousness until it becomes his obsession. The near crash of an airplane, preceding the chemical fell, is a harbinger of that disaster. Heinrich's friend Orest attempts to expose himself to death as he prepares to sit in a cage with poisonous snakes. Lecturing to his class and discussing the plot to kill Hitler, Hack asserts that "all plots tend to move death ward," a hypothesis which, whether valid or not, forecasts the momentum and direction of the plot of White Noise. Echoing the closing words of James Joyce's story "The Death" the last words of White Noise are "and the dead," Neil Heims concludes that "we seem to believe it is possible to ward off death by following rules of good grooming. (310)

Don DeLillo's next subject matter is that in which matter related with "Mass Media" in White Noise is, in large measure, bland, vicarious, and determined by mass media that is by those who simulate reality for popular consumption. The Gladney family's main sources of stimulation are watching television, listening to the radio, and going to the supermarket and the mall, where they listen to live Muzak, that is, to

a live performance of music designed to sound canned. Steffie mouths the words the actors speak as she watches them on television. Reality is filtered through tabloids. Disasters are simulated and, when a real disaster occurs, it has the look of a movie. Even Jack's plot to kill Willie Mink is set up like a parody of a movie. Only wilder, whose name suggests an uncivilized state, and who is preverbal, seems to be in touch with authentic experience whether it is crying from the depth of his soul as an existential act, or weeping in front of the television, or facing the danger of a crowded highway.

Lou F. Caton argues that "contemporary society struggling with a nostalgic palimpsest of old fashion values that have been layered over by the textual, semiotic materialism of marketing, commoditization and computer codes. Cited as quintessentially postmodern." (312) Don DeLillo's next subject matter is that which is related technique, he presents his technique in this novel "is montages of tones, styles, and voices that have the effect of yoking together terror and wild human." Lentricchia also comments on DeLillo's portrayal of "the essential tone of contemporary America." DeLillo's characters are, he argues, "expressions of – and responses to – specific historical processes." (309)

Michael Veldez Moses, also writing in *New Essay on White Noise*, argues that "White Noise is DeLillo's exploration of an America in which technology has become not merely a pervasive and mortal threat to each of its citizens, but also .... Deeply ingrained mode of existing and way of thinking that is the characteristic features of the republic." (310)

Mark Osteen, in *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*, states that "the characters of White Noise try to counteract death by mouthing

chants and litanies practicing pound – religious rituals, crafting narratives that deflect or purge their fear, [and] performing violent or death – defying actions.” Cited 310)

*White Noise* is Don Delillo’s eighth novel and it won the 1985 National Book Award. It is considered to be the novel that brought Don Delillo’s work into the mainstream of contemporary American literature. In his novel, David Cowart reports in don Delillo: The physics of Language that “White Noise has generated more critical attention than any other Delillo’s novel.” (309)

In the Introduction to New Essay’s on *White Noise*, Frank Lentricchia observes that Delillo is a novelist of ideas whose novels “are montages of tones, styles, and voices that have the effect of yoking together terror and wild humor.” (309)

*White Noise* is Delillo’s exploration of an America in which technology has become not merely a pervasive and mortal threat to each of its citizens, but also .... Deeply ingrained mode of existing and way of thinking that is the characteristic features of the republic.” (310) Mark Osteen, in *America Magic and dread: Dan Delillo’s Dialogue with culture*, states that “-the characters of white Noise try to counteract dread by mouthing charts and litanies, practicing pseudo-religious rituals, crafting narratives that defect or purge their fear [and] performing violent on death -defying actions.”

The invasion of private space has been elaborated by Jean Baudrillard. In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, he explains that “there is no longer any system of objects” in the contemporary world; objective have been affected by a world saturated by commoditized signs. In such a world, “our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odd with his objects and with his image is played out: we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple

networks” (14). “The most intimate operations of your life, Baudrillard adds, “become the potential grazing ground of the media” (15). Think only of the explosion of home video technology, of the “reality” programming on American TV networks, and of the growing sense, adumbrated by Andy Warhol (15) and now reaching critical mass, that nothing is real unless it exists on television, “Reality packaging” now saturates our culture life. It has even become a principle feature of American politics too (16), so that democracy’s most vital process has become a matter of “photo ops”, “spin doctoring”, and the most cynical manipulation of political manipulation of political symbolism. Baudrillard call this packaging “obscenity” because the scene of “personal space” has been obscured, a sense of reality “behind” the images replaced by the individual’s dizzy sense of implication in a whirling array of simulacra, making him feel boundary-less, a simulacra himself, a node in universal force field of information.

One of the horrors of our century is that mass death and the prospect of total extinction has made it terribly difficult to look at death as one of the touch-stones to arouse individual consciousness. The individual’s anesthetization to death. Because of the looming nuclear crisis is a pervasive theme in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*. The nuclear crisis as a central subject of fiction is rare- it may be too over whelming a subject to taken on directly- but it has helped set the emotional ground tone for the fiction that we consider contemporary.

When this fear of nuclear holocaust is combined with mass media technique, the individual’s predicament in the post modern era becomes even more evident. “The Airborne Toxic Event” section of *White Noise* is an almost paradigmatic representation of what I call the post-modern, tragicomic situation in which the individual can trust her perception no more than she can trust the air she breathes, and her most intimate

feeling about her own death are managed and manipulated by a media system which simultaneously strips her of personal power and offers itself as an authority she can trust.

I believe what first drew me to don Delillo and his novels was his excellent examples of this anesthetization that about in his novel, let me take up just one particularly powerful one now, especially since it examines the effects of a media culture on individual experience of an ecological disaster. In *White Noise*, Jack Gladney and his family endure “The Airborne Toxic Event,” a cloud of toxic chemicals that hovers over the town and slowly infects some of the inhabitants. Delillo, like most American writers who work in a pragmatic, empirical tradition rather than say, the more theoretically-inclined French novelist, is for more willing to go to with his instincts, and through these instincts have often lead him to agree in large part with the claims of theorists about the problematic of the self he is reluctant to dispense with the concept altogether.

The concept of self that has become such a subject of contestation is the bourgeois humanist self, a self we might characterize as a discrete, impermeable, phenomenological site of freedom and sovereignty. It is ostensibly experienced as the source of one’s originality of thought and feeling, independence of judgment, and responsibility and self and self-control. It implies the starkest of subject-object dualism: this “self” is completely in command of his experience, conscious and unconscious, and is absolutely free to choose among the options his environment presents to him. It’s a kind of black-box concept of subjective, and philosophers and theorists have chipping away at it for the last century and half.

Most of Delillo’s characters do seem, in fact, constituted by the forces of language, media, communication, ideology. They never seem to be able to get

“outside the aura”: many enter the codes of the post modern world drivingly, or else because they aren’t strong enough to resist them.

Jack Gladney of *White Noise* who shares Delillo’s own quasi-mystical sense of languages, that is in their own play with language (and Delillo’s novels are filled with characters who play with language in an ironic, transformative way) they sense what I will call the “familiar mysteries,” an intimate and ephemeral feeling of Immanence.

Over all Delillo explores his characters’ persistent feeling-feeling cloaked in deep suspicion exculpation, sometimes both at once—that something ominous and invisible hovers amidst the mundane. Amidst the vast array of quotidian details that are so familiar that they no longer notice how eerie they are, there exists, over it all, or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension, It is never easy to hear roar since it sounds very much like a waste-noise of an electronic culture, and it is one more step to hear in roar “some form of swarming life just outside the range human apprehension.”

*White Noise* is Delillo’s eighth novel, and it won the 1985 National Book award. It is considered to be the novel that brought Delillo’s work into the mainstream of contemporary American Literature. Here the critic David Coward reports in *Don Delillo*:

*The Physics of Language* puts an argument that “*White Noise* has generated more critical attention than any other Delillo novel.” In the same page in the introduction to *New Essays on White Noise*, Frank Lentricchia studies that Delillo is a novelist of ideas whose novels “are montages of tones, style, and voices that have the effect of yoking together terror and wild humor.” Again he also comments on Don Delillo’s portrayal of “the essential tone of contemporary America.”

(309) In the novel Delillo's *Characters* are, he argues, "expressions of --and responses to ---specific historical processes." In this novel next critique Michael Valdez Moses, also writing in *New Essay on White Noise*, argues that "White Noise is Delillo's exploration of an American in with technology has become not merely a pervasive and mortal threat to each of its citizens, but also . . . a deeply ingrained mode of existing and way of thinking that is the characteristic feature of the republic. Mark Osteen, in *American Magic and Dread Shows* here: Don Delillo's *Dialogue with culture*, states that the character of white Noise try to counteract dread by mouthing chants and litanies, practicing pseudo-religious rituals, crafting narratives that deflect or purge their fear, [and] performing violent or death-defying actions (310).

Neil Heims has presented an essay; Heims discusses the importance of style as content in *White Noise*. *White Noise* is narrated by Jack Gladney, the college professor and specialist in Hitler studies, who explores what it is like to be alive in a world where life is devitalized and where being alive means becoming a consumable image. As he and his family are inside a mall, eating, "a band played live Muzak. Muzak is, by definition, recorded music of an essentially bland and seemingly unassuming nature that is piped into public spaces, usually shopping centers or elevators. Its general purpose is twofold, to sooth customers and, by enhancing the shopping environment, to stimulate them to buy things, even things they had never thought they wanted. The idea of live Muzak is an oxymoron, a yoking of contradictory terms. Never the less, it is clear that by refurbishing and updating the perennial insight that life imitates art, Dellilo is establishing a purposeful symbol.

Neil Heims links the phrase “Live Muzak” one of the novels’s governing patterns of construction can be found. The live performance is a simulation. It is something real pretending to be something artificial, consequently conferring more authenticity to the artificial than it actually has. The actual, in fact, is in decline thought *White Noise*. The actual is undermined by the media, the home of ersatz (fake), and it is threatened by an increasing number of catastrophes that make actual experience less desirable than simulations. Actual experience, unmediated by style, is fraught with anxiety and difficulty. Style indicates a denial of anxiety and difficulty. It is an end run around death.

Next his content in the *White Noise*: the social environment evoked by the novel is derived from the televised representation of the world rather than from the world as it is experienced by individuals. Rather than holding a mirror up to nature (as most writers do,) in *White Noise*, DeLillo holds a mirror up to a mirror and thereby mirrors the mirror of a culture that has usurped the power and the authority of nature. The triumph of style over content, of image over reality, of imitation over spontaneity and authenticity, of simulacra over nature, in effect, cripples or limits the range and power of the senses and, consequently, the capacity for experience and action.

In the essay another critic Canton explores the elements of romanticism and postmodernism that can be found in *White Noise*. A critical exploration of romanticism in Don DeLillo’s eighth novel *White Noise* may initially seem misguided or it shows odd: And yet, some of the values and topics commonly associated with popular notions of romanticism, like sympathy, unity, authenticity, and an interest in the “unknown,” do emerge in this supposedly postmodern novel. They emerge not from overarching themes but rather from common thoughts and desires associated with the novel’s e viewpoint character, Jack Gladney. By judging such



characterization as romantic, that is, supportive of these broad Trans historical values, he finds a deeply qualified postmodernism within *White Noise*.

Lou F. Cantgon observation, a first response to Delillo's fiction is probably not romantic, after all his novels frequently show contemporary society struggling with nostalgic palimpsest of old fashion values that have been layered over by the textual, semiotic materialism of marketing, comodification, and computer codes,. Cities as quintessentially postmodern, Delillo reportedly writes a novel of simulacra with an endless regress of mediation. John Frow portrays Delillo's curiosity here about simulation and iteration as "a world of primary representation which neither precedes nor follows the real but are themselves real . . ." (313). Bruce Bawer has gone so far as to claim that Delillo merely presents "one discouraging battery after another of pointless pretentious rhetoric. [Delillo] does not develop ideas so much as jungle Jargon (P. 313)." In the meantime Paul Canton directly calls section of *White Noise* "self reflexive" and "mediated;" a bit later, he claims *White Noise* transforms the "autonomous self" into the "inauthentic self" (313).

The scenes present evidence for this uncertain romanticism composing the character of Jack Gladney. On the one hand, he is a traditionally unified character: a romantic who questions society but all along deeply values his personal relation and family. He is communal person who desires to tell a simple story about a man trying to understand the eternal human questions of life. His is, as Delillo describes him, "a reasonable and enquiring voice- the voice of a man who seeks genuinely to understand some timeless human riddle."

## Chapter Two

### Post-modernist Irony and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

The message of the *White Noise* is the confused alarms that Irony is quintessentially peculiar to the age of postmodernism. It functions as the very episteme of the age. Irony challenges and ride made consensus or community, allowing the special whole and everyday language to be questioned. One the other hand, the position of this questioning and ironic viewpoint is necessarily hierarchical, claiming a point of view beyond the social whole and above ordinary speech and assumptions. Indeed how we understand value post modernism depends very much our definition and evaluation of irony. We might want to embrace a post modern society without Mat narratives privileged views points or ideal of levitation. Alternatively, we might redefine irony. If we there is nothing other than we would be lefty with a word of saying without my any possibility of under lying truth or ultimate serves. Such a word would radically ironic, for no speech act could be legitimated, justified and grounded. To describe post modernity as a society of the simulacra, where copies and receptions have no original , where system has no centre and where image s have no prior model of substance imaged, is to see the post modern present as a finally having librated itself from the constricting myths of an ultimate real Colebrook (150).

Richard Rorty argues that irony is the only possible ethic of modern liberalism. We could not believe in a foundation that would underlie or supersede the difference and specificity of cultures. As Rorty says, “we have no paralinguistic consciousness to which language need to be adequate, no deep sense of how things are which it is the duty of philosophers to spell out in language”(21). We should recognized that “we” are effect of the vocabulary we speak, and that we can only renovate or renew such

vocabularies from within “The ironist spends her time warring about the possibility that she has been initiated in to the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game but she cannot give a criterion of wrongness.”(74). But Rorty’s Ironist sees “no read on to think that Socratic inquiry in to the essence of justice or science or rationality will take one much beyond the language games of one’s time (75).

For the ironist renovation of language comes about through private irony or continual self-creation, while at the public level we have to be nominalist, reigniting that our concepts have no corresponding reality but only a stabilizing function (87). We recognize that our fixed political institutions and our moral vocabulary—terms such as justice, democracy and even liberalism—have no inherent meaning: Rorty takes pragmatists and deconstructionists to be united in thinking that anything can be anything if you put in (sic) the right context, and that ‘right’ just means the context that there is a right context” (43).

Publicly and pragmatically, we must adopt a common political vocabulary: in the case of modern western democracies and we think justice, rights, humanity and freedom. There is a contradiction in Rorty’s advocacy of irony, but one he is quite happy to embrace that contradiction. On the hand he argues for the value of irony: that it is the only way we can abandon grand claims about truth and foundation, claims that have allowed the west to think of itself as a privileged home of reason. On the other hand, he does not want to establish irony, or the perpetual Questioning of one’s public language by private individuals, as a universal truth or theory. Publicly values of the west: we commit ourselves to the language of rights, humanism and democracy. Private and philosophically, we know such values to be contingent and context dependent, so we remain ironic at a private level.

One way to understand post modernity is to see it as radical rejection of redefinition irony. If irony demands some idea or point of view acknowledge that all we have are competing contexts and that any implied 'other' position would if self be a context. Post modernity would be a society of simulation and immanence with no privileged point from which competing voices could be judged. One would have to accept one's own position as one among others, and ass thoroughly unoriginal. Post modern irony in its radical form works with this contradiction. Insofar as one speaks one must adopt or generate a point of view one must say something. Even speaking ironically, or being other, than what is said, requires one to express a position.

Irony involves a kind of simulation. The Greek *eirneia* means simulated ignorance we need to explain both why we indulge in it and how we manage to communicate through it whether or not it is actually ambiguous, irony is certainly applied to several categorically different kinds of objects- single utterances and discursive style, for example. There is irony as a particular trope or figure of speech, classically illustrated by a remark like "what a fine friends!" said some-one who turned out to treacherous, But it is wrong to generalize from this example and define irony, as any dictionaries do, as meaning the opposite of what is actually said. Not only does that definition fit lying as much as irony, by the ironist by no means always intends to convey the opposite of what the words literally say. Irony speech and writing do not typically consist in the production of ironic tropes, and it is not for the production of there that writer's such as Swift, Voltaire, Heine and Anthony Powell are celebrated as masters of irony. That there are other, modes of ironic discourse is established by the existence of so-called Socratic irony. In Plato's dialogue, Socrates characteristically feigns modest ignorance of a topic and empathy with his opponent's position, thereby leading him on until the absurdity of that position becomes clear.

Such devices of irony have at least two-road features in common with her trope of irony. The words used by a speaker or a character in a book are not intended to convey, to an alert audience at least, the attitude they superficially convey. It is less easy to perceive connections between these forms of verbal irony and that which we attribute to events of circumstances such as those in the O. Henry's story where a husband sells his watch to buy a comb for his wife, in the mean times, has sold he hair to by a chain for the husband's watch, in the mean times, has sold he hair to buy a chain for husband; watch. The irony owes ti the incongruence between the actual dispensation of fate and the protagonist's own understanding of events.

The typical proposes of ironic devices are ridicule, mockery, and the like. A plausible suggestion is that irony has the same kinds of attraction as criticism through mimicry. The ironist echoes the words that someone holding the opinions mocked actually or might well have used. Thus Socrates ridicules his opponents through mimicking the speech of their obsequious disciples.

The problems of how an audience catches in to the ironist's intentions are a vexed One. One proposal appeals to the recognition that if the writer intended his or her words literally there would then have a violation of some maxim of proper discourse, such as truth-telling. The reader them searcher, by way of interpretation, for an mention behind the utterance that would save the writer from the charger of culpably having violated any maxims. But while this man fit some cases, it suffers from the false assumption that the ironist must always intend to convey some particular propositional message.

*White Noise* is a novel about the mysterious sounds we make as we engage in the familiar rounds of daily life, about the "deep, terrible lingering fears" that somehow get expressed as we "walk around, talk to people, eat and drink." The most

misleading way to read the presence of *White Noise* in the novel is to assume that it stands strictly for cultural detritus, and that Delillo is merely indicting America's enslavement to the hypertrophied consumerist desires instilled by a media society, of course this is partly what he is doing, but Delillo's contribution to this theme in American writing is unique; what's more, it's consistent with his postmodern principal that he can't assume a space outside the aura for social criticism. Delillo is admitting that yes, the junk of media and consumer culture stifles imagination, weakens our sense of personal being and makes us diffuse our awareness of morality, but that is now a given of postmodern culture, and there is nowhere to run from it: not to football, not to science, not to religion and finally not even to art, the only thing left to do is to re-engage the mass culture that modernists abandoned. "In the commonplace I find unexpected themes and intensities," says Jack (P. 184). Since *White Noise* is about a world of language, it is the commonplaces of language; it is the commonplaces of languages that will lead to the novel's revelations about being and morality.

In the *White Noise* the tone is marked by different from that of *The Names*, but their attitudes toward language are identical. Later soon after Delillo's return from Greece, whose burden of history gives *The Names* its solemn heavy rhythms, *White Noise* reads like an amazed rediscovery of America. When we read through the inventory of supplies that the students take from their parents' station wagons on the first page—"the junk food still in shopping bag-onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut crème patties, waffles and kabooms, fruit chews and wife popcorn; the dum-dum pops, the mystic mints" – one is struck that *White Noise* defamiliarizes the habits and furnishings of White middle-class America more effectively than any novel since *Lolita* (*White Noise* P. 3). The tone of the inventory, spoken in narration Jack

Gladney's voice, is typically ambivalent: half-baffled by the vertiginous abundance of products that didn't even exist on the planet till groups of food technicians and advertisers invented them just a few years earlier, and half-delighted at the inventiveness and revelatory power the names of these products displays. What are fruit chews, anyway, and why do they exist? Isn't fruit (unchewed) enough? Why do we have to thin our ranchos? These are questions for Murray Jay Siskind and the other professors at college-on-the-Hill, but one thing will become clear: it is important that we attend to them, not just because they address how denatured our food has become, but because the names we give our food, like all *White Noise*, speak to our sense of mystery: not for nothing is the last item on the list a Nabisco chocolate wokie called "mystic mints."

According to the information theory, the term "White Noise" refers to the sound of information which a messenger sends but whose meaning is garbled because the receiver- a computer terminal, a TV, a human being- does-not have the necessary interface equipment – a compatible modem, a clear cable connection, ears to hear-to process the signal. Thus, we tend to think of *White Noise* as marginal interference, as what we must clear away in order to hear what the real message is. But in Delillo, the marginal has become the message: what can't be assimilated is exactly what we need to tune in to, because there are good reasons why we have pushed to the margins the human make to utter their fear of death, and modern culture, as Tolstoy knew in "The Death of Ivan Ilych" is organized precisely to suppress and marginalize the fact of death. If we are going to hear our "cries for pity", we have to learn to listen to what the *White Noise* is saying.

Unluckily we are unable to learn it from Murray Jay Siskind, who is this novel's exemplar of a surrendering strategy of self. Murray is an arresting cultural

analyst, but as I 'll try to show here, Murray is finally the most inhuman character in the book because death-his own or anyone else's-has no existential meaning to him: he's virtually abstract, a pure manipulator of signs, a man who can recommend to a desperate man religion one moment and murder the next, and not see that there is a difference between the two. Murray is what Owen Brademas might have become had he not taken his stand against the cult. Murray doesn't take stands against anything because that does not touch him: he is a obscenely innocent, a pure product of postmodern America.

Murray Jay Siskind has come to Black Smith to lecture on "Living icons" (10). This makes perfect sense, since that's how he sees the living: as icons, simulacra. It's in keeping with his admission to Jack that "I am here to avoid situations;" that is live situations that require him to treat human as something more than fascinating behavioral data (11). The key to his character is that "immensely pleased" that "[W]e can't get outside the aura" of postmodern culture (13). The aura of disembodied language is what saves him; rather than language being a vivid reminder of mortality, as it is for James Axton, it is Murray's escape from the consciousness of death, all white allowing him to talk volubly about it. Signs are his Dylar, Murray feels absolutely none of the anxiety Jack feels about death because language doesn't represent anything to him: language defers endlessly, is nothing more. He doesn't fear death because there is nothing in him stable enough to house such fear.

In the novel including with the fear of death vanquished, Murray is free to become a sponge of all the postmodern phenomena that, in its demotic fashion, speaks of the culture's death fear. One of the novel's real triumphs is the way Murray elevates the supermarket and television into the realm of the sacred. In the mean time



for him, the supermarket “recharges us spiritually “(38); T V, which “welcomes us into the grid,” “practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness and disgust” (51). Yet unlike James Axton’s epiphany before the crowd at the Parthenon, Murray’s elation isn’t connected to any existential awareness; it’s pure ecstasy of communication, a celebration of his vertiginous entanglement in the circulation of information. It’s no accident, then, that Murray latches onto figures like Elvis Presley, whose name no longer signifies a human being but a vortex of fantasy and media speculation. The dialogical minute about Elvis and Hitler that Murray dances with Jack in the classroom is brilliant and entertaining, but Jack speaks for both of them when he says “Death was strictly a professional matter here. I was comfortable with it. I was on top of it” (74). The difference between the two of them is that Jack will not remain so far long.

Here the character of Murray’s remoteness from death makes him remote from life, his own and everyone else’s. In the last chapter of the “Waves and Radiation” section, Murray comes to the Gladney household to talk to the children. “He talked about the otherworldly babble of the American Family. He seemed to think we were a visionary group ---. There were huge amounts of data flowing through the house, waiting to be analyzed” (P. 102). The Gladneys are an extraordinary group, but Murray’s relationship to them is strictly scientific. When Babette’s face suddenly appears on the TV screen, the whole family becomes disoriented, even terrified. “ a two syllable cry, ba - ba, issued from the deeps of my soul,” Jack says (P 104). “We were being shot through with Babette. Her image was projected on our bodies, swam in us and through us. Babette of electrons and photons, of whatever forces produces that gray light we took to be her face” (105). The disturbance arises because Babette

isn't simply waves and radiation to the Gladney; she is real, and her transformation reminds Jack, at least, that he and Babette are both mortal creatures, a fact that TV normally obscures: "I tried to tell myself it was only television-whatever that was, however it worked-and not some journey out of life or death, not some mysterious separation" (105). But what is Murray's reaction to all this? "Murray looked up at me, smiling in his sneaky way." And what does he do while Wilder cries, his face inches from the TV screen? "Murray took notes."

Murray sustains this remoteness through-out the book, through his speeches seem to "intelligent about death" that it is tempting to believe that he's not avoiding it but truly "on top of it" (282). On their "serious looping Socratic walk," Murray's relentless rationality about death is practically ghostly.

There is no reason to believe life is more precious because it is fleeting. Here is a statement. A person has to be told he is going to die before he can begin to live life to the fullest. True or false? False. Once your death is established, it becomes impossible to live a satisfying life. ( 285)

That Jack wrestling with a panicky bout with the death fear doesn't deter Murray. When Jack asks "How do I get around" death, Murray's answers- three all told- suggest how far into the realm of pure discourse he has gone.

His first answer is to "Give yourself up to" technology: "believe in it. They will insert you in a gleaming tube; irradiate your body with the basic stuff of the universe. Light, energy, dreams. God's own goodness" ( 285). When Jack rejects this suggestion, Murray answers: "In that case you can always get around death by concentrating on the life beyond" (285). But Murray is puzzled that Jack rejects this on the grounds that he doesn't believe in the life beyond. (Believe, because it involves

owning an idea rather than simply letting it circulate through the mind, is alien to Murray.) Then comes his last suggestions:

I believe Jack, there are two kinds of people in the world. Killers and diers. Most of us are diers, We don't have the disposition, the rage or whatever it takes to be a killer. We let death happen,. We lie down and die. But think what it's like to be a killer. Think how exciting it is, in theory to kill a person in direct confrontation. If he dies, you cannot. To kill him is to gain life credit. The more people you kill, the more credit you store up. (290)

Murray will insist, in the next four pages, that he is talking only "in theory." ("We're a couple of academics taking a walk") but he steadily goads Jack into the position where his only option seems to be murder. "Are you a killer or diers, Jack?" (P. 292). When Murray exits the novel, he has succeeded in stripping Jack of the entire system of rituals and beliefs that have kept his life manageable to this point, Jack can do nothing else now but attempt to murder, and Murray because his own death is just "theory" to himself, can't understand that for others it can't be. He lives the novel recommending fascism because the swirl of language with which Murray is so "immensely pleased" is not linked to the feat of death. His own language, like he names cult, in the end "mocks our need to structure and classify, to build a system against the terror in our souls" -and he does it because there is no terror in his own.

Here, Babette's character is hardly missing terror, however, which is why it isn't difficult to call her one of Delillo's paralytic characters. The real "point of Babette" - through Jack needs there exactly the opposite- is that the feat of death immobilizes her. Her capacity for nurturing and intimacy keep her from surrendering to implication in a death - denying media-system, but her freedom from the system

enslaves her to the death fear. Babette is a deconstructed Earth – Mother: though she looks and acts the part –hefty heavy- breasted, forever tending to the young, the old, and the husband- she finds it impossible to be the life –force everyone needs her to be.

However, her stoic immersion in the everyday makes her one of DeLillo’s most attractive characters. Her fear immobilizes her, but her life is still infused with a sense of wonder and vitality. She has made the kitchen one of the two “power haunts” of the Gladney household (the other is the bedroom), and her presence anchors many of the sense there, scenes full of food, energetic, loopy conversation and as much *Familiengefuehl* as one could expect in a house whose children come from at least four different sorts of parents (6). One of the jobs is to teach old people “how to stand, sit and walk,” which Jack explains by saying that “we seem to believe it is possible to ward off death by following rules of good grooming” (27). Her other hob is reading tabloids to old man Treadwell, a practice which, as we learn from Murray, is an attempt to ward off Treadwell’s fear of death by other means. Constantly on the lookout for her youngest boy, Wilder, always on self-improvement diets and exercise regimens, appearing always to “say yes to things,” it’s easy to see why at the beginning of the novel Jack says that she “makes me feel sweetly rewarded, bound up with a full-souled woman, a lover of daylight and dense life” (6).

According to Jack characterization, of course, is a major case of wishful thinking, for Babette, even before the beginning of Jack’s chronicle of their lives, has had her encounter with Dylar-the drug designed to repress the death fear-and Willie Mink. It takes a long while for Jack to catch on, but when he finally confronts her, Babette owns up to the familiar and mysterious truth: “I am afraid to die” (196). Not only this, “but Mr. Gray said I was extra sensitive to the terror of death” (197). What ensues is a remarkable dialogue between a husband and wife – who, until now, have

told “each other everything --- except (their) fear of death” (29-30). Now they exchange their fears, make love, scold and soothe each other, and eventually fall asleep, all talk finally useless before “the hard and heavy thing, the fact itself” (203).

The novelist has presented the condition of abette doesn't however; shrink from the death fear after her failure with the Dylar. As would so many of Delillo's paralytics. She keeps pushing her shopping cart through the market, holds her dying husband's head to her breasts. It is wilder who gives her strength, that pure familiar mystery in the flesh, that wordless tearful boy. She has a Kierkegaardian resilience in the face of death. A while after their major dialogue, Jack asks her, “Are you basically feeling the same?” Her answer “You mean I am sick unto death? The fear hasn't gone, Jack” (263). Yet at the end of the novel, she stands with her infected husband at the spectacular sunsets that the deathly clouds has left behind, she “doesn't know how to fell” any more than Jack does, but she is there with him, facing the mystery in a brave wondrous silence (324). Is it significant that they've brought wilder along? Delillo doesn't make much of it. Part of the reason they brought him may be because the boy can anchor the turbulence of their awe, but bringing him also suggests that Babette knows how important it is to cope with the new kinds of postmodern experience of which Babette and Jack are only beginning to learn.

In the comparison Jack is considerably more volatile than Babette – he is erratic, ambitious, and foolish in ways she never is – but his ability to face the sunset knowing what is inside his body gives his paralysis a brave, strangely elegiac quality. He does not start the novel so bravely, in fact, early in the novel Jack notes his “tendency to make a feeble presentation of self . . . I am the false character that follows the name around” (17). He wants very much, one sense, to be a surrendered,. He evades, in almost everything he does the death-terror that causes him to wake-up

in the middle of the night “in the grip of a death sweat” (47). He loses himself in shopping:

Babette in the mass and variety of our perches, in the sheer plentitude those crowded bags suggested . . . in the sense of the 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 the people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening.

## Chapter Three

### Conclusion

The present research – Delillo “self” is one that knows it is going to die throughout consumerism, fear of death, unnecessary round of TV, Radio, which are causes of death and lack up consciousness. It shows it knows this is from internal evidence – Psyche terror, a desire to attach oneself to a body of belief-but because it has learned to hear in all the *White Noise* which obscures death the reasons, lack up consciousness.

The self that hears throughout mass media, TV, radio, Muzak shows unnecessary things highly focused to the consumerism which are familiar mysteries the news that he or she is going to die doesn't have much to go to on, obviously. It is in a very volatile and dangerous state, and as we have seen, is as likely to hear in the familiar mysteries a call to murder as a cry for pity.

*White Noise* represents here throughout ironically toward the death fear. Which is lack up consciousness, Delillo which is as it should be: Delillo owes us no more than that he should put us in such a position. As I've suggested, he hasn't given us an activist or instrumental strategy of self. It is and remains paralyzed: But it is capable of expressing on enormous range of affect, from horror to inspired awe, and that it seems to me is a beginning. One of the formidable achievements of Delillo's fiction is that some of the characters withstand the pushing assaults of postmodern experience, and survive without the benefits of any soft illusions.

In the *White Noise* they have multi voices of language, which they have had from the beginning from the character and different types of satire also. Language dominated by T.V. radio and –mall also which is by forcibly obligatory to unnecessary goods. People are not presented as ideas about the contemporary reality.

They are presented without connectives so that they actually impose themselves on the narrative as pieces of reality.

A literary criticism of the book *White Noise* by don DeLillo is presented. It comments on the definition of White Noise as something that can be either positive or negative. The novel discusses mass media and advertising, and examines the term White Noise as it applies to theories in economics. References to shopping and the supermarket are discussed in the novel as themes present in the novel, and the constancy of consumerism is explored.



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