Chapter 1

Sense of Departure and Deviation in *White Noise*

This research aims at examining how dreadful cyber culture has become in Don DeLillo's *White Noise.* The narrator of this novel is engaged in exploiting the fashionable fervor of consuming things that are available in the supermarket. Resultantly he cultivates obsession with death, and mortality. He competes with others in the race to consume fresh and latest commodities. Frequenting visit to pub, bar, restaurant, movie hall, concert hall is the trademark of his life. He along with his kids and wife are often glued to television programs. The idea of remaining loyal to only one wife is alien to him. He has more than four wives. His friend Murray chooses to lead a life of mobility and rush. Exposed to the late capitalist mode of living lives, Babette, Murray and Gladney develop fixation on death. They are fearful of death. Often Babette and Gladney quarrel regarding who would die first. Fear of death and the desire for death coexist in them creating further cycle of anxiety, restlessness, emptiness and isolation.

In the name of promoting the range of free choice and haphazard sense of freedom, Murray, Babette and Gladney happen to witness the death and dearth of life-affirming values like care, affection, family integrity and mutual sense of support. Specter of death haunts them. The more exposed they are to glamour and glimpse of consumer society, the more disillusioned and exhausted they become. Constant exposure to violence to television programs and comic books produce deadening and sedative effect in Gladney's children. In the name of innovating existing technology of energy production, toxic chemicals leak out, claiming the lives of several people. Ultimately, almost all the characters are bound to encounter the darker side of late capitalist venture, consumer society, and the widening gap between immediate

experience and mediated experience.

In Don DeLillo's *White Noise,* the protagonist's unrestrained passion for latest fashion, consumerism, popular culture and cybernetic practice puts his life in jeopardy. Gladney and his wife, Babette, build up obsession with death. Their expectation to lead a meaningful and glamorous life at the cost of established norms make them fearful of death. Their uncritical reliance on technological comfort makes them too naïve to treat chemical leakage lightly. As a result, they are affected badly by toxic leakage.

The ideological underpinning of cyber culture is called into question in DeLillo's *White Noise* as the characters like Gladney, Babette and Murray develop dreadful obsession with death. Due to their unrestrained passion for consumerism, and sedative effect of cyber culture, they get languished and weakened. Ultimately they are affected by the fatal effect of toxic leakage. The lack of moderation and self-restraint lead to the disintegration of an individual's role in society.

Don DeLillo produced most of his known work in late twentieth century. His early novels are mainly concerned with malaises and maladies faced by people who are trapped in the postmodern society. He raises postmodern genre to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the last century. He then writes mainly on some of the latest trends and fashions. He captures the ethos and shifting trend of present society which is exposed to countless ills and hazards like simulation of society and obsession with death. Matthew J. Parker is a popular critic of DeLillo. Regarding DeLillo's *White Noise*, he makes the following remarks:

> In *White Noise,* though, the sacred and the other anthropological
>
> elements have scarcely been considered—despite the religious awe
>
> looming in the airborne toxic event and the narrator's invitation to

consider the scientific study of the cultural behavior and development

of man. Hidden among the novel's characters—hidden by them—is an

imitative tendency that first shapes not representational behavior but

desire itself. Triangular desire Girard documents in the French novel

structures much of *White Noise*. (1)

Both the sacred and profane elements coexist in *White Noise*. In addition, there are

also other elements which jointly give a glimpse of troubled and superficial tendency

of contemporary society. The most mysterious thing about this novel is that DeLillo

points out how unpredictably desire changes into source of unknown fear.

Kareen Weekes concentrates on the valorous and puzzling disposition of

Gladeny. He takes Gladney as the most complex character. Weeks discloses the

following view regarding Gladney in the context of *White Noise:*

Rather than DeLillo's suggested axiom of consume or die, *White Noise*

argues that we consume and die. Confronting death is a random shock

that subsides into mere white noise, as our lives adjust. Our shopping

may be temporarily confused, but it continues; we work our way up

and down the aisles and toward the culminating registers, while the

ambient roar—the background noise of both living and dying—

rumbles on. (16)

The idea of the confrontation with death and mortality is the most thrilling idea

inherent in the text, *White Noise.* When society offers plenty of possibilities to

individual citizens, they are rather haunted by their own sense of guilt and

unconscious fear. The reason for the unnecessary rise of fear is the most puzzling

thing in this novel.

Scott Rettberg is of the opinion that in the mind of Babette, obsession with

death is represented as the ruling motive, an intense, over-mastering passion. Such chronic sense of fear is gratified at the expense of every just and generous principle, and every feminine feeling. Her exposure to television culture and its sedative effect on her mindset are taken as the root cause of unexpected troubles. Rettberg makes the additional commentary in the following excerpt:

> The characters in Don DeLillo's novels inhabit a world that is at times cynically hysterical, sometimes loaded with hopes and potential, sometimes with a brooding, stark darkness that is frightening to us because of the fact that it is so present in our everyday lives. DeLillo's characters face angst of the most contemporary varieties. Although Don DeLillo is not a conventional realist or naturalist in any sense of the word, he is a postmodernist author. (10)

DeLillo is certainly innovative. Despite his innovative hallmark, he is content to work in forms and genres that are long established. Yet the work of DeLillo is distinctly postmodern. It presents the stories of characters that face life in a postmodern, postindustrial, television culture.

Mark Osteen examines *White Noise* in the light of characters' soaring obsession. Growing obsession of the characters reveal heightens the possibility of committing crimes. Osteen makes the following pronouncement regarding this aspect of the novel:

> *White Noise* thus brings together many of DeLillo's obsessions: the deleterious effects of capitalism, the power of electronic images, the tyrannical authority and dangerous byproducts of science, the unholy alliance of consumerism and violence, and the quest for sacredness in a secularized world. Like all of his fiction, it displays his virtuoso

command of language and, particularly, his ventriloquist capacity to

mimic the argots of various cultural forms. In it he amplifies the noises

around us and permits us to hear again how these sounds shape our

own voices and beliefs. (5)

DeLillo operates from the inside of the cultural institutions that he is assessing to

instigate a dialogue with cyber culture. He maintains a measured opposition while

treating the subjects. Masking its critique in celebration, *White Noise* inhabits the very

heart of cyber culture to weigh its dangers against its marvels.

Victor Seidler argues that *White Noise* displays how masculinity is shaped by

academic pursuits. Masculinity and reasonable manner are put side by side by DeLillo

in the novel. Concentrating on this aspect of reasoning, Victor Seidler makes the

following observation regarding this sort of view that DeLillo projects in this novel:

Don DeLillo's 1986 novel *White Noise* provides a narrative which

critiques the educational reproduction of masculinities. The lecturers in

his, School of American Environments, are portrayed as shallow and

insecure, desperate to outdo each other in feats of masculinity which

resemble rites of passage rather than pedagogic experiences. In the

Western world manliness has come to be closely aligned with

reasonable behavior. (2)

Seidler Victor reiterates the way in which reason is put forward as the legislator of

reality. Thus, this trend gains authority for men to form, and educate, a world

according to their notion. This construction prioritizes rationality and requires that

men should live a careful and controlled life. DeLillo's academics noticeably struggle

to align their urges with their society's expectations.

Ugo Panzani makes the following observation regarding the subversive power

of visual technology which is obviously handled in *White Noise*:

> Since visual technologies are in *White Noise* the apparatus of state
> control, such aesthetic situation represents a moment of counter-
> hegemonic practice. The novel suggests that by reenacting the
> traumatic scene, brilliant's performance, defined in opposition to the
> traumatizing media image, offers an opportunity for a cathartic
> working through. (7)

DeLillo's portrayal of the power of media is one of the most striking aspects of the
novel. The miracle of visual technology is also reproduced in the novel. The portrayal
of power is carefully planned and maneuvered. DeLillo leads reads to make the
inevitable extension to it.

Noeme Abe maintains that painful sense of numbness is projected in *White
Noise*. This sense of numbness echoes the numbness of grief. Abey reveals the
following truth concerning this aspect of the novel:

> The discussion of many ethical issues, such as family, gender and the
> (female) body drew to a halt in the face of the strong nationalistic
> propaganda that tended to censor any views that did not comply with
> its rhetoric. The collapse of the public sphere into the private one has
> engendered a society in which the political is hidden within the
> domestic in such a way that the dynamics of hegemony are no longer
> apparent. (16)

Various issues are addressed by DeLillo in the novel. Core thematic content appeals
to the readers and critics alike. The nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor
occupy the forefront of the novel.

Rosie Partington notices lots of sympathetic characters. She expresses the

following remarks about pathetic characters in *White Noise:*

> It is interesting to consider whether when reading *White Noise* we are
>
> empathizing or sympathizing with the characters, and whether or not
>
> this affects our emotional response and the feeling of resonance that
>
> we experience in relation to the text. Empathy and sympathy are
>
> extremely difficult words to define, as there seems to be a
>
> psychological and cognitive overlap in what people think they mean.
>
> (2)

Characters are dramatically convincing and life-like. They are really appealing to the
audiences. They try to identify the actual noise in the famous picture. DeLillo's
representation of terrorist threat is questionable in the light of the poor pathetic
characters.

      According to Silvia Caporale Bizzini, DeLillo's view on terror and machine
culture is clear in the novel. DeLillo does not aim to document the terrorist attacks in
his 9/11 novel. Bizzini makes the following remarks as to if DeLillo's view is
explicitly clear or not:

> My point is that *White Noise* does not aim to tell a story that is
>
> centered on the spectacle of terrorism and terror, even though it retains
>
> most of DeLillo's fictional themes and theoretical nodal points such as
>
> the analysis of postmodern society or his interest in the power of
>
> images, in language, and in cultural history. Rather, DeLillo's 9/11
>
> novel probes how we react to terror and how we seek reasons in order
>
> to come to terms with a reality. (3)

How the characters feel threat is portrayed in this novel. Characters' response to the
increasing sense of terror is documented clearly in the novel. The text starts with a

third-person narrator. The sensation of chaos and loss of understanding are twin problems that are dramatized in the novel.

Although all these critics examined the novel, *White Noise,* none of them examined the disruptive effects of unrestrained immersion in cybernetic practices and enterprises. When the cyber culture reaches the climax, people become greedy for materialistic gain. Obsession with death and confusion resulting from the disparity between simulated reality and actual reality grow dramatically. Denial to one's own selfhood becomes the means to achieve instant pleasure quickly. That is why there is connection between the exhausted will of people and dreadful effect of cyber culture. The unregulated hunger for consumption leads to the outbreak of exhaustion, fear, despair and deviation. Rapid mechanization and huge reliance on machine culture weaken the will, passion and free choice of people at large. Since the topic of the disruptive effect of uncritical immersion in cyber culture is untouched and unexplored; the researcher claims that it is the fresh, new and original topic.

Lyotard's perspective on postmodernity and Linda Hutcheon's opinions on postmodern practice including cyber culture give rise to the theoretical framework of this research. Lyotard says that science and technology has become the tool of exploitation and deception in the emerging world of postmodernity. Because the prospect of human beings has decreased, the perspective of ethical humanism will be used to conduct the research.

Lyotard defines postmodernism in a somewhat different way. His version of postmodernism differs substantially from other postmodernists. To Lyotard, postmodernism is the collapse of grand narrative. Science as a grand narrative appeared to be the means of domination. In his famous book *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard presents postmodernism as the stepping stone for modernism.

Lyotard portrays scientific and technological innovation as a form of domination. Consumers are simply cheated and exploited by the ongoing advancement and innovation in science and technology. This idea of Lyotard is further explained by Andrew Benjamin. Benjamin makes the following observation:

> *The Postmodern Condition* resembles the bulk of postmodernist writing. One could say that, often in spite of itself, much postmodernism remains pre-political. Its political credentials –its implication for the existing distribution and legitimacy of power crystallized in state and non-state institutions-remain wholly ambiguous. Postmodernism is said to involve the practice of resistance; challenging master narratives with the discourse of others. (89)

In the era of postmodernism, science has sought to seek legitimacy via narrative. To Lyotard, science appears as a separate sphere that is no less than grand narrative. On the one hand, science achieves power and legitimacy through narrative. When scientific discourses and claims tend to take the form of grand narrative, those who pursue science begin to feel adversely affected by it. Rather than valorizing science as another grand narrative, it would be better to let it function as language game. The concept of language game is crucial in understanding Lyotard's notion of postmodernism.

As Hutcheon writes, "Postmodernism is not incredulity toward narrative or myth; on the contrary, it unveils that all knowledge is grounded in such" (57). She goes on to make clear that "what legitimates knowledge in the postmodern condition is how well it performs, or enables a person to perform, in particular roles" (14). The writings of Lyotard were strongly influenced by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.

Foucault does not believe that the free human subject is a subject of a certain

sort, naturally good, warmly sociable, kind and loving. Men and women are always social creations, the products of codes and disciplines. If man and woman is the product of social relations, how do they happen to get new insight and vision to go against establishment and status quo? How can the same system give birth to a new consciousness which is subversive? This question deserves deeper contemplation.

Foucault has not given explanation about how a new vision and idea arise against that very system out of which these new vision and idea arise. Foucault's thought does not inculcate belief in the possibility of revolution. Those who want to launch revolution should have firm footing in normative principles. But Foucault has already sabotaged normative values. Foucault's thought does not seem to be conducive to revolution.

This thesis has been divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, the researcher introduces the topic, elaborates the hypothesis, and quotes different critics' views regarding the text. In the same chapter, the researcher shows the departure also. The second chapter deals with the thorough knowledge of postmodernism and cyber culture. In the third chapter the researcher makes a thorough analysis of the text, *White Noise,* by applying the theory of postmodernism. The last chapter contains the conclusive ending of the research.

Chapter 2

Postmodernism and Cyber Culture

Jean Baudrillard is a major proponent of postmodernism. His theoretical insight is used extensively. His notion of simulation is indispensable to describing the psychological effects of undue alliance with the postmodern passion. The postmodern trend sets the stage for simulation. To simulate is more than to pretend to have what one does not have. Pretension is also one of the core components of postmodern simulation. But simulation is more than pretending to have what one does not have. In the simulated state there is danger of the loss of the real. Baudrillard makes the following remarks regarding the effect of simulation:

> The difference between the real object and imaginary object snaps. The growing resemblance between the real and the imaginary puts the simulator in jeopardy. The simulator begins to mistake the imaginary as the real. He or she is totally detached from the real. The imaginary begins to perform as the real. The imaginary no longer serves as the substitute of the real but it works as the real. (76)

When the place of the real is taken by the imaginary, the postmodern dreamer is lost in the fictitious world of his fantasy. He or she begins to judge each and every thing from his or her simulated world that is quite detached from the real world. Moreover, they become so detached from the real and normal that they are simply under the illusion whether the real exists or not. There are several factors which compel and tempt citizens to simulate. In the late capitalist –consumer society, the excessive domination of technology and massive dependence on technology create daily lives of people entirely drab and dreary.

Fed up with the mundane and monotonous lives, the postmodern consumers

isolate themselves from the drab and arid world. They prefer to remain in the world of simulated reality. He states," Confined nostalgically in the simulated world, consumers sometimes try to involve in the murderous acts, dreadful fantasies and formidable delusions" (74). The moment the connection between the real and the imaginary snaps, the simulator's sufferings start.

Baudrillard is of the view that the identifying feature of postmodern world is its dependence on technology. Technology has largely structured the postmodern world. "The postmodern world is defined in terms of its heavy reliance upon technology. The narrative of technological progress contains elements which eulogize the possibility of the collective liberation of mankind from their discomforts through the medium of technological advancement" (101). As a postmodern theorist, Baudrillard dwells upon the darker sides of technological dependence. He shows the contexts in which total dependence upon technology turns out to be counterproductive. By manufacturing and distributing consumer objects in abundance, the late capitalist industries try to glut the market and compel consumers buy goods and commodities.

In the name of innovation and technological breakthrough, the outmoded medicines and military technology are sent by the developed countries to the developing countries. Postmodern subject experiences technology as a part of life. Some theorists highlight postmodern narrative of technology as the redeemer of mankind from their discomforts and hardships. On the contrary, there are some eco-protesters who simply take the aggressive march of technological innovation as the foreboding of apocalypse.

Richard J. Lane illustrates Baudrillard's notion of simulation which takes place at three levels. Lane's clarification runs as follows:

Baudrillard argues that there are three levels of simulation, where the first level is an obvious copy of reality and the second level is a copy so good that it blurs the boundaries between reality and representation. The third level is one which produces a reality of its own without being based upon any particular bit of the real world. The best example is probably virtual reality. Virtual reality is thus a world generated by mathematical models which are abstract entities. (30)

Simulation around which the modern digital technology moves undergoes three successive stages. In the first stage, the simulate object is just a copy only. The second phase is that level of copy which blurs the boundaries between reality and representation. The second stage of simulation too is productive of detrimental consequences.

In the third phase of simulation, the simulated object begins to serve itself as the real. It leaves no space for the real. In the third stage of simulation, the simulated object appears to be the powerful reminder of the real. It tends to be as sovereign as the real. The power of simulation has had the detrimental effect in the psyche of people at large. The propensity towards extremity and obsessive yearning takes root when the third stage of simulation arrives at the mature state.

The shifting notion of knowledge is a gateway to understanding some of the important tenets of postmodernism. Knowledge has become informational commodity in the wake of postmodern scenario. Manufacturing commodities are replaced by the digitalized or computerized form of knowledge. Hans Bertens has exemplified this kind of postmodernist conception. Bertens elaborates thus:

The scenario in which information replaces the manufacture of material goods as a central concern in the most advanced economies.

> This computerization of society will affect the nature of our
> knowledge. It is not very clear how exactly our knowledge will
> change, but Lyotard offers the prediction that the direction of new
> research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being
> translatable into computer language. (119)

Bertens subscribes to the conviction that metanarrataives have been replaced by a great number of language games. These language games range from models of discourse, various forms of utterance-denotative, performative, and prescriptive. Narrative language games can accommodate elements such as deontic statements prescribing what should be done with respect to kinship, the difference between the sexes, children, neighbors, and foreigner. Narrative language games have only limited social and historical validity.

Arthur Crooker and David Crooker concentrate on how the postmodern tendency gives birth to the thrill of catastrophe and the ecstatic implosion of postmodern culture into excess, waste and disaccumulation. The trend to excess, waste and sense of anarchic jubilation receives momentum in the high days of postmodernism. The following lines cited from Arthur Crooker and David Crooker throw further spotlight on this aspect:

> For who can now speak with confidence of the future of a postmodern
> scene when what is truly fascinating is the thrill of catastrophe, and
> where what drives onward economy, politics, culture, sex and even
> eating is not the will to accumulation or the search for lost coherences,
> but just the opposite – the postmodern culture into excess, waste, and
> accumulation. (30)

The postmodern trend opens a new avenue for the pathological symptoms of nihilism.

The gradual loss of established norms and the much hallowed cult of hyper-aesthetics as well as excremental culture jointly generate nihilistic impact. To certain time span, the nihilistic cult gives the unique dose of freedom from the restrictive measures of universalistic pretensions and absolutist claims. But in the long run, its adverse impact appears in the prospect of humanity.

Viewed from the normative perspective, this impact seems to be normative. But it is the constant source of jubilation approved within the framework of postmodern context. The postmodern ethos is the ethos of transgression. It is the 'lightning-flash' which illuminates the sky for an instant only to reveal the immensity of the darkness within. Postmodernism is not a gesture of the cut. Whatever transgression takes place, it would further reveal latent primitive instinct in its crude and raw form. David Crooker makes the further disclosure:

> Transgression is not limited to the limit as black to white, the
>
> prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of
>
> a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather their relationship takes the
>
> form of spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like
>
> a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time,
>
> gives a dense and black intensity to the night which it denies. (8)

When the surface of normative and the rationally approved conception are torn asunder, what arises outside is the dark forces which, if irrupts sporadically, can render entire human life vulnerable and enervated. The dark forces and instinctive urges put life on the path of anomaly, incompatibility and gruesome track. At the postmodern moment of the eruption of latent primitive and dark forces, people can hover between ecstasy and decay.

Bryan C. Taylor views the effects of postmodern contemplation in the light of

the role of media in shaping objects, understanding and strategies of survival. Taylor is of the opinion that the burgeoning media industries are largely responsible for putting people's power of perception in hazard. Taylor is closer to Baudrillard in dramatizing the effects of how the productions of objects or simulated objects without reference make people getting drowned in the hyperreality. Taylor's view is reflected in the following citation:

> The rise of global media systems whose continuous operations breaks traditional boundaries of space and time exerts powerful influence in the psyche of people. In their cumulative effects, the programs circulated by these systems collapse important distinctions that traditionally have shaped modern cultural identities. These systems create a rapidly shifting phantasm of fragmented, decontextualized information. (4)

According to Taylor, this stimulation does not, however, necessarily produce knowledge or wisdom, but rather hyper-realities with no real referents. These environments are populated by simulations, models, and copies of something else that has no single, original, real source. Postmodernists argue that organizations are marked by irony, ambiguity, contradiction, and paradoxes that oppress their members by prematurely foreclosing options for understanding and action. As a result, postmodernists adopt the image of fragmentation to characterize some organizational cultures and identities. This condition is presumed to result from several factors.

In his famous book *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault points out how sexuality appears to be the category of concept created by power and power relations. By rejecting repressive hypothesis, Foucault asserts that power not only represses sexuality; it produces new notions of sexuality. Shifting notions of sexuality are

actually the effects of complicated circulation of forces and interest of those who are in the position of power and the trend in which institutions have been taking the dominant thought of people. In the ancient Greek society, pederasty, same sex relation and homosexuality arose as the part and parcel of Hellenic life.

Sufficient attention falls on seeming deviant sexuality. But it was not as deviant as readers are trained to believe. In the Christian era, sexuality was probed in the light of rigid morality. Throughout the early eighteenth and nineteenth century, sexuality was repressed as well as recognized in a new way. Sexuality repression as well as the expression of sexuality in a new way occurred. No matter how productive power might be in redefining prevailing outlook on sexuality, it hardly paves the way for the true sexual freedom.

Sexualities of gays, abnormal and hysterical women were transformed into discourse not with the intention into discourse to provide-sexual freedom to the excluded and the ostracized but with the intention to manage them, to control them and then to put them under surveillance. The following lines describe Foucault's view about how sex was put into discourse:

> For was this transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the endeavor to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practice w hose object not procreation? Through the various discourses legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness. (36)

To the believers in the repressive hypothesis, singular sexuality is repressed. But Foucault puts forward different claim. He argues that various mechanisms of power

generated manifold sexualities such as infantile sexualities, homosexuality, sodomy, masturbation and hysteria. The production of manifold sexuality is evidence forwarded by Foucault to show that power is not always repressive but productive too.

Foucault argues, "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul'' (43). Only the sovereign power is starkly repressive. In the disciplinary power and bio-power, power seldom exerts its repressive impact. In an indirect and subtle way, the bio-political mechanism puts everything under control.

Postmodernism is an umbrella term that is used in different ways by different speakers. Speakers invoking postmodernism are committed to exploring the complex relationships of power, knowledge, and discourse created in the struggle between social groups. Additionally, it is mixed with several other perspectives that challenge the normative and socially approved conduct. According to Richard Tarnas, "Postmodernism is an object of celebration and scorn, both in intellectual discourse and in cultural vernacular. Through repeated use and enduring controversy, it has assumed several forms, including a powerful theoretical resource, a political lightning rod and a cultural cliché" (247). The ambiguity of this term stems partly from the enormous work that we ask it do. That work involves adequately conceptualizing and engaging the phenomena of postmodernity.

In one sense it is quite sagacious to claim, "the theoretical doctrine of postmodernism brought a local sense of salvation from the terror of absolutism and universalistic pretension. Yet it has darker side too. It has its own Achilles heels. The disastrous effects of postmodern thinking are unimaginable and unthinkable" (Tarnas 252). The dread and danger of clinging to the tenet of postmodernism is generative of

the detrimental consequences.

The loss of the real creates many hazards. The loss of the real and the normal put the followers of postmodernism creed in jeopardy. Once the idea that the real no longer exists is firmly entrenched in the mind, people begin to act out of whim, impulse, urge, rash and reckless emotion. The loss of the normal and the normative paves the way for the anarchic indulgence. "Obsessive inclination, morbid proclivity and deviant habit flourish when the postmodern thinking invades the normative spheres of life. The idea of maintaining balance and moderation in one's impulses hardly exist since the dividing line between the normative and the anomalous ceases to demarcate" (Jameson 54). One resembles the other. Clear cut boundaries fade paving the way for the emergence of anarchic irruption obsessive and morbid longings.

Extreme self-reflexivity is the fatal effect of unrestrained exposure to postmodern thinking. The more an individual is exposed to postmodern practices, the more he or she is tempted to ponder upon oneself. Much more preoccupation with one's self leads to nowhere. As claimed by Jameson, "Self-reflexivity is no less than isolationist and self-erasing practice ultimately puts one's life in further unprecedented conditions. Unrestrained reflection on one's self begets narcissism, delusions, megalomania and manic depression" (76). Total disconnection from the external world and the subsequent onrush of malaises like split mentality are doubtless the effects of overt exposure to the dreadful doctrine of postmodernism.

As a consequence of implementing postmodern assumptions in practices, people would lose the normal framework to evaluate what they are doing and where they are heading. The followers of postmodern mentality are ignorant about the fact that there is an ironic disparity between their thoughts and deeds. The growing ironic

characteristics of "postmodern existence renders the life entirely parodic. Parodic and ironic sense of life is doubtless the effects of postmodern practices. The breakdown between high and low cultural forms is facilitated by the pervasive influence of postmodernism" (Jameson 63). When people give follow on the footsteps of postmodernism, what they encounter is the culture of pandering to their violent spree and fervent passions that are invincible. The socio-cultural trend to cater to one's ego, impulse and fervent longing at the cost of normative ethics takes momentum. The more people plunge into the morass of postmodern pride and prejudice, the more they lose freedom and finally become trapped in the maelstrom of chaos and confusion.

Postmodern art follows and then challenges such principles as value, order, meaning, control, and identity. These have been the basic premises of bourgeois liberalism. Those humanistic principles are still operative in our culture, but for many they are no longer seen as eternal and unchallengeable. Regarding to this line of reasoning, Linda Hutcheon makes the following remarks:

> The contradictions of both postmodern theory and practice are
> positioned within the system and yet work to allow its premises to be
> seen as fictions or as ideological structures. This does not necessarily
> destroy their "truth" value, but it does define the conditions of that
> truth. Such a process reveals rather than conceals the tracks of the
> signifying systems that constitute our world. However important these
> systems are, they are not natural, given, or universal. (13)

Postmodernist critique must acknowledge its own position as an ideology. The formal and thematic contradictions of postmodern art and theory work to do just that. It calls attention to both what is being challenged and what is being offered as a critical response. It is criticism which would include in its own discourse an implicit

reflection upon itself. It is this kind of self-implicating questioning that should allow postmodernist theorizing to challenge narratives that do presume to master status, without necessarily assuming that status for itself.

Linda Hutcheon points out how the question of identity and a cause and effect relation are involved in the logic of postmodernism. Concentrating on this aspect, Hutcheon makes the following remarks:

> A poetics of postmodernism would not present any relation of causality or identity either among the arts or between art and theory. It would merely offer, as provisional hypotheses, perceived overlapping of concern, and here specifically with regard to the contradictions that I see as characterizing postmodernism. It would be a matter of reading literature through its surrounding theoretical discourses, rather than as continuous with theory. (15)

It means blaming art for having created an ingrown theory wherein specific critical and literary trends supported each other into a hegemonic network. The interaction of theory and practice in postmodernism is a complex one of shared responses to common sayings.

It would not be difficult to figure out what postmodernism challenges and what attempts at change it offers a list: cultural democratizing of high/low art distinctions and a new moral instruction, potentially radical political questioning, contextualizing theories of the complexity of art, and a contesting of visions. In fact Charles Russell argues precisely this:

> Postmodern literature recognizes that all perception, cognition, action, and articulation are shaped, if not determined, by the social domain. There can be no simple opposition to culture, no transcendent

perspective or language, no secure singular self-definition, for all find

their meaning only within a social framework. (51)

Clearly, it all depends on who is valorizing what in this kind of theory of a break

between the modern and the postmodern. The other school of thought argues a

relationship of continuity or extension between the two.

Regarding the role of adaptation, Linda Hutcheon says, "In the telling mode—

in narrative literature, for example—our engagement begins in the realm of

imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of

the text and liberated— that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural"(23).

Hutcheon adds the following view in this regard:

We can stop reading at any point; we can re-read or skip ahead; we

hold the book in our hands and feel, as well as see, how much of the

story remains to be read. But with the move to the mode of showing, as

in film and stage adaptations, we are caught in forward driving story.

And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct

perception—with its mix of both detail and broad focus. (23)

Visual and gestural representations are rich in complex associations. Music offers

aural equivalents for characters' emotions. It provokes affective responses in the

audience. Sound can enhance, reinforce, or even contradict the visual and verbal

aspects. On the other hand, however, a shown dramatization cannot approximate the

complicated verbal play of poetry or the interlinking of description, narration, and

explanation.

Identifying postmodern texts is a matter of determining which elements within

them are especially dominant, in this sense. In Bran Nicol's view, the most important

features found in postmodern texts are:

A self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text's own status as

constructed, aesthetic arte-fact an implicit critique of realist approaches

both to narrative and to representing a fictional 'world' a tendency to

draw the reader's attention to his or her own process of interpretation

as s/he reads the text. The reason why the concept of the dominant is

useful is that none of these features are exclusive to postmodern

fiction. (18)

It is also important to consider how these dominant features correspond to the specific

historical context of postmodernism. Certain social and cultural factors have caused

them to be more dominant than they are in modernism. The trend to excess, waste and

sense of anarchic happiness receives momentum in the high days of postmodernism.

The postmodern trend opens a new avenue for nihilism.

The gradual loss of established norms of aesthetics generates nihilistic impact.

To certain time span, the atheistic trend gives the unique dose of freedom from the

restrictive measures of universalistic pretensions. But in the long run, its adverse

impact appears in the prospect of humanity. Viewed from the normative perspective,

this impact seems to be normative. But it is the constant source of happiness approved

within the framework of postmodern context.

The postmodern ethos is the ethos of challenging the tradition. It is the

'lightning-flash' which brightens the sky for an instant only to reveal the immensity

of the darkness within. Whatever transgression takes place, it would further reveal

hidden primitive instinct in its crude and raw form. In this regard, Bran Nicol

illustrates this issue in the following way:

Postmodernism rests on the assumption that fiction – no matter how

realist or experimental is it celebrates its meaning inside fragmentation.

Postmodernists novel doesn't necessarily ensure meanings for readers. Sometimes the readers grasp the meanings after the novel ends. Transcription is in fact impossible because the act of representing something external to the text actually ensures that a separate, aesthetic version of it is created in the pages of the novel. The mode of consuming culture has veered off to an unexpected direction. (23)

When the surface of normative and the rationally approved conception are torn apart, what arises outside is the dark forces which, if irrupts suddenly, can make entire human life vulnerable. The dark forces and instinctive urges put life on the path of abnormality. At the postmodern moment of the eruption of latent primitive and dark forces, people can move and fro between ecstasy and agony. When the primitive instinct and passion come out in an irresistible way, people will have to live on the violent edge. They will have no option other than getting lost between fascination and lament. The calm and tranquil psyche can be made violent, restless and hallucinogenic.

According to Ross, "Popular music and movies began to exert a greater influence on adolescents, questioning the norms and illusions of the affluent society to which many belonged. By packaging the culture of delinquency in a marketable form, popular culture of the mid-Fifties challenged the generation of outdated parents and advocated a spirit of fun and adventure" (87). It came to represent the burgeoning teenage culture of the Fifties.

It goes without saying pop music itself is an offspring of postmodernism. It redraws the boundary of classical songs which elevate the grand narratives. The work of pop music doesn't embody any meanings but they are considered as lyrics. Sometimes the instruments of pop music manifest the awe and pain of human plight,

which the traditional songs lack.

Chapter 3

Cyber Culture Represented in DeLillo's *White Noise*

This research examines the effects of youths' unrestrained and uncritical attachment to the essence and ethos of cyber culture. In DeLillo's *White Noise*, some of the assumptions and effects of cyber culture are critiqued trenchantly. DeLillo presents the notion and scope of cyber culture in broad way. He does not represent cyber culture in a limited context.

In the novel, a visiting lecturer named Murray Jay Siskind, is ambivalent about if he yields to the temptations of cyber culture or to pursue and maintain the dignity and subtlety of intellectual didacticism. His profession entails him to keep the professional ethics and dignity intact. But he is enticed by the pervasive influence of cyber culture, social networking, consumer culture and the cult of developing obsessive passion for trendy things. He is on the horn of dilemma as to which side he should favor. The following extract is illustrative of the point:

> An exception to some of the above is Murray Jay Siskind, an ex-sportswriter who asked me to have lunch with him in the dining room, where the institutional odor of vaguely defined food aroused in me an obscure and gloomy memory. He was a visiting lecturer on living icons and seemed embarrassed by what he'd gleaned so far from his colleagues in popular culture. I understand the music, I understand the movies, I even see how comic books can tell us things. (11)

Though Murray is engaged in the task of intellectual cultivation, his taste is skewed towards reading comic books, trendy things like frequenting visit to movie halls and developing obsessive passion for music. On the face of commercial and consumer-oriented music industry, Murray indulges in that musical trash uncritically. There are

full professors in this place who read nothing but cereal boxes. Murray typifies this sort of obsessively skewed passion of professors. Murray is new to the Hill. His very appearance betokens that fact is a stoop-shouldered man with little round glasses and an Amish beard. He is the chaser of popular cultural trend. He doggedly conforms to the requirements and rigors of cyber culture.

Murray appreciates Gladney for inventing the separate department of Hitler Studies. As claimed by Murray, Gladney deserves the whole credit of bringing this new department into establishment at Hill College. Goaded by Murray, Gladney could not resist the temptation to curb his hankering to see photographed barn. The narrator, who is Gladney himself, admits that his passion for recent hubs and hangouts of digital appeal is ignited by Murray. The narrator himself says, "several days later Murray asked me about a tourist attraction known as the most photographed barn in America. We drove twenty-two miles into the country around Farmington. There were meadows and apple orchards" (12). The following extract further evinces Gladney's increasing obsession with simulated and animated objects of aesthetic appeal:

> White fences trailed through the rolling fields. Soon the signs started appearing. The most photographed barn in America, we counted five signs before we reached the site. There were forty cars and a tour bus in the makeshift lot. We walked along a cow-path to the slightly elevated spot set aside for viewing and photographing. All the people had cameras; some had tripods, telephoto lenses, and filter kits. (12)

Murray is not interested in seeing delightfully natural objects of beauty, rural landscape and bucolic scene. He is simply tempted by the beauty of simulated objects which intend to evoke a glimpse of reality. Casting aside the natural appeal and

charm of objects which are beautiful per se, they near a grove of trees and watch the

photographers. Murray maintains a prolonged silence. He tries to draw an analogical

parity between object that is animated digitally and object that is naturally beautiful.

Consumer culture sometimes takes deviant and odd form. The narrator says

that when time is bad, people overeat voraciously. There are no restraints in the

preferences and hunger of people. The standard of being a consumer is too fragile to

maintain its distinct form when time is adverse to people at large. The narrator

concedes when time is bad, people feel compelled to overeat. Blacksmith is full of

obese adults and children, baggy-panted, short-legged, and waddling. "They struggle

to emerge from compact cars; they wear sweat suits and run in families across the

landscape; they walk down the street with food in their faces; they eat in stores, cars,

parking lots, on bus lines and movie lines, under the stately trees" (13). Only the

elderly seem exempt from the fever of eating. If they are sometimes absent from their

own words and gestures, they are also slim and healthy-looking. The women carefully

groom whereas the men are purposeful and well dressed. They tend to select shopping

carts from the line outside the supermarket. The following extract exemplifies how

the narrator is meticulous in his observation of this situation:

> I crossed the high school lawn and walked to the rear of the building
>
> and toward the small open stadium. Babette was running up the
>
> stadium steps. I sat across the field in the first row of stone seats. The
>
> sky was full of streaking clouds. When she reached the top of the
>
> stadium she stopped and paused, putting her hands to the high parapet
>
> and leaning into it to rest diagonally. Then she turned and walked back
>
> down, breasts chugging. (13)

Overeating has become the expression of people's discomfort with the emerging

adversity. Time does not always go bad. In the same way, it is unpredictable to declare that it always stands in favor for people. People belonging to both gender are equally affected by the sporadic outbreak of adverse time. At the time of the emerging adversity, the narrator's wife tends to act as though she is always in torpid mood.   In search of fresh mood, when she reaches the bottom step she turns to face the seats and does some kind of neck stretching exercise. Then she starts running up the steps.

Babette, the wife of Gladney, tends to cultivate exotic and esoteric interest. She lies down on her bed and goes through classics on erotic. She plans ski trip to the utter amazement of the narrator. She gets easily excited to Gladney's dismay. He does not understand why she behaves that way. She pretends to talk to pet dog and cat. The narrator describes, "She runs she shovels snow; she caulks the tub and sink. She plays word games with Wilder and reads erotic classics aloud in bed at night. What do I do? I twirl the garbage bags and twist-tie them, swim laps in the college pool" (13). Babette talks to dogs and cats. I see "colored spots out of the corner of my right eye. She plans ski trips that we never take, her face bright with excitement. I walk up the hill to school, noting the whitewashed stones that line the driveways of newer homes" (13). Babette gets obsessed with death.

Pointless obsession with death is not the harrowing experience from which Gladney is exempt. Babette is formidably obsessed with death. She is frightened by death if it is on the point of looming in her life or not. All of a sudden, she asks question with her husband who will die first. It is unclear to fix and finalize if she is fearful of the looming prospect of death or eager to liquidate herself on the chessboard of death. The following extract sheds light on this aspect of her obsessive attachment with death:

Who will die first? This question comes up from time to time, like

where are the car keys. It ends a sentence, prolongs a glance between

us. I wonder if the thought itself is part of the nature of physical love, a

reverse Darwinism that awards sadness and fear to the survivor. Or is it

some inert element in the air we breathe, a rare thing like neon, with a

melting point, an atomic weight? (13)

There is no ground to feel frightened by death. But Babette and her husband are

afflicted with the chronic and obsessive preoccupation with death. Babette's exposure

to   violence and death ridden television programs and her fervent passion for

pornographic sites filled with sexual violence underpins her obsession with death.

Besides, there are other factors that are equally liable for the inception of fear

psychology in Babette and her husband. The societies they live in are characterized by

the pervasive nature of risks.

In the course of her morbid rumination, Babette goes on to say, "Sometimes I

think our love is inexperienced. The question of dying becomes a wise reminder. It

cures us of our innocence of the future. Simple things are doomed, or is that a

superstition? We watched the girls come round again"(13). Sedative effect of

television is another factor that contributes to the fear of death which haunts Babette

and Gladney intermittently. Gladney narrates that he watches television with all of

his children. But he is acutely aware of how Babette is badly harmed by the sedative

effect of television. Gladney reports, "That night, a Friday, we ordered Chinese food

and watched television together, the six of us. Babette had made it a rule. She seemed

to think that if kids watched television one night a week with parents or stepparents.

The effect would be to de-glamorize the medium in their eyes"(14). Babette makes it

wholesome domestic sport. The narcotic effect of television is presented below:

Its narcotic undertow and eerie diseased brain-sucking power would be

gradually reduced. I felt vaguely slighted by this reasoning. The evening in fact was a subtle form of punishment for us all. Heinrich sat silent over his egg rolls. Steffie became upset every time something shameful or humiliating seemed about to happen to someone on the screen. She had a vast capacity for being embarrassed on other people's behalf. (14)

Each of Gladney's children has peculiar habits and taste. They are often glued to television. They act heedless of the consequences. Without any fault of their own, they feel vague and vacuous. They are fond of watching violence-ridden programs. Any television program that tends to moralize bothers Gladney's children. They prefer to enjoy watching new fashion, new objects and commodities launched in the supermarket, automobile and the thrill brought forth by its use for escapist adventure, reckless and disordered life which mocks strict and disciplined life.

Fascination and seductions of supermarkets tantalize characters like Murray, Gladney, Babette and others. The narrator confesses that supermarket is a great revelation to me. Gladney goes on to say, "supermarkets, large and clean and modern, are a revelation to me. I spent my life in small steamy delicatessens with slanted display cabinets full of trays that hold soft wet lumpy matter in pale colors. High enough cabinets so you had to stand on tiptoes to give your order"(23). The crowd of consumers, shifting consumption pattern, rowdy and unruly consumers getting easily excited with new commodities are the part and parcel of daily life.

The temptation to buy goods and refresh consumption pattern are accompanied by the growing fear of death on the part of those consumers. In this regard, both Gladney and his wife, Babette, typify the case in point. The following extract illustrates the situation:

> In cities no one notices specific dying. Dying is a quality of the air. It's
> everywhere and nowhere. Men shout as they die, to be noticed,
> remembered for a second or two. To die in an apartment instead of a
> house can depress the soul, I would imagine, for several lives to come.
> In a town there are houses, plants in bay windows. The dead have
> faces, automobiles. (23)

The trend of frequent visit to supermarket coexists with the chronic fear of death. Consumption is good thing. It is associated with life. It is related to the survival of human beings. Characters that are incorporated in this novel have access and strength to consumption. They are able financially to buy any latest goods. They are additional access to the latest fashion and current trend of maximizing the principle of life. But in such situation, the question of death is no longer supposed to come. Contrary to the expectation of Gladney and Babette, the fear of death has weakened them dreadfully. The sole concern of their life is how to get rid of the mounting fear of death and dissolution.

In the discussion and conversation amidst Gladney's children, the notion of violence is reiterated again and again. Often they talk about how deranged and frenetic youths commit violence. The sort of freedom which youths in their teens get offers leverage to the possibility of violence. Youths' exposure to video games, simulated version of computer games, violence based television programs goad them to take entire aspect of life casually. That is why, the possibility of violence rises by leaps and bounds. In the open society where consumerism and cybernetic practices gain upper hand, the possibility of the death and crimes increase rampantly. The following extract conveys this sort of problematical matter concerning cyber culture:

> We send notes sometimes. Who did he kill? He was under pressure.

And what happened? It kept building and building. So he went out and shot someone. Who did he shoot? Some people in Iron City. How many? Five people. Not counting the state trooper, which were later. Six people? Did he care for his weapons obsessively? (25)

Electronic means of taking money from bank account facilitate daily pattern of consumptions, shopping and daily transactional activities. Master cards, credit cards and various other forms of electronic means are applied to draw money so that individual life can be incredibly better. In addition to the bright side of the life, there is another dark side too. Many thugs and hackers decode the secret pin numbers of master cards. There is the possibility of robbing money by hacking the pin code. Not only daily life is enhanced but it is affected badly by the burgeoning robbery of money deposited in bank.

The narrator goes on to account for how he happens to witness the robbery of bank deposit. He narrates, "In the morning I walked to the bank. I went to the automated teller machine to check my balance. I inserted my card, entered my secret code, tapped out my request" (26). The figure on the screen roughly corresponds to independent estimate. The narrator goes on to say "Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hardware, the mainframe sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction"(26). Lots of deranged persons are involved in this process of robbing banks and engaging in crimes. A deranged person was "escorted from the bank by two armed guards. The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies" (26). The darker side of latest innovation in the field of consumption, communication and transaction appears

as the burgeoning phenomenon.

The narrator's friend, Murray, is critical of the effect of television on his children. He says that his children learn without television. If his children tend to learn without television, Gladney's children are glued to it. Murray himself says, "The boy is growing up without television," I said, "which may make him worth talking to, Murray, as a sort of wild child, a savage plucked from the bush, intelligent and literate but deprived of the deeper codes and messages that mark his species as unique" (28). In the conversation regarding how television obstructs the growth of children's creativity, the following extract illustrates the point a bit further:

> TV is a problem only if you've forgotten how to look and listen, Murray said. My students and I discuss this all the time. They're beginning to feel they ought to turn against the medium, exactly as an earlier generation turned against their parents and their country. I tell them they have to learn to look as children again. (28)

Murray laments that he and his students discuss about television. He also indicates that his students are opposed to the effect of unrestrained attraction to television. They ridicule television by calling it a junk mail. Murray does not fully agree with his students' lamentation to the sedative effect of television.

Frightened by the sedative and deadening effect of television, most of the onlookers of it are tempted to watch films. They tend to take cinema as the most viable and fruitful means of communication and entertainment. Murray does not hesitate to tell that television is the death of human consciousness. He exposes youth's growing concern with the effect of television on the creative power of mind. He adds the following remarks in this regard:

> The medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can

remember how to respond innocently and get past our irritation, weariness and disgust. But your students don't agree. Worse than junk mail. Television is the death trap of human consciousness, according to them. They're ashamed of their television past. (28)

To Babette, Murray tells how he saw the effects of junk mail, a euphemism for television. It is he who concludes that television is the death throe of human consciousness. His journey to New York makes him familiar with many negative things that have occurred in the society dominated by cyber culture. All that is fruitful and creative are shattered by the sedative effect of television. Youths have started choosing films rather than television. While passing time with Babette in his favorite hangout, Murray does not lag behind in dwelling upon serious subject matter like the cyber culture, means of communication and forms of entertainment that is graphically and digitally enhanced.

If Murray is skeptical of television programs, the narrator, Gladney, is tempted by the seductive charm of it. He narrates how he happened to surf television channels while brooding on his mother's death in a melancholic way. He luckily sees a man speaking about weather forecast in his reportage. Having seen his skill and precision of knowledge, Gladney begins to like television and various programs that are telecasted through it. Unlike Murray, Gladney is glued to television. He takes television programs as source of solace and consolation. The following extract exemplifies how Gladney's view is divergent from that of Murray and Murray's students:

My mother's death had a terrible impact on me. I collapsed totally, lost my faith in God. I was inconsolable, withdrew completely into myself. Then one day by chance I saw a weather report on TV. A dynamic

young man with a glowing pointer stood before a multicolored satellite

photo, predicting the weather for the next five days. (30)

To Gladney, television is seductive whereas it is sedative to Murray. It implants

confusion in critical youths like Murray's students. But TV provides solace and

satisfaction. Afflicted with the lingering impact of his mother's death, Gladney turns

to TV which softens his agony temporarily. Those who want to cultivate creativity are

skeptical of the impact of TV. But those like Gladney who are yearning for solace get

healed and soothed by watching TV. Gladney takes his life, after his mother's death,

as deserted land which needs oasis of shelter and solace. That is why, it is natural for

him to seek sense of comfort and solace by watching various television programs.

Life becomes increasingly cheaper and vulgar. It loses vitality and dynamic

sense of mobility. Babette appears as supine and susceptible lady who always wants

to frequent her visit to Mall. Carrying cookies in the bag and quenching hunger by

fast food, trusting in the available information are the part and parcel of Babette's life.

Dust and rubbish are littered in any place that draws the attention of visitors of mall,

mart and supermarket. Gladney informs that frequenting visit to mall brings profound

sense of satisfaction in her. But he loathes doing as his wife tells him to do.

Alfonse is an interesting character who embodies the trend to follow whatever

lifestyle cyber culture brings. He maintains that the best way to succeed in life is to

express dissatisfaction in an interesting way. The following extract typifies the trend

followed by Alfonse in the name of being successful:

Alfonse invested everything he did with a sense of all-consuming

purpose. He knew four languages, had a photographic memory, and

did complex mathematics in his head. He'd once told me that the art of

getting ahead in New York was based on learning how to express

dissatisfaction in an interesting way. (34)

Alfonso talks about popular culture. He exercises the closed logic of a religious zealot. His breathing grows heavy. He cannot have strength to modify and direct his life as per his decision. He allows his life to be driven by momentary whims and impulses. He seldom thinks about what the public thinks about his unregulated life driven solely by whim and fashionable fervor. He is enticed by catastrophe. He takes delight in watching catastrophic events.

Even the search for natural bliss is distorted by the use of artificial ready made goods, foods and other entertainment. Some students prefer to stay in campus far from making an outing for natural entertainment. "The students tend to stick close to campus. There is nothing for them to do in Blacksmith proper, no natural haunt or attraction. They have their own food, movies, music, theater, sports, conversation and sex. This is a town of dry cleaning shops and opticians" (32). Photos of looming Victorian homes decorate the windows of real estate firms. These pictures have not changed in years. The homes are sold or gone or stand in other towns in other states. Their tastes have undergone huge transformation. In the town also, artificial color and decoration lie abundantly. The narrator says, "This is a town of tag sales and yard sales, the failed possessions arrayed in driveways and tended by kids" (32). Artificial means of communication and cheap as well as comfortable means of entertainment render youths' lives arid and mechanical.

Forgetfulness is the effect of unrestrained immersion in the cult of enjoying television. Every important information, date and factual detail is encoded in digital box, devices and power of remembrance is hardly exercised. Due to this trend facilitated by emerging digital innovation and cyber culture, human creativity is increasingly dulled and deadened. Forgetfulness has become widespread

phenomenon. Nobody bothers to know about even the important fact and statistical data, code number and key information. That is why forgetfulness takes a huge proportion. The following extract is illustrative of how forgetfulness infects a large group of people including Murray himself:

> I dial a number on the phone and forget who I'm calling. I go to the store and forget what to buy. Someone will tell me something, I'll forget it, they'll tell me again, I'll forget it, they'll tell me again, showing a funny-looking smile. We all forget, I said. I forget names, faces, phone numbers, addresses, appointments, instructions, and directions. (29)

Hundreds of youths follow on the footsteps of cyber culture and digital means of communication as well as transaction. Their lives are assisted from every side by technological innovation and digitally connected devices. Every sphere of life is infected by it. There is hardly any sphere which is not immune from the effect of excessive reliance on digital technology and cybernetic means of communication. Forgetfulness has gotten into the air and water. It gains upper hand at the cost of some of the life-affirming values and beliefs.

Dwelling upon the pervasive effect of television, Murray laments about the pervading effect of cyber culture. He says, "It's entered the food chain. Maybe it's the gum I chew. Is that too farfetched? Maybe it's something else. What do you mean? You're taking something besides chewing gum. Where did you get that idea?" (29). As a result of growing forgetfulness, many youths and middle aged people from decent profession have become critical of unrestrained reliance on cybernetic medium of communication and digital forms of entertainment.

Chaos and disorder charm Alfonso's eyes. Instead of seeing catastrophic

events in the spot, or witnessing events in the concrete site of their occurrence,

Alfonso prefers to see them on television screen. He hardly takes delight in the

immediate experience. What goads him ahead in his mission is rapturous delight in

mediated experience. Experience mediated through various digital devices and

mediums charms Alfonso. That is why there is the danger of encountering simulated

reality. The following extract illustrates this sort of situation:

> The flow is constant, Alfonse said. Words, pictures, numbers, facts,
>
> graphics, statistics, specks, waves, particles, motes are the objects
>
> frequently preferred by Alfonso. Only a catastrophe gets our attention.
>
> We want them, we need them, and we depend on them. As long as they
>
> happen somewhere else, he is bent upon using it. (34)

Most of the characters are frightened by the sort of lives they have chosen to live.

Lack of any energy to imbibe the actual and the immediate puts his life in the troubled

condition. Constant attachment to the mediated reality blocks him and other fellows

who share the same fate from accepting the actuality. Life of Alfonso is increasingly

devoid of any substantial essence. He is unable to delve deep into the spectrum of the

immediate reality. Disordered psyche, pathological condition and psychopathic

nature are some of the attributes developed by Alfonso.

In the age dominated by information that flows through digital web and link,

serious access to true knowledge is hardly found. Only flood of information can be

seen. Access to information can be found easily. Even the family becomes the

storehouse of information. Gladney says, "the family is the cradle of the world's

misinformation". There must be something in family life that generates factual error.

The family process works toward sealing off the world. The true upbringing of

children is blocked if unnecessary information flows thwarting the growth of children.

The following extract sheds light on how individuals are beset with hostile facts which benumb the creativity of people:

> Small errors grow heads, fictions proliferate. I tell Murray that ignorance and confusion can't possibly be the driving forces behind family solidarity. What an idea, what subversion. He asks me why the strongest family units exist in the least developed societies. Not to know is a weapon of survival, he says. (41)

Most of the institutions endowed with the authority to provide knowledge turn into the storehouse of information. Murray is curious to know why nobody bothers to know the objective reality. He is uncomfortable with the dwindling prospect of objective, immediate and concrete forms of knowledge. Both Murray and Gladney agree that family is the strongest unit in which objective reality lies. Gladney is puzzled to know why so many things have been turned upside down. It is mysteriously appealing to him. In the mood of utter bafflement, he does not bother to know the real fact that underlines surface reality.

In this flood of information which can hardly enhance life, characters are so confused and disoriented that they do not have a firm hold on the reality. Funnily enough, each of the character has an itching to buy. It appears that they can hardly survive without buying. In the wake of difficulty to select one item amidst two, consumers like Gladney decide to buy both the object. It shows how they have lost freedom and will to choose. The narrator says, "Babette and the kids followed me into the elevator, into the shops set along the tiers, through the emporiums and department stores, puzzled but excited by my desire to buy. When I could not decide between two shirts they encouraged me to buy both" (41-42). Rapacious sense of feeding and consuming drives the narrator. The following extract clarifies the

situation faced by characters like Gladney and Murray:

> We smelled chocolate, popcorn, cologne; we smelled rugs and furs,
> hanging salamis and deathly vinyl. My family gloried in the event. I
> was one of them, shopping, at last. They gave me advice, badgered
> clerks on my behalf. I kept seeing myself unexpectedly in some
> reflecting surface. We moved from store to store, rejecting not only
> items in certain departments. (42)

Reckless shopping is mark of life driven by hankering for consumption. From mental power to the corporeal spirit, the fervor of reckless consumption penetrates. Fancy, faculty of imaginative power, creative thrust of people are affected badly by the tendency to go for shopping. Other aspects of daily life are neglected by the spree to purchase and then consume. The narrator says that his family members take glory at the event of purchase and consumption. They buy in such a way that the only thing that bring happiness in their lives is shopping, purchase and consumption.

Cyber culture, reliance on technology, carefree life and various other shifting norms give jolt to authority. When a plane loses power in all of its three engines, passengers react and scream as though they are trapped in the mouth of death. In the name of seeking comfort, people have to face plenty of hazards. The society dominated by the norms and protocol of cyber culture is the society at risk. The following extract is reflective of the attribute of risky society:

> The plane had lost power in all three engines, dropped from thirty-four
> thousand feet to twelve thousand feet. Something like four miles.
> When the steep glide began, people rose, fell, collided, and swam in
> their seats. Then the serious screaming and moaning began. Almost
> immediately a voice from the flight deck was heard on the intercom:

>We're falling out of the sky! (44-45)

Optimism resulting from people's naïve reliance on technological innovation falls flat when disaster like this breaks out. When a plane sidetracks from its trajectory, people scream uproariously. They have to face such situation due to the misinformation and wrong facts that are in circulation. It is customary for people to fear the impending disaster. They could not help getting shocked and confounded due to their naïve belief in the power of communication constituted by many digitally developed techniques and devices. In this regard, it can be said that foundational norms of cyber culture are called into question.

There is a character named Bee who is exposed to tour, travel, wanderlust and various other forms of entertainment. Assuming that her exposure to tour and adventure makes her mature, she is sent by her parents on travel. When she returns after yearlong tour and travel, even her parents are afraid of her bizarre appearance. The way she turns to be strange creature exemplifies Mr. Murray's view concerning how an individual has become a fragile unit surrounded by hostile fact. Instead of getting the highest grade of maturity, Bee happens to develop fragility. The following extract presents how Murray's commentary on the position of an individual is justified by the increasing fragility of Bee:

>Bee was quietly disdainful of wisecracks, sarcasm and other family business. A year older than Denise, she was taller, thinner, paler, both worldly and ethereal, as though in her heart she was not a travel writer at all, as her mother had said she wished to be, but simply a traveler, the purer form, someone who collects impressions, dense anatomies of feeling, but does not care to record them. (46)

Effect of popular culture and temptation of cyber culture render individual as helpless

being. Bee is goaded to pursue adventure so that she could develop certain degree of maturity. But contrary to the expectation, she happens to develop fragility. What she gets is not the strengthening of her vitality and spirit but collection of fact. From her adventurous pursuit, she takes just a bundle of information and not the real creative thrust. She is self-possessed and thoughtful. She had brought her relatives hand-carved gifts from the jungles. She takes taxis to school and dance class, spoke a little Chinese. Except shallowness, she gets nothing which is enough to conclude how dreadful indulgence in practice of cyber culture can be.

Children want to live in their own ways. In this situation, it is not bad if parents are lonely. Babette is beset with plenty of hassles and horror resulting from disorder and deviation. Gladney unknowingly comes to ponder on the sequence of death of people who have hardly crossed the prime of their youth. He enumerates a list of death. He goes on to say, "Mr. Treadwell's sister died. Her first name was Gladys. The doctor said she died of lingering dread, a result of the four days and nights she and her brother had spent in the Mid-Village Mall, lost and confused" (48). The following extract shows how Gladney deliberates upon death that looms as the repeated phenomenon:

> The lieutenant governor of the state died of undisclosed natural causes, after a long illness. We all know what that means. A Mechanicsville man died outside Tokyo during a siege of the airport by ten thousand helmeted students. When I read obituaries I always note the age of the deceased. Automatically I relate this figure to my own age. (48)

The occurrence of death as the most recurrent phenomenon compels Gladney to get obsessed with death. He is inwardly frightened by the occurrence of death. He explores the reason behind the frequent death of those youths who are much younger

than him. Obsession with death makes him increasingly fearful. It is difficult to say if Gladney has death wish or not. The troubled condition of mind occasioned by Gladney's thinking on death touches his wife, Babette. Obsession with death, death wish that surged up in the subconscious level of Gladney and Babette's feeling of loneliness are some of the factors leading to the pervasive phenomena of death and mortality.

Aspect of the subculture marks the territory of the farther reaching youth upheaval of the late sixties. The clamor of rock music was the outward projection of the noise of youth submerged by order and affluence.

Thus, it can be concluded that unrestrained immersion in practice of cyber culture yields unexpected dreadful consequence. A crass marketing term becomes transformed into something mystical and beautiful, despite the genuine expectation of people. Individuals are likely to degenerate into a fragile unit beset with hostile facts. No access to true knowledge is found. Only the flood of arid facts and boring information circulate.

Chapter 4

Constraints of Cyber Culture

The core finding of this research is that cyber culture produces detrimental and deadening effects in those who follow unduly its cult and spree. DeLillo's *White Noise* documents some of the cases of how human dignity and decent concern for creativity are badly affected by youths' uncritical and excessive indulgence in practice of cyber culture. This novel dramatically presents the worst effects caused by the unrestrained immersion and assimilation of practice of cyber culture like digital mode of communication, simulated reality and artificial means of entertainment.

Murray observes in the most photographed barn scene that the observers cannot escape the aura of the barn. The barn assumes this aura of authority that controls the observers. In the same sense, there is much exploration in *White Noise* of how the media controls reality. The girls consistently feel the symptoms of radioactive exposure only after the radio informs them of what they are. Tabloids also have the same effect over their audience. Jack also frequently discusses the ways Hitler could control crowds by sweeping them up in his aura of authority. Jack, too, tries to create this aura with his own authoritative academic costume.

The family is also called the disseminator of misinformation. Parenthood is also diffused in the Gladney family. No single child is biologically from both Babette and Jack. Moreover, Jack's status as a father is often usurped. The family is brought together by consumerism, a tactic that usually fails. DeLillo makes the more subtle point that at least consumerism tries to bring them together. Wilder does not feel uncomfortable being in a chaotic system. Adults need to feel in control of their lives even if it ultimately makes them more fearful. When the supermarket is rearranged, they wander the lanes in panic.

Faceless and beyond the grasp of the individual, technology makes everyone anonymous. This distance and objectivity seems comforting. The ATM confirms Jack's own financial calculations. He becomes filled with a sense of peace. At other times, this detachment proves threatening. The chemical cloud is noxious and lethal, but it also creates beauty. When Steffie mumbles "Toyota Celica" in her sleep, a similar tension is being evoked. It appears to be the logical conclusion of the proliferation of drugs. This type of technology embodies a frightening dehumanization that inevitably isolates the individual.

In the post–airborne toxic event world, SIMUVAC has gone from using a real event as preparation for a simulated event to simulating a simulation. The tension between what is real and what is artificial is stressed again. Jack repeatedly asserts that the snakes are real, that he is real, and that death is real. After watching the distressing SIMUVAC simulation, Jack's need to profess and defend the existence of some kind of tangible, intelligible reality becomes increasingly desperate.

The authentic and the artificial often blur together. Substance seems interchangeable with surface. This confusion between appearance and reality represents an essential part of Jack's own existence. Although Jack has created a venerable, he remains painfully aware of the total fabrication of this character. Aided by the distinguished outfits, Jack manages to hide the fact that he lacks the ability to speak German. Jack is driven to learn the language only when an academic conference threatens to expose his lie. Jack relies on Hitler's larger, more powerful persona to bolster his own fragile sense of self-worth and self-identity.

Thus, it can be summed up that DeLillo's *White Noise* foregrounds the unexpected effects which can arise from an individual's unrestrained immersion and engagement in the cult of handling life dictated by institutions of cyber culture. Since

no normative ethics and values are credited by doctrine of cyber culture, unrestrained

immersion in the ethos of cyber culture itself leads to the degradation of an

individual's psyche.

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