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The Supermarket: Consumerism, Simulation, and the Fear of Death in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Houda Hamdi

Abstract

Through a study of Don Delillo's metafictional novel, *White Noise*, this paper portrays the ways in which the novel reflects upon the postmodern American world of consumerism and simulation. The space of the supermarket reveals not only the postmodern subject's obsession with the erratic shopping mode of life, but also the detachment of the subject from the reality of the product he or she buys. Polyphony or the diversity of discourses, similar to the Bakhtin's theory of the marketplace in his definition of the novelistic genre, translates the invasion of media communications, advertising, TV commercials, and conversations in the daily life of the contemporary fictional characters. These discourses, in their polyphonic aspect, function as mediated representations which obstructs the subject's relationship with reality. This paper demonstrates that, behind the surface, the supermarket, as both a space and a metaphor for the world of simulacra and consumerism, hides another existentialist issue—man's fear of death. The supermarket is, therefore, not only interpreted as a metaphor for the American simulacra and consumerism, but also as a self-reflexive element which, in Bakhtinian terms, reflects the polyphonic nature of the fictional world of the novel. The paper discusses Gladney couple's defence mechanism strategies to defy or repress death, and the metafictional nature of 'white Noise' which fears its own hermeneutic closure, another name for death.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, Consumerism, Simulacra, Death, Metafiction, Polyphony, Hyperreality, De-Doxify/De-Doxification, Baudrillard.*

In theorizing postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon argues that this seemingly volatile trend is self-conscious, self-contradictory, and self-unsettling, struggling for commitment to duplicity as a strategic means of denaturalizing some of the conventional features of our way of life

and of addressing the issue that what has been traditionally taken as natural is in fact a mere social construct (2). Relying on the Derridean poststructuralist technique of deconstruction, postmodernism subverts traditional literary patterns, especially the belief in objectivity, truth, essence, substance, and innocent representations. Deconstruction is a form of cultural de-doxification, a rhetorical position which implies that we can only know the world through a network of socially established or fabricated meaning systems that constitute the discourse of our contemporary culture. Within the deconstructionist frame of postmodernism, objects, beliefs, and practices are discursively represented, reimagined, and performed in literary texts in an unpredictable manner owing to the ability of the contemporary writers to collect and shape the forces of their culture "…so that elements powerfully interact and have the potential to unsettle the boundaries of culture" (Jackson 174).

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* is a poignant novel that translates the postmodernist art of de-doxifying our conventional perception of reality and subjectivity. Taking as its main corpus the overriding presence of the supermarket in the narrative, the paper reflects upon the self-reflexive dimension of this fiction and the way in which it reveals how, within the postmodern era of simulation and consumption, all conventional beliefs in the immediacy of an authentic truth and subjectivity are disrupted. From a Baudrillardian perspective, the supermarket is read as a metaphor for the simulated and the consumerist postmodern world in the paper. From a Bakhtinian standpoint, the supermarket is related to the polyphonic dimension of *White Noise*, wherein fictional characters are invaded by various sources of discourses, such as television, media communications, and news which mediate their vision of reality. The supermarket, as both a space and a metaphor, reveals not only the mediated and dialogical nature of the novel and the outside world that the narrative reflects upon but also a deeper existentialist dimension: man's fear of death. The paper studies Bakhtin's polyphony of discourses in relation to man's need for language, beneath which hides his constant awareness of ultimate death. In so doing, the last section of this paper is devoted to exploring the strategies of defence mechanisms that the fictional characters use to repress and defy death. The fear of death is then translated in the structure of the open text of *White Noise*, which invites the active involvement of the reader to reproduce it and avoid an interpretative closure.

As a part of postmodern culture, invaded by the spirit of commodification and consumption, *White Noise* comes to illustrate the formation of the postmodern subject within American materialist society. In the novel, the activity of shopping consumes a surprisingly

large portion of the narrative itself, with entire chapters spent cruising the aisles of supermarkets, peering curiously into shopping carts, soaking up the atmosphere at check-out counters, and roaming aimlessly through malls (Lindner 154). These shopping trips are central to Don DeLillo's representation of the postmodern consumer world showcasing the effects these spaces have on everyday consumer practice, experience, and behaviour.

White Noise centers around the Gladney family, which is presented as a prototype of the American consumerist family unit that is immersed in the shopping spirit. Shopping, for them, is a ritual. In the supermarket, Jack Gladney, the father, does not care what he buys. He has no vision or plan. He shops randomly, impulsively, frantically, and restlessly. Jack contends that he shops for the sake of shopping. He enjoys looking, touching, and inspecting the merchandise without any intention to buy. However, he ends up buying because the mass and variety of his purchases provide him with the illusion of "self-replenishment," "well-being," "security," and "contentment'' (84). Impulsive shopping provides the Gladneys with the feeling that they have achieved a fullness of being, unknown to those who need or buy less and plan their lives around solitary evening walks. The clear suggestion of this compulsive consumption implies that the Gladney family seeks comfort in "...the spending of money, not the actual acquisition of goods" (Ferraro 21). Jack confirms as much when he talks about the rush he gets from spending money. He argues that the more money he spends on shopping, the less important it seems. "I was bigger than these sums. These sums poured off my skin like so much rain" (163), he says. "These sums in fact came back to me in the form of existentialist credit" (163).

DeLillo's focus on the overriding presence of shopping spaces illustrates that the mantra of consumerism, in late twentieth century America, had sunk so deeply into the collective social consciousness that it operated at unconscious level as well (Lindner 137). As an instance, Steffie, Jack Gladney's daughter, murmured two clearly audible and familiar words in her sleep, Toyota Celica, the brand name of a car. This unconscious internalization of the consumerist environment reveals the way "Steffie's nocturnal chants" dramatize "...the colonization of the unconscious by the commodity structure" (Baker 95). Throughout the novel, Jack Gladney describes a world bombarded with subliminal advertising and flooded with commercial jingles. Even this activity of just looking at commodities becomes, in Rachel Bowlby's phrase, "…an experience that is itself consumed and a source of pleasure and gratification" (3). Jack's exhaustive description of objects

shows that *White Noise* belongs to a world dominated by the culture of commodities, congested by their presence, and glutted by their consumption, a commodified world wherein consumer objects hijack and colonize the thoughts, imagination, practices, and desires of its mesmerized subjects (Lindner 138). In DeLillo's view, identity is constituted and created around goods, and commodity itself has become representative of an entire lifestyle, which therefore functions as an emblem of nationhood and whose effect on people is a sense of belonging derived from a shared pattern of consumption (Lindner 140). Co-opted by the culture of commodity, Americans have become a mere "…collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation" of goods and surfaces (*WN*[1] 4).

The shopping obsessed atmosphere reveals not only people's immersion in the culture of consumption but also DeLillo's critique of the postmodern era, which stands, in Fredric Jameson's view, as "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (60). The supermarkets and the malls are described as "...warehouses of the generic signs which represent not so much the products themselves, but a whole system of relations of exchange: texture, code, tacit links with something more mysterious and pervasive" (51). What can be known about such coded messages, according to one character, Murray Jay Siskind, is that one must learn "how to look and how to open oneself to data that welcomes customers into the grid" (*WN* 50). Hegemonized by the superficiality of the consumerist world, Murray's basket holds generic food, drink, and non-brand items in plain white packaging with simple labelling, which testifies to his lack of quality because "flavourless" packaging appeals to him and he feels that he is not only saving money but contributing to some kind of "spiritual consensus" (18). Murray approximates his superficial taste to World War II: everything is white (18).[2] In this context, the supermarket is not only a space dominated by a play of surfaces, but these surfaces also blur the presence of the real. Visually assaulted by the shocking white austerity of the generic packaging, Murray loses sight of the actual products inside them. The real is displaced by its representational display, which creates an overwhelming sense of dislocation from reality, a sense of a new artificially constructed reality characterized by what Jameson terms "flatness."

[1] *White Noise* abbreviated as *WN*.

[2] "they'll take our bright colors and use them in the war effort […] Most of all I like the packages […]. This is the last avant-garde. Bold new forms. The power to shock" (18–19).

DeLillo's location of most of the events in his narrative in the polyphonic atmosphere of the supermarket epitomizes, in Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, a carnivalesque and dialogic space that fuses different stratas of voices and discourses. In studying Rabelais's narratives, Bakhtin associates the dialogic novel with the subversive instance of the carnivalesque, which he defines as a moment of equality, wherein traditional rank, dichotomy, and hierarchal precedence are obfuscated. The carnivalesque is associated with the marketplace wherein "a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (Bakhtin 199). As opposed to the conventional "monological" genre, Bakhtin perceives that the novel, in its deconstruction of the traditional hierarchy, led to the emergence of special forms of marketplace speech, which is "...frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (200).

In *Metafiction*, Patricia Waugh defines introspective fiction in terms of its instability in that it is constructed through a constant assimilation of daily historical forms of communication (43). In the reflexive novel, there is no privileged language. As a democratic space, it combines the language of memoirs, journals, diaries, and documentary which interact among each other for the sake of relativization (43). Waugh associates this process of relativization to Bakhtin's definition of the dialogic novel. As she puts it, "Bakhtin defines as overtly 'dialogic' those novels that introduce a 'semantic direction into the word which is diametrically opposed to its original direction…the word becomes the arena of conflict between two voices'" (43). In fact, given its close relation to everyday forms of discourse, the language of fiction is dialogic since it assimilates a diversity of discourses that always interrogate and to some extent relativize each other's authority. In contrast to a realistic novel, which subordinates itself to the dominant voice of the omniscient author, dialogic narratives resist such a resolution. Likewise, metafictional narratives rejoice in the impossibility of such a resolution (43).

As a metafictional narrative, *White Noise* follows the same patterns as the marketplace novel. It is laden with diverse voices and discourses of media communication such as TV, radio, journals, and cybernetic systems that disrupt the monolithic order of discourse and, in the process, translate the contemporary world of mediation. *White Noise*'s characters are prototypes of the postmodern subjects whose knowledge and perception of the world is mediated. In this context, the supermarket becomes a self-reflexive element that both reflects upon

the polyphonic aspect of the novel and reveals the role of media in simulating the American culture. As Christoph Lindner suggests, *White Noise* contains a vision of the postmodern world as conceptualized by Baudrillard (143). Baudrillard's writings portray a vision of contemporary consumerist societies in which reality itself is in crisis. His conception of postmodernity embarks on the notion that in today's mass consumerist world, owing largely to advanced innovations in information technology and electronic media, the real, however, has been so far displaced by its own simulations (replicas) that simulations, in turn, have become the new reality. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard contends that in a world dominated by simulations, "signs will exchange among themselves exclusively without interacting with the real" (125). In Baudrillard's vision of the world of "screen and network," the surface and simulation, "the sign no longer means nor refers. It no longer designates beyond or outside its seamless exchange and solipsistic play with other signs" (125). Undoubtedly, capitalism is "the villain of the situation" because it multiplies desires by endlessly multiplying signs (Lindner 144). The result, as Baudrillard points out is that "it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality" but instead a question of "…concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" ("Simulacra and Simulations" 127). In view of this, culture has become "...the collective sharing of simulacra as opposed to the compulsory sharing of the real and of meaning" ("Fatal Strategies" 50).

According to Baudrillard, the excessive consumerist society juxtaposed with the rise of communication technology in the postmodern America creates a world characterized by an utter loss of the real in "...the black hole of simulation and the play and exchange of signs" (Wilcox 346). In *White Noise,* the mediated world finds its expression in the opening of the novel with the depiction of the most photographed barn in America, an opening which imparts a clear convergence between Don DeLillo's fictional world and Baudrillard's critique of postmodernity as a moment of simulation. In describing the American barn, Murray argues that no one can eventually see it: "Once you have seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see them […] We are not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura […] They are taking pictures of taking pictures" (*WN* 12). Put differently, those who are taking the picture of the barn are not copying the original of the picture itself, but the copy of another copy. Here, the presence of the real is short-circuited and is literally replicated by signs, which, in turn, become the basis for the real itself. They ensure that the tourist of this barn only see it through its hyper-real existence as mass-mediated image without

origin or reality (*WN* 147). The barn's photographic aura can be understood in Boorstin's terms as the haunting presence of the image that has replaced reality or in Baudrillard's view "the spectre raised by simulation" ("Simulacra and Simulation" 168), a flash of hyperreality.

In *White Noise*, DeLillo foregrounds representation as a problem, as an area for inquiry that serves as demystification, at least in part because our culture is immersed in televised or videoed images, an immersion that has the effect of precluding what can be authentically experienced or so known (Jackson 150). Television, which in Jack Gladney's view is America's "demonic seduction," "a narcotic undertow," and an "eerie diseased brain-sucking power" (*WN* 16), is represented as a perfect medium that disseminates the world of simulacra in which meaning, truth, and reality are mostly lost in the mere play of surface. For Murray, the world of television, with its "insipid jingles," "slice-of-life commercials," futile advertising slogans, and floating images of fetishized commodity objects, becomes more real than the real itself, an object of "nocturnal worship" and a source of "spiritual elation" (*WN* 50). In his account, watching television approximates a religious experience wherein coded messages and innumerable repetitions of commercials perform the ceremonial role of chants, mantras, and sacred formulas (50). Their effect on the individual subject, trapped in this space of simulation, produces a dizzying experience in which meaning and reality per se become lost in the interplay of surfaces (50).

Despite the relativistic function of the supermarket and the polyphony of the mediated discourses it metaphorically suggests, Don DeLillo's focus on this shopping space reveals a deeper psychological dimension: man's existentialist fear of death. As the title suggests, the expression of the term 'white noise' implies that language, in all its multi-layered forms, functions, first and foremost, as an expression of mortality. Put differently, language in all its discursive forms, whether media, literature, science, and so on, is a smokescreen underneath which lies man's fear of death. In *Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker contends that the idea of death and the fear of it has always haunted the human consciousness. "It is a mainspring of human activity- activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (11). *White Noise* shows that the fear of death lurks within us from birth, and that all human projects, especially the language we use to help us construct our belief systems, are designed to evade or deny or conquer the fear of death (Bonca 163). In DeLillo's words, language stems from a determinable but unusual source, "the human's intense terror of death,

whatever it denotes, utters under its breath, I speak to bridge the lonely distances created by our mortality" (*The Names* 308). All discourses are in fact the language of the denial of death, as the avoidance of what cannot be avoided (Bonca 163). "Pain, death, reality," Murray Jay Siskind argues, "we can't bear these things as they are. We know too much. So we resort to repression, compromise, and disguise. This is how we survive in the universe. This is the natural language of the species" (*WN* 289).

In this novel, the Gladney family finds not only pleasure within the consumerist atmosphere of the supermarket but also a momentary relief from the fear of death. Throughout the novel, Jack and his wife, Babette, are described as being constantly obsessed with the question, "Who will die first?" Because of their fear of death, the couple seeks the means to overcome their existentialist anxiety. Jack sees the supermarket as a collective place of motion and sounds that prevents his mind from thinking of death. Within this polyphonic milieu,

> [he] was suddenly aware of the dense environmental texture. The automatic doors opened and closed, breathing abruptly. Colors and odors seemed sharper. The sound of gliding feet emerged from a dozen other noises, from the sublittoral drone of maintenance systems, from the rustle of newsprint as shoppers scanned their horoscopes…from the whispers of the elderly women with talcumed faces, from the steady rattle of cars going over a loose manhole cover just outside the entrance. Gliding feet…a sad numb shuffle in every aisle. (168–169)

"Breathing," "Colors," "odors," "sound," "noises," "rustle," "whispers," "rattle," and "shuffle" are all terms that prefigure Jack's experience inside the shopping malls, terms that connote movement, sight, and sound; hence, the language of life.

In order to repress his fear of death, Jack becomes the founder and the chairman of Hitler studies. He believes that Hitler is "fine, solid, dependable" (89) and "larger than death" (98). Subsequently, he becomes the disembodied character who internalizes this personage because Hitler epitomizes authority and power. Attempting to grow into the role, Jack changes his name, gains weight, and wears glasses and a Hitler-like black robe. As a result, he becomes "...the character that follows the name around" (17). In embodying the persona of Hitler, Jack becomes a postmodern subject "...without center or core; multiply written, absorbed or displaced" (Jackson 160). Not only does he corporeally internalize Hitler's identity, but he also indulges in all things Nazi. He carries *Mein Kampf* as if it were a mascot. He goes

even further as to name his own son Heinrich and secretly takes German lessons. Feeling the power of that language, Jack contends that he wanted to speak it fluently and use it as "a charm…a protective device" (*WN* 31). In his well-attended lectures on the crowd psychology of the Nazis, Jack believes that crowds constitute a shield against "their own dying": joining a crowd implies avoiding death and breaking away from the crowd is "...to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone" (73).

Babette, his wife, finds comfort in giving free lectures to the Treadwell family because in doing so, she unites with other people to form a collective readerly spirit as an escape from loneliness, another name for death. For Babette, loneliness implies her social isolation from the crowd, which nurtures her with stories, facts, and fictions. She equates loneliness with the death of noise, and language as something through which she can, at least momentarily, forget about her own mortality. Despite the couple's unstable family unit, since both have serial marriages, Babette and Jack find this one-yet-many family structure a comfort because the children remain dependent on their parents. To Babette, they are a guarantee of the couple's relative victory against death, which she compares to "the emptiness, the cosmic darkness" (100). She thinks that, as long as the children are around, Jack and she are safe. But once the children grow older and scatter, she wants to be the first to die as being left alone frightens her.

Both Babette and Jack are reassured by Wilder, their youngest son, not only because he remains caught in the parental web but also because his youth makes him unaware of his mortality. This unawareness comforts them. When Wilder cries, Jack feels a soothing comfort while listening to his "uniform lament" (78). He perceives that the sound is an "ancient dirge" that is impressive for its "resolute monotony. Ululation." (78). It is "so large and pure" and "...touches [him] with its depth and richness" (78). Jack listens to his son, but he does not wish to stop him because he wants to let the inconsolable crying wash over him "like rain in sheets" (78). In this moment, Jack begins to think that he and Babette have disappeared inside "this wailing noise" and that if they could join Wilder in "his lost and suspended place," they might together perform some "reckless wonder of intelligibility" (78).

Fearing death after the airborne toxic event, Jack becomes obsessed with the diverse versions that people have of the traumatic event, which releases a spirit of deep imagination. The event encourages individuals to spin and invent tales while others listen spellbound to the most chilling tales. There is growing respect for the vivid rumor,

which makes all those involved in this traumatic event "...no closer to believing or disbelieving a given story" (153). Some find a greater appreciation in listening to the tales around the event, while others "...began to marvel at [their] own ability to manufacture awe" (153). Jack is aware of the healing power of language which provokes a "...sense of an eerie separation between your condition and yourself" (142). He notices that when "the crash landing" or "the landing crash" of the plane takes place, people find psychological satisfaction when a man who acts as a storyteller tells their story. He notices that passengers coming from the tunnel begin to gather around and no one speaks or dares interrupt the account.[3] Instead, they come back to listen. They do not want to disperse because they want to linger with their terror and "...keep it separate and intact for just a while longer" (*WN* 91). In listening to the mediated story, the crowds show interest in what the storyteller says, even curiousness to some extent. They trust him to tell them what they had actually said and felt (91).

After the airborne toxic event, Jack becomes more aware of his mortality. He believes that the little breath of Nyodene "...has planted a death in his body" (150). Subsequently, he becomes ready to search for any hint of comfort. He grows more concerned with the theatricality of death scenes because not only do the deadly events create a collective consciousness among people to share their common universal fear of death, but also because, in Jack's mind, witnessing the simulated death is a therapeutic and an anaesthetizing moment which immunes him from death anxiety. In so doing, Jack becomes intrigued by the catastrophe and by the effect of televised death because he thinks that a mediated confrontation with reality is in fact a strategy of evading one's own mortality, thus, giving the viewer a temporary false sense of power (LeClair 397). "There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes," says Jack. "We'd never before been so attentive to our duty, our Friday assembly […] Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (64). For Jack the ritual of death, like the funeral, is in fact a gathering moment in which crowds come to form a shield against their own death. In order to transcend the anxiety of death, people engage in "the evasive artifices and mastering devices that turn back upon themselves, bringing them closer to the death they fear, even inspiring a longing for disaster" (Brooks 5).

[3] "They were content to let the capped and vested man speak on their behalf. No one disputed his account or tried to add individual testimony. It was as though they were being told of an event they hadn't personally been involved in" (91).

In *White Noise*, the Gladneys' intense fear of death, in the end, entailed their seclusion from the outside world. "The deeper we delve into the nature of things," Jack concludes, "the looser our structure may seem to become" (82). This "looseness," what the systems theorists would term "openness" or "equifinality" (LeClair 404), has become an intellectual disaster for Babette and Jack. Janet Savory, Jack's ex-wife, for instance, is a corporate character who is described as a "glocal" woman who threatens certainty and stability for Jack. He believes that she entangles and enmeshes him. She is trying to incorporate him into the world.[4] Using their children as a shield against their own dying, Babette and jack are ironically informed by them and often receive fragmented information from the outside world which penetrates their ignorance (404). The knowledge that others impose on the Gladneys is stripped off its scientific context and transmitted in its nomenclature and frequently "...requires the Gladneys to deny the obvious, accept the improbable, and believe in the invisible" (404), because in Murray Jay Siskind's view, human beings know too much and as a defensive regression, they hanker after reversing the flow of experience (*WN* 289). This knowledge, in Babette's view, stigmatizes a strange and complicated world of shifting facts and attitudes, something that antagonizes her ordered and dichotomized vision of the world. Gladneys's fear of death suggests their rejection of uncertainty. Their strategies to evade uncertainty "...overlap with their defences against mortality, closed spatial, psychological, and social systems" (LeClair 405). The destructive consequences of their intellectual implosion are Don DeLillo's "...photo-negative methods for pointing to his system-based conception of nature, mind, and mortality" (405). Because nature, whether strictly defined as living systems or more widely defined as the world in its totality, is, like the marketplace, a complex of multiple, overlapping systems, many of which are open, reciprocal, and eventually equifinal (405). In other words, life, as a form of social interaction, is a heterogenous system of overlapping discourses that go beyond the conventional paradigms of hierarchies and established dichotomies. The coherence of either/or logic, a major basis for delusions about certainty, should not, suggests DeLillo, be expected to apply to the simultaneous, both/and nature of phenomena (405).

Babette's ultimate fear of death leads her to trade sexual favours with Doctor Gray for Dylar, a substance that provokes memory

[4]Jack says, "We made vast sums. I was entangled, enmeshed. She was always manoeuvring. My security was threatened. My sense of long and uneventful life. She wanted to incorporate us. We got phone calls from Leitinstein, the Hebrides. Fictional places, plot devices" (87–88).

lapses. Jack is induced by Murray Jay Siskind to kill Doctor Gray in order to perform the role of the victimizer and to simulate the death scene as an anaesthetizing moment of self-empowerment. For Jack, death, which is "the vast scene and terrible depth," the inexhaustibility, "the whole huge nameless thing," "the massive darkness," and "the whole terrible endless hugeness," is a realm that must be repressed (*WN* 287). Yet when his embodiment of Hitler's personae becomes defensively inappropriate, he incorporates Murray's discourse as the only alternative left to survive an assassination attempt.[5] Murray's motto, "Kill to live," pushes Jack into his failed assassination attempt (291). At the end of the novel, Jack Gladney is portrayed in his moment of elaborating a death plot. He repeats at least three times how he will carry out the doctor's assassination.[6] Nevertheless, Jack's perception that "all plots tend to move deathwards" (26) is inconclusive because, as he puts it, "one cannot advance the action according to a plan" (98). What Jack implies is that one should not determine his actions in advance. One must expect the unexpected and avoid certainty and premeditated plans. Instead of killing Gray, Jack's humanity awakens. He finds himself driving the doctor to the hospital in a moment of pity, compassion, and self-redemption. This failure to kill has a crucial function in that it symbolizes, in a self-reflexive way, the procrastination and the indeterminacy of the protagonist's ultimate action and, therefore, the betrayal of the reader's expectation of the doctor's death. Instead of closing the text with an assassination plot, as presumably determined by Jack Gladney, DeLillo subverts the linearity and the deathward movement of the traditional text to give voice to openness, unexpectedness, and indeterminacy.

This resistance to finitude is translated in the complexity and the fragmentation of the open text of *White Noise*, which requires the active involvement of the reader in the reconstruction of the text. As

[5]Jack Gladney assumes that, "Nothingness is staring you in the face. Utter and permanent oblivion. You will cease to be, Jack. The dier accepts this and dies. The killer, in theory, attempts to defeat his own death by killing others. He buys time, he buys life. Watch others squirm. See the blood trickle in the dust" (291).

[6]"[He will] drive past the scene several times, approach the motel on foot, swivel [his] head to look peripherally into rooms, locate Mr. Gray under his real name, enter unannounced, gain his confidence, advance gradually, reduce him to trembling, wait for an unguarded moment, take out the .25-caliber Zumwalt automatic, fire three bullets into his viscera for maximum slowness, depth and intensity of pain, wipe the weapon clear of prints, place the weapon in the victim's hand to suggest the trite and predictable suicide of a motel recluse, smear crude words on the walls in the victim's own blood as evidence of his final-related frenzy, take his supply of Dylar, slip back to the car, take the expressway to Blacksmith, leave Stover's car in Treadwell's garage, shut the garage door, walk home in the rain and the fog." (311)

Jacques Derrida points out, "only by repeating the book can we avoid its potential dead end" (294). The book should not enclose the reader. Instead, it must be remade and taken up again because in that "repetition," that "bottomless of infinite redoubling" (296), what disappears is "the self-identity of the origin," the center as "the abyss," "the unnameable bottomless well," "the absence of play and difference, another name for death" (297). As a retrospective novel, *White Noise*'s reference to the reader's response is an indication that a novel is not simply a story of some sort but rather "a string of words" that directs the attention of the reader to the text as a text (Boyd 175). In this context, readers invariably find themselves constructing some sort of index to the novel and therefore engage in the re-writing of the original text. This situation is what Roland Barthes calls "the writerly value" of the text wherein the aim of a given literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer but an active producer of the text (5). *White Noise* requires this writerly value on the part of the readers who must engage in reconstructing the given text to avoid its closure through their multi-faceted interpretations. Reading, thus, becomes an invitation to another form of hermeneutic mediation, exactly like the mediated fictional world of the novel itself.

In conclusion, *White Noise* remains one of Don DeLillo's most poignant novels in portraying the postmodern world of consumerism and simulation. The supermarket, as a space, is a perfect metaphor that reflects not only the hyperreality of consumerist American society but also unfolds the ways in which the postmodern subject is invaded by a network of discourses that shape, nurture, gratify, and influence one's life and thoughts. The supermarket, from a Bakhtinian perspective, reflects the multiplicity of discourses, the polyphony of the novelistic genre, that self-reflexively characterize the theme and the structure of *White Noise*. However, taken from a more existentialist perspective, *White Noise* implies that people's need for conversation, stories, voices, and language per se is but the outcome of man's fear of death. In doing so, Don DeLillo captured the psychological dimension of language, which in this novel becomes the discursive noise that temporarily diverts man's attention from his existentialist anxiety about death. Jack and Babette Gladney's seclusion from the noise of the outside world makes them look for irrational and, to some extent, murderous means to defy their fear of death. DeLillo has aesthetically transposed this anxiety of death onto the open-ended dimension of the narrative itself.

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