

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and the Postmodern

Economics of Displacement

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Abstract

The primary aim of this work is to investigate the definitively postmodern economy of Don DeLillo's novel, *White Noise*. Methodologically, this thesis creates a dialogue by comparatively analysing DeLillo's text, its critical and literary reception, and key theoretical texts produced from the same context, as to diagnose the underpinning historical processes which characterise the postmodern. The key theoretical works employed are from Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Nick Land, as these theorists have all been primarily concerned with symptomizing the nature of the postmodern world. The main argument made in this thesis is that the postmodern is the product of what I call an economy of displacement. By focusing on three fundamental concepts which recur throughout the novel and its reception, as well as the theoretical texts examined, I argue that the postmodern, the sublime, and capitalism are all defined by a shared economic process characterised by a perpetual, self-propelling, process that escalates and accelerates sociocultural dissolution and fragmentation. The primary conclusion drawn from this study is that DeLillo's novel symptomizes an economic process that dissolves the geopolitical-existential status of the Human into obsolescence at an ever-accelerating rate, named as the postmodern.

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Introduction

DeLillo as Postmodern Economist

In 1985, Viking Press published Don DeLillo's eighth novel, *White Noise*. Widely held to be DeLillo's "break through" novel, *White Noise* drew attention from a far wider audience than his previous novels. The extensive and positive reception of *White Noise* was initially viewed as a bizarre phenomenon. As Frank Lentricchia has pointed out, DeLillo's

Readings are rare. He attends no conferences, teaches no summer workshops in fiction writing, never shows up on late-night television and doesn't cultivate second-person narrative in the present tense. So he has done little to promote himself in the approved ways (Lentricchia 1991, 1).

In the case of DeLillo, we find a reclusive and thoroughly reserved writer, whose eighth novel ascended to a cult status, earning the author the National Book Award for fiction, and a canonical status among postmodern novelists. It is safe to argue, then, that there is something significant about this novel, something within its pages that illuminates a fundamental aspect of our contemporary world, so fundamental that it reached readers who had never encountered DeLillo before. Such a response in-itself justifies the study of this text, as to uncover what it was that DeLillo revealed that spoke so true to this novel's readers.

Employing the word "truth" may appear ironic, as DeLillo is celebrated as a great postmodern novelist, with postmodernism being renowned for its disdain of objective truths.

The vast readership and reception of this novel, however, exemplifies that DeLillo's novel illuminated a number of fundamental aspects of our contemporary world that spoke truth to its readers, bringing to light key economic processes that are the driving force of the postmodern age. My thesis examines the correlation between the ascension of DeLillo's novel and the critical theory that arose within the same time and context. By examining the

context which enabled this canonical postmodern novel to arise, as well as the critical theory that became influential in academic and intellectual circles at the same time, both of which are described as “postmodern”, I aim to examine the key, essential economic processes that created these texts. By economic, I do not solely mean the normative understanding of accounting, banking, and monetary marketing (although these will come into it). Rather, I employ the term “economic” in its ontological and epistemological sense. This is to say, my thesis aims to investigate the key material process upon which the postmodern operates, as found in *White Noise*, the novel’s reception, and the critical theory produced from the same historical and material conditions.

Methodologically, my thesis comparatively analyses key points of intersection between DeLillo’s novel and acclaimed critical, cultural, and literary theory from the same context. The theory I have selected is generally located within the field of Continental Philosophy from the latter half of the twentieth century, specifically those theorists labelled Post-Structuralist and Post-modernist. I have selected this area because such theory has continued to hold a strong position within literary criticism, thereby providing for me the tools with which I am able to navigate the academic and critical field. Structurally, my thesis is thematic and conceptual. My first chapter establishes the context of DeLillo’s novel, its reception, and my own work, by providing a survey of the postmodern environment. The second chapter proceeds from this contextualization by addressing an essential tension, or, conflict, that is raised within this context, as is made evident in the novel’s critical and literary reception. Specifically, this conflict is summarized as the modern-postmodern debate, and it symptomizes the largest rift in the novel’s interpretation. To navigate this conflict, I employ and examine a concept shared by both sides of the debate, namely, the Sublime. My third chapter attempts to clarify and resolve this context, and crucial conflict, by providing a reading of the novel that is absent from the text’s critical milieu. In summary, my finally

chapter examines a reading that resituates the negative tendencies of the novel's context as positive, and productive. I do so by utilizing the affirmative accelerationist perspective of capitalism provided by Nick Land.

In my first chapter, I examine DeLillo's novel in relation to the postmodern. The main aim of this chapter is to position DeLillo's novel within its historical, cultural, political, and aesthetical context. This is to say, the postmodern not only designates the novel's historical context, but, also, the novel's literary context. Furthermore, this postmodern context gives rise to the novel's conceptual context. The conceptual context of the postmodern is two-fold insofar as this conceptual context not only gives rise to the concepts that DeLillo utilizes in the novel, but also, it contextualizes the conceptual framework from which the novel's literary and critical reception operates. To gain an elaborate understanding of this postmodern context, I position DeLillo's novel, as well as its literary and critical reception, in conjunction with a number of key, quintessentially postmodern theorists. Specifically, I analyse *White Noise*, and its reception, in relation to the work of Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, and Jean-François Lyotard, because these theorists have most extensively supplied the theoretical framework for scrutinizing, analysing, and symptomizing the postmodern. Such contextualization is essential for studying *White Noise*, because the postmodern is, as Frank Lentricchia has argued, the most essential term for studying contemporary literature, as well as, our contemporary world: we employ the term postmodern "in order to define not merely contemporary art and literature of the first world, but also who we are, how we live" (Lentricchia 1991, 87).

After contextualizing *White Noise* within the postmodern milieu, I proceed to analyse an essential tension within the novel's critical and literary reception. On one side of the conflict, there are those readers who argue that DeLillo's novel is a celebration of the postmodern. From this position, it is argued that DeLillo's novel exemplifies the dissolution

of, and triumph over, modernity, modernism, and the Enlightenment Project. On the other side of this debate, there are those who argue that *White Noise* exemplifies DeLillo's disdain for the postmodern: that DeLillo's novel is, rather, a call for a revitalization of the Modern, an attempt to move beyond the nihilism and pessimism associated with the postmodern, so as to re-establish the transcendental and romantic values of Modernity, and Enlightenment. The focus in this chapter is to interrogate this tension within the novel's literary and critical milieu, because, as Randy Laist highlights, "most [of] DeLillo criticism concerns itself with negotiating the territory between postmodern and romantic readings" (Laist 2010, 2). To do this, I draw on an essential concept that recurs throughout the reception of the novel, namely, the concept of the Sublime. The concept of the sublime acts as a pivotal point in the novel's reception, as it is employed from both sides of the modern/postmodern debate. I begin by examining the context of the sublime which is rooted in the Modernist-Enlightenment thinking of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. I then reflect upon the reconceptualization of the sublime by quintessential postmodern theorists, that is, the readings of Kant by Jameson, Lyotard, and Deleuze. Once I have developed an understanding of how the sublime functions within the context of the postmodern, I shall analyse how the sublime manifests within the postmodern. In doing so, I construct a reading of *White Noise* that clarifies the Modern/Postmodern debate by genealogically connecting the concept of the sublime to both the Modern and the Postmodern. Owing to the key significance the sublime has held for *White Noise*, specifically in regard to the interpretive conflict of the modern/postmodern, I aim to comparatively analyse DeLillo's novel, the novel's reception, as well as the relevant philosophical theory of the sublime, as to highlight the essential economic process upon which the sublime operates within this context.

In my final chapter, I aim to provide a reading of *White Noise* that addresses, and argues for, a perspective that is missing from the novel's readership. In the novel's

readership, the case is often made that this novel exemplifies the deterioration of Modernity and the Enlightenment Project, as manifested in the postmodern. As I show in the first and second chapter, the postmodern is read and understood in both a positive, and a negative manner. What I found missing from this milieu, however, is a reading of the postmodern in *White Noise* from a stern anti-humanist, and anti-anthropocentric perspective. Such a perspective would, I argue, read *White Noise*, as well as its reception, as exemplifying the deterioration, dissolution, and displacement of the human. To do this, I comparatively analyse *White Noise* and its reception in conjunction with the work of Land. I have selected Land, because utilizing his work holds a two-fold benefit for my study. First, Land is perhaps the most radical contemporary supporter of capitalism and, as it is capitalism which gave birth to the postmodern, inherently interwoven with modernity and the Enlightenment project, a developed understanding of capitalism appears to be required. Not only does Land's work stand out as one of the strongest celebrations of capitalism, with his work providing an elaborate and comprehensive study of capitalism, but also, his work is stripped of all humanist sentimentality. In fact, the primary reason for Land's dedication to capitalism is, as I aim to demonstrate through *White Noise*, because capitalism is a material process that actively deteriorates the Human at an accelerating rate. Arming myself with Land's unrelenting anti-humanist Accelerationism, I aim to demonstrate how *White Noise* can be read as celebrating capitalism's deterioration of the Human, a reading that is absent from the novel's critical and literary reception.

In each chapter I demonstrate that DeLillo's novel functions on the basis of an economy of displacement. Land summarises the historical-material importance of this economy of displacement, presented in a way that offers a preliminary introduction to the specific economic function which, I argue, drives DeLillo's novel. Land writes:

Modernity is 'essentially' reconstructive, a characteristic captured both in the merely abstract continuity of its productive organization – capital is always neo-capital – and in the transcendental

dynamic of its predominant (Kantian) philosophical mode. Critique belongs to capital because it is the first inherently progressive theoretical procedure to emerge upon earth [...]. In the case both of the mode of production and the mode of reason what is most evident is a *self-perpetuating movement of deregulation* [...] (Land 2014, 262: emphases mine).

Here, Land identifies the fundamental historical-material economy which contextualizes DeLillo's novel, situating it within a context of perpetual displacement. My thesis examines this economy through the analysis of three fundamental thematic-conceptual sectors established by DeLillo's novel, the novel's reception, and the predominant mode of philosophical theory from this context. In the first instance, we find that the novel's postmodern context operates on the basis of an ever-escalating, outward displacement of historical-material conditions which have defined Western societal structure. In the case of the postmodern, I argue that DeLillo's novel gives expression to the Human's displacement by the techno-scientific developments established through the processes of modernity, which historically-materially determine the postmodern, or, the contemporary moment with which DeLillo's is concerned. In summary, my study of *White Noise* via the postmodern illustrates how the processes put in place by modernity have escalated beyond the initial anthropocentric intentions of humanity, displacing the human subject into a position of futility with regards to the primary material processes which determine the contemporary world. In the second instance, by mapping the genealogy of the sublime, and repositioning it within the context of the postmodern, I argue that *White Noise* demonstrates how the sublime also operates on the basis on an economy of displacement. Specifically, as the sublime manifests in *White Noise*, there is a perpetual displacement of ontological and epistemological form. I highlight that the essential economy of the sublime displaces the subject, because the sublime is instantiated when ontological and epistemological form is destabilised. Furthermore, I claim that the context of the postmodern exacerbates and accelerates the manifestation of the sublime, thereby intensifying the displacement of the

human subject by the sublime. Finally, in light of Land's accelerationism, I identify that this economy of displacement found in the postmodern, and the sublime, is synonymously rooted in the material process of capitalism. Following Land's works on capitalism, I argue that *White Noise* offers a way of understanding how capitalism functions on the basis of the economy of displacement, as analysed in the two prior chapters, that is accelerating humanity towards the obsolete.

Chapter One

White Noise and the Postmodern

Don DeLillo's *White Noise* offers a literary expression of "the textures of postmodern experience, of daily life in the midst of images, commodities and conspiracies" (Maltby 2003, 65). Indeed, it is the accuracy and attentiveness, the narratological hyperawareness, with which *White Noise* explores the contemporary moment that has led this novel to hold unanimous critical acclaim. Due to the vast amount of critical recognition *White Noise* received, with few, if any, evading the use of the "postmodern" as reference point, DeLillo has come to be regarded as "a pathologist of postmodernism," in which he "obsessively analyses the contemporary moment" (Douglas 2002, 104). Portraying one year in the life of Jack Gladney, a middle-aged, economically comfortable, college professor, DeLillo's novel is positioned within the context of the consumerist, technologized, media-saturated America of the late twentieth century. DeLillo's "treatment of such issues as media culture, advertising [...] [and] conspicuous consumption" leads *White Noise* to be recognized as "DeLillo's canonically postmodern novel" (Duvall 2006, 117; Lucy 1998, 179). Lentricchia highlights the critical importance of understanding DeLillo's novel through a relationship with the postmodern: not only does studying *White Noise* in conjunction with postmodernism deepen one's understanding of DeLillo's novel as a literary text, but, also, studying this relationship enables a point of critical reflection on, and analysis of, one's own context and situation within the contemporary world. Minimally, this chapter aims to examine *White Noise* as an intersection, or, nodal-pivotal point, which mediates historical-material context, literature, and normative subjectivity-readership. "Postmodernism," Lentricchia writes, is "[o]ur key term of cultural self-consciousness – a word we utter [...] in order to define not merely

contemporary art and literature of the first world, but also who we are, how we live” (Lentricchia 1991, 87).

In *White Noise*, DeLillo offers a witty, funny, critical, and inquisitive style of writing that constantly plays with the metaphysical. Due to this, some critics view DeLillo’s novel as a work of cultural criticism in the form of fiction, arguing that DeLillo “uses fiction explicitly to analyse cultural and social patterns as an alternative to ‘pure’ theory” (Nicol 2009, 184). It is understandable, therefore, that many have interpreted DeLillo’s work with “a critical edge,” insofar as DeLillo presents a penetrating “critique of image culture and consumer capitalism as fostered by televisual simulacra” (McClure 1999, 99; Cowart 2003, 71). Furthermore, with the publication of *White Noise* coinciding with postmodern theory becoming established within academic circles, the grounds for arguing that DeLillo’s novel can, or even, should, be read in conjunction with postmodern theory appears justified. DeLillo’s novel shares a strikingly similar conceptual schema with critical postmodern theory, as well as sharing its historical-cultural context.

It is important, then, to offer some preliminary comments defining the term “postmodern”. Traditionally, postmodernism has been conceived as both a shift in theoretical conception, as well as a shift in historical-material conditions upon which our society is grounded (Best and Kellner 1997; Giddens 1990; Jameson 1998). The shift is primarily characterized by its critique of modernism, modernity, and the ideology of the Enlightenment Project. The postmodern critique attacks such modernist concepts as reason, objectivity, humanism, autonomy, progressivism, and universality (Best and Kellner 1991). Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the most widely recognized postmodern theorists, frames these modernist-enlightenment concepts, and the structural network they create, in terms of meta-narratives, or, grand-narratives. He writes:

The ‘metanarratives’ I was concerned with in *The Postmodern Condition* are those that have marked modernity: the progressive emancipation of reason and freedom, the progressive or catastrophic

emancipation of labour (source of alienated value in capitalism), the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist technoscience. [...] Like myths, they have the goal of legitimating social and political institutions and practices, laws, ethics, ways of thinking. Unlike myths, however, they look for legitimacy [...] in a future to be accomplished, that is an Idea to be realized. This Idea (of freedom, 'enlightenment', socialism, etc.) has legitimating value because it is universal. (Lyotard 2003, 18)

In the last two sentences of the above quote, Lyotard highlights a specific economical function on Modernity-Enlightenment, namely, the becoming-actualized, or, the materialization, of the abstract. Here, Lyotard explains how Modernity, as a project, and as a material process, sought to instantiate the abstract ideals and transcendental truths of existence. The projection of materializing transcendental ideals constituted the project's conceptual framework. This is to say, modernity, as a historical and a cultural phenomenon, was the attempt to actualize transcendental concepts as the basis of social, cultural, economic, political, and aesthetic formation and production. My aim in this chapter is to demonstrate how the world of postmodernism/postmodernity is the result of a historical and material exhaustion of modernity. The world of *White Noise* results from modernity and the Enlightenment Project precisely because it exemplifies the inherent dissolution of the social body materialized-actualized through the process of modernity.

Modernity's "positivistic, technocratic and rationalistic" structure is one of the main points of the postmodern critique. According to postmodern critique, modernity was the essential "belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders and the standardization of knowledge and production" (Sarup 2002, 94). Following from this assertion, postmodern thinkers aimed to show the increasing failure and exhaustion of the modernist grand narratives, universality, and totalizing discourses, which are exemplified in key modernist thinkers, such as Kant, Rene Descartes, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx (Sarup 2002: Best and Kellner 1991: Jameson 1991). The

essential projection shared through the work of these quintessential modernist thinkers is the uncovering of an overarching paradigm, or, universal structure, which comprehends all human experience. In contrast, postmodernity is primarily differentiated from modernity in the claim that:

there is no common set of rules, norms and values [...] There are many different language games and these enter into conflict with one another over what proper practice is in given cases. [...] So, there is a multiplicity of language games and this multiplicity can never be unified under a single metanarrative. This, then, allows for a classic definition of the postmodern condition: a fragmented society with many different and incompatible moral and social codes. (Williams 1998, 27-34)

Following from this assertion, the postmodern is differentiated by the lack of contingency in contemporary social codes: the postmodern signifies a heterogeneity of codes, which are not intrinsically related. Furthermore, any such codes may join together to formulate new assemblages of codes which create narratives. This position is most adequately exemplified in Jameson's defining the postmodern as the society of pastiche, as well as Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages and desiring-machines (Jameson 1991; Deleuze & Guattari 2004). The postmodern can be understood, therefore, as the product, or products, resulting from the highly developed (and ever developing) modes of change and transformation characteristic of the contemporary technological-media society, following, or, determined by, modernity's globalizing, transcendental tendency. Postmodern thinkers highlight the rapid development and production of technologies in the second half of the twentieth century irreversibly changed socioeconomic and cultural formation, as well as irreversibly impacting upon Nature-Earth, as seen in the contemporary discussion, and scientific attention to the "Anthropocene". Theorists such as Baudrillard and Lyotard aimed to demonstrate how such technological developments produce new modes of information and knowledge, while Fredric Jameson and David Harvey pursued the Marxist tradition, advocating an understanding of the postmodern primarily in terms of "late-stage" capitalism. Common to

these postmodern interpretations, however, is the idea that these technological processes increasingly produce socio-cultural fragmentation and disillusion. Despite the fact that these theorists differ in their approaches to the postmodern, as well as the conclusions they draw, each examination highlights the same economic process. In summary, the varying applications of the postmodern all identify the way in which contemporary western society is the result of an economic process that perpetually breaks from, goes beyond, and dissolves established structure and form.

One essential aspect of the postmodern debate is understanding the way in which the material context functions as a feedback loop, insofar as the socioeconomic and cultural conditions influence the perspectives employed to analyse and interpret those conditions and vice versa. To retain conceptual clarity, the postmodern debate often distinguishes between two general currents: one current aiming to define contemporary society's form, artifacts and institutions, and the other, aiming to investigate the nature of critiquing this contemporary society (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 2005). "Postmodernity" is often used to name the supposed historical-temporal epoch that follows, or breaks, from modernity: it is debated whether this postmodern epoch began with the end of the Second World War, or with the "technological boom" in the 1980s. Rather than arguing that postmodernity is a definitive separation, or break, from modernity, I intend to demonstrate that the postmodern delegates specific symptoms that result from the processes employed by modernity. More specifically, as I have already mentioned, I aim to demonstrate how postmodernity may best be understood as the geopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural exhaustion of modernity, that the postmodern is the result of the essential economic process of modernity exceeding beyond the resources of human utility, thereby signifying a period of displacement for the human. Further, as a point of clarification, because there is a dispute over postmodernity's precise temporal genesis, I will employ the term to refer to the latter half of the twentieth century. I

do so, because the specific focus of my project is the context of America in the 1980s, when DeLillo's novel was published. Furthermore, the majority of theoretical texts I employ in conjunction with DeLillo's novel were also published in this period, or, are fundamentally contextualized by this period.

“Postmodernism” is used to signify the aesthetic-cultural artifacts produced by the historical and material conditions of Postmodernity (Reichl 1989; Mura 2012). The use of the term “postmodernism” thereby distinguishes such artifacts from the aesthetic-cultural products categorized under the guise of “modernism”. Postmodernity and postmodernism are used for pragmatic distinction; however, these two categories are heterogeneous, which is to say, both of these categories are in a constant affectual-productive relationship. Simply put, postmodernity defines the material conditions which give rise to aesthetic-cultural productions, while examples of postmodernism offer material to be analysed in order to help understand and define the historical and social conditions of postmodernity.

Following from this distinction, one may argue, as many have, that *White Noise* is an aesthetic-cultural product of postmodernity. From this position, *White Noise* is an example of literary postmodernism, which, as defined above, means that DeLillo's novel is a product determined by the context of postmodernity. In this way, DeLillo's novel offers an apt opportunity for one to critically analyse the postmodern: *White Noise* may be used to exemplify both currents of the postmodern, namely, this text offers material insight into defining the postmodern society, while also giving material from which one may critique the postmodern society. In this chapter I aim to show how DeLillo's novel can be understood as postmodern in three ways: firstly, one may analyse the novel's content, which would offer insight into how the social, the political, and the cultural take form within postmodernity; secondly, one may closely analyse the literary tools and devices which DeLillo employs, which would offer a means of understanding how aesthetic-cultural artifacts of postmodernity

differentiate from those produced by modernity-modernism. The third way DeLillo's novel functions when examining the postmodern debate, with specific emphasis of the perpetual current of critiquing modernity/modernism, is how DeLillo's novel offers the material grounds to test the arguments and analysis of the postmodern, which is to say, *White Noise* offers examples of how the modern/postmodern debate plays out. The primary aim of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss how *White Noise* defines postmodernity, as an era differentiated from modernity, while simultaneously paying attention to the literary forms and modes that DeLillo creates, which will provide insight into how the conditions of postmodernity produces artifacts which are characteristically different from those of modernity and literary modernism.

Despite the differences in approach and application, all postmodern theorists appear to be motivated by the essential desire to comprehend the heterogeneous, or even, chaotic, nature of the consumerist, computerized, and media-saturated postmodern society. One key trend in postmodern theory, which I intend to have demonstrated by the end of this chapter, is that postmodernity is the historical-material exhaustion of the Enlightenment project, which is fundamentally interwoven with Modernity. In this lineage, postmodernity, taken as the historical and cultural context of the latter half of the twentieth century, offers the grounds to demonstrate the various points of exhaustion, collapse, and failure of modernity. Owing to the fact that DeLillo's novel gives detailed expression of this precise historical-cultural context, namely, postmodernity, his novel offers us examples of how one may understand that the project of modernity has failed: how the socio-cultural and technological-scientific developments of modernity have created irreversible altercations to the nature of western society. Jameson understands the postmodern as a specific socio-cultural context can be used in order to justify reading *White Noise* in such a way. For Jameson:

[Postmodern] is not just another word for the description of a particular style. It is also, at least in my use, a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order (Jameson 1998, 3).

From Jameson's position, DeLillo's novel offers a keen sense of awareness of the prevailing postmodern condition, specifically highlighting the tensions which result from the modernity/postmodernity relation. DeLillo's work accomplishes this through his creative, entertaining, satirical, and unsettling prose, which maps the socio-cultural predicaments, obsessions, fears, and struggles of the postmodern socius. In *White Noise*, DeLillo

speaks about individuals living within postmodern culture, which is to say that disconcerting economic and cultural condition of late capitalism. His characters – like many of his contemporary western readers – experience living in a culture driven by mass produced images and products. [...] [So, we can] classify DeLillo's novels as postmodern if by that we mean [...] works which represent and reflect upon postmodern culture and the postmodern condition (Ebbesen 2006, 114).

DeLillo's novel, therefore, presents a detailed "anatomy of contemporary American life [...] probing some of the innermost hideaways of the postmodern condition" (Engles and Duvall 2006, 1). In this light, DeLillo offers the textual material for one to search for insight into the complexities of the postmodern.

The vast and rapid rate which social, economic, technological, philosophical, and cultural developments occur, specifically in the second half of the twentieth century, gives rise to immense transformations in all areas of life, differentiating this era from prior historical contexts, which Lyotard identifies as "the postmodern condition" (Lyotard, 1997). Critical theorists, artists, and fiction writers alike became preoccupied with how the heterogeneous make up of this postmodern condition, how it determines the way human beings experience reality, and how these new modes of subjectivity, in turn, create a feedback process which affects the social (Best & Kellner, 1991). In DeLillo's career, he has come to occupy a distinguished place among those contemporary writers who have attempted to diagnose the symptoms of the current postmodern sociocultural condition. DeLillo's novels

consistently portray a world that is becoming further detached from what has been traditionally conceived of as reality, or, “the Real” (Baudrillard, 2010): a society dominated by mass media, immersed in consumerism, continually making ambiguous the distinction between an objective reality and a virtual simulation. One contingent concern throughout the postmodern debate, as well as throughout DeLillo’s novel, is the crisis of subjectivity: it is constantly called into question whether the characters are, on the one hand, autonomous individuals with a unique identity, or, on the other hand, hollow figures that simulate subjectivity, lacking all integrity, and finding themselves alienated in the face of the disorienting contemporary environment. Arising from this subjective tension, DeLillo’s characters are often driven numb by overexposure to a superabundance of information and images, alienated from any concrete sense of reality or stability. As Laist has stated, “[c]ritics excavating this postmodern vein point to the many instances of self-diminishment, psychic fragmentation, and numbing depersonalization that resonate throughout DeLillo’s pages” (Laist 2010, 1).

I will begin by addressing the essential role of consumerism and the economic process of commodification in postmodernity. I start here because “the theme of consumerism shows up in the first paragraph” of DeLillo’s novel (Osteen 2006, 192). In Baudrillard’s conception of the postmodern, he identifies a definite historical rupture and break from modernity, primarily characterized as “a new era of simulation in which social reproduction (information processing, communication, knowledge industries) replaces production as the organizing principle of society” (Kellner 2002, 51). The fundamental logic at the heart of this break is the process of commodification and consumption. Baudrillard writes:

There is all around us today a kind of fanatic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects and material goods [...] [T]he humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings as they were in all previous ages, but by

objects. Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather – on a rising statistical curve – with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages (Baudrillard 1998, 25).

The replacement of human relations by commodity relations directly echoes the first page of *White Noise*. Here, Jack describes the return of students to college from his office, dubbing the annual event as the “day of the station wagons,” an event that he has observed each “September for twenty-one years,” thereby giving emphasis to the repetitive, ritualistic nature of the event (5; 3). Jack notes:

The roofs of the station wagons were loaded down with carefully secured suitcases full of light and heavy clothing; with pillows, quilts; with rolled-up rugs and sleeping bags; with bicycles, skis, rucksacks, English and Western saddles, inflated rafts. As cars slowed to a crawl and stopped, students sprung out and raced to the rear doors to begin removing the objects inside; table ranges; cartons of phonograph records and cassettes; the hairdryers and styling irons; the tennis rackets, soccer balls, hockey and lacrosse sticks, bows and arrows; the controlled substances, the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags—onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut crème patties, Waffelos and Kabooms, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints
(3)

The novel’s opening passage not only operates as a taster for Jack’s style and tone throughout the novel, it also offers the precise postmodern economy that Baudrillard emphasized. What is most obvious from the above passage is that it is a list, a catalogue of stuff, objects, and commodities. Throughout the novel, Jack’s narrative style condenses the scene into a list that is episodic and centred around objects, offering snippets of images that lack clear contingency and causality. Jesse Kavadlo draws out the essential postmodern feature in Jack’s opening remarks: “Ultimately missing from Gladney’s perception, here and subsequently through most of the novel, however, are the human beings to whom the cars, paraphernalia, and gadgets belong” (Kavadlo 2004, 13). The point being made is that postmodern subjective perception, DeLillo positioning Jack as an analogical postmodern “every-man”, is dominated by commodities, objects, images, rather than the other characters

that occupy the scene. The other human characters in this scenario, external to Jack's first-person narration, are described, primarily, as vessels that carry, or are constituted by, commodities. Owing to this, the way in which characters are presented throughout the novel are predominantly as objects or commodities themselves.

Jack's opening remarks can be analysed as distinctly postmodern in two ways. First, Jack is immersed by object-commodities. As far as Jack's narration informs the reader, his environment is primarily made up of commodities, as it is a list of objects-commodities that occupied the majority of Jack's opening description. The second aspect that is characteristically postmodern in this passage is that the people are described in the terms of commodities, insofar as the people are not described by notably human-subjective characteristics. Lacking any suggestion of autonomy, authenticity, reason, or integrity, as modernity had defined the human subject, DeLillo opens the novel by highlighting the postmodern displacement of the subject by the commodification process. The novel's opening thereby attests to Baudrillard's hypothesis that postmodernity establishes a rupture, and break, from modernity, namely, the usurpation of human relations by the expansive process of commodification. The humans that populate the setting are defined by the objects-commodities that they carry, or, that constitute their surroundings. Simply, not only does Jack's perception eliminate almost every trace of the present humans, but also, when Jack does acknowledge other humans, he defines them solely on the basis of objects-commodities. In Jack's commentary, one finds that humans are in "the service of their things, items all referred to by the definite article that leave no doubt that these belongings, unambiguously, define them" (Kavadlo, 13). Jack summarizes the direct relevance of objects-commodities to the wider, more general, postmodern condition when he notes that "[t]his assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually

akin, a people, a nation” (DeLillo, 4). DeLillo welcomes the reader, therefore, to correlate Jack’s perspective as a common, generalized, postmodern view.

The student procession establishes another distinct postmodern characteristic, namely, in the way that it mirrors an assembly line of mass-(re)produced goods. Jack’s opening remarks highlight that the postmodern society is a society driven, and literally produced, by the process of commodification:

DeLillo’s vision of cars as a stream of machines slowly weaving through a pastoral landscape implies that these students are products of an assembly-line culture. [...] DeLillo refuses to give these students emotional and personal details; instead they are defined by the things that surround them. [...] The student becomes another commodity built from commodities [...] the product of an empty consumerism” (Caton 2003, 110-112).

Categorically, the parents are defined as a homogeneous class of consumers. Jack goes as far as to suggest that the parents’ primary concern is that their children are integrated into their consumer society. For the parents, their children's admission into college is not a matter of developing a sense of authentic autonomy, coming of age, a broadening of their intellectual horizons, or the process of teaching productive skills to be essential participators in society. Rather, the novel’s opening chapter signifies their transition of adolescence into “a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation” (DeLillo, 4). By including the word “spiritually,” this passage is loaded with a tone that mockingly emphasizes the materialist and object-based reality of consumer society. DeLillo establishes this connection between college education and consumer culture explicitly when Jack notes that the “tuition at the College-on the Hill is fourteen thousand dollars”: the parents are literally described as buying the status of their children in consumer society (41).

The emphasis DeLillo places on consumerism in the postmodern society is found in the sheer number of scenes set at the supermarket. The supermarket's role in the novel is not solely reducible to a physical location that represents consumer-based society. As Murray

frames it, the supermarket represents the spiritual essence of their society. Murray, as a postmodern “semiotician and cultural critic,” spends the majority of his time being fanatically obsessed with deciphering “the natural language” of commodity culture (Salyer 2003, 35: DeLillo, 9). From Murray’s satirical romantic perspective, the supermarket offers apt ground for studying postmodernity. Murray tells Jack that the supermarket “is full, of psychic data. [...] Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material” (37). Murray’s point of view follows both Baudrillard’s and Jameson’s conception of postmodernity, to the point in which Murray’s postmodern sermons start to appear as parodies, or simulations, of the notion of postmodern semiotics. Consumerism, and the extent to which commodification has shaped contemporary society, ought to be primarily understood as “a network of floating signifiers that are inexhaustible in their ability to incite desire” (Baudrillard 2001, 3). Murray’s proposition, that the supermarket is animated by “psychic data,” follows Baudrillard’s in an almost identical way:

Goods and objects, like words [...] form a global arbitrary, coherent system of signs, a cultural system [...]. [...] The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of different goods and sign/objects today constitute our language, our code, the code by which the entire society communicates and converses (Baudrillard 1998, 79-80).

DeLillo, in an ironic tone, highlights the fact that consumerism is not only physically essential to the postmodern world, it may also be understood as the leading source of existential and spiritual value.

Both DeLillo and Baudrillard show that postmodern subjectivity is produced by the commodity-object-sign economy, namely, through consumption. This is to say, because the postmodern socius is constructed by commodities-objects-signs – everything in one’s environment is understood within the object-commodity-sign economy – the mode of subjectivity that is produced is, first and foremost, grounded in commodities. Baudrillard argues that, because the logic of commodities is the primary logic of postmodern society,

“people actualize themselves in consumption [...] [because] all individuals are described in terms of their objects” (Baudrillard 2001, 15: 23). Baudrillard’s argument may appear totalizing, perhaps even hyperbolic, but this is because, from Baudrillard’s perspective, postmodernity is primarily defined by the commodification process of capitalism, which has come to structure and produce every aspect of contemporary life. “[E]very desire, plan, need, every passion and relation,” Baudrillard explains, “is abstracted or materialized as a sign and as an object to be purchased and consumed” (26). When Baudrillard is speaking of the totalization of commodification, he is not strictly referring to just objects and perishable goods, but is rather highlighting the notion that everything that exists within postmodernity is always already embedded within the commodification process. Thus, personal characteristics, religious belief, information and knowledge, scientific and technological development, are all defined by their being part of the global network of commodification. In this sense, people are no longer defined by transcendental ideals, such as authenticity, morality, sovereignty, and reason, but are rather defined as/by commodities: subjects are nodal points of assemblage and conjunction of a multiplicity of commodities-signs.

In an environment that is both physically and psycho-spiritually constituted by commodities, the only means Jack has to gain a sense of security and fulfilment is consumerism. Consumerism becomes “merely the accumulation of the signs of happiness” (Baudrillard 1998, 31). For example, when Eric Massingale, a colleague from the college, tells Jack he looks “harmless, again, [and] indistinct” outside of his professional attire, the only means Jack knows to restore his self-image is through a fanatical shopping spree (DeLillo, 83). Jack explains:

The encounter put me in the mood to shop. [...] I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it (83).

Jack's default response to his hollowness is to submerge himself within the superabundance of commodities that fills his environment, thereby demonstrating the extent, or excess, to which consumption drives contemporary postmodern society. DeLillo's characters fail to find any other means offered by society to give their lives existential credit. Commodities offer the material and nonmaterial needs for the novel's characters. This demonstrates how the postmodern subject gains existential and spiritual sustenance through the physical process of buying and accumulating commodities-objects, and the symbolic value they hold. This is most overtly stated by Murray, who posits that "the supermarket recharges us spiritually" (37).

The rise-to-domination of commodification in DeLillo's novel highlights one of the essential shifts characteristic of postmodernity which differentiates it from modernity. The project of modernity prioritized production as the source of social meaning, with emphasis placed on the positive contribution to the universally applicable ideal of humanity: work equals progress. In the postmodern world, by contrast, this social value is inverted. Rather than the central focus of society being production, the postmodern era denotes the dominance of and emphasis on consumption. Social meaning and value are no longer established through productivity (work and contribution) but rather through the accumulation and consumption of sign exchange, which increasingly characterizes every facet of contemporary reality.

Whereas modernity sought to produce ideals within every category (the best politics, the best labour, the best aesthetics, the best architecture, the best family, etc.), postmodernity qua late-stage capitalism has effectively dissolved such definitive categories into a global economy of consumption and exchange (Jameson, 1997). In other words, the essential economic model of postmodernity operates on the basis of something being produced only if it is consumable and exchangeable. The most overt implication of this reversal of the production-consumption dynamic is that consumption is not reduced to being the end of the process of production, as

it was for modernity, but rather, consumption is itself understood as creative and productive. This is to say that the act of consumption is not a personal and private act by which the subject destroys a commodity. Instead, consumption is a social act that constructs symbolic meanings, social codes, and relationships that are produced and reproduced, consumed and exchanged. Consumption has itself become the process that produces subjectivity; consumption as means of self-realization, and self-identification. Thus, consumption produces the image of one's self to one's self, and to others. The postmodern therefore comes to define the way in which production, as a process, never ceases, and is a perpetual process. In contrast to the modernist conception of production, postmodernism posits that the form of production changes at different stages of the process. In the stage most generally known as production, the producers are human beings, while the products are the commodities. At the stage commonly known as consumption, however, the producers are the commodities, the products are the human beings.

DeLillo's characters are constantly surrounded by objects, insofar as Jack's narration gives equal, if not more, focus to the objects-commodities-signs that define the settings. Even Wilder, the youngest member of the Gladney brigade, is described by his relation to objects and commodities, rather than any family-bond, or, human characteristics. For example, when we are first introduced to Wilder, it is during lunch and in passing. Jack describes Wilder sitting on the kitchen counter surrounded by commodities: "open cartons, crumpled tinfoil, shiny bags of potato chips, bowls of pasty substances covered with plastic wrap, flip-top rings and twist ties, individually wrapped slices of orange cheese" (DeLillo, 7). Furthermore, during one occasion at the supermarket, Jack describes Wilder, seated in the trolley, "[t]rying to grab items whose shape and radiance excited his system of sensory analysis" (167). Wilder, as an infant, is shown to be immersed within the consumer culture. In this sense, DeLillo shows how, as an infant, Wilder is adequately initiated into postmodern

consumer society from birth. Wilder, being preverbal, is described as existing immanently within the array of commodities.

White Noise also demonstrates that this postmodern American landscape, characterized by the proliferation of objects, is, as Jameson argues, extremely disorienting, and even menacing. DeLillo portrays a number of varying perspectives in this regard. Jack's children tend to have a deeper understanding of technology than their parents. Murray, somewhat younger than Jack, is fuelled by an obsessive enthusiasm for the new techno-landscape. This scaling of contextual perspectives, predominantly across generations, is further exemplified in the elderly characters in the novel. Most overtly, or hyperbolically, the elderly characters highlight how technological developments, and their effect on social formation, operate at an accelerating speed which leaves subjects behind in a disorienting and unfamiliar environment. In the first section of the novel Jack explains how a blind, elderly man, Mr. Treadwell, and his sister, become lost in a shopping mall. Jack speculates that their grandniece had driven them to the mall and then had forgotten to pick them up. The Treadwells wander the mall for two days, "Lost, confused and frightened," before "taking refuge in the littered kiosk," where they hid in terror for another two days, before they are finally discovered (59). Jack speculates that "[i]t was probably just the vastness and strangeness of the place and their own advanced age that made them feel helpless and adrift in a landscape of remote and menacing figures" (59). Jack's theory, though delivered with an ironic tone, of two people becoming lost within a shopping mall for four days, as if lost in a rain forest, is in actuality an extremely apt summary of Jack's own experience within the same world.

Jack often describes his own first-hand experiences in an almost identically frightening, confusing, and disorienting way. At the beginning of the novel, Jack's

description of his suburban neighbourhood ends with a remark that posits a daunting presence which follows him throughout the rest of the novel:

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

Jack's postmodern surrounding is accelerating around him: "a quiet street in what was *once* a wooded area with deep ravines"; "There is an expressway beyond the back yard *now*" (4, emphasis mine). Jack struggles to keep up with the postmodern world and is more often than not left overwhelmed, confused and alienated. "In the commonplace," Jack tells us, "I find unexpected themes and intensities" (184). "Everywhere Jack turns in his suburban object-scape", he is confronted by a bewildering radiance of "unusual meaning" (Laist, 67). In the household kitchen, for example, Jack becomes phenomenologically hypnotized by the coffee maker. "It was like a philosophical argument rendered in terms of the things of the world – water, metal, brown beans," Jack notes (103). Again, when opening the refrigerator, Jack finds "[a] strange crackling sound came off the plastic food wrap. [...] An eerie static, insistent but near subliminal, that made me think of wintering souls, some form of dormant life approaching the threshold of perception" (258). Jack attests to Baudrillard's idea that

the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings as they were in all previous ages, but by objects. Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather – on a rising statistical curve – with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages (Baudrillard 1998, 25).

Because everything in the postmodern world is constituted by technology that proliferates commodification, Jack finds himself to be the alien in his environment.

In Baudrillard's, as well as Jameson's, understanding of postmodernity, fragmentation is a major symptom (Baudrillard 1981; Jameson 1983). Both Baudrillard and Jameson use fragmentation to denote the process by which all "things" are disconnected and disjointed in

their relationships to all other “things”. The postmodern ontology and economy posits a perpetually disconnected, and disconnecting, process by which objects, signs, commodities, and subjects are severed from their fixed and homogeneous origin, history, and context. These disconnected signs operate as nodes which offer the grounds for postmodern communication. That is, in postmodern culture, something is understood as an entity insofar as it (re)presents a message, which is to say, the image communicates through the affects created from the assemblage of signs. Due to the competitive nature of a capitalist market, individuals are constantly subjected to competing (re)presentations, all of which aim to arouse interest and desire in consumption. Because of the fragmented nature of this symbolic exchange, each commodity-sign must be independently enticing and exciting to the subject. This is because there is no substantial underlying link between these commodity-signs, but rather, a continuous antagonism between different commodity-signs. Consequently, it is through a technological medium that these techniques are employed to seduce the viewer through communication. Each instance of commodity-sign communication is thus promoted, or hyped, through intensive affectivity, emphasising the way marketing employs technological devices to entice and manipulate the subject to consume the commodity (re)presentation. It is for this reason that the postmodern culture is often used to denote sensationalism's prominence in society. Television commercials and music videos, borrowing a heterogeneity of images and styles from each other, and which are increasingly indiscernible from the broader television and cinema industry, provide an excellent example of this postmodern spectacle phenomena.

Cultural representations in the media, by means of technologies also employed in contemporary marketing practices, thereby create the (re)construction of reality qua simulation (Baudrillard 1981; Jameson 1983). DeLillo's novel exemplifies how the contemporary subject continuously witnesses, through the everyday process of consumerism,

the reproduction of roles, relationships, and characteristics that are, initially, simulated on screen, on television, or other media forms. The (hyper)reality promoted by media technologies become actualized through audience consumption, thereby (re)producing those hyped realities.

The notion of Hyperreality is closely linked to the concept of simulacrum, which is when a reproduction of an image is abstracted from, and replaces the original. Here, the use of the term image becomes interchangeable with the term copy, insofar as, the image is a (re)production of some other image-sign: it is a simulated image abstracted from another established aspect-image of reality (Baudrillard 1981; Jameson 1983). This image, or copy, is severed from its reference to an original, in the sense that the simulacrum becomes stand alone, and is cut off from its original context and meaning. Hyperreality is primarily the product of technologically mediated experience, which highlights the intrinsic role technology plays in creating subjective experience. In this technological perspective, reality created qua technology is a network of images, or, simulacrum, which have no external reference, assembled together to create a new reality. This new reality, the “Hyperreal”, is artificial in the sense that it is entirely made up of simulated representations of images. For Baudrillard:

The difference between the real and the image, signs and simulations of the real has dissolved. This leads to the creation of what Baudrillard refers to as *simulacra* – reproductions or simulations of the real that are difficult or impossible to distinguish from the real. The result is the emergence of what he refers to as *hyperreality*. This term is meant to imply that it is not real and more real than real (Kivistio 1998, 142).

In Baudrillard’s understanding of postmodernity, hyperreality is the process of simulation, through hype, which becomes actualized as real. In other words, society’s romanticized perspective of the image, that which was once understood as artificial, or, a simulated version of reality, is made actual and concrete, insofar as the image is now

understood as being as-real-as reality. Hyperreality is the (re)production of a reality in which the distinction between real and imaginary (simulation) is no longer clear. The real disappears, and “truth, reference, objective cause cease to exist” (Baudrillard 2010, 3). The “hyper” component indicates a double meaning, both of which highlight a different aspect of its being derived from the word and concept “hyperbole”. Firstly, the reality produced exceeds, or, is beyond, what had previously been definitively characteristic of scientific and philosophical reality, and, in this sense, the reality produced is a hyperbole of ‘reality’; secondly, this reality is created by technologies that were initially developed for hype. This second connotation of “hype” establishes the importance technologies play in the way that the media promotes this (hyper)reality, analogous to propaganda.

In the same way that Jack's environment is visually populated with a constant excess of objects-commodities, so too is Jack perpetually encompassed by media saturation. Quotes from the television interrupt Jack's narration repeatedly throughout the novel. These media excerpts appear at random, with no clear correlation, filling Jack's life with white noise. Laist has highlighted that “[f]or an American male of the 1980's, Jack actually watches comparatively very little television”: “Television is predominantly an atmospheric presence in *White Noise*, rather than a localizable object” (Laist, 73). In this sense, Jack's environment is aptly postmodern, insofar as, no matter where he finds himself throughout the novel, he is unable to evade the presence and impact of technology, which creates an “aural landscape, a dull murmur, invisible and everywhere” (Laist, 73).

Technology, in all forms, constitutes every aspect of Jack's environment, and everywhere he turns he observes the radiating presence of technology. Already, in the first chapter, Jack has highlighted the way postmodern reality is defined by the melding of technology into every aspect of existence as a detectable and inextricable aspect of postmodern life. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Jack already relates this technological

presence to the transcendental nature of death in the above cited phrase which describes the hum of the highway “as [...] dead souls babbling,” invisible and everywhere, as if technology is a transcendental plane of existence alongside reality (4).

DeLillo’s technology-infused environment displaces and alienates the novel’s characters in at least two ways. Firstly, the media snippets which bombard Jack’s consciousness appear detached and fragmented. Rather than offering pieces of information being communicated with the listener, the fragments of phrases that come from the television appear at complete random in the narrative: there is never any context given with these statements, nor does Jack ever offer any thoughts about them. The production and function of these media-bites operate, so it would seem, independently from human subjects. Due to this, television and media technologies are generally shown to create an aural presence of exile.

The displacing and isolating effect of the postmodern techno-media-scape is overt when Jack and Babette speculate on the relationship between the white noise of postmodernity and death. The always-present ambient whisper of technology in the novel is metaphorically embedded with Jack and Babette’s fear of death, which, like the techno-media voice, follows them everywhere.

“What if death is nothing but sound?”

“Electrical noise.”

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

“Uniform, white.” (198)

The irony here is that their speculation of death qua white noise is an adequate description of their own lives in a postmodern era. Placing both technology and death in a realm which transcends human meaning, in complete isolation and exile, is made more literal when Jack is diagnosed with his premature-death caused by exposure during the Airborne Toxic Event.

DeLillo’s characters are overwhelmed by the constant bombardment of information, unable to find time to reflect on or make sense of any of the messages because the production

of this information never ceases. Reduced to white noise, devoid of meaning the “information explosion cancels all meaning in a meaningless white noise” (Best and Kellner 1991, 302).

As Baudrillard posits:

information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. Thus, the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite of the implosion of the social in the masses. [...] Beyond the horizon of the social, there are the masses, which result from the neutralization and the implosion of the social (Baudrillard 2010, 81-83).

In Baudrillard’s view, it is technology that has given rise to the reign of hyperreality.

Simulations, information explosions, and new technologies like “the Internet, communication satellites, cryogenics, biotechnology, nanotechnology, robotics and other phenomena” all “intensify the culture of the hyperreal” (Poster 2000, 10). Nevertheless, the greatest simulating technologies responsible for the spread of the hyperreal are found in the mass-media, the electronic media in particular, for “it is especially [...] the electronic media through which the hyperreal has managed to replace the real” (Bertens 1996, 150). So, for Baudrillard, it is above all television that has led to “the transformation of life itself, of everyday life into virtual reality” by “infiltrating it exactly like a virus in a normal cell” (Baudrillard 2001, 198). As a result, the depth and authenticity of lived experience has disappeared completely from our media-saturated lives, to the extent that what we see on television has become indistinguishable from our everyday experience; in other words, we have reached the point where “TV is the world. TV is dissolved into life, and life is dissolved into TV” (Sarup 1993, 165).

One may argue, then, that one of the most fundamental postmodern characteristics, as DeLillo’s novel demonstrates, is the displacement of reality. The extent to which DeLillo’s characters feel lost and displaced in the white noise of contemporary life has led critics to argue that *White Noise* is a “fictional working out of the theoretical discourse associated with

Jean Baudrillard” (Douglas 2002, 104). Baudrillard’s theoretical work gained status within the postmodern discussion, arguing that the contemporary West, specifically contextualized by the United States, was “the apotheosis of a new age of technological futility and simulated reality” (Bradbury 1992, 207). If we follow this logic, *White Noise* exemplifies how the product of this technologically-mediated reality, this hyperreality, is

A world which is increasingly divorced from the real as a result of the pervasive power of technology and systems of representation which dominate our culture: television, the media, advertising and marketing. The consequence for the individual is that the self is experienced as being emptied out of substance, lacking coherence and consistency (Nicol 2009, 184).

Jack’s environment, as Baudrillard suggests, is dominated by the electronic.

Baudrillard’s engagement with the postmodern shifted from his initial exploration of the logic of commodities and consumerism, to the impact that the technologies employed in the commodification network has in constructing the conditions of postmodern reality. The most overt, and perhaps essential, implication for Baudrillard is how the postmodern world has become distinguished by the dominance of media, information, and advertising.

According to Baudrillard, the importance and power of simulation is locatable in the network created in social (re)production. Baudrillard employs the word “simulation” to refer to the representation of objects-commodities-signs and how these representations become indistinguishable from reality, or authentic originality (historical-cultural reference). The effect of this postmodern simulation is not an imitation of an already established reality, but rather, that simulation itself comes to create its own reality. For Baudrillard, the distinction between simulation and reality is no longer definable, “so that simulation can no longer be taken as either an imitation or a distortion of reality, or as a copy of an original” (Ward 2003, 65). Rather, the postmodern signifies how there is no longer any model of reality against which simulations can be contrasted. Technological and electronic reproduction, as simulation, have become so extensive, intricate, and totalizing, that positing an original or

authentic reality no longer has any relevance. Simulation in the postmodern age, then, is an economic process in which (re)productions and representations of reality substitute reality. This leads to scrutinizing the notion of an essential reality, owing to the fact that, in the postmodern world, a representation and reproduction of any reality is readily available.

The most obvious manifestation of the hyperreal is symbolically and literally found in the television that radiates throughout the postmodern home. Theorists who focus on the postmodern and the hyperreal, more often than not, draw a correlation between the development and domestication of television:

The television screen [...] represent[s] the perfect object for this new era. The pure immanence of its unreflecting surface has come to replace any sense of depth, reflexivity and transcendence. [...] television provides the perfect figure for that new world of communication networks and cyberspace in which isolated individuals are plugged into their own control panels and divorced from any contact with reality unless, and in so far as it is simulated on the screen in front of them (Homer 1998, 112-113).

A particularly disturbing example of the impact that the electronic media has on the human psyche is found when the Gladney family takes pleasure from watching media representations of natural disasters that destroy homes and lives. The Gladneys display a fanaticism for “floods, earthquakes, mud slides,” and “erupting volcanoes,” similar to the fanaticism they have for shopping: “Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping” (DeLillo, 64). After an evening spent watching televised disasters with his family, “totally absorbed in these documentary clips of calamity and death,” Jack asks a colleague what such stimulatory fanaticism could mean:

I said to him, “Why is it, Alfonse, that decent, well-meaning and responsible people find themselves intrigued by catastrophe when they see it on television?”

I told him about the recent evening of lava, mud and raging water that the children and I found so entertaining.

“We wanted more, more.”

“It’s natural, it’s normal,” he said, with a reassuring nod.

“It happens to everybody.”

[...]

“You are saying it is more or less universal to be fascinated by TV disasters.”

“For most people, there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is” (65-66).

“[B]y turning human disasters into glitzy” images, the postmodern subject becomes so absorbed in the sensory fanaticism of the television, that they become entirely disconnected from the real historical and cultural context of the material that the television screen projects (Fuller 2006, 23).

DeLillo demonstrates that in the postmodern society, representations of a real disaster, which cause devastation, suffering, and death, quickly become indistinguishable from the sensory experience of watching a thrilling action blockbuster. Following this logic of the hyperreal, television distorts the distinction between what the subject understands to be real and what is to be understood as a simulation. By disconnecting the content and images from fixed historical-cultural context, television reduces reality to a flat, two-dimensional image. The result of such a process, as we find in the Gladney family, is that the victims of the televised disaster cease to be regarded as real human beings, but rather, are reduced to flat, affectless images that appears to lack any material referent in the real world. This is why Jack is shocked when he sees Babette, a person he knows to be a living, breathing human being, on television. When one of Babette’s adult education courses on posture is televised by a local station, Jack immediately becomes disoriented, even to the point where he questions whether Babette’s image on the screen means she has died:

The face on the screen was Babette’s. [...] What did it mean? [...] Was she dead, missing, disembodied? Was this her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology [...] I had seen her just an hour ago, eating eggs, but her appearance on the screen made me think of her as some distant figure from the past [...] a walker in the mists of the dead. [...] It was the

picture that mattered, the face in black and white, animated but also flat, distanced, sealed off, timeless.

It was but wasn't her (104).

Although Jack has just been with his wife, the flat, two-dimensional image of Babette frightens Jack, because he is so accustomed to simulated images lacking any referent in the real world. Jack's ability to differentiate between reality and simulation is completely displaced: he is unable to associate the televised image with his living, breathing wife, just as he and his family were unable to recognize the real-world referent in the images of disaster.

The most disturbing manifestation of the hyperreal occurs in chapter thirty-two, where Jack and Heinrich watch the insane asylum on their block as it is in flames. The way that Jack and Heinrich watch the event is framed the same way as when they watch television. The scene demonstrates the totalizing effect that technological media has on society, in which even the most traumatic experiences are transformed into entertainment for the voyeur. Jack finds himself using the event as a time to bond with his son, "a conversational wedge[:] there is the equipment to appraise, the technique of firemen to discuss" (239). The postmodern father and son bond over such a fanatically stimulating scene, to the point in which a woman in a nightgown burning to death causes them to "gasps in appreciation" (239). "It's funny," Heinrich remarks "how you can look at it and look at it [...] just like a fire in a fireplace": the commodification of the burn victims provides an endless of satisfactory entertainment for the viewer (240). The only reason they leave the scene is because of the rancid smell, "some small and nasty intrusion," which spoils the evening because it forced them "to recognize the existence of something" (240). When they finally leave the scene, and arrive home for the night Jack states that he "almost expected [Heinrich] to thank me for the nice fire" (241). The totality of commodification identified in *White Noise* is the result of living in an age of technologically mediated existence. As *White Noise* shows, "the real disappears, or rather the real becomes cinematic [...] it is the 'reality'

constituted by our society of TV watchers who imagine the world” through television screens (Goodheart 1999, 130).

Even when the Jack and his family are themselves subject to disaster, displaced from their homes and town, with the Airborne Toxic Event expanding before their eyes, they are still unable to comprehend reality in a way that is not likened to a technological medium. Watching the billowing cloud, Jack notes that “they seemed to be spotlighting the cloud for us as if it were part of a sound-and-light show” (128). As Jack watches the fleeing evacuees he makes mention of the cinematic “epic quality” of the event: as if watching an apocalyptic film, the evacuees remind Jack of “people trekking across wasted landscapes” (128). Ironically, it is only when Jack is told of his contamination and premature death that he finally shows awareness of the truly dissociating and alienating effect of technological-mediated life. He reflects on the prognosis:

You are said to be dying and yet you are separated from the dying, can ponder it at your leisure, literally see it on the X-ray photograph or computer screen the horrible alien logic of it all. It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying (142).

Here, DeLillo offers a moment of self-reflection that summarizes the postmodern impact of technology.

In the media-saturated world of *White Noise*, “events are only ever thought about in relation to and through media response and representation” (Lane 2000, 126). The media and television attained a privileged status through their employment of technology and manipulation of the image insofar as they obtain the primary social “authority and authenticity to an event which it would otherwise lack” (Millard 2000, 125). Representation thereby takes precedence over reality, in Baudrillard’s sense. The novel extends Baudrillard’s logic in a number of ironic and dramatic scenarios where “traumatic experiences are

insignificant because those experiences are not documented by the mass media” (Melley 2006, 78). In Chapter Eighteen, for example, when picking up his daughter Bee from the airport, Jack stumbles upon a crowd of plane passengers who have just been through a horror-story experience: their plane suddenly lost power and started dropping in the air. The engines, however, amazingly restarted at the last minute, ensuring a safe landing. The scenario is an absurd dramatization of a news story. The truly horrifying aspect, however, is not that the passengers almost died, but that there is no media there to cover their story, thus rendering it obsolete:

“Where’s the media?” she said.

“There’s no media in Iron City.”

“They went through all that for nothing?” (92).

Bee’s comment highlights that reality is validated and legitimized through media representation, and that what counts for reality, is what is represented in the media.

The notion that technologies causally effect the construction of reality is also present at the beginning of the Airborne Toxic Event. While the Gladney family are listening to the radio, they are told that the toxins from the spill cause “skin irritations and sweaty palms” (111). Soon after, both Denise and Steffie start complaining of sweaty palms. The next update from the radio informs them of “nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath,” which is followed by both girls starting to show signs of an upset stomach. Jack questions whether the girls are really “experiencing the symptoms described in the news bulletin,” ironically pointing to the notion that the real and the artificial are no longer distinguishable, with the media offering representations of reality, and the lived experience of the subject following the representations given by the media (Frow 1999, 182).

By far, the most overt example of simulation in the novel is given by the team who conduct the evacuation during the Airborne Toxic Event: SIMUVAC. SIMUVAC is a state-funded agency that conducts simulated evacuations in preparation for real disasters.

“But this evacuation isn’t simulated. It’s real.”

“We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model.”

“A form of practice? Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?”

“We took it right into the streets.”

“How is it going?” I said.

“The insertion curve isn’t as smooth as we would like. [...] Plus which we don’t have our victims laid out where we’d want them if this was an actual simulation. [...] You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. There’s a lot of polishing we still have to do” (139).

Here, DeLillo provides a comedic inversion of the simulation-reality paradigm: it is reality that offers the opportunity for simulation. Furthermore, and most ironically, Jack is told that the whole ordeal disappoints SIMUVAC for not providing an adequate representation of their work: “By exaggerating the hyperreality of this scene, DeLillo exposes the Disney-like condition of American postmodernity” (Duvall 2006, 120).

Jack’s entire life, in fact, is structured upon this model of simulation and hyperreality. His position as an academic emphasizes the simulated nature of his constructed identity. Jack is more interested in the maintenance of his aura, rather than the production of intellectual work (9). Jack notes that the additional dark-framed glasses, intentionally-gained mass, and academic robe help maintain his aura: “I like clearing my arm from the folds of the garment to look at my watch; the simple act of checking the time is transformed by this flourish” (9). Jack simulates a character, in the sense that his perceived identity is an image which he propagates through intentional manipulation. The image Jack projects may be understood as a commodity, in the sense that he has constructed an image for others to consume, namely, J.A.K. Gladney, inventor of Hitler Studies. Thus, Jack follows the logic put forward by Baudrillard, who argued that in postmodernity “we are simulators, we are simulacra” (Baudrillard 2010, 152).

The irony is that Jack is aware that the life he projects upon the world is merely an image, a commodity. Jack admits, “I am the false character that follows the name around” (17). Being aware of the hollow nature of his life, there is some sense in which DeLillo gives the possibility for self-reflexivity and self-critique. What we find, however, is that Jack falls prey to his own constructed image, attempting to materialize some sense of empowerment in Hitler: Jack looks for a model in his studies to live his life by, rather than his life producing the model. The way DeLillo dissolves the separation of reality, simulation, commodification, and subjectivity takes a highly ironic tone in Jack’s role as inventor and head of department of Hitler Studies. Jack ironically and narcissistically embraces his worldwide status as the leading Hitler scholar. What exacerbates the irony, however, is the fact that Jack is overwhelmed with anxiety and insecurity, due to his awareness that his academic status, which has come to define his entire life, is “the construction of a fake persona” (Tate 2003, 29). Not only is Jack unable to speak German, he constantly simulates a character that can, exemplified during the Hitler conference, by restricting his academic discussions to “words that are the same, or nearly the same” in both English and German (DeLillo, 274). Jack’s success is “revealed as simply a moment of the hyperreal in which the model [...] generates the real” (Duvall 2006, 121). Jack’s admission of this fact appears early in the novel when he explains how the college chancellor encouraged him to fabricate a name and image that was more respectable and inspiring than Jack’s real self:

The chancellor had advised me back in 1968 to do something about my name and appearance if I wanted to be taken seriously as a Hitler innovator. Jack Gladney would not do, he said, and asked me what other names I might have at my disposal. We finally agreed that I should invent an extra initial and call myself J. A. K. Gladney, a tag I wore like a borrowed suit. The chancellor warned against what he called my tendency to make a feeble presentation of self. He strongly suggested I gain weight. [...] I had the advantages of substantial height, big hands, big feet, but badly needed bulk, or so he believed. [...] The glasses with thick black heavy frame and dark lenses were my own idea, an alternative to the bushy beard that my wife of the period didn’t want me to grow (DeLillo, 16-17).

Jack's amplifies his own anxieties and insecurities through self-reflection, which is to say, Jack is openly aware that his life, as far as daily performance and perception is concerned, is a hollow simulation of subjectivity. Throughout the novel, although he is steadfast in playing the role of J. A. K. Gladney, his narration is always haunted by a lingering sense of emptiness and inauthenticity. Jack admits this fact, admitting that he is "the false character that follows the name around" (DeLillo, 17). In the same way that consumer marketing detaches an image from its historical-cultural context, as to bring the image into commodity exchange, so too does Jack appropriate Hitler to generate academic success: Jack detaches Hitler from history to remake the ominous figure into a commodity ready for consumption and exchange. Some critics have demonized Jack, arguing that "Jack's exploitation of [Hitler] to generate his own cult of personality marks the novel's most disturbing example of a sign severed from its referent" (Young 2006, 45). Jack "is merely the postmodern simulacrum of a German" (Cantor 1991, 55).

The displaced subject, that is, the displacement of the subject as conceived via modernity, is a key aspect of this postmodern debate. From the perspective of modernity, the human being as subject is the centre of discourse, ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, and aesthetics. Here, the subject is drawn into dialogue with the idealism of autonomy, of morality, of individuality. The project of modernity emphasized, first and foremost, the improvement of the conditions of life for the individual subject based on the transcendental ideals of rationalism and universalism. Therefore, it makes sense that humanism, libertarianism, and anthropocentrism have recurrently been associated, by way of historical correlation, with modernity.

In postmodernity, however, we find what is generally called the "death of the subject" (Jameson 1983). The 'death of the subject' describes how the subject is displaced from its position of priority, power, and control. It is characteristically postmodern, as implied by

this displacement of the subject, that the subject-object division is no longer clear. This is found in the discussion of consumption, and commodity-sign exchange. There we found, within postmodernity, the subject is no longer the transcendental pilot of production, but has rather been subsumed in the process itself. The subject itself has become an effect, and even object, in the process of consumption. Ideals, such as individualism, and sovereign autonomy, become lost in this postmodern displacement, and we find that subjects merely repeat and replicate, and (re)produce the mechanisms inherited from the products that are consumed. This involves, to quote Jameson again, the “death of the subject, the end of the autonomous, bourgeois monad or ego or individual” (Jameson 2009, 15). The postmodern subject is in a constant tension, insofar as postmodernity signifies the exhaustion of such transcendental idealism. This is to say that the subject no longer has ideal models to appeal to, and if the subject does attempt to pursue an ideal, the subject is to find nothing but failure.

Contemporary marketing and media claim to offer individuality and social value through mass consumption. The consumer is driven to obtain uniqueness and individuality through the over-determination of autonomy qua consumer choices. The subject is led to believe that if they consume a certain deodorant, or pair of jeans, or brand of canned beans, they will become more authentically individual, while millions of other people around the world are doing the exact same thing with the same ‘unique’ defining commodities. More often than not, however, DeLillo's characters demonstrate the contrary. Mass-consumption has led these subjects into an endless process that has no finite or attainable goal beyond the further perpetuation of the process itself. In the culture of mass-consumption, uniqueness is found in images, yet these images are in constant antagonism with a seemingly infinite number of other images that are only of the slightest difference. Furthermore, uniqueness itself becomes an image that functions without any authentic sense of original meaning or

value. Rather, uniqueness operates as a relative expression, a mobile image itself, that merely denotes an arousal in consumer interest.

The question of subjectivity therefore becomes: have these ideals of the independent, the autonomous, and the unique individual subject been exhausted as a result of the rapid rate of developments in our society, or did these ideals ever exist at all? More simply, is postmodernity the cause of this “death of subject”, or is it the recognition that it was always dead, a mere socio-cultural myth? As we find, the characters in the novel are the medium through which this tension is negotiated. This is not to say that by reading *White Noise* we will finally be able to put the debate of subjectivity to an end, but, rather, the opposite. *White Noise* acts as a mapping of the postmodern subject, who is constantly caught in the *aporia* of existing in the contemporary world: characters whom constantly attempt to gain authenticity, through rampant consumerism, in a world devoid of ideals or meaning, and yet are never able to achieve such authenticity.

With specific regard to this postmodern theme of subject displacement, DeLillo has asserted that *White Noise* was an attempt to find “what place there is, if any, for the notion of the individual or the authentic” (Gray 2004, 617). The result of DeLillo’s attempt has led some critics to argue that “most of DeLillo’s characters [...] seem like simulations of characters” (Douglas 2002, 105). From this position, the novel’s characters merely act as screens upon which an image of subjectivity is projected. As with hyperreality, which propagated a simulation of reality so effective that it became as real as reality itself, DeLillo's characters simulate subjectivity, through the accumulation of signs, in a manner that is superficially believed to be authentic subjectivity.

Jack’s attempt to kill Willie Mink in the last section of the novel highlights how absurd the postmodern mode of subjectivity is. When Jack discovers that Babette has taken the drug Dylar from Mink in exchange for sex, he quickly decides, with the suggestive

help of Murray, to find Mink and kill him. Jack's motivation to do so, however, does not appear to be motivated by any genuine emotive affect. Rather than being an act of authenticity or autonomy, Jack's actions appear to be determined by roles and set narrative, like those one would find in a television sitcom. The role that Jack takes up is first suggested by Babette who neglects to reveal Mink's identity and location because she believes that Jack's actions will fulfil the male biological archetype that "follows the path of homicidal rage" (DeLillo, 269). The notion of predetermined, ready-made roles is further exacerbated by Murray who speculates the killing another man will alleviate Jack's own fear of death. By overcoming Mink, which is to say, by murdering Mink, Jack will gain the existential credit of the life that he takes. Therefore, rather than acting out of authenticity, Jack's plot is the simulating of "the clichéd image of male rage" (Douglas 2002, 106). What actually motivates Jack to save Mink's life is not empathy for another human being: "human beings take up little space in Jack's empathetic imagination (if he still has an imagination that supports empathy)" (Young 2006, 42). A general lack of empathy, and interpersonal affect/effect are not, however, merely the peculiar pathologies of Jack as an individual. What the novel suggests, rather, is that it is "the postmodern experience of living in a hyperreality" marked by the growing dominance of the electronic media that accounts for the "affectlessness of characters" (Maltby 2003, 53; Molesworth 1999, 151). This is the conclusion that Jameson arrives at who argues that the postmodern denotes "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation [...] in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (Jameson 2009, 6).

The concluding implications of postmodernity in *White Noise* leave little to no room for a bright future. What we find to be the essential feature of postmodernity is the increasing speed with which humans are becoming obsolete to their own system. As I have shown, DeLillo's characters are often left feeling isolated, alienated, and confused in their techno-environment. The efficiency with which the technological development and (re)production

has abstracted labour and intelligence from the human subject, in every single aspect of postmodern existence, shows no sign of slowing down in order for humanity to set up a new mode of enlightenment or authenticity. As Lyotard highlighted:

it is common knowledge that the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited [...] The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language (Lyotard 1997, 4).

White Noise expresses the way in which the status of humanity is being exhausted in the postmodern age. Firstly, the novel demonstrates how scientific and technological progress has surpassed human capability, and making the importance of humans redundant. The proliferation of information and knowledge has fragmented the human subject's ability to comprehend reality, in that it is now technology that determines reality, in ways that are not always compatible with the subject's sensory faculties. DeLillo implies this by having his characters unable to distinguish between fact and fiction, original and simulation, and the real and the artificial. In the last scene of the novel, Jack returns to the familiar supermarket, only to find it awash in confusion. The supermarket has been updated owing to the introduction of bar code. The entire supermarket is now based on technological code that evades human comprehension. Here,

[i]n the altered shelves, the ambient roar, in the plain and heartless fact of their decline, they try to work their way through the confusion. But in the end it doesn't matter what they see or think they see. The terminals are equipped with holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly. This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living. And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks (326).

The signs of postmodernism no longer need semioticians to decipher them now that the bar code scanners have made human capability outmoded. Murray's job is rendered obsolete by the infallibility of the technical code. Rather than technology and science offering a system that helps drive human progress, humans are now play a minor role in the functioning of the system. The system is now beyond humanity's wants or needs, operating by itself. It is only a matter of time, Jack suggests earlier in the novel, until the system surpasses humans completely: "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" (46). Land articulates the exhaustion of humanity by technology, summarizing the consequence of such a process as follows:

It is ceasing to be a matter of how we think about technics if only because technics is increasingly thinking about itself. It might be a few decades before artificial intelligences surpass the horizon of biological ones, but it is utterly superstitious to imagine that the human dominion of terrestrial culture is still marked out in centuries, let alone in some metaphysical perpetuity. The highroad to thinking no longer passes through a deepening of human cognition, but rather through a becoming inhuman of cognition, a migration of cognition out into the emerging planetary technoscience reservoir, into 'dehumanized landscapes ... emptied spaces' where human culture is dissolved. Just as the capitalist urbanization of labour abstracted it in a parallel escalation with technical machines, so will intelligence be transplanted into the purring data zones of new software worlds in order to be abstracted from an increasingly obsolescent anthropoid particularity, and thus venture beyond modernity (Land 2014, 293).

As the final section of *White Noise* attests, "[h]uman brains are to thinking what mediaeval villages were to engineering: antechambers to experimentation, cramped and parochial places to be" (Land, 293).

Postmodernity also exemplifies the exhaustion of the human in a more physical, or, geological, sense. The Airborne Toxic Event highlights the fine line that a consumer based society rides, namely, that the excess resulting from the immediate satisfaction of subjective

wants and desires cannot be repressed forever. “The threat of death and the anxiety of guilt have become immanent presences in the earth and sky,” Laist notes (90). For Laist:

As a result of the atomic reconfiguration of the landscape, American destiny is writ large in the sunlight and cloudshape in a way that is disturbingly literal. [...] Nature has been rewritten as the symbol of the same world-historical spirit that brought you Nazis and nuclear war (97).

Not only does postmodernity thereby signify the displacement of the human by technological development, it also signifies the imminent exhaustion of the human in a limited terrestrial space that is running up against the limitation of compatibility. The increase of attention to the scientific articulation of the Anthropocene suffices in suggesting the significance that this conclusion holds for the contemporary world. At least Jack and his family will have comfortable seats, and the newest technologies to view the exhaustion of humanity on Earth.

Chapter Two

The Postmodern Sublime

In the last chapter I discussed how *White Noise* is contextualised by postmodernity; *White Noise* may be understood as a literary meditation on what it is like to live in the age of postmodernity. My main conclusion in the last chapter was that the postmodern signifies the exhaustion of humanity's existential, geopolitical status by the processes put in place by modernity/Enlightenment. More simply, I argued that the postmodern symptomizes the way in which the socioeconomic and cultural conditions instantiated under the guise of modernity have created an autoproduktive runaway process which exceeds the intended utility for the Human. In this chapter, I want to examine a specific, recurring affect documented by DeLillo's characters in their postmodern environment. More specifically, the aim of this chapter is to study how DeLillo gives detailed expression and representation to the experience of the sublime as it arises within the context of postmodernity. In this regard, the critical reception and readership of *White Noise* presents a tension, or, what could even be understood as a dichotomy, as to how the novel's relation to the postmodern ought to be interpreted. On one hand, there are critics who read the novel's postmodernity as example of a death-knell call for the Enlightenment Project, and modernity. From this position, DeLillo's novel suggests our society has reached a point where concepts of universalism and the meta-narratives of God, the autonomous subject, Truth, and morality are no longer relevant. Randy Laist, for example, highlights that "[c]ritics excavating this postmodern vein point to the many instances of self-diminishment, psychic fragmentation, and numbing depersonalization that resonate throughout DeLillo's pages" (Laist 2010, 1). On the other hand, there are critics who argue that DeLillo's work is a reaction against this very postmodernity, urging for an interpretation of romantic transcendentalism characteristic of modernism, which aims to

regain and instantiate the values which are eroded and displaced in the postmodern world. Harold Bloom exemplifies this position, arguing that “Despite [DeLillo’s] supposed Post-Modernism, he is a high Romantic Transcendentalist” (Bloom 2003, 2). Such romantic readings posit that *White Noise* gives expression to modernist notions of autonomy, mystery and miracle, and the appeal of the transcendental and the ideal. These readings, therefore, employ modernity/modernism as to attack the postmodern characteristic of DeLillo’s novel. The importance of acknowledging this tension when studying DeLillo is emphasised by Laist, who notes that “most [of] DeLillo criticism concerns itself with negotiating the territory between postmodern and romantic readings” (Laist, 2). It appears, therefore, that it is impossible to study DeLillo’s novel in a critical manner which would not confront these two concepts of ‘the postmodern’ and ‘the sublime’.

Critically, making the case of reading *White Noise* via the postmodern sublime may seem conflicted. In one sense, “postmodern” and “sublime” may be read as signifying two opposing concepts. Reading *White Noise* as postmodern would appear to place the novel in opposition to the romanticism and transcendentalism of modernity and the Enlightenment Project. At the same time, reading *White Noise* for examples of the sublime appears to oppose the postmodern, as the concept of the sublime has been historically and cultural associated with the romanticism and transcendentalism of modernity and the Enlightenment Project. Simply put, the conflict between transcendental romanticism and empirical materialism exemplifies that in the postmodern, there exists a paradoxical impasse in the material context of the contemporary world, symptomized as the belief in the non-belief of “our” historical and cultural beliefs.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the concept of the sublime reappeared in critical and academic circles, this time being read within the context of the postmodern, signifying the attempt to resolve, or reconceptualise, the conflict between the

sublime and the postmodern. The sublime's reappearance by quintessential postmodern theorists, such as Lyotard, Deleuze, and Jameson, suggests that the concept of the sublime has a specific importance in postmodernity, for both the aesthetics of postmodernism, and for the socio-cultural-political of postmodernity. Following this logic, my argument in this chapter is that when *White Noise* is read in conjunction with these theorists, the tension between enlightenment-modernity and postmodernity becomes apparent, clarifying a number of highly contrived tensions within the modern-postmodern debate, which has led to the dichotomized readership of DeLillo's novel. My primary argument in this chapter is that the sublime operates within both the modern, and the postmodern, exemplifying an economic process which is shared by both the modern, and the postmodern. Specifically, the sublime is an affect that erupts violently from the historical-material conditions, and that this eruptive affect is essentially symptomized by its displacement of the human subject. I aim to genealogically ground the sublime within the modernity-enlightenment heritage, as to demonstrate how the contemporary manifestation of the sublime is simultaneously determined by the processes of modernity-enlightenment, while also highlighting the key points of differentiation, specific to the contemporary, postmodern context. Key to my argument, following from the first chapter, is that the sublime is characterised by a specific economic model which is grounded in modernity's specific economy. What *White Noise* demonstrates, however, is that the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of postmodernity, as laid out in my first chapter, exacerbate the process of the sublime. The acceleration of the sublime economy, I argue, aptly exemplifies the displacement of the human subject. The specific economy of the sublime in *White Noise* exemplifies the way in which an understanding of the sublime can no longer be solely restricted to the modernist model, and in this sense, demonstrates the essential characteristic of displacement. Reading *White Noise* vis-à-vis the postmodern sublime, therefore, offers a new reading which aims to reconcile this

critical tension, by illustrating the heterogeneous economy of the sublime within the context of both modernity and postmodernity, defined above all by its displacement of the human.

Using the term “postmodern sublime” has a number of implications, which I will briefly outline, but which I hope will become evident by the end of the chapter. First, the prefix “postmodern” indicates that the mode of sublimity that I am discussing is differentiated from the traditional understanding of the sublime. This is to say, the sublimity in *White Noise* is not identical to the models given by Burke, Kant, or, furthermore, the American Transcendentalists. My use of the term “postmodern” in this chapter signifies the historical, social, cultural, and political context of the latter half of the twentieth century. Employing the term “postmodern” indicates a number of ways that the world of *White Noise* is different from the industrialising world of the Enlightenment and Modernity. If I were to argue that *White Noise* exemplified the sublimity of Burke and Kant, I would not need to use the word postmodern as a prefix for my study of the concept of the sublime. Simultaneously, my inclusion of the word sublime implies a specific relation to the way that the concept was formulated by thinkers such as Burke and Kant. Highlighting my employment of the word ‘sublime’ acknowledges this concept’s rich historical and cultural heritage. I therefore aim to demonstrate how *White Noise* gives representation to a mode of sublimity that is specific to the novel’s context, namely, the context of postmodernity. This requires me to compare the sublime as found in *White Noise* with the historical and cultural context of the enlightenment-modernity. I have selected Lyotard, Deleuze, and Jameson to read in conjunction with *White Noise*, because these theorists directly critique and develop the concept of the sublime within the context of postmodernity. Further, each of these thinkers proceeds from a reading and critique of Kant, since Kant is a quintessential thinker of enlightenment and modernity. I will, therefore, be attentive to the specific developments which these postmodern theorists have

produced in light of Kant's model of the sublime, as to clarify and emphasise points of comparison and contrast with postmodern sublime, as exemplified in DeLillo's novel.

I shall begin by defining the sublime within its historical context. In conjunction with the work of Kant, I will draw on readings and critiques by Lyotard, Jameson, and Deleuze. Once I have presented a general understanding of the sublime, in light of postmodernity, I will then turn to *White Noise* for examples of how the sublime manifests within postmodernity. Finally, after reading *White Noise* qua the postmodern sublime, I will employ a number of the conclusions made by such postmodern thinkers, as to clarify the implications DeLillo creates. I do so by drawing upon the work of Land, which emphasises the material significance that the sublime plays within the postmodern world. I aim to demonstrate how DeLillo's novel illustrates the way in which the sublime symptomizes the postmodern world through fundamentally violent, sporadic, fanatical, and entropic tendencies. As with my last chapter, which examined the historical-material context of the postmodern, I argue that the sublime operates within *White Noise* via an economy of displacement.

Kant's theory of the sublime outlines a violent phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological process, "by virtue of the violence that reason must exercise upon sensibility" (Kant 2000, 63). In *Lessons of the Analytic of the Sublime*, Lyotard identifies a simultaneous and overwhelming feeling of pleasure and pain, as the essential affect created by the sublime. This is caused by the imagination's failed attempt to present a thought, or, what Kant calls "intuition", which corresponds to an unrepresentable object. With the Kantian sublime, we find the phenomenological violence which reason must exercise upon sensibility in the subject's deductive synthesis. The violence exercised upon the subject's sensibility is, for Kant, necessary for the subject to deduce an ordered perception from raw sensual data. The sublime is, therefore, symptomized as an experience that arises from the conflict of giving representation to the unrepresentable. In other words, the sublime denotes the affect felt by

the subject during the violent process of deducing representation for, or, intuition to, raw sensual data,[.] which ruptures the subject's ontological, and epistemological world. The subject is, therefore, confronted by something which it is unable to give representation to, symptomizing the sublime as an affect which displaces the subject. The *aporia* of the sublime experience, which Lyotard summarizes from Kant, is that "[t]he imagination is barred *a priori* from presenting an intuition corresponding to an idea of the absolute, because it is constitutively capable only of presenting phenomena [the synthesized deduction of that raw sensibility] that are by definition conditioned, limited, and finite" (Johnson 2012, 5). The experience of the sublime, therefore, results from the shattering awareness of that which is beyond the subject, figuring the finite subject in confrontation with the infinite outside. It is in this sense, that the sublime has been construed as a paradox, denoting the tension which arises from an attraction to that which violently disrupts, and displaces the subject. Following from this conflict, the sublime has, understandably, been correlated with an attraction towards the transcendental, insofar as the popularity of the concept, "the sublime", highlights a drawing tide towards that which is essentially beyond the subject.

Kant uses the word "imagination" to refer to the process by which the subject grasps the raw material of sensation. Kant's "imagination" may be understood, primarily, as the faculty which moulds intensive data. "Totality" is used to designate the result of the subject's ability to formulate a concept, or intuition. This concept is totalizing for the subject insofar as the product of the subject's faculties wholly defines the (subject's) world. Land elaborates upon this process, explaining that "the imagination is the faculty of appropriation, which assimilates passively received material to basic concepts," constituting "experience" (Land 2014, 134). It is important to remember, for Kant, "[t]hat which [...] excites the feeling of the sublime, may appear to be frustrating for our powers of judgement, inappropriate to our faculty of presentation, and a violation of the imagination, but yet be judged even more

sublime on that account” (Kant 2000, 129). It is in this sense, I argue, as exemplified in DeLillo’s novel, that the sublime, first and foremost, operates on the basis of displacement, as the sublime denotes the violation, and disruption, of the form which structures the subject’s world: The sublime is economically produced by that which violently dissolves subjectivity. Lyotard emphasises that the sensual effect of the unrepresentable cannot be restricted to a positive, romantic view of the sublime, but rather, the sublime is primarily characterized by its negative impact upon the subject, as the sublime fundamentally identifies a failure of one’s faculties. The sublime highlights, then, the paradoxical play of subjective limitations, insofar as the subject is faced with something that it is unable to produce an adequate representation of, yet attempts to do so, regardless of the violent displacement of the subject. Thus, the sublime may be summarized, as Lyotard’s reading of Kant does so illustratively, as the attempt to give representation to that which exceeds the subject’s ability to give representation.

It is noteworthy that one of Jack and Heinrich’s discussions concerning sensory synthesis mirrors the above discussion of Kant’s subjective deduction. Heinrich informs Jack about this process in a way that could be understood as a postmodern satire of Kant’s high modernist theory:

Our senses? Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they’re right. This has been proved in the laboratory. Don’t you know about all those theorems that say nothing is what it seems? There’s no past, present or future outside our own mind. The so-called laws of motion are a big hoax. Even sound can trick the mind. Just because you don’t hear a sound doesn’t mean it’s not out there. Dogs can hear it. Other Animals. And I’m sure there are sounds even dogs can’t hear. But they exist in the air, in waves. Maybe they never stop (23).

As Heinrich posits, all subjective intuition is created on the basis of sensory reduction. Therefore, although we may comprehend our phenomenological experience to be objective, insofar as it is derived from actual, empirical data (continuously referred to as “waves and

radiation” throughout the novel), such experience is always-already determined by the limitations of our subjective faculties. Heinrich’s identification of subjective limitation echoes the *a priori* limitation of the imagination’s capability to produce an intuition of that which is unrepresentable. The idea of subjectivity qua sensory reduction indicates that there exists a surplus of waves and radiation which do not make it into, thereby exceeding, the deduced intuition that the subject formulates from their faculties. The subject’s experience is, therefore, determined by the faculties which deduct intensive sensory stimulation, or, waves and radiation. This deduction of waves and radiation situates subjective intuition in an almost-identical manner to Kant’s formulation of the subjective faculties, as well as the affectual rupture of the sublime experience.

Within the last half of the twentieth century, this conceptualization of the sublime has become synonymous with discussions of the limitations of the subject, the limitations of presentation and representation, as well as a logic of transgression. The sublime relates to these concepts by way of a shared economy, namely, the displacement of a limit or boundary. David Benjamin Johnson highlights this play of limitations, or, economy of displacement, in the sublime:

The imagination tries to present an intuition of some object that is strictly and intrinsically unrepresentable, thereby running up against its own limit. [...] [T]he experience of the sublime involves a crisis for the faculty of presentation in the form of an irresolvable conflict between it and a set of objects that remain fundamentally inaccessible to it, but which it strives to present nonetheless (Johnson 2012, 2).

The common view among postmodern understandings of sublimity is that this irresolvable conflict between the subject’s faculties takes on a productive role insofar as the sublime generates a profound and violent response within the subject. This response leads to the revelation of modes of thinking and sensing that are radically different from the modes given by the subject’s faculties prior to the sublime experience. A quintessential example of this

economy of displacement is found in *The Postmodern Condition*, first published in 1979, where Lyotard writes: “In Burke as well as Kant, the sublime emerges when there is no longer a beautiful form. Kant himself said that the feeling of the sublime is the feeling of something *Das Unform*. Formless. The retreat of rules and regulations is the cause of the feeling of the sublime” (Lyotard 1984, 11). By indicating that the sublime experience begins in the absence of developed and established forms, or ideas, Lyotard highlights the essential role of conflict between the subject’s ability to produce representation, and that which evades prior forms of subjective representation. It then follows, Lyotard argues, that the sublime is primarily a loosening, or dissolution, of form qua the displacement of the subject’s exterior limit. The sublime, according to Lyotard’s reading of Kant, is evoked by this very process of displacement, namely, the sublime is the effect that results from the destabilization of form, defined and established by rules and regulations, limits and boundaries. In conclusion, Lyotard argues that this economy of the sublime allows for critical reflection of the sublime experience. In other words, the subject’s ability to critically reflect upon the sublime experience enables the ability to formulate new modes of thinking and new modes of representation. By establishing these new modes one capitalises upon the sublime experience. This is precisely how Land understands the essence of Kant’s work: “The internal struggle of Kant’s philosophy is the attempt to characterize synthesis as the *management and control – the capitalization –* of the excess upon which synthesis operates” (Mackay & Brassier 2014, 10). More simply, subjective faculties attempt to give form (management and control) to raw sensory material, which exceeds prior forms. Therefore, forcing the subject’s faculties to give an intuition of this new material is to identify the way in which the subject attempts to produce new forms. In doing so, the economic process of displacement is perpetuated insofar as establishing a new exterior limit after the old limit was displaced, one sets up a new ontological and epistemological setting that may itself become the setting for another sublime

experience and displacement. Therefore, the sublime is evoked when the subject experiences the destabilization of forms which had established the ontology and epistemology for the subject. In light of this sublime destabilisation, the subject is able to critically reflect upon the sublime event thereby creating the setting for a sublimity to be evoked *ad infinitum*.

One of the key characteristics of postmodernity that directly resonates with the sublime is the way in which the technologies have developed to a point of complexity that eludes the faculties of the subject. As Jameson notes, postmodern technology creates “a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp” (Jameson 1991, 38). In a conversation with Jack, Heinrich expresses a strikingly similar claim. Heinrich asks Jack to explain the principles of a radio, to which Jack claims “[t]here’s no mystery. Powerful transmitters send signals. They travel through the air, to be picked up by receivers” (148). Heinrich’s mocking rebuttal mirrors Jameson’s notion of how technology takes on a mystical essence for the every-day individual in postmodernity:

They travel through the air. What, like birds? Why not tell them magic? They travel through the air in magic waves. What is a nucleotide? You don’t know, do you? Yet these are the building blocks of life. What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air. It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of every day. But no body actually knows anything (148-49).

Heinrich identifies that the fundamental principles upon which technology operates exceeds the subject’s comprehension. Posed with Heinrich’s questioning, Jack is unable give a response which adequately comprehends how a radio works in any sense that is not ambiguous. Further, these principles evade the subject’s sensory faculties of perception which elevates technology to a status of transcendence, beyond our apprehension. Finally, Heinrich points out how technological developments in the age-of-information operate via an economy of displacement. In other words, “every second of everyday,” technology and information develop in a continual displacement of prior models. Rather than these developments providing enhancement for the normative subject, we find that the characters in

White Noise are awash in confusion, uncertainty, and mystery. Laist highlights this consequence, writing that “[t]echnoscience has landed Jack in the terrain of the supernatural, in which the most commonplace artifacts are animated with elemental forces that baffle the individual’s capacity for understanding” (Laist 2010, 82)

Heinrich and Jack’s conversation offers an apt place to discuss the postmodern sublime. Jameson emphasises that the sublime appears due to an unbridgeable distance between the subject’s faculties, specifically the subject’s mind and imagination, and the object, technological networks, external to the subject. Such a gap results in the failure of the subject’s faculties to offer an intuition or comprehension of the object. Jameson thereby agrees with the phenomenological claim that Kant made regarding the process that creates the sublime experience. Owing to the subject being unable to give accurate representation to that which it encounters, namely, technologically complex networks, something unrepresentable to the subject’s faculties appears. Thus, the technological networks upon which global capitalism operates evade the subject’s ability to give representation to the “objective” and all-encompassing knowledge of the technological regime of the postmodern world.

The first scene in the novel that overtly establishes a number of the postmodern sublime’s traits is set at the Most Photographed Barn in America. Murray’s meditation on this aptly postmodern site establishes a strong connection with the sublime. At the Most Photographed Barn in America, Murray highlights a number of key aspects of postmodernity and the sublime as being interrelated in his experience. People “are taking pictures of taking pictures,” Murray says, pointing out that “[o]nce you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn” (13; 12). As Murray frames it, the barn has been phenomenologically transformed through its new status as the site of technologically mediated perception: “Thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We’ve agreed to be part of a collective perception” (12). It is here where the

postmodern is first presented in the mystical and transcendent nature of the sublime, explicitly so when the scene is referred to as a “kind of spiritual surrender. [...] [A] religious experience” (13). This is further exemplified when we understand the way in which Murray understands the sublime object as a presence of something unrepresentable, that is, the site’s technological aura. As Murray says, “We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies” (12). The sublimity of the experience is grounded in the unrepresentable, seemingly infinite, totality of technological networks which have created the site and the experience. Murray specifically highlights that it is not what they can physically see that creates this presence, but that it is, rather, the aura created by the infinitely complex system of technology that produces the experience. As Lentricchia argues, *The Most Photographed Barn in America* “is the ostensible subject of the scene; the real subject is the electronic medium of the image as the active context of contemporary existence in America” (Lentricchia 1991, 88).

The frequently visited supermarket also sets the scene for these themes of the postmodern sublime. Jack offers a phenomenological meditation on his supermarket experience that is framed in a very similar manner to Murray’s transcendental speech. “I realized the place was awash in noise,” Jack notes,

The toneless systems, the jangle and skid of carts, the loudspeaker and coffee-making machines, the cries of children. And over it all, or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension (36).

Jack’s meditation presents the same abstract essence of Murray’s postmodern sermon. Jack first observes what may be understood as an object-orientated ontology, specifically identifying an array of physical objects which make up his environment. Jack directly follows his observation by specifying the presence of something that is “unlocatable [...] just outside the range of human apprehension” (36). Murray explains the experience in a strikingly

similar way, noting that “Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery,” which he identifies as “psychic data” (37). This psychic data is abstract and transcendental in the sense of being beyond the perceptual reductionism of subjective sensory synthesis. Or, as Jack states, it transcends the “range of human apprehension” (36). Furthermore, although he does not identify his own understanding as religious, we find Jack’s description mirroring the way Murray speaks of Tibetan rituals of the dead.

In the Tibetan rituals, Murray identifies “Chants, numerology, horoscopes, recitations” (38). Murray’s description of such rituals echoes Jack’s description of the supermarket. In the supermarket, Murray points out that one can find “[a]ll the letters and numbers, [...] all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases” (38). Here Murray identifies this transcendental presence in terms of “Energy waves, incident radiation” (38). This recurring notion of waves and radiation in *White Noise* overtly brings to mind the way in which Kant understands raw sensory data prior to being deduced by the subject’s faculties.

In Murray’s analogy between the supermarket and the Tibetan concept of the sacred, he postulates that the subject is able to look back upon a sublime experience in a critical way that produces a “clear vision” of the experience (38). Beyond the “awe” and “terror” of the subject’s phenomenological overload, which is perceived as a moment of sacred, transcendental sublimity, the subject can learn new modes of understanding the world, or to give new models and forms of representation. In light of Murray’s romanticized perception of Blacksmith, it becomes evident that there is a separation of difference between Murray’s new-comer view of the town and Jack’s extended, normalized experience of the town. Murray explains that he is happy to be “[i]n Blacksmith, in the supermarket, in the rooming house, on the Hill,” which allow him to reflect upon and learn of “important things” such as “[d]eath, diseases, afterlife, outer space” (36). “It’s all much clearer here,” Murray continues,

“I can think and see” (36). Murray’s understanding of Blacksmith puzzles Jack, who asks: “What did he mean, much clearer? He could think and see what?” (36). It becomes apparent that Jack’s view and experience of the town, which may be understood as normative, is contrasted by Murray’s heavily philosophical, even theological interpretation, which may be understood as transcendental. Jack is confronted by a clear distance, or gap, between his own worldview and his colleagues. Jack is unable to make any clear sense of the gap between the everyday, here-and-now of his phenomenological experience, and that which is presented in Murray’s discourse, which privileges the abstract essence of Kantianism.

Murray’s advocacy of a self-reflexivity in light of the supermarket experience is also presented in a recognizably Kantian way. For Lyotard, grounded in his reading of Kant, the concept of the sublime “directs us towards and allows us to reflect on the limits and conditions of our experience” (Johnson 2012, 3). As I highlighted at the start, Lyotard develops Kant’s sublime to demonstrate an essential economical function for the postmodern. The sublime enables the subject to extend its exterior limit by which the subject is then able to give representation to the previously unrepresentable. Or as Land and Jameson would have it, to capitalize upon alterity vis-a-vis commodity exchange. As Murray argues, and as the Gladneys come to realise by the end of the book, the process of displacing an exterior limit via the contact with and capitalization of alterity enables the subject to critically reflect upon that which was previously unrepresentable. The result is that the previous sublime experience becomes a homogenised part of the subjective ontological-epistemological order. In other words, the displaced limit gives way to establish a new limit *ad infinitum*. What DeLillo's characters find, and as I aim to demonstrate in this chapter, is that the process and experience of the sublime is never completed, but rather, that the process and experience always gives way to more sublime displacements. Furthermore, the material conditions examined in the

last chapter, identified as the postmodern, exacerbate the process of the sublime, making the postmodern an environment which escalates the process.

DeLillo's novel demonstrates the way in which this perpetual displacement of limits cannot be entirely reduced to either taste-value, or technology, or a psycho-phenomenological process. Rather, the postmodern sublime is created by the heterogeneity of these factors. This is most overtly demonstrated when Jack and his family gather together and fanatically watch videos of disaster footage on the television. Jack notes, "there were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes. [...] We'd never been so attentive to our duty, our Friday assemblage. [...] Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (64). The Gladneys' Friday duty establishes the postmodern sublime in a number of ways. Firstly, their experience is a technologically mediated one. Secondly, their experience follows the economy of sublimity in the displacement of a limit observed in the family's response to the footage. As Lyotard highlights, what was previously unrepresentable becomes displaced following the sublime experience, and thereby adheres to the outside-in, correlationism of the Kantian sublime, Enlightenment, and (post)modernity. Thirdly, this scenario establishes the interrelation of sublime pleasure and suffering. Jack even asks how it is that they could find such a thing so elevating which points to the way in which previous categories are exceeded and displaced by the event, namely, what they previously considered to be the suffering of others has now been displaced by the sublime pleasure they take from the disasters. Land highlights the connection Kant makes between sublimity and disaster, writing that "[s]ublime pleasure is an experience of the impossibility of experience, an intuition of that part of the self that exceeds intuition by means of an immolating failure of intuition. The sublime is only touched upon as pathological disaster" (Land 2014, 135).

The sublime culminates in the second part of the novel: the Airborne Toxic Event. The result of the toxic spill is an enormous billowing cloud that hovers over the town, which

we are told exceeds previous categories of awe and dread. The event is the product of technology, making the event an apt setting for the postmodern sublime. Jack's narration during the town's evacuation is worth quoting at length:

It appeared in the sky ahead of us and to the left, prompting us to lower ourselves in our seats, bend our heads for a clearer view, exclaim to each other in half finished phrases. It was the black billowing cloud, the toxic airborne event, lighted by the clear beams of seven army helicopters. They were tracking its windborne movement keeping it in view. [...] The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armoured creatures with spiral wings. We weren't sure how to react. It was a terrible thing to see, so close, so low, packed with chlorides, benzides, phenols, hydrocarbons, or whatever the precise toxic content. But it was also spectacular, part of the grandness of the sweeping event [...]. Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. It is surely possible to be awed by the thing that threatens your life, to see it as a cosmic force, created by elemental and wilful rhythms. This was a death made in a laboratory, defined and measurable but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, [...] like a flood or a tornado, something not subject to control. Our helplessness did not seem compatible with the idea of a man-made event (127-28).

In the first sentence Jack notes the magnitude of the cloud. Not only is the cloud in front of the Gladneys, but it is also to the left of them. The size of the billowing cloud diminishes the characters, placing them into a submissive position, forcing them down low as it towers above them. Jack also directly echoes the linguistic shortcomings of the sublime experience, with the Gladneys only being able to formulate fragmented sentences. Unable to give an accurate linguistic representation to the scenario, Jack resorts to comparing the cloud to a mythical and transcendental figure, a death ship in Norse mythology. Furthermore, Jack notes the emotional confusion of his family's situation, unsure how to react to the event, because there is the simultaneous sense of terror and awe. He describes the cloud as both terrible and spectacular, which highlights the grandness of the cloud which evokes fear in a way that is nearly religious.

Even though Jack identifies the event as objective, he demonstrates how such scientific facts are displaced during the normative context of the situation. Jack formulates the event as being wholly beyond his own faculties of comprehension. Jack expresses this by relating the sublime effect of the event to a natural disaster that is completely indifferent to the subject. In other words, Jack is pointing to the fact that it makes no difference to the subjects involved in the situation whether or not the event was man-made or natural. The contrast between, on the one hand, the primitive, simple, and natural, and on the other, the planned, rational and industrial sphere of human, highlights the way in which the sublime experience breaks down the homogeneous units of scientific measure. Jack is highlighting the fact that, in the face of the sublime, rationality falls short and fails to provide an adequate intuition of the confronted object. In summary, the sublime reveals the presence of something uncontrollable and unplanned in the world. The sublimity of the Airborne Toxic Event, for example, displaces the characters into the realm of the unrepresentable. Deleuze observes the same effect of sublimity evoked by the on-rush of emotions in the face of a violent destruction of order. He argues that:

The deranging of this rhythm and ignition of the sublime are caused when certain disordered and disordering phenomena - violent, 'catastrophic' phenomena that function [...] to 'break up the sovereign organization' of perception - produces sensations that are so confused, so intensely deformed, that they momentarily forestall any possibility of sensory organization" (Deleuze 1981,15)

Deleuze's comments directly echo Jack's experience, as he finds the sublime evoked by the disruption of his ontological and epistemological perception. The toxic spill and its billowing cloud erupt into his life as something alien which exceeds his capacity to comprehend the event. Johnson frames this exact process of the sublime in psychoanalytic terms, saying that the sublime is triggered by the "appearance of the abject," which "shatters the ways of representative structures of the symbolic" (Johnson 2019). This is exemplified in the last sentence, when Jack identifies that there is a distance created between himself and the object

which causes the sublime experience. Jack mirrors Kant's understanding of the sublime, insofar as he identifies an incompatibility between the event in-itself and the idea offered by the subject's faculties. Jack and Kant are thereby highlighting a shortcoming of the subject's faculties.

The Postmodern sunset that occurs in the wake of the Airborne Toxic Event offers a number of insights into the significance that the sublime has for postmodernity. The sublime experience of the Airborne Toxic Event has sealed the fate of both the novel's characters and their environment. By way of displacement, the sublime has not led to transcendental enlightenment, but, rather, as Laist says, "the effect has been more to drag nature down into the thanatoid Hitlerism rampant in mankind" (Laist, 93). DeLillo's postmodern reality is strikingly similar to Baudrillard's notion that "[i]f there was in that past an upward transcendence, there is today a downwards one," highlight the dissolving power of the processes at play (Baudrillard 2005, 25).

The sunsets demonstrate how the sublime operates to enable a capitalisation of experience. The community capitalise upon the sublimity of the Airborne Toxic Event, in which the deadly event is critically reflected upon, thereby establishing a new mode of understanding in the wake of the prior modes displacement. The result is the setting up of the grounds for further displacement, in which the sunsets provide the site of a new mode of sublime experience. This time, the sublime experience more explicitly spells out the deadly consequences. Jack observes:

All of this uncertainty is implicit in the awe of the sunset-gazers. Certainly there is awe, it is all awe, it transcends previous categories of awe, but we don't know whether we are watching in wonder or dread, we don't know what we are watching or what it means, we don't know whether it is permanent, a level of experience to which we will gradually adjust, into which our uncertainty will eventually be absorbed, or just some atmospheric weirdness, soon to pass (324-5)

Jack's words are similar to the observations he gave in front of the Airborne Toxic Event. It is now the sunset that displaces the categories of awe, wonder, and dread, all of which Jack said were exceeded during the Airborne Toxic Event. The sublime experience of the toxic spill, the billowing cloud, and the evacuation of their community, has in turn been capitalised through a process that establishes new modes of thought and representation. Just as Jack highlights this capitalisation of the sublime in order to give way to a new mode of the sublime, Jack identifies the uncertainty of this sublimity, asking whether what he and his family find sublime today will not become normalized tomorrow. The sublime's economy of displacement offers no necessary end in itself. Because of this, one questions where the limit for the human and its environment rest. The way in which Laist interprets this scenario, and in turn the role of the postmodern sublime in *White Noise*, is beautifully articulated and it deserves to be quoted at length:

The sunset signifies the American future rather than the human past. [...] It signifies a world the human meaning of which has been fundamentally altered by global warming, mutually assured destruction, and genetic modification; our plant is a man-made one, infected with a human-like mortality. In this sense, it captures us; it compels us. Whatever beauty there is in such a sunset is the beauty of a toxic, poisonous world of man-made death; whatever there is in Jack that responds so gutturally to such beauty implicates him as an idolater of such sinister values. As such, he is seduced by a strain of suicidalism and apocalypticism, not *against* his will, but as if his will itself has been co-opted and reconfigured in alignment with the new ontological dispensation which the sky vividly announces. The feeling of the sublime itself, the most definitive experience of subjective ecstasy, is rerouted into the circuit of a culture that is always looking for new places to affix advertisements for its death-loving self; in classrooms, on mountain tops, across the sky, or in the structure of human perception (96).

DeLillo's characters become overwhelmed by the haunting truth of the sublime, in which the postmodern sunsets bring the community together, highlighting a shared and collective future, as Laist argued. The normativity of postmodern daily-life which brought the community together at the Most Photographed Barn in American, together at the supermarket

and mall, and together during the Airborne Toxic Event, now brings them together again, this time in the image of deadly consequence.

Such a conclusion appears to be bleak and perhaps too drastic, but this is the precise conclusion that Land uncovered from reading Kant. The sublime, according to Kant, represents a violence that is inflicted upon the subject, perceived as a “super-natural delight” (Land, 133). Kant finds in the sublime a process by which the subject finds “delight in the excruciation of its animality” (134). Indeed, Kant argues “that which, without our indulging in any refinements of thought, but simply in being apprehended, excites the feeling of the sublime, may appear to be frustrating for our powers of representation, and a violation of the imagination, but yet be judged even more sublime on that account” (Kant, 129). Or, as Land concludes, “[t]he sublimity evoked by an experience is in direct proportion to the devastation it wreaks” (Land, 135). By means of critical reflection the sublime experience is capitalised, thereby enabling the fanatical pursuit of sublimity despite immediate violence, as well as the unforeseeable extent of consequences in future. However, as Land identifies, the Kantian sublime, critique, and its capitalisation, function as a “tool for dissolution” (Land 1992, 2). The economy of the sublime, of critique, and of capitalisation, “are names for metamorphosis as such, reproduced in their own substitution” (2). If the sublime follows this infinite principle, each time pushing the exterior limit outwards, one might ask if such a process even has an end. “The Kantian conception of infinity,” Land explains, “which abstractly opposes itself to finitude rather than subsuming it, indefinitely perpetuates a dangerous tension, insofar as it ascetically suspends the moment of resolution” (4). Such suspension of a definite end is precisely how DeLillo finishes his novel.

In the final scene of the novel, Jack returns to the familiar supermarket only to find himself once again displaced and disorientated. Jack explains that the “shelves have been rearranged [...] one day without warning” (325). In the supermarket aisles Jack finds

“agitation and panic [...] dismay in the faces of older shoppers” (325). In the postmodern world, change and development operate at a speed which exceeds the subject’s faculties of comprehension. “In the altered shelves” Jack finds an “ambient roar, in the plain and heartless fact of their decline” the people aimlessly wander, trying “to work their way through the confusion” (326). The postmodern subject cannot keep up with the rapid speed of displacement and development. Jack and his community’s fanatic drive has led them to a single fate in which their individual wants and desires have become obsolete. As Jack himself states, “in the end it doesn’t matter what they see or think they see,” as it is no longer the human subjects who do the decoding of reality, but rather the “holographic scanners, which decode the binary secrets of every items, infallibly” (326). DeLillo ends the novel by illustrating the essence of the postmodern sublime, namely, the book ends with a suspension of the economy of displacement that fuels postmodernity and the sublime. The final passage of the novel offers no clear ending to the process, but rather a further perpetuation of the process, as if the last year of the Gladneys’ life meant nothing. DeLillo ambiguously finishes the novel in a way that suggests that nothing has been learnt, or rather, that it no longer matters if something is learnt. The process continues to perpetuate in an auto-generative manner of displacement and capitalisation, a process common to both DeLillo’s model, and to Kant’s. In Land’s reading, we find that Kant’s infinity of the sublime embodies the inability to evade the “prospect of utter collapse” (4). “Kantian infinity,” Land argues, “is deprived of any possibility of intervening in developmental series, leaving them vulnerable throughout their length to the catastrophic collision with a limit” (4). The final scene of *White Noise* aptly demonstrates such a conclusion, with DeLillo offering little hope, if any, for signs of redemption in the postmodern world.

Throughout the chapter my argument has been that when *White Noise* is read in conjunction with the theoretical works of Kant, Lyotard, Deleuze, Jameson, and Land, one

comes to understand how the historical and cultural developments of postmodernity have enabled, if not accelerated and intensified, the experience of the sublime. The postmodern conceptualizations of the sublime that I used highlight the specific ontological and epistemological economy that the postmodern sublime takes in DeLillo's novel. First, we found that the postmodern technoscape offers an apt environment for the subject to come into a sublime experience. Specifically, DeLillo's novel demonstrates how technology has developed to a point in which even the most commonly used objects in the characters' lives exceed their abilities of comprehension. Due to this, technology obtains a characteristic aura which evades the subject's perception which gives the illusion of mystical transcendental properties. Underlying the experience of the sublime we found a violent process which leads to the dissolution of limits and boundaries. However, this economy of the sublime, grounded in the process of (post)modernity itself, shows no signs of having a definite exterior limit, or, end. Due to this, the postmodern sublime follows a logic of *ad infinitum*. Land identified that because there is no apparent limit to this process, that this process actually functions on the basis of there not being a limit, the process inevitably leads towards dissolution and destruction. In other words, just because the process which the subject falls into has no definite end, that does not mean that the subject is without a definite end. As we found in the sunsets at the end of the novel, the postmodern sublime has culminated in the heterogeneous relationship of the subject and its environment that is the unavoidable and ever accelerating movement towards death. In the end, Jack's narrative takes up Murray's quasi-theological view of the postmodern world with the checkouts metaphorically and literally representing their society's progression deathwards.

Chapter Three

Moving Deathward: Nick Land's Accelerationism and Don

DeLillo's *White Noise*

In the introduction to *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo's Novels*, Laist proposes that “[r]ather than lamenting [...] that DeLillo does not offer a ‘way out’ of [our postmodern condition], we might rather consider that we have been provided with a ‘way into’ [the] fundamental phenomenon at the heart of our [...] culture” (Laist 2010, 3). This is to say, instead of searching DeLillo’s novel for suggestions of critique and attack, how one may escape or overcome the dominating technomatrix of capitalist postmodernity, one may rather look for examples in the text that allow us to go deeper still, to push further into the essential nature of our contemporary condition. Laist’s suggestion echoes the influential hypothesis put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in the first part of their *Capitalism & Schizophrenia*: When attempting to give a concluding hypothesis to their analyses of capitalism’s material conditions, they ask:

So what is the solution? Which is the revolutionary path? [...] To withdraw from the world market, as Sam Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist ‘economic solution’? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process’, as Nietzsche put it: in this matter the truth is we haven’t seen anything yet (Deleuze & Guattari 2012, 260).

Deleuze and Guattari's evocation of Nietzsche has come to hold a controversial cult status amongst contemporary intellectuals under the guise of Accelerationism. No one has taken the fundamental idea of accelerationism as seriously and far as Land. Owing to Land’s unrelenting commitment to the project of accelerationism, it appears justified to claim that if

one is to read *White Noise* as a means to go further-still into the fundamental essence of our society (capitalism), as Laist argues, a dialogue with Land's work would be a good place to begin.

My use of Land warrants an obvious point of hesitation which deserves addressing before I proceed to engage DeLillo's novel with Land's Accelerationism. It only takes a brief Google search to establish the controversial nature of Land's work. Searching his name results in a large number of articles deeming him a neo-fascist, a racist, and a generally disputable character, positioning him as one of the founders of a new, dissident, far right-wing political philosophy called "neo-reaction" (Bartlett 2014). A brief look at the overviews which attempt to summarize this movement undoubtedly raises concern with employing Land's work. In 2016, Andrew Culp positioned Land as a fundamental contributor to the neo-reaction, or Dark Enlightenment, movement, arguing that Land "eagerly adopts a 'scary' mixture of cognitive, elitism, racist social Darwinism, and autocratic Austrian economics" (Culp 2016, 45). Furthermore, it is claimed that Curtis Yarvin, who wrote extensively under the name Mencius Moldbug, who is undisputedly identified as the key, originating conceptual source of the neo-reaction movement, had a voice in the ear of Steve Bannon, who served as Donald Trump's Chief Strategist, with Bannon himself recommending Moldbug's work in his top reading list, although this claim was mocked and disputed by Yarvin (Johnson & Stokols 2017). It has also been argued that the neo-reaction movement provided the grounds for the rise of the new wave of ethno-nationalism in the United States, although such a correlation is also heavily mocked and disputed by Land and Yarvin (Rosie 2015). Although I believe a study of this reactionary movement is necessary, it must also be highlighted that the most basic reading of secondary texts concerned with Land's work employed in this chapter emphasise a strong distinction between Land's accelerationism years (the texts at focus in this chapter), and his neo-reactionary work and status. The legitimacy of

such a distinction, and the study of such a connection, extends beyond the discussion of this thesis. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier's introduction to Land's work from his accelerationist years, for example, argues that the strong dose of psychosis prior to his relocating to China, prior to his neo-reaction status, is enough to dispute a teleological connection (Land 2012). Although the grounds to examine DeLillo's novel in conjunction with Land's, as well as Moldbug-Yarvin's, neo-reaction work is enticing and well worth the time, the restrictions of my project require me to note that I refrain from engaging with the later work, as my focus on accelerationism plays a fundamental role in the overall argument of my thesis, as played out in my previous chapters.

I will begin by giving an overview of the genealogical map Land offers of the contemporary historical-material which will ground the conversation between DeLillo's novel and Land's accelerationism. First and foremost, Land's historical-material reading of capitalism specifically addresses the key themes and issues I examined in the previous two chapters, thereby establishing a coextensive medium connecting my overall project. I will then juxtapose selected passages from DeLillo's novel and Land's accelerationist texts, drawing out key features from the material that not only establishes an accelerationist reading of *White Noise*, but, also, a reading of how *White Noise* may be used to develop an argument for the accelerationist thesis. While I analyse these texts, I will draw on the critical and literary reception of the novel, so as to situate an accelerationist of the novel within the academic milieu.

One primary aspect that connects Land's writing with DeLillo's novel, beyond merely sharing socio-cultural and historical context, is that both operate as a sampling machine, cutting up theory, fiction, science, and popular culture to synthesise a bizarre blend of theory-fiction. For example, we are told that DeLillo "uses fiction explicitly to analyse cultural and social patterns as an alternative to 'pure' theory" (Nicol 2009, 184). To do so, DeLillo's work

melds science, critical theory, pop culture, and tropes from American modernist fiction in order to give literary expression to the heterogeneous, chaotic essence of contemporary work. Many critics have highlighted the “a critical edge” of DeLillo's novel, insofar as *White Noise* presents a penetrating “critique of image culture and consumer capitalism as fostered by televisual simulacra” (McClure 1999, 99; Cowart 2003, 71). Similarly, grounding the cohesion of Land and DeLillo's projects, we are told that “Land’s writing sought out and tapped into modes of then-contemporary cultural production that provide explosive condensates of [the] fusion of commodification and aesthetic engineering” (Land 2012, 33). In this sense, both DeLillo and Land produce a mode of writing that extends beyond the normative categorisation of both fiction and theory: pop cultural references are spliced with high-end contemporary critical theory, philosophy, mysticism, and science, thereby disrupting attempts to read their work in reductive way that strictly limits their work to either fiction, or theory. Owing to this, with DeLillo’s work being referred to as “ficto-criticism”, and Land being credited with pioneering “theory-fiction”, or what he called “hypersitions”, the case for bringing their work into dialogue is obvious and beneficial for my study: both arise from the same socio-cultural context and employ the same heterogeneous methodology to produce literary texts which simultaneously hack into the banally normative to reveal the present as bizarrely futuristic, and the future as scarily present (Nicol, 191; Mackay 2013; Land 2012, 26). With both of these writers, temporality evaporates into a mystical blend of quasi-science fiction, revealing the mystical future to already be here, infecting the most boring aspects of our contemporary lives: realism qua science fiction, science fiction qua realism.

I will now turn to Land, as to offer a more comprehensive understanding of his character, career, and context. From the beginning, Land’s work has always been followed by polarized reception and controversy. First and foremost, Land’s writing primarily sought to

disrupt and disorder the academic world he was initiated into, constructing an “anarchitecture” of “schizophrenic metaphysics” (Land 2012, 1). In the introduction to *Fanged Noumena*, the only collection of his writings from the late 1980s until his retirement, or, “disappearance” from the academic world, Mackay and Brassier note that Land’s work “provoked both adulation and execration” (3). “Marxists in particular were outraged,” they specify, because of his “aggressive championing of the sociopathic heresy urging the ‘ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field’” (3). It is this aspect of his oeuvre, which is both persistent and consistent throughout, that I take as my source for this chapter. Specifically, I focus on Land’s heretical advocacy for “the acceleration, rather than the critique, of capitalism’s disintegration of society” (3). The aim of this chapter is to present an account of Land’s “accelerationism” that reveals a cohesive and coextensive connection with DeLillo’s *White Noise*. By comparatively analysing both Land’s work and DeLillo’s novel, I aim to provide a critique of the general critical and literary reception of *White Noise*, while simultaneously offering a new way of reading DeLillo’s canonical text, a reading that reveals historical-material tendency of capitalism as socio-cultural disintegration.

Reading *White Noise* in conjunction with Land’s accelerationism has a two-fold benefit: not only does Land’s work provide the grounds to critique the dominant academic work written on *White Noise*, but, also, Land’s original and innovative understanding of capitalism offers a new way of reading DeLillo’s novel. As Laist suggested, rather than merely analysing *White Noise* in a derogatory moralism qua reaction, reducing the contemporary condition to depressing alienation, Land’s work provides a comprehensive materialist understanding of the fundamental economy of capitalism which evaporates the theopolitical humanist motive as to uncover that which is driving our contemporary world from-without: an unbiased, which is to say, antianthropocentric, study of the material forces

at play, and abstracting from those conditions an economic trend which details the future already at play. Land's comprehensive philosophical inquiry of capitalism, which on face value appears as a romanticisation of the abhorrent force of capitalism, complements a reading of *White Noise*, in the sense that, McClure has identified, we find a return to and focus on the "sites within capitalism, and [discovery of] the materials of new forms of romance," rather than a reaction or retreat from the definitively fundamental economy (McClure 1991, 102). My central argument is that *White Noise* gives literary expression to the processes that Land's project maps, namely, the tendencies which break down social-human form, the essential economy of capitalism. It is in this sense that both Land and DeLillo cover an "affirmative telecommercial dystopianism" which haunts the heart of capitalism and postmodernity (350). It is justified to argue that employing Land's apparent romanticisation of dystopian collapse appears to be in stark contrast to the concerns that many have argued DeLillo invokes in this novel. The critical and literary readership of the novel alone suggests that DeLillo is ironically mocking the degeneration of society qua contemporary capitalist. It would follow that situating *White Noise* alongside Land's face-value "celebration" of such degeneration calls for concern, if not disputation. My argument is that when Land's work is read as a descriptive analysis of the contemporary world, rather than as a solely literal depiction, a reading of the novel is provided that deepens the understanding of our contemporary context. In this reading the prevalent humanist-anthropocentric conception of the novel and our contemporary condition is displaced, while the nonhuman material forces which shape our reality are foregrounded. The novel's focus thus extends beyond a call for social, existential, and moral reform, to encourage readers to put aside the common egocentric theopolitical ideology, and to develop a deeper, material, understanding of what is shaping the world we inhabit. Specifically, Land's work reveals a number of historical and material currents, or affects, which shape the specificities of

DeLillo's novel, which are generally overlooked by the normative humanist readings: currents which extend far beyond human value, meaning, and causality. First and foremost, as I argued in the previous two chapters, when *White Noise* is read in conjunction with Land, we find that the postmodern world symptomizes the geopolitical displacement and exhaustion of the human. In surpassing the normative, humanist reading of the novel, we gain a greater understanding of the implications of the future which DeLillo's novel uncovers.

Land's project was, first and foremost, initiated by a disgust for the "stupefying inanities of academic orthodoxy," aiming to "expectorate the vestigial theological superstitions afflicting mainstream [P]ost-Kantianism," which is to say Western, academia (5). Land's mockery of academia, and the prevalent theopolitical ideology, establishes an inherent connection with DeLillo's novel, as *White Noise* has been readily analysed for its satirical and critical portrayal, and undermining, of that very overarching, dominant academic matrix. Land subverts the banalities of academic theopolitical humanism by arming himself with work of Deleuze (and Guattari), to which he excised "all vestiges of Bergsonian vitalism to reveal a deviant and explicitly thanatropic machinism": namely, "death" is a functioning and operating process found at the dark heart of all life-production, rather than being some transcendent externality (5). Land thereby subverts the traditional conception of life and death by demonstrating how the two are enable to dichotomised: life and death are not binary, but rather, the two are inherently entwined, with one unable to exist without the other. The primary inheritance from Deleuze and Guattari that enabled Land to do so was the notion that, contrary to popular psychological and philosophical belief, desire "is not qualified by humanity," which is to say, desire is not solely a matter of what things are like for humans (8). Desire is not a characteristic of consciousness or sentience, but rather, desire is "the capacity of intensive matter itself": pre-human, pre-subjective, pre-social, and pre-conscious (13). Land's aim, therefore, is to demonstrate how "desire" in-itself subverts the

anthropocentric model, providing a map of how life-desire continually exceeds the restrictions of "human history". Land's project is supported by, and borne from, the genealogy of deviant Western thinkers Arthur Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Georges Bataille, who demonstrate how the common anthropocentric understanding of desire collapses into an "unknown 'will', a 'purposiveness without purpose' whose unmasterable eruptions are in fact dissipations [...] of energy excessive to that required for the 'work' of being human" (14). In this sense, "[s]entience" is only "a virulent element of contagious matter" (18). From this perspective, "society" may be regarded as a negative-feedback loop that provides the mechanical framework to stabilise vis-a-vis reduce excessive and dissipative energies through the maintenance of unified and homogeneous "identity", or, Body. Specifically, the "Social" qua "Human History", embodies the human attempt to constrain and repress the purposeless, disordering, chaotic, and anonymous will/desire. From here, Land summarises, in a crude yet striking manner, that the entirety of human history, "from bacteria to Microsoft," is "the history of suppression" (2). We therefore arrive at Land's notoriously disdained and controversial equation: "law = humanity", or, "*Organisation is suppression*" (25; 31). Land's formula, identifying homeostasis, homogeneity, law, and negative-feedback, as the mechanic constriction and suppression of desire, evokes an intensive affirmation to disorganize, or in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, to accelerate the processes of destratification/deterritorialisation: to release the virulent potentialities of desire-life suppressed by the rigid stratification, specifically under the guise of the Human. The key correlation between Land's project and *White Noise*, I argue, is Land's discovery that capitalism, as a mechanical and material process, is an economic process which frees desire from the restrictions of the human: the postmodern symptomizes the perpetual unbinding and dissolution of all bonds traditionally held to be fundamental to the maintenance of our society. *White Noise* – an apt literary mediation on how contemporary society has been

shaped, and is continuing to be shaped, by capitalism – therefore offers a way in which Land’s concepts of capitalism can be found operating within popular, contemporary American literature. When *White Noise* is supplemented with Land's conception of capitalism we find an economic diagnosis of the fundamental processes shaping our contemporary world, driving deeper into the essential essence of our present, and providing an understanding of the future to which we are already on course. I argue that these insights are not only overlooked by the present critical-literary reception of the novel, but that they in fact subvert the moralistic, reactionary anthropocentrism which dominates the novel’s milieu.

One primary benefit of employing Land’s concepts in conjunction with DeLillo’s novel is found in the way Land understands literature. Land identifies textuality, first and foremost, as a mechanical process “for affecting reality by intensifying the anticipation of its future” (32). Land employs this understanding of literature to produce texts which hack into the future they speculate/anticipate, via the scientific mechanics of feedback loops qua cybernetics, as to intervene in the present. In this sense, Land utilizes hype (amplification feedback) to intensify and accelerate the present processes which are dissolving the human/social body vis-a-vis the becoming-inhuman of the future: “re-routing tomorrow through which its prospect makes today” (33). So, just as we found with the postmodern concept of the Hyperreal, Land embraces the means of hype to create an interactive text which dissolves temporality, in which the future and the present become indistinguishable, thereby subverting attempts to restrict textuality to fact or fiction, science-fiction or realism. Land’s combination of theory and fiction, reminiscent of "the hyperreal", dissipates the line between the actual-real and the artificial-simulated. In summary, Land’s hypersitations are performative texts which displace the categorisations of fact and fiction, and dissolve the distinction of present and future: the banal is mystical, and the future is already commonly boring.

Both *White Noise* and Land's work uncover and hack into a transcendently immanent plane found at the heart of our contemporary world. In subverting the dialectical humanism of Hegelian-Marxism, when *White Noise* is read in conjunction with Land, we discover that “the insurrectionary basis of revolution now lies at the *virtual* terminus of capital” (36: emphasis added). Capitalism, arising from the “progressive time of modernity,” Land explains, is a “‘self-perpetuating movement of deregulation’, relentlessly dismantling customs, traditions, and institutions” (27). The identification of progressive temporality with modernity qua capitalism highlights the essential economy of displacement in operation: progressive temporality inherently functions by reproducing the displacement of limitations. To progress is to go beyond established limitations, an economic process which is exemplified by Modernity-Enlightenment and capitalism, which by-definition function on the basis of an ever outward-expanding economy. In Land's subversion of the anthropocentric conception of capitalism, one finds that the fundamental economic trend at play in fact dissipates “the neurotical refusal mechanisms” instantiated under the name of the social and human, which “separate[s] capital from its own madness” (36). The comparison of capitalism and psychosis is consistent and extensive throughout *White Noise* as exemplified in the literary and critical reception: many readers and critics “point to the many instances of self-diminishment, psychic fragmentation, and numbing depersonalization that resonate throughout DeLillo’s pages” (Laist 2010, 1).

Seeking to uncover the suppressed madness within capitalism, Land construed his project as the “tendency [...] oriented to the disabling of ROM command-control programs sustaining all macro- and micro-governmental entities, globally concentrating themselves as the Human Security System” (450). The Human Security System being targeted is what Land calls PODS, or “Politically Organized Defensive Systems”:

Modelled upon the polis, pods hierarchically delegate authority through public institutions, family, and self, seeking metaphorical sustenance in the corpuscular fortifications of organisms and cells. The

global human security allergy to cyberrevolution [technophobia] consolidates itself in the New World Order, or consummate macropod, inheriting all the resources of repression as concrete collective history (320)

Land therefore goes “in the opposite direction to socialistic regulation; pressing towards ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field” (340). It is important, then, when examining Land’s understanding of capitalism, to clarify the specific aspects of capitalism which Land sought to amplify, the processes of marketization that are causing human society to dissolve.

I will now turn to a number of Capitalism’s characteristics which Land argues fuel the process of social dissolution. Following Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Land argues that capitalism is the first historical-material economy to manifest that inherently operates on the basis of perpetual displacement and disorganization: Capitalism names a machinic process that accelerates the unbinding and dissipation of restrictive and homogeneous structures. It must be noted that, following Deleuze and Guattari, Land acknowledges that capitalism is not the first system to implement a process of decoding, but, rather, it is the first operation of general-global decoding, which is to say, capitalism names the runaway feedback process which strips all archaic coding and enters everything into the transcendently abstract immanent field of the market. It is, furthermore, important to note that Land’s understanding of capitalism is not strictly limited to the previous/current instantiations of capitalism: “Capital[ism] only retains anthropological characteristics as a symptom of underdevelopment” (446). In this sense, humanity's causal influence and status within capitalism is seen as a flat tire with regards to the potentiality of capitalism's economic process: “Man is something for it [Capitalism] to overcome: a problem, a drag” (446). Simply put, capitalism does not restrict and strain humanity, on the contrary, it is humanity that restricts and imposes a strain on capitalism. Because of this, Land is perhaps the most radical thinker of capitalism, owing to his dislocation of capitalism

from its anthropocentric model-restriction, envisioning and predicting a capitalism that increasingly degenerates humanity to the point of obsolescence and extinction, self-programming beyond human capacity. In this sense, Capitalism may be understood as the geopolitical digestion of humanity on earth: catabolically dissolving human history in a statistical curve that is accelerating towards the imminent and immanent horizon of humanity.

By diagnosing human history as the history of suppression, the model of “primary repression” crushing the potentiality of intensive matter and restraining it from what it can really do, it follows that Land must identify an underlying force, or plane, which supersedes and surpasses the status of the Human. By seeking the base of the contemporary “affirmative telecommercial dystopianism,” Land arrives at the abstract cyber network enabling the technocommercial marketization of capitalism (350). Arriving at the transcendently abstract matrix known as “cyberspace”, Land identifies the inner economic processes of capitalism:

The modern dominium of Capital is the maximally plastic instance – state compatible commerce code pre-setting the econometric apparatuses that serve it as self-monitoring centres, organizing its own intelligible existence in a co/de/termination of economic product and currency value (350-51).

By framing Capital as “maximally plastic”, Land introduces the notion that capitalism is the material-historic final-threshold of human history, which Land understands to be dissolving at an accelerating speed, thus reaching its most plastic form in capitalism. Land inherits his understanding of capitalism from Deleuze and Guattari’s study of capitalism, found in the first part of their collaboration, *Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. Mark Fisher summarizes their model of capitalism in a manner strikingly similar to Land:

In their account of capitalism, surely the most impressive since Marx’s, Deleuze and Guattari describe capitalism as a kind of dark potentiality which haunted all previous social systems. Capital, they argue, is the “unnameable Thing”, the abomination, which primitive and feudal societies ‘warded off in advance’. When it actually arrives, capitalism brings with it a massive desacralization of culture. It is the system which is no longer governed by any transcendent Law; on the contrary, it dismantles all such codes, only to re-install them on an *ad hoc* basis. The limits of capitalism are not fixed by faith,

but defined (and redefined) pragmatically and improvisationally. [...] [A] monstrous, infinitely plastic entity, capable of metabolizing and absorbing anything which it comes into contact (Fisher 2009, 5-6).

In the first sentence, Fisher alludes to capitalism in a way that is strikingly Landian: “dark potentiality” in conjunction with the notion of haunting incites specific imagery of horror and death. The analogy between capitalism and an unnameable abomination refers to the specific economic trend of capitalism, namely, the migration of the market into cyberspace, thereby transcending the human insofar as capitalism is an unlocatable presence that is everywhere yet unidentifiably – occupying a space of no-where. Formulating capitalism as the “unnamable Thing” emphasises the aspect of horror, drawn from John Carpenter’s film *The Thing*: a horror film about a metamorphic entity “capable of metabolizing and absorbing anything which it comes into contact” (6). Fisher’s investigation of Deleuzo-Guattarian and Landian capitalism thereby establishes a relation with the sublime, as capitalism is construed as a formless and unnameable entity, a “monstrous [...] abomination” that transcends human comprehension. In this sense, developing capitalism’s relationship with the sublime, capitalism as an economic process operates in an identical manner to Carpenter’s entity, notably highlighting the sublime horror in Carpenter’s film. Capitalism’s digestive absorption of everything it comes into contact with gives grounds to the notion that capitalism is the abomination of all previous societies, because capitalism is able to consume and transform all other societies into its own market economy. Fisher delegates the word “plastic” to “capitalism” in the same way as Land, specifically emphasising the flexible, heterogeneous, and transformative nature of capitalism. With this in mind, we may understand Land’s plan, then, to drive foot-down “hard on the accelerator,” accelerating Capitalism’s deterioration of human society beyond the final threshold (350). In this sense, capitalism becomes the driving force of sublimity in the postmodern world, as discussed in my last chapter. If, as LeClair has argued, DeLillo employs of the postmodern sublime to symptomize “humankind’s self-destructiveness, [...] gathering itself into its own powerful and vicious circles, loops

[becoming] nooses,” Land’s understanding of capitalism embodies the acceleration of such tendencies (LeClair 1998, 27). Capitalism, therefore, functions on the basis of displacement, abstracting and digesting everything into the market.

Land employs the term "Hot Culture" to refer to the environment Jack inhabits. “Captured by a spiralling involvement with entropy deviations,” Land characterizes DeLillo’s postmodernity as a “meltdown process”: “[t]he postmodern meltdown of culture into economy is triggered by the fractal interlock of commoditization and computers: a transscalar entropy-dissipation from internal trade to market-oriented software” (445; 447). Similarly, Murray informs Jack:

Heat. That is what cities mean to me. You get off the train and walk out of the station and you are hit with the full blast. The heat of the air, traffic and people. The heat of food and sex. The heat of tall buildings. The heat that flows out of the subways and tunnels. It’s always fifteen degrees hotter in the cities. Heat rises from the sidewalks and falls from the poisoned sky. The buses breathe heat. Heat emanates from crowds of shoppers and office workers, the entire infrastructure is based on heat, desperately uses up heat, breeds more heat. The eventual heat death of the universe that scientists love to talk about is already well underway and you can feel it happening all around you in any large or medium-sized city (10).

Murray specifically identifies that the “heat death of the universe” is already in play, already functioning within our own system, also identifying the precise the process Land emphasizes: “Hot cultures tend to social dissolution. They are innovative and adaptive. They always trash and recycle cold cultures” (445). Analogous to Earth’s development in the first few million years, postmodernity identifies:

An environment dense with constituent elements in the form of free-circulating shareware, dumped data, viruses dormant and active and clippings and dippings of data-fat from gigabytes of processing power in motion at any one moment across the worldweb, energy rich, subject to chaotic fluctuations, and approaching critical mass and complexity out of which an independent, self-sustaining, self-motivating, self-repairing and replicating system (MacDonald 1994, 46).

Modernity plays an essential part in this process because it is with modernity that “irreversible time” is discovered, a temporality apt for acceleration. “Conceived as a progressive enlightenment tracking capital concentration,” modernity’s temporality is integrated with “nineteenth century science as entropy” (351). Here, all hopes for “liberal and socialist SF utopias are trashed” as “[p]roduction as process overtakes all idealist categories” (351: Deleuze & Guattari 2012, 5). For this reason, capitalist production becomes an auto-replicating process of global commodification, while condensing progressive temporality irreversibly. Because of this, Land identifies that modernity and its historical-material transformation, signified under the title “the postmodern condition”, instantiates a “future [that] is closer than it used to be, closer than it was last week, but postmodernity remains an epoch of undead power: it’s all over yet it carries on” (Land 2012, 351). Capitalism, again, embodies the source of postmodern sublime insofar as it perpetually decodes and dissolves all prior limitations: Both the sublime and capitalism quintessentially operate on the basis of economic displacement.

As Paul A. Cantor has summarized in his study of the postmodern condition in *White Noise*, “[e]verything, no matter how exotic or rare, is equally available, from all over the world, and indeed seemingly from all eras of history,” (Cantor 1991, 43). Cantor argues that the novel’s characters fail to understand that they are themselves products of deeply ingrained and complex historical processes that precede and contextualize their consumer autonomy. In this sense, as Land argues, postmodernity obtains a dead temporality insofar as the postmodern world is abstracted from historical-cultural context, dissolved by marketization. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari:

Capitalism is indeed the limit of all societies, insofar as it brings about the decoding of the flows that the other social formations coded and overcoded. [...] [I]t substitutes for the codes an extremely rigorous axiomatic that maintains the energy of the flows in a bound state of the body of capital as a

socius that is deterritorialized, but also a socius that is even more pitiless than any other (Deleuze & Guattari 2012, 267).

Deleuze and Guattari highlight the fact that capitalism, as an economic process, has managed to abstract all codes from pre-existing culture as to bring them into the capitalist market. In Deleuze and Guattari's lexicon, capitalism is the first great machine to deterritorialise all pre-existing codes, signs, values, cultures, traditions, peoples, while reterritorialising them into the axiomatic market of capitalism. Similarly, Cantor argues that in *White Noise*, "the autonomous self becomes the inauthentic self," in the sense that the novel's characters having all been reduced to a mere husk of subjectivity utilized to further the process of the market: "The price one pays for this complete freedom in adopting one's role in life, however, is that it becomes merely a role" (43).

I now want to closely analyse a number of capitalism's key characteristics in the novel that exemplify the above discussion of Land's accelerationism. From the novel's beginning, Jack is constantly overwhelmed with confusion in the postmodern technoscape. For Jack, the relationship between transcendental significance and meaningless coincidence is blurred, constantly puzzled by the prospect of semiotic significance. There is, however, a consistent radiance present in Jack's technoscape, "a kind of radiance in dailiness" (DeCurtis, 70). Jack summarizes this presence in the statement: "[i]n the common place I find unexpected themes and intensities" (DeLillo, 184). For instance, Jack's conflation of Hitler and Elvis, during a lecture shared with Murray, exemplifies the tendency to misconstrue the banally common with that which radiates transcendental value. During the lecture, Jack highlights that there was "some magnetic wave of excitation" present, "some frenzy in the air" (72). Jack's tendency to romanticize materiality, or, for materiality to transcend into a position of romanticism, rather than leading to enlightenment, leaves him with crippling anxieties, and pervasive uncertainty.

When struck by the sight of his coffee machine, Jack deviates his thoughts to identify that his coffee machine appeared “like a philosophical argument rendered in terms of the things of the world – water, metal, brown beans” (103). Again, later in the novel, upon opening his freezer, Jack notes that there was:

A strange crackling sound came off the plastic food wrap, the snug covering for half eaten things, the Ziploc sacks of livers and ribs, all gleaming with sleety crystals. A cold dry Sizzle. A Sound like some element breaking down, near subliminal, that made me think of withering souls, some form of dormant life approaching the threshold of perception (258)

As Laist has highlighted, “Jack’s connection of cosmic principles to mundane existents tends to do just as much to invest the cosmic principles with the alienating mundaneness of the signifiers that suggest them as to transfigure the suburban technoscape into a terrain of abstract glory” (Laist 2010, 66). Jack is constantly lost in his postmodern technoscape, unable to keep up with the rapid changes that occur around him. Frequently, Jack speculates that his environment hints towards the presence of something that transcends subjectively deduced perception, an aspect of materiality that evades immediate observation. Underneath his transcendental and romantic meditations, however, Jack hopes that “the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to plan” (93). Jack’s hope for time itself to stop is lost in the hum of capitalism, the white noise of postmodernity.

At the very beginning of the novel, Jack offers an extended inventory of commodities that operates as an introduction and summary of the narrative style for the rest of the novel. The inventory of objects that Jack lists lacks almost every sense of causality, introducing an ambiguous and disconnecting style of prose to the novel. Although Jack does mention that human subjects, the returning college students and their parents, appear among this commodity-scape, Jack’s narration dissolves any important causality between the humans and the objects. The individuals and objects become immanent with one another, neither human nor commodity propped up to a position of existential value. It ought to be noted that

even though Jack does include the odd observation of human subjects, they are only given a fraction of his attention, far less than the objects proliferating the scene. Moreover, when his attention is given to these humans, they are themselves reduced to cliché tropes that one would observe of a human character in an advertisement or television show. As I discussed earlier, with regards to Jack's narration of the station wagon procession, the only mention of humans are the students who quickly disappear into the field of objects. When Jack deviates from the list of commodities, offering a few small lines about the parents and students, they are presented as if characters on television, images from sitcoms or reality television. The students and their parents have “conscientious suntans” with “well-made faces and wry looks”: “The women crisp and alert, in diet trim, knowing people’s names. Their husbands content to measure out the time, distant but ungrudging, accomplished in parenthood, something about them suggesting massive insurance coverage” (3). Each figure – child, mother, and father – identically fits the commoditized role they play. Kavadlo’s statements are immediately recalled, as discussed early, which highlight the fact that “[u]ltimately missing from Gladney’s perception, here and subsequently through most of the novel, however, are the human beings to whom the cars, paraphernalia, and gadgets belong” (Kavadlo 2004, 13). What we find, as Kavadlo highlights, is that human subjects hold no elevated position of value or meaning amongst the commodified object-scape. Rather, these people “more than merely being identified or understood by their possessions, are [...] at the service of their things, items all referred to by the definite article that leaves no doubt that these belongings, unambiguously, define them” (13). Here, Kavadlo’s point to the fact that the human subjects are no longer treated as existentially meaningful and important figures. Baudrillard observed the same symptom of postmodernity:

There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects and material goods [...] the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings as they were in all previous ages, but by objects.

Their daily dealings are now not so much with their fellow men, but rather – on a rising statistical curve – with the reception and manipulation of goods and messages (Baudrillard, 1998: 25).

Land's perspective, however, strips the above symptomisation of all humanist morality and sentimentality. Land offers a sarcastic rendition of the contemporary humanism Cantor employs: "A Cartesian howl is raised: *people are being treated as things*" (Land 2012, 294). "Rather than as [...] soul, spirit, the subject of history, Dasein?" Land asks: "For how long will this infantilism be protracted?" (294). Stripping the above quote of its sarcasm, one may understand that Land is calling for a material understanding of the current displacement of the human: if everything that was once held to be essential to socio-cultural bonds is shown to be dissolving in front of our eyes, on what grounds is it justified to expect that the status of the human holds some transcendent status that is inherent to the wider, nonanthropocentric history of Earth and the future to come? A return to some prior form of socio-cultural form become unlike by the minute, at an accelerating rate.

Jack's opening observations immediately resonate with Land's understanding of the role played by money and commoditization within capitalism. Specifically, borrowing from Land, the importance of money is "not what it can obtain," which is to say, what it can buy, but rather, "what it can melt" (Land 2012, 328). Kavadlo's observation that commodities are not possessions of the human subject, and not the example of money's buying power, identifies that money dissolves the traditional status of the human subject into an immanent field of capitalism. The displacement, or dissolution, of the human subject by techno-commercial marketization is elaborated by Land:

Capitalism is not a totalizable system defined by the commodity form as a specifiable mode of production, determinately negated by proletarian class-consciousness. It is a convergent unrealizable assault upon the social macropod, whose symptom is the collapse of productive mode or form in the direction of ever more incomprehensible experiments in commodification, enveloping, dismantling, and circulating every subjective space. [...] Capitalism is not an essence but a tendency, the formula of

which is decoding, or market driven immanentization, progressively subordinating social reproduction to techno-commercial replication (339-40).

Capital's "mathematico-scientific and monetary quantization" is a "dehumanizing convergence" which decodes the human subject and socius (macropod) into an "integrated and automatized cyberpositive techno-economic intelligence" (338-39). It is here that we first see the signs of capitalism's "affirmative telecommercial dystopianism", "[r]eaching an escape velocity of self-reinforcing machinic intelligence propagation" (341). Land writes:

Capitalism is still accelerating, even though it has already realized novelties beyond any previous human imagining. After all, what is human imagination? It is a relatively paltry thing, merely a sub-product of the neural activity of a species of terrestrial primate. Capitalism, in contrast, has no external limit, it has consumed life and biological intelligence, vast beyond human anticipation (626)

Land sees all opposition and critique of capitalism as futile, theo-political moralism because its essential economic tendency is positive feedback: capitalism functions independently from and indifferently to humanity, which is to say, capitalism is self-programming, self-reinforcing, a self-propagating machinic process. With witty tone, Land observes:

Do we want capitalism? They used to ask. The naivety of this question has come to render it unsustainable. It no longer seems plausible to assume the relation between capital and desire is either external or supported by immanent contradiction, even if a few comical ascetics continue to assert that libidinal involvement with the commodity can be transcended by critical reason (339).

Nearing the end of the twentieth century, the period of both DeLillo's novel and Land's virulent understanding of capitalism, "the long senile spectre of the greatest imaginable reterritorialization of planetary process ha[s] faded from the horizon, cyberrevolutionary impetus is cutting away from its last shackles to the past" (341). It is this very process that leads Land to affirm that the "history of capitalism" is a one-way street accelerating towards a definitive conclusion: "a run-away whirlwind of dissolution, whose hub is the virtual zero of impersonal metropolitan accumulation," throwing the human "into a new nakedness, as everything stable is progressively liquidated in the storm" (Land 1992, 80).

Following Land's diagnosis of capitalism, the affinities of capitalism and the sublime are solidified, exemplified through his choice of language, namely, the liquidation of human limitations and form in the storm of capitalism. Framed in a franker fashion, "[t]he eradication of law, or of humanity, is sketched culturally by the development of critique, which is the theoretical elaboration of the commodification process. The social order and the anthropomorphic subject share a history, and an extinction" (Land 2012, 322-23). Simply, the sublime identifies a process of dissolution, in which the ontological and epistemological structures of one's world are displaced, a process which shatters everything once conceived as normative and given. Similarly, capitalism identifies an economic process which by definition dissolves any and every bond and status, dissolving structure in an abstraction to a wider transcendently immanent plane, namely, the outside of structure.

It is with postmodernity that the transcendental ideations of modernity materially emerge as cyberspace, a transcendently immanent plane of desire, which is to say, a purely economic (non)space of affective communication and transaction. "Cyberspace first appears as a human use value," Land highlights, as "a way of representing data" (354: Gibson 1988, 76). The virtual, abstract space of data maps a matrix on the other side of the machines, seen by humans as a "consensual hallucination" (Gibson 2000, 197). Indeed, at the Most Photographed Barn in America, Murray makes a similar observation: "No one sees the barn," Murray says (DeLillo, 12). Instead, the Most Photographed Barn in America is the locus of a communal experience, the maintenance of an image that is reinforced through aura qua the "accumulation of nameless energies" (12). "We've agreed to be a part of a collective perception," Murray tells Jack, or, as Gibson framed it, a consensual hallucination (12). The inclusion of the term "nameless" recalls the discussion of the sublime in my second chapter, in which the sublime object, or that which triggers sublimity, is essentially nameless because it is beyond human apprehension. These nameless energies thereby occupy a (non)space of

transcendence beyond the human. Indeed, the virtual and abstract aura that occupies the location of the Most Photographed Barn in America anticipates the emergence of the virtual plane of cyberspace: a parallel temporality and spatiality that exists on the other side of materiality, yet is coextensive with it. Cyberspace, unlocatable to humanity's normative vision-scaled deduction, displaces the enlightenment's anthropocentric apprehension of space and time:

The apprehension of death as time-in-itself = intensive continuum degree-0 is shared by Spinoza, Kant, Freud, Deleuze and Guattari, and Gibson [...]. It is nominated variously: substance, pure apperception, death-drive, body without organs, cyberspace matrix. Beyond its oedipal sense as the end of the person, death is an efficient virtual object inducing convergence (Land 2012, 369-70)

Land's identification of death with time-in-itself, time as a virtual essence beyond the sensory mechanisms of humanity, directly resonates with a number of conversations and meditations that Jack has through the novel. The sublime and capitalism, then, both quintessentially name an economic process which engages with, or, is engaged by, the outside: both identify the way in which that which is inherently beyond human apprehension affects the human, subverting the egocentric and anthropocentric perception by violently disintegrating the grounds upon which the human/self is formed. The sublime signifies the affect caused by the intrusive disruption of the outside upon the inside/self, as capitalism identifies an economic process which dissolves bonds which form structure, thereby disintegrating the structural barriers that separate or define the inside from the outside: both name a dissolvent economic process that is characterised solely by the dismantling of structural form qua an economy of displacement.

Television is the most overt medium that connects the novel's character to the abstract and virtual plane of cyberspace, and is also, therefore, the most overt medium accelerating the process dissolving the separation of the inside from the outside, the real from the abstract, fact from fiction. Murray, who becomes obsessed with the technological medium, tells Jack

that he had “been sitting in [his] room for more than two months, watching TV into the early hours, listening carefully, taking notes. A great and humbling experience [...]. Close to mystical” (DeLillo, 50-51). Murray’s remark that the technological medium borders on the mystical identifies the precise abstract and virtual nature of the cyber matrix enabling television. According to Murray, television opens onto a plane that is beyond normative human apprehension, explicitly identifying a sense of transcendence. Laist summarizes Murray’s romantic view of the technosphere, mediated by television, as “a metaphor for an abstraction that transforms the being of the beholder. [...] If only we could complete the transcendence from our first-person selfhood which television invites us to accomplish, then we would be in touch with heaven” (Laist, 69-70). As Sean Homer observes in his study of Baudrillard concept of the postmodern:

The television screen [...] represent[s] the perfect object for this new era. The pure immanence of its unreflecting surface has come to replace any sense of depth, reflexivity and transcendence. [...] [T]elevision provides the perfect figure for that new world of communication networks and cyberspace in which isolated individuals are plugged into their own control panels and divorced from any contact with reality unless [...] it is simulated on the screen in front of them (Homer 1998, 112-113).

Though the images and sounds of the television translate into a condensed synthesis observable by humans, Murray notes that beyond this deduction, television operates via “waves and radiation,” the novel’s key catch-phrase for describing the presence of something beyond subjective perception (51). Furthermore, and most directly echoing Land, Murray explains that the plane with which television communicates, the plane of waves and radiation, is “[s]ealed-off, timeless, self-contained, self-referring” (51). Beyond human perception, this virtual plane is described in a strikingly similar way to the philosophical genealogy identifies by Land, correlating the essence of time with death as a virtual and abstract essence. Death, time-in-itself, cyberspace, and capitalism share an affinity due to the specific economic trend of displacement, namely, the irresolvable process to dissolve form. The outside plane evoked

by each of these titles exists independently of the human, insofar as the human can never, by definition, comprehend or experience the outside. Yet, these titles identify the way in which the outside constantly impinges upon the inside: Death is the unbinding of all form, form qua life, demonstrating the presence of a coexistent, transcendental plane beyond life; time-in-itself displaces the personal and specific because that which is perceived as temporality by any individual is only-ever a deviation from, and delusion of the abstract plane of the outside, which is to say, the instant one identifies temporality (duration and entropy) it is necessitated that they have not identified time-in-itself; cyberspace displaces materiality and perceptive temporality by identifying an inaccessible (non)space that exists alongside the normative real, unlocatable yet continually influencing the real; capitalism evaporates socio-cultural bonds and tradition, evaporating everything that has been significantly important to the human, and abstracting that value into the axiomatic market that is virtual and exceeds normative human apprehension. All of these names operate via a fundamental process, or, economic trend, in which form and structure are eroded and displaced by the outside.

Later in the novel, Murray offers a meditation on the Tibetan understanding of death that overtly establishes the economy shared by the technocommercial virtual plane and death. Murray explains that “Tibetans try to see death for what it is,” telling Jack that “[i]t is the end of attachment to things” (38). If, as Murray suggests, death is the end of attachment to things, the negation of thingness, or, as Land holds, the process of things unbinding and dissipating, death may then be understood as the ultimate exteriority, the transcendental abstract-virtual plane. Such a plane, being without things, would also be without temporal duration or the entropy of things. What one perceives as entropy, the increase of chaos and the dismantling of things, is therefore the process of matter being unbound of form, and migrating back towards zero-intensity qua death. Murray's meditation identifies the precise economy found in Land's reference to death as a hydraulic tendency: Life is a deviation from zero/death, and

what is perceived as death from the position of life is the unbinding of life ("things"/form), as matter dissipates back to zero vis-a-vis a hydraulic tendency. In this sense, Murray frames death in the same way as Land, namely, death is the zero point of intensive matter, identifying the dark side of Kant's transcendental project:

Since [...] sensation is not in itself an objective representation, and since neither the intuition of space nor that of time is to be met within, its magnitude is not extensive but *intensive*. This magnitude is generated in an act of apprehension whereby the empirical consciousness of it can in a certain time increase from nothing = 0 to the given measure (Kant 2000, 202).

Death as “the intensive continuum degree-0,” in the same sense that Murray’s Tibetan death “is timeless” (Land 2012, 369; DeLillo, 38). It may be noted, then, that the "zero-degree-death" of the cyber technoscape is the generative (non)space of the sublime, beyond apprehension and sensory deduction, as the sublime is the perception of form/structure being disintegrated from without. Furthermore, one may highlight the similarity between Kant’s application of "magnitude" in intensity’s migration to-and-from “zero-death”, and his use of magnitude essential to the mathematic sublime. In both instances, all intensive magnitude exemplifies a migration and hydraulic tendency. As discussed in the last chapter, Kant's mathematical sublime was defined by the presence of magnitude which displaces the status of the human in a "sublime" experience of insignificance. Intensive magnitude induces a sublime feeling of insignificance because it demonstrates the inability to evade the hydraulic tendency of intensive matter towards death: scale (magnitude-intensity) necessitates zero. The process by which this migration occurs also embodies the definitive feature of the dynamic sublime. Kant defined the dynamic sublime as the sublime experience of vulnerability, or, the overwhelming, impending insecurity and danger of the self. The hydraulic tendency of intensive matter towards death therefore evokes the dynamic sublime insofar as this economic process exemplifies the material dissipation, or, disintegration of form. One gains the sublime feeling of vulnerability when it is revealed that no form,

structure, and substance can evade the entropy definitive of intensive matter, which is to say, nothing can escape the hydraulic tendency of intensive matter returning to zero-death. The deterioration of intensive matter is this specific migration "deathwards", exemplifying the obstruction of stable form which Kant identified as the sublime (Land 2014, 140: Kant 2000,107-8). Above all, the sublime identifies the catastrophic power of the outside, as the sublime is evoked when the outside disrupts, displaces, and deteriorates the stable structural form of subjectivity: Murray's undoing of thingness qua Land's death.

Later in the novel, in conversation with Babette, Jack blends Murray's understanding of television with the Tibetan understanding of death, arriving at the Landian model of thanatological cyberspace. Laist offers a summary of this connection that establishes the direct relevance to Land: "Although the image of white noise is primarily televisual, this sound surrounds Jack throughout the novel, always latent in the ambient noise of the culture-scape, inescapably insinuating the sibilant whisper of death into everything" (Laist, 72).

Babette asks Jack:

"What if death is nothing but sound?"

"Electrical noise."

"You hear it forever. Sound all around. How awful."

"Uniform, white" (198).

It may initially be noted that relating death to white noise evokes the concept of immanence, which Land argues is shared both by the capitalist market and death, as white noise is the formless, chaotic immanence of soundwaves. Furthermore, as Laist highlights, Babette and Jack's discussion of death mirrors Jack's description of the lingering presence that follows him everywhere throughout the novel. Recall that in the first chapter, for instance, when walking home, Jack mentions that "at night as we settle into our brass bed that sparse traffic washes past, a remote and steady murmur around our sleep, as of dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream" (4). Jack intuits that beyond his apprehension of daily life, there is a

presence that follows him, in the same way that a photograph has a negative: postmodern life is mirrored by the hum of waves and radiation, white noise, which Jack constantly relates to death. “Haunting a-life is a-death,” Land remarks, “the desolated technoplane of climaxed digitalization process, undifferentiable from its simulation as cataplexy,”: “[e]ach intensive magnitude is a virtually deleted unit, fused dimensionlessly to zero” (369). Beneath the skin of human reality lies the zero-degree from which all intensive matter deviates, almost identically to Jack’s seemingly analogical comments. As Deleuze and Guattari hold:

The body without organs is the model of death. As the authors of horror stories have understood so well, it is not death that serves as the model for catatonia, it is catatonic schizophrenia that gives its model to death, zero intensity. The death model appears when the body without organs repels the organs and lays them aside[.] [...] Death is not desired, there is only death that desires, by virtue of the body without organs or the immobile motor (Deleuze & Guattari 2012, 370).

Deleuze and Guattari’s *Body without Organs* presents the model which enables Land to argue “that primary production migrates from personality towards zero” (Land 2012, 269). As Murray posited, death is that which is without “things”, things being the product formed from intensive matter, migrating from zero-degree-death to *n*-degree of intensity. So, just as Jack intuitively, and as Deleuze and Guattari argued, death is perpetually alongside life: “machines,” or Murray’s “things”, exist alongside death, “erupting like a tumour out of pre-substantialized matter, by which nature spawns death adjacent to itself” (270). In summary, “[t]he death drive is not a desire for death, but rather a hydraulic tendency to the dissipation of intensity” (283).

Following Land’s argument, capitalism functions as an accelerator for the death-as-dissipation process. As we saw, the scientific discovery and elaboration of entropy correlates with the development of capitalism, and as Land argued, capitalism-as-process disorganises human society, which is to say, it decodes all previous social codes in an immanentisation into capitalist markets:

Capital is machinic (non-instrumental) globalization-miniturization scaling down dilation: an automatizing nihilist vortex, neutralizing all values through commensuration to digitized commerce, and driving a migration from despotic command to cyber-sensitive control: from status and meaning to money and information (Land 2012, 444-45)

In developing a comprehensive understanding of Capitalist Realism (the notion that there is no longer an alternative to capitalism), Fisher summarises the essential economic function of capitalism:

The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumed and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or *Das Kapital*, a monetary value. [...] Capitalist realism is therefore not a particular type of realism; it is more like realism itself. [...] Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and relics (Fisher 2009, 4).

Capitalism thereby describes, as Land argued, a global entropy accelerator, disorganizing the social body, and dissolving previous societies and cultures into the market. The relationship between capitalism and the thermodynamic theory of entropy is emphasised beyond analogy when Land dubs (post)modernity a Hot Culture, offering a literal connection between Murray's scientific "heath death" and the postmodern metropolis. Land writes:

Disorder always increases in a closed system [...] because nature is indifferent to her composition. The bedrock state of a system which is in conformity with the chance distribution of its elements has been called 'entropy', a term that summarizes the conclusions of Carnot, Clausius, and their successors concerning thermic engines and the science of heat. With the concept of entropy everything changes. Natural processes are no longer eternal clockwork machines, they are either extinct [...] or tendential. Mechanisms are subordinated to motors; the thermic difference, energy of flux, reservoir, and sump. Order is an evanescent chance, a deviation from disorder, a disequilibrium. Negative disorder – negentropy – is an energetic resource, and chance potential for the degradation of energy, as the fluidification of matter/energy, as the possibility to release towards the unregulated or anarchic abyss into which energy pours, as the death of God. Upstream and downstream; the reserve and its dissipation. Order is not a law but power, and power is aberration (Land 1992, 37).

The postmodern era thereby names the

meltdown of culture into economy [...]: a transscalar entropy-dissipation from internal trade to market-oriented software that thaws out competitive dynamics from the cryonics bank of modernist corporatism (447).

In this sense, “[c]apital is precisely and exhaustively the definitive anti-culture” (56).

Capitalism is “anti-culture” because the primary economic function of capitalism deconstructs, displaces, and deterritorialises all previous culture. Capitalism may therefore be understood as the material digestion of culture, being that which breaks culture down and disintegrates socio-cultural code into the immanent capital market. One may conclude, then, that capitalism is an economic tendency which is “[c]onverging upon [a] terrestrial meltdown singularity” (Land 2014, 443). Postmodernity, being the historical and material manifestation of the accelerating process of capitalism, is indistinguishable from a global “phase-out culture accelerat[ing] through its digitech-heated adaptive landscape, passing through compression thresholds normed to an intensive logistic curve” (443). Functioning via an economy of displacement, or, the reproduction of the displacement of its own limitations, capitalism acts as an amplifier, or accelerator, for the economic process driving the sublime. Specifically, both function by dissolving limitations and boundaries, reproducing this essential displacement, and thereby converging upon Kant’s Infinity. To paraphrase, neither capitalism nor the sublime have an intrinsic external limit, but are rather defined by the perpetual tendency to dissolve such a limit.

One of the most essential themes in the novel is the direct effect technology has in determining and altering human life. The sensitivity to external stimuli that obsesses Jack's narration indicates a general characteristic of an environment constituted by technology, namely, the displacement of the liminal space which differentiates the organic subject from the synthetic, technological object. DeLillo’s novel shows this in two main ways: on the level of individuality, in which specific characters are shown to be melded to technology, wholly

becoming defined by their relation to and with technology, as well as, on a far more general scale, highlighting an un/subconscious level in which the environment is shown to be indifferent to the characters, both demonstrating the irreversible effect of living in an environment primarily constituted by technology. In both cases, there is a consistent ambiguity as to whether the characters are aware of the extent to which technology alters human life, whether such ignorance is intentional or not.

Following his mother's death, Dunlop, a fellow resident at Murray's boarding house, fell into a deep depression, bringing him to the brink of suicide. That was, Dunlop explains, before he watched a weatherman on television: "[W]eather was something I'd been looking for all my life" (55). Television weather programming offers an explicit example of television's quasi-magical qualities: "The network of satellites, telecommunications, and computer modelling that makes meteorology possible constitutes a transcendent system of unfathomable power and complexity" (Laist, 74). In the case of Dunlop, the cybernetic feedback loop created through televisual weather dissolves subjectivity as its omnipresence predicts and seemingly creates the nature of future weather. Dunlop's obsession, Laist states, "leaves him closed off in his boarding room bunker, getting progressively weirder and more self-absorbed" (74). Though Laist is correct in concluding that Dunlop is entrapped by his televisual shrine, getting weirder, and getting more wired, I disagree with the assertion that Dunlop's melding- and plugging-into the postmodern technoscape is a sign of self-absorption and egotism. When one examines Dunlop's situation, it seems that there is, rather, an entire deterioration of self or identity, dissolving Dunlop's sense of self and individuality into the technomatrix. It is worth asking where exactly the sign of egotism is in Dunlop's obsession. How does the abortion of all aspects of social and cultural life, to the technosphere, constitute egotistic narcissism? The case of Dunlop, rather, demonstrates the tendency of technology to

increase deterioration of the social field, with sociocultural bonds being displaced into a nonhuman cybernetic network.

Steffie also embodies an apt example of how technology reprograms and dissolves traditional conceptions of the human. Steffie frequently sits in front of the television “attempting to match the words as they were spoken” (84). The reality of technology’s addictive and viral nature manifests in Steffie, first and foremost, by demonstrating that television is not merely the projection of digital images, but is rather the creation of real intensive affects. Jack notes that Steffie cries while watching sitcoms, which is often read to signifying an apt postmodern symptom: Steffie’s hypersensitivity to technological affect exemplifies an inability to differentiate reality from simulated fiction. This is further exemplified when both of the Gladney girls begin to develop infectious symptoms that are broadcasted on the radio. What is most striking and disturbing about the prospect of the girls developing these symptoms is not that they have been infected by the toxins of the Airborne Toxic Event, but rather, that these symptoms have been virally transmitted from technology itself. As Laist argues, the appearance of these symptoms “insinuates that their entire personalities are technopsychically conditioned and mediated” (Laist, 99). The most urgent question that arises, then, is, if it is possible for the daughters to have caught the infection from the technological medium itself, what else in their personalities and lives is caught from, or programmed by, technology? DeLillo dissolves the traditional conception of the human, in so far as autonomy and subjectivity are displaced from the position of cause to the position of effect. In doing so, DeLillo extends the postmodern concept of hyperreality beyond its general use: not only is the distinction between the Real and the Simulacra blurred, collapsing the organic-synthetic dichotomy, but also, we find the affectual-effectual relationship between the two to be completely deteriorated. More simply, with the collapse of the reality-artificial paradigm, DeLillo exposes a sinister symptom in which the human

becomes completely displaced, as it is no longer the humans that are in control of the programing of technology, but, on the contrary, it is technology, the synthetic and artificial, that is programing the humans.

The notion that technology is virally programing the human, displacing the human subject from its anthropocentric and autonomous status, is developed more explicitly during the Airborne Toxic Event. While Jack watches Steffie sleep during the town evacuation, he notices her muttering a number of mystical sounding syllables. Upon closer inspection, Jack finds that Steffie is in fact uttering the words “Toyota Celica”. She appears to be unconsciously hardwired into the technomatrix. Laist reads this scenario as exemplifying:

the completion of a circuit that is so totalized as constitutive of both Jack’s will to televisual perception and the actual viral televisuality of his world and his family that resonate with a convincing profundity. [...] His daughter not only glows with the aura of advertisement, she *is* a living advertisement in her most elemental psychic being; [Postmodernism’s] ontological aspiration in the flesh (77).

Denise and Steffie accuse their mother of the same kind of cyber-existential fusion with the technoscape when they make the diagnosis that Babette negotiates her own body-image through patterns of commodity consumption. Babette tries to trick herself into thinking that if she buys wheat germ she’ll be healthy; the mere biological detail of whether or not she eats it or not is a secondary issue. Babette's self-confusion, or -delusion, however, is only a representation of the more fundamental problem, in which the postmodern subject is completely assimilated into information exchange and technological programing. Babette’s cycles demonstrate the model of someone who lives squarely in the world of daytime talk shows, insofar as she does not determine her being through autonomy and subjectivity, but rather, that she is determined by techno-commercial programming. We are told that she exemplifies all the little anxieties and suburban concerns inherited from consumer

advertisement. Authenticity and autonomy is dissolved, as the subject no longer determines the model, but rather the model developed by techno-commercialism determines the subject.

In Part Three, however, Babette undergoes a more overt and sinister rupture of subjectivity. Babette reveals that she is terrified of dying more so than being concerned about her waistline, and that her televisual consumerism has been supplemented by sexual perfidy. In literally becoming a body-for-medicine, her organic body becoming a medium for cybernetic communication, Babette finally becomes the perfect image of a televisual consumer. Babette mentions that in the room where her exchanges with Mr. Gray occur, there is a “TV up near the ceiling. This is all I remember [...] I was remote. I was operating outside myself. It was a *capitalist transaction*” (194). Babette’s organic body is displaced, stripped of all signs of autonomy, becoming the medium for a virtual exchange of information, dissolving all sense of authentic subjectivity into the capitalist market.

When Dylar, a drug designed to disable one’s fear of death, fails Babette, she becomes “addicted” to talk radio, demonstrating the literal relationship between technology and addiction (179). Land symptomizes the situation, arguing that “Capital propagates virally in so far as money communicates addiction, replicating itself through host organisms whose boundaries it breaches, and whose desire it reprograms” (338-39). Babette becomes so overcome by her addictions that her most physical and literal sense of subjectivity dissolves into abstraction. Babette is no longer able to make sense of existence, and increasingly becomes indistinguishable from the white noise of the technoscape. She asks “What is truth,” and “What is night. It happens seven times a week. Where is the uniqueness in this?” (263: 301). Babette’s ability to differentiate between differences dissolves the world that she lives in into indifferent abstraction. “My life is no longer a matter of want,” she says, “I do what I have to do,” or rather, what she is programmed to do (301). Here, Babette explicitly identifies the way in which autonomy dissolves into the market, merely becoming a vessel to

communicate the axiomatic of capitalist consumerism. As the novel progresses, or accelerates, Babette's character comes to inhabit the ontological weather of the "nothing kind of day" that she imagines to be a characteristic of the climate of outer space: weather of nowhere (232). The non-space that Babette describes echoes the zero-degree differentiation of cyberspace, matrix, body without organs, and death that Land construes. Materiality dissolves as the cyberspace of technocommercial marketization dissolves the material world towards literal zero-degree-death. Babette flees from her death-fear into a literal process of becoming-death, occupying a space of murky oblivion and semantic *entropy*, "entering the white noise of zero-meaning" (Laist, 101). This is the precise effect of postmodernity which Jameson called "death of the subject, the end of the autonomous, bourgeois monad or ego or individual" (Jameson 2009, 15). Again, we return to Land's categorization of capitalist culture as an anti-culture, which is to say, the disintegration of the social body.

Mr Gray, or Willie Mink, is by far the most extreme example of how the postmodern technoscape dissolves subjectivity. With Budwiser shorts, distorted physiognomy, and global-nonlocalizability, Willie occupies the zero-degree matrix of the "affirmative telecommercial dystopianism". His seamless splicing of television sound-bites into his speech figures him as a virally infected sample-machine, having becoming one with his television set. Unable to differentiate his own being from the television, Jack notes that Willie throws Dylar pills ambivalently at both his face and his television set. Mink is configured as a surreal culmination of the novel's overarching theme of televisual, technocommercial, and virtual reality. As a character, Mink seems to have already existed within Jack's mind before he actually appears in the novel: he is a looming non-figure, the heart of darkness that haunts postmodern suburbia. From the beginning, Jack imagines Babette's sexual partner in televisual images: "The man was literally grey, giving off a visual buzz" (241); "an unresolved figure collapsing at the edges" (232); "the picture wobbled and rolled" (241). Not

merely hyperbolic or metaphoric, Willie turns out to be this precise televisual entity. Willie is apparently able to read Jack's thoughts, thereby placing him beyond the temporality of normative human materiality, and in the timeless, non-space of the technosphere. DeLillo shows that Willie exists as much in Jack's mind as he does at the Roadview Motel, similar to the way in which technology has a consistent, phenomenological and physiological presence for Jack: Mink has dissolved to the point of abstraction concrete materiality. When arriving at Mink's location, Jack immediately notes that he "heard a noise, faint, monotonous, white" (306). "White noise everywhere," he comments: "The intensity of the noise in the room was the same on all frequencies" (301: 312). Jack explicitly makes the connection between Mink and the technosphere, describing the presence of both in an almost identical manner, and thereby solidifying the correlation with death. If this relation is not explicit enough, one may note that it is with Mink that Jack had premeditatedly planned a meeting with death, by planning to murder Mink. Furthermore, it is with Mink that Jack is, melodramatically, brought into a literal near-death experience, with Mink shooting Jack after attempting to make Mink hold the gun after Jack has shot him.

The connection between technology and imminent death is most concretely made by Heinrich, who identifies the everyday commonality in which technology indifferently leads humanity towards peril. From the individual level, this process may appear to be a slow and gradual, but from the general perspective, this trend is accelerating towards the exterior horizon of humanity. Heinrich appears to be the only character in the novel that displays an overt, even melodramatic, concern for the impact technology has on human society and the human future. Heinrich informs Jack that "[t]he real issue is the kind of radiation that surrounds us every day. Your radio, your TV, your microwave oven, your power lines just outside the door, your radar speed-trap on the highway" (174). It is worth noting that Heinrich specifically identifies "radiation" as being the large cause. Heinrich's observation

has at least two implications that resonate with my discussion: firstly, the "waves and radiation" that recur throughout the novel represent an abstract-virtual plane that transcends human perception, yet is constantly present and felt. Heinrich grounds this in technology's everyday use, because the machines humanity use function upon a mechanic process which produces a by-product alongside the machine that is normatively unlocatable by the subject, yet is there indifferently compared to humanity's intended use-purpose of the technology. Secondly, this radiation, although not directly in the forefront of the technology's normative use, which is to say it generally evades individual awareness, has material and concrete effects on humans: not only those who use the technologies directly, but also those who are in the vicinity of such technologies, which is to say, everyone in postmodern society. Both of these points highlight a level of indifference towards the human subject – being aware of the radiation or its negative effects does not stop the radiation from existing, nor does it stop the deeper biological, geological, social, and political effects it produces. Furthermore, Heinrich's concern shows that results of the radiation are always-already in process, since, by the time one becomes aware of such negative impacts, those effects have already begun to impact upon the subjects who have been born into a society that is fundamentally constituted by such technology and radiation, hence the recurrence of "everyday" and "everywhere" in the novel. "Where do you think all the deformed babies are coming from?" Heinrich asks, "Radio and TV, that's where" (175). Heinrich's vocal concerns may appear to be on the side of paranoia, or even of conspiracy, but at the centre of his queries there is a legitimate concern. Specifically, Heinrich identifies the blindness with which Western society has wholeheartedly given itself to machinic determination: the technologies which drive our society participate in a material economy with future determinations that are indifferent towards human subjectivity.

Jack himself ponders the effects of raising his children in the postmodern technoscape. Jack suspects, early in the novel, that he is responsible for Heinrich's premature hairline degeneration. "Have I raised him, unwittingly, in the vicinity of a chemical dump site, in the paths of air currents that carry industrial waste?" (22). Here, Jack points to the indifference with which technology impacts human society, that whether one is aware or not, technology has a material determination on the future of humanity. This is summarized when Jack follows his question with the comment "Man's guilt in history and in the tides of his blood has been complicated by technology, the daily seeping falsehearted death" (22). It ceases to be a matter of whether electrical and chemical radiation actually scrambles evolutionary biology into mutating degeneracy. The key to these concerns, which is horrendously overt, yet often overlooked and ignored, is that these technologies have irreversibly impacted upon individual humans and humanity in general, reformatting social, economic, and geopolitical structures in varying degrees of harm to humanity and its future. The invisible responsibility that marks Jack's life and death, becomes extremely literal when Jack notices, in the last chapter, following the Airborne Toxic Event, that the "men in Mylex suits are still in the area [...] gathering their terrible data, aiming their infrared devices at the earth and sky" (325). The men in Mylex suits indicate not only the harm done in the present, but also the extent to which geography has been tainted, the damage and harm seeping deep within society's environment and future.

The extent to which technology determines the fate of postmodern society is directly associated with death in a number of the novel's scenarios. While watching his neighbours talking on the telephone, as if he were watching the television, Jack notes that "[t]hey share the Trimline phone, beamish old folks in hand-knit sweaters on fixed income" (272). Jack asks himself a question that extends the relationship between technology and death beyond literary metaphor: "What happens when the commercial ends?" (272). Jack's question

implies a complete dependency on technology, questioning what becomes of humans when the commercial – the embodied representation of television – no longer continues: what happens if the plug is pulled, the series cancelled? What happens when humanity is no longer required for the continuation of technology? It is in this sense that Land directly connects technology and death, giving Jack's dramatic, bordering on comedic, connection a more sinister tone. Land's understanding of technocommercialism and the accelerating trend inherent to the process of marketization (which stems from his combination of Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, and Gibson), in conjunction with Jack's televisual-existential inquiry, directly highlights the operative function and non-metaphoric presence of death:

The matrix, body without organs, or abstract matter is a planetary-scale artificial death – Synthanatos – the terminal productive outcome of human history as a machinic process, yet it is virtually efficient throughout the duration of this process, functioning within a circuit that machines duration itself. In this way virtuality lends its temporality to the unconscious, which escapes specification within extended time series, provoking Freud to describe it as timeless (326).

Or, in a more playful tone, strikingly similar to Jack's own question:

Level-1 or world space is an anthropomorphically scaled, predominantly vision-configured, massively multi-slotted reality system is obsolescing very rapidly.

Garbage time is running out.

Can what is playing you make it to level 2? (456).

At the heart of this, we find that technology has developed an increased indifference towards humanity, to the point in which it is largely plausible that the machinic-technosphere has affected nature itself as to give rise to a new mode of intelligence that out-performs humanity.

Predominantly, those who read the technoscape and the way it has fundamentally altered humanity and nature have done so with despair and dismay. More often than not, such a reading is accompanied, if not inherently interwoven, with a reactionary humanist moralism. “‘CABLE NATURE,’ advertises in a dense aphoristic manner of the underlying

promise of postmodern culture,” Michael Valdez Moses claims: “Nature is on tap, on cable, readily available to any American viewer who possesses access to subscriber television” (Moses 1991, 64). Moses’s concern with the postmodern condition is that “man [now] assumes sovereignty over a reality that was once understood to transcend man himself. [...] [N]ature is ‘revealed’ to be at man’s disposal, and in so doing [nature] is transformed into a *thing* which man chooses to consume at his convenience” (65). There is no doubt that "nature" has become a part of capitalism’s globalising process of commodification. The fundamental economic argument Land makes, after all, is that capitalism dissolves everything. Moses’s argument is, first and foremost, an argument of reactionary moralism, indicated by his use of the concepts purity and authenticity, which Moses borrows from the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Moses assumes that technics and machinics are opposed to nature, that instrumentality and gadgetry are the mediating material with which man appropriates, objectifies, and commodifies nature. Land summarises Moses’s position: “[i]f machinery is conceived transcendently as instrumental technology it is essentially determined in opposition to social relations” (Land 2012, 294). Moses's study arrives at this precise conclusion. According to Moses, techno-machinic cybernetics always creates a space between Man and nature, separating the human from its natural environment.

In opposition to Moses, Land argues that “if [machinery] is integrated immanently as cybernetic technics it redesigns all oppositionality as non-linear flow” (294). In other word, Moses’s position relies on the assumption that there is a dialectical relationship between man and technology, technology and nature, and man and nature. Land reminds us:

Nature is not the primitive or the simple, and certainly not the rustic, the organic, or the innocent. It is the space of concurrence, or unplanned synthesis, which is thus contrasted to the industrial sphere of telic predestination [...]. America is no more ecological than it is socialist: no more protective of an organic nature than an organic society. [...] Capital is not overdeveloped nature but undeveloped

schizophrenia, which is why nature is contrasted to industrial organization, and not to the escalation of cybertechnics, or anorganic convergence (314)

Land argues that “[t]here is no dialectic between social and technical relations, but only a machinism that dissolves society into the machines whilst deterritorializing the machines across the ruins of society” (295-95). In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, paraphrasing Marx and Engels, “[t]here is no such thing as either man or nature [but] simply the production of production itself” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 2). The dialectical tradition becomes increasingly obsolete:

Traditional schemas which oppose technics to nature, to literate culture, or to social relations, are all dominated by the coming *techno sapiens*. Thus one sees the decaying Hegelian socialist heritage clinging with increasing desperation to the theological sentimentalities of praxis, reification, alienation, ethics, autonomy, and other such mythemes of human creative sovereignty (294).

In a strikingly similar vein to Land, Donna Haraway argues in her infamous *Cyborg Manifesto*, that “[b]y the late twentieth century, [...] we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism [...]. The cyborg is our ontology [...] a condensed image of both imagination and material reality” (Haraway 1991, 150). Here, the acceleration of humanity’s becoming obsolete qua capitalism is emphasised, exemplified in the deterioration of tradition transcendent conception. “The capitalized terminus of anthropoid civilization (‘axiomatics’),” Land argues, “will come to be seen as the primitive trigger for a transglobal post-biological machinism, from a future that shall have still scarcely begun to explore the immensities of the cybercosm. Overman as cyborg, or disorganization upon the matrix” (297). The last half of the last sentence aptly identifies the economic trend I have been mapping: capitalism, above all, dissolves form and structure, breaking down all socio-cultural bonds, and melts the Human "body" into an immanent plane.

Those who advocate and hold fast to the traditional conception of the human, such as Moses, are, in Land’s eyes, examples of an active suppression of intensive matter. Above all,

a phobia and resistance of life's migration into capitalism's technomatrix. Though such a position may offer some sense of importance and security, from an indifferent materialist reading, it is futile because "[i]t ceases to be a matter of how we think about technics if only because technics is increasingly thinking about itself" (Land 2012, 293). It may appear that our discussion is starting to veer into the realm of science fiction, but this is to be expected, as "DeLillo manipulates the genre of social realism in order to reveal the cyborgism of everyday life," justifying the claim that *White Noise* offers a literary example of Haraway's notion that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (Laist, 4: Haraway, 149). More overtly, Haraway argues that "[l]ate twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, [...] [all] distinctions that used to [be] appl[ie]d to organisms and machines" (152). In the contemporary world, as DeLillo's novel exemplifies, "machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (152). "It still may be a few decades before artificial intelligences surpass the horizon of biological ones," Land admits, "but it is utterly superstitious to imagine that the human dominion of terrestrial culture is still marked out in centuries, let alone in some metaphysical perpetuity" (293). As we come to find in *White Noise*, and as Land has so eloquently stated:

The high road to thinking no longer passes through a deepening of human cognition, but rather through a becoming inhuman of cognition, a migration of cognition out into the emerging planetary technoscience reservoir, into 'dehumanized landscapes [...] emptied spaces' where human culture will be dissolved. Just as the capitalist urbanization of labour abstracted it in a parallel escalation with technical machines, so will intelligence be transplanted into the purring data zones of new software worlds in order to be abstracted from and increasingly obsolescent anthropoid particularity, and thus to venture beyond modernity. Human brains are to thinking what mediaeval villages were to engineering: antechambers to experimentation, cramped and parochial places to be (293).

White Noise demonstrates that postmodernity's anthropoid inhabitants are being continually outmoded at an accelerating speed. Land explains this trend through a study of

cybernetics, specifically identifying capitalism's trends as correlating to the phenomena of positive feedback. Positive feedback is “self-designing,” “escalative,” “runaway” and “exploratory mutation” (Land 2012, 297-98). Positive feedback is, therefore, positioned in opposition to Tom LeClair’s “systems theory” reading of *White Noise*. Via systems theory, LeClair aims to stabilise DeLillo’s work within a homogeneous system sustained through negative feedback. LeClair writes that systems theory is “a contemporary scientific paradigm that concentrates on the reciprocal – looping – communications of ecological systems” (LeClair 1987, xi). In contrast, Land identifies that capitalism operates via escalation and the destabilization of homeostatic-homogeneous form. In summary, LeClair's negative feedback is the cybernetic source that preserves loops, or, forms, of communication, while Land’s positive feedback is the source of systematic dissolution and destabilisation. Land argues that positive feedback is a more accurate model of understanding capitalism, pointing to the way that capital’s axiomatic marketization continually decodes and recodes in the process of commoditization, a process which by definition destabilises form and structure, rather than preserving it. Due to this, and as I argue DeLillo’s novel exemplifies, humanity's position within the system of capitalism becomes increasingly obsolete, as science and technology meld into ever escalating modes of intelligence.

At a bank, Jack notes:

I inserted my card, entered my secret code, tapped out my request. The figure on the screen roughly corresponded to my independent estimate, feebly arrived at after long searches through my documents, tormented arithmetic. Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hard-ware, the mainframe sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. 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 (46).

Jack's inclusion of "at least for now" implicates the looming fear that the accordance between the invisible, transcendently complex system, and human society, is only a matter of time, with the prospect of humanity being phased-out becoming ever more plausible, if not inevitable. Indeed, this exact process was a key symptom observed by Lyotard in his study of postmodernity:

it is common knowledge that the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available and exploited [...] The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language (Lyotard 1997, 4).

The postmodern condition which displaces the human, perpetually reskilling machinery, and migrating intelligence into the cyberspace of the market, leaves one questioning what is to be made of the human. *White Noise* demonstrates how the postmodern socius has created a world in which humanity appears to have reached a limitation in its productive abilities of cognition and form. Cantor concludes that this abandonment of human significance leads directly to an increased investment in fascist and totalitarian politics, in an attempt to re-establish existential and spiritual value. According to Cantor, DeLillo's novel illustrates that it is only in the idolisation of figures like Hitler that can reunite a community. Obviously, Cantor's position holds immediate value, insofar as the novel's protagonist is the inventor of Hitler Studies, with Hitler as a recurring figure throughout the novel. Cantor argues that "the spiritual void that made Hitler's rise to power possible with us" has become "exacerbated by the forces at work in postmodern culture" (49). Simply, Cantor's argument is that postmodernity is the age of disbelief in which "Americans are no longer united by a common religion (...) or even by political forces": the social body is fixed to the slippery-

slope of nihilism that leaves the subject alienated from authentic meaning and value, and amplifying the appeal to totalitarian and fascist ideology (49). When Cantor's argument is read in light of Land's work, however, one begins to see that the opposite is in fact the case. Cantor's claim that the lack of moral codes and existential values amplifies investment in fascism, in actuality, aligns itself far more to the side of establishing socio-political fascist tendencies, in contrast to the historical-material deterioration of such codes. From Land's perspective, "[t]rying not to be a Nazi approximates one to Nazism far more radically than any irresponsible impatience in destratification" (Land 2012, 285). In other words, Nazism, or fascism in general, is essentially defined by its tendency to create homogeneous, rigid structures, and not a tendency that accelerates the disintegration of code, form, and structure:

Nazism might even be characterized as the pure politics of effort [...]. Nothing could be more politically disastrous than the launching of a moral case against Nazism: Nazism is morality itself, heir to Europe's respectable history: that of witch-burnings, inquisitions, and pogroms (285).

Indeed, in response to Cantor's argument, one might highlight the fact that there is virtually no reference to politics in the novel, whether fascist-inclined or otherwise. A stronger point to be made, as Land has argued, capitalism is in fact an anti-political process, defined by its depoliticisation: politics being substituted for markets. In this sense, *White Noise* more accurately demonstrates how the contemporary postmodern socius is in fact the dissolution of the social body, by any traditional standards. To justify this distinction, Land appeals to Deleuze and Guattari's fascist/revolutionary paradigm:

The *Anti-Oedipus* interpretation of fascism is no doubt crude, but it is also of enormous power. The revolutionary/fascist disjunction is used to discriminate between the broad tendencies of deterritorialization and reterritorialization; between the dissolution and reinstitution of social order. [...] The revolutionary task is not to establish a bigger, more authentic, more ascetic exteriority, but to unpack the neurotic refusal mechanisms that separate capital from its own madness, luring into the liquidation of its own fall-back positions, and coaxing it into investing at the deterritorialized fringe that would otherwise fall subject to fascist persecution (277-78).

So, in contrast to Cantor's argument that the dissolution of socio-cultural and moral values inherently leads towards fascism, thereby implicating the need to reinstate and restore socio-cultural and moral codes, we find that the fundamental economic tendency of capitalism, that process which is dissolving said values, is in fact the driving force in contradistinction to the fascist model-process. From such a distinction, one can identify that positive feedback is the feedback process that defines the revolutionary model, while negative feedback is the feedback process that defines the fascist model. The death drive is aligned with capitalism, not because seeks genocidal death as found in the Nazi's holocaust model, but because capitalism's fundamental economy dissolves codes, territories and structures, characterised above all as the unbinding of all form: "DNA, species, civilisation, galaxies: all temporary obstacles are dispensable coagulants inhibiting death's unwinding. The ramifications of drive are to be allowed to unfold irrespective of their consequences for the organisms through which it courses" (31). Fascism is nothing without the active, forceful instantiation of structure and code. Land is not arguing that the threat of Nazism and Fascism is solely absent from the contemporary world. Rather, he is simply pointing out that the general trend of capitalism is the depoliticization of the socius, that capitalism dissolves politics, replacing it for the market economy. Further, from Land's perspective, Nazism is not trying to destroy the social, but is rather a reaction to social degeneration, thereby positioning Nazism alongside the pure effort of morality and politics, which he draws the connection to witch-hunts, inquisitions, namely, the attempt to purify and homogenize the social body.

The way DeLillo concludes the novel locks onto the same conclusion as Land's: humanity is reaching its own event-horizon. The return to the sunset in the final chapter is not merely analogical. As Laist argued, the "sunset signifies the American future rather than the human past" (95). The sunset, infected by the toxins from the Airborne Toxic Event, literally presents death in the face of the community. The sunset definitively exemplifies the

displacement of the social body through the extension of technological development. Not only are members of the community directly infected with the toxins, but also, the sunset at the end of the novel demonstrates a literal deterioration of the environment which the Human inhabits. Jack emphasises this conclusion when he returns to the supermarket in the novel's final scene. "There is agitation and panic in the aisles," Jack notes, "dismay in the faces of older shoppers" (325). The customers are displaced into a "fragmented trance, stop and go, clusters of well-dressed figures frozen in the aisles, trying to figure out the pattern, discern the underlying logic" (326). As I have already discussed, the cause of this commotion is the rearrangement of the supermarket aisles, owing to the introduction of the now-common barcode: a digital system with "holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly" (326). DeLillo ends the novel with the literal displacement of the human, overtly highlighting the notion that humans are being out-moded by technology. It is no coincidence, then, that Jack describes this technological system as operating via "the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living" (326). The novel's technology-as-death is given the novel's final words; human history is being drawn into its final-threshold. Jack finally comes to a conclusion strikingly similar to Land's, namely, that "resistance" towards the determinism that is programming human history is futile: "this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line" (326). Murray's proposition that "[w]e don't have to cling to life artificially, or to death for that matter. We simply have to walk towards the sliding doors" can be construed as to echo the mantra of Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari, and Land: accelerate the process (38). If, as Jack asserts, "[a]ll plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot," DeLillo's novel becomes a

literary exemplification of capitalism's ability to accelerate the thanatological economy of "plots" (26).

Reading *White Noise* in conjunction with Land's radical celebration of capitalism enables an understanding of the essential economy of postmodern capitalism. Such a reading aims to identify, amplify, and accelerate, the tendencies of capitalism that disorganise and deteriorate the social body. If, as Lentricchia argued, *White Noise* is compelled by a "desire to move readers to the view that the shape and fate of their culture dictates the shape of the self," one may understand that, following Land, capitalist postmodernity is determinedly making humanity obsolete (Lentricchia 1991, 1). Marion Muirhead drew this precise Landian conclusion, when she argued that "technology [is] responsible for the acceleration of time and the omnipotence of death" in *White Noise* (Muirhead 2001, 413). DeLillo's novel, therefore, may be said to give literary expression to the contemporary displacement of humanity by capitalism, mapping the emergence of new forms of intelligence that increasingly make the anthropoid model of Being and intelligence obsolete.

Conclusion

Imminent/Immanent Horizons

Throughout my study of *White Noise*, we have found that the postmodern delegates the exhaustion of the human in a spiritual-existential, socio-political, physical, and geological, sense. In *White Noise*, the definitive “threat of death and the anxiety of guilt have become immanent presences in the earth and sky,” indicates the imminent, and immanent horizon of human history (Laist 20120, 90). Not only does DeLillo’s novel signify the displacement of the human by technological developments, but it also signifies the imminent exhaustion of humanity in a limited terrestrial space, running up against a compatible threshold of the environment. Furthermore, *White Noise* attentively exemplifies the ambiguous space into which the role and status of Human on Earth has be (dis)placed.

In my first chapter, I examined DeLillo’s novel in relation to the context of the postmodern. I did this by positioning DeLillo’s novel within its historical, cultural, political, and aesthetical context. To gain an elaborate understanding of the postmodern context, I read *White Noise*, and its reception, in conjunction with key postmodern theorists, namely, Baudrillard, Jameson, and Lyotard. What I found, in light of these theorists, was that *White Noise* exemplifies the way in which the postmodern embodies the exhaustion of Modernity and the Enlightenment Project. Indeed, the postmodern socius is what remains when the economic processes of Modernity and the Enlightenment Project have exhausted the abilities of human productivity. DeLillo exemplified this through the continual displacement of his characters by the technological devices which run the postmodern world. Throughout the novel, we consistently find characters who struggle to establish themselves as legitimate subjects, while the contemporary world accelerates beyond their subjective capabilities. Each character is displaced into a space of futile ambiguity, as the tension between the virtues

which define the human subject are confronted by the inhuman auto-production of the material (techno-scientific) world. Conclusively, in the context of the postmodern, human subjects are awash in confusion, incapable of comprehending the economic processes of their world, unable to determine fact from fiction, or reality from the artificial and simulated.

My second chapter examined *White Noise* through a dialogue with the concept of the sublime developed by Kant, and as elaborated upon by postmodern theorists, Lyotard, Deleuze, Jameson, and Land. This reading showed how the historical and cultural developments of postmodernity have enabled, if not accelerated and intensified, the manifestation of the sublime. The postmodern conception of the sublime identifies the specific ontological and epistemological economy that operates at the heart of DeLillo's novel, which I highlighted in the first chapter, namely, an economy of displacement. Firstly, we found that the postmodern technoscape offers an apt environment for a sublime experience to manifest. This was primarily examined in the way that technology has developed to a point in which even the most commonly used objects in the characters' everyday lives exceed their comprehensive capabilities. Due to this, technology obtains an aura which transcends the subject's perception, giving the illusion of mystical, quasi-religious properties. Underlying this sublimity is, however, a violent process which fundamentally accelerates the dissolution of limits and boundaries. Moreover, the economy of the sublime in *White Noise*, as genealogical grounded in the work of Kant, showed no signs of having a definite exterior limit, or, end. Due to this, I argued that the postmodern sublime follows an *ad infinum* economy of displacement. Land's study of Kant identified that the sublime fundamentally functions on the basis of there being no definitive limit, with the process inevitably leading towards the dissolution and destruction of form. At the end of the novel, Jack's narration embraced Murray's quasi-theological view of the postmodern world, metaphorically and literally claiming that the supermarket checkouts embody society's

progression deathwards, that is, to the elimination (perpetual dissolution) of structure and form.

Finally, reading *White Noise* in conjunction with Land's radical "celebration" of capitalism enabled me to develop a new understanding of the fundamental economy of DeLillo's novel. Such a reading identified capitalism's tendency to disorganise and deteriorate the social body, which Land's work aimed to amplify and accelerate. Following Land, I showed how capitalist postmodernity effectively dissolves the status of humanity into obsolescence. This is to say, the economic processes of capitalism displaced humanity from its traditional status, digesting social structures into the market. Contrary to the general reception of *White Noise* which urged to regain and instantiate morality, politics, and spiritual-existential value, Land's work enabled me to argue that capitalism is in fact a "revolutionary" force, operating via an economy which releases desire-life from the crippling restrictions imposed under the guise of what Land calls the Human Security System. So, just as in my study of the context of the postmodern, and the manifestation of the postmodern sublime, *White Noise* give literary expression to an economy of displacement, located in the material process of capitalism. By comparatively analysing *White Noise* and Land's anti-humanist Accelerationism, I demonstrated how *White Noise* uncovers and gives literary expression to the fundamental economic process at the heart of capitalism, symptomized qua the deterioration of the Human.

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