



## A Postmodern Study of Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

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**Abstract:** In this study, I will analyse how DeLillo's book *White Noise* predicts the influence of Cyber culture on today's youth. The story explores how the media and pop culture have become entangled. The book explores several facets of consumer society. True knowledge isn't something any of the characters want to get passionate about. They no longer value it enough to make the effort to learn the truth. People are seen as frail entities. The digitally generated world matters greatly in the lives of Gladney, Babette, Bee, and the other children of Murray. The protagonist has fantasies as a means of breaking out of his mundane professional routines, such as using digital means of communication and encoding business codes. The researcher has utilized library and online resources to do this qualitative study. Fiction has been analyzed and interpreted using postmodern theory and the lens of cyberculture.

**Keywords:** Cyber culture, postmodernism, consumerism, capitalism, and young people are all significant concepts.

### 1. Introduction:

This study analyses how Cyber Culture drastically altered Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. The narrator of the novel relies on supermarket fare for sustenance. The narrator is obsessed with the subject of death and dying. In the quest for the newest and most desirable goods, he competes with others. He is a frequent patron of the local theatre, cinema, and music venues. He, his wife, and their three children are all TV addicts. Babette, Murray, and Gladney are terrified of dying because of the capitalist way of life. There is a dispute between Babette and Gladney about who will die first. Death is both feared and desired by them. The protagonist is recklessly devoted to the most cutting-edge trends in consumerism, pop culture, and cybernetics, putting his life in danger. The couple, Gladney and Babette, were morbidly obsessed.

Fear of dying stems from their want to live a glamorous and meaningful life at the expense of accepted conventions. Their ignorance and reliance on modern conveniences make them particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of hazardous chemical leaks. In *White Noise*, Don DeLillo questions the appeal of internet culture. Sadistic preoccupation with death plagues characters like Gladney, Babette and Murray. Their zeal for consumption and the numbing influence of internet culture eventually lead to their downfall. Don DeLillo's significant novels were all published in the 2000s. His earlier works deal mostly with the psychological toll that living in a postmodern culture has on its inhabitants. He takes the postmodern style to a whole new level of artistic brilliance. After then, he focuses mostly on current fashion and trend writing. He can depict the spirit and changing fashion of modern culture as it is shaped by Postmodernism. It has been used to describe a wide range of ideas and movements, from the construction of society to an unhealthy preoccupation with death; in order to understand how different social groups negotiate power, knowledge and speech. It combines elements from a number of different schools of thought that provide problems for conventional wisdom about how people should act in a society. Postmodernism is both lauded and mocked in academic writing and popular culture. It has reached the status of a cultural cliché after years of overuse and continued criticism. The terrible results of postmodernism are beyond comprehension. A fundamental tenet of postmodern thought is that reality and its representation are indistinguishable. The depicted content is not drastically different from reality. Postmodernist adherents often see the world through rose-colored glasses. When it comes to the realm of screens, whether they be



analogue or digital, or the world of representation, the contemporary era has the upper hand. People have such a strong bias toward accepting the veracity of manufactured reality that they are often oblivious to the existence of the genuine or the transcendently vital essence. In order to analyse *White Noise* from the postmodern perspective of Cyber Culture, the study has constructed a delimitation in the form of the text itself. This study relies heavily on secondary materials obtained via library research.

## **2. The Literature Survey:**

Since its publication, the novel has been the subject of extensive analysis from a wide variety of critics and reviews. There are further indicators of shallow tendencies of the society. The fate of Gladney is discussed by Weekes (1971). He singles out Gladney as the most nuanced, saying, "Our shopping may be briefly confused, but it continues; we make our way up and down the aisles and toward the climactic registers" (16). The book *White Noise* is most exciting because of its central premise, which is a dispute between death and mortality. Even though people in modern society have more options than ever before, they are nonetheless plagued by their guilt and subliminal fears. The most perplexing aspect of this work of fiction is the prevalence of unneeded anxiety. According to Rettberg (2006), Babette has an unhealthy preoccupation with death. The satisfaction of such persistent dread comes at the price of every tenet of fairness and generosity. Her exposure to television culture and its sedating influence on her frame of mind are blamed for her unanticipated difficulties. "DeLillo's protagonists confront anxiety of the most modern types," writes Rettberg. "Don DeLillo is a postmodernist author because he is neither a realist nor a naturalist in the traditional sense" (Rettberg, 2006, p.10). DeLillo is happy to stick to tried-and-true methods and genres, despite his inventive nature. However, DeLillo's writing is unmistakably postmodern. It tells the tales of people navigating a post-modern, post-industrial, television-dominated society. Osteen (1984) examines the growing preoccupation of the protagonists in *White Noise*. As the characters' fixation deepens, so does the likelihood that they will perform criminal acts. Osteen argues that *White Noise* unites many of DeLillo's preoccupations in a single work, including the ill effects of capitalism, the influence of electronic images, the tyrannical authority and harmful by products of science, the unholy alliance of consumerism and violence, and the search for sacredness in a secularized world. His mastery of language is on full show, as is his ability to replicate the slang of many cultures with the ease of a ventriloquist. In it, he intensifies the sounds we encounter daily and lets us hear how they influence our own voices and convictions once again. (Osteen, 1984, p.5) According to Seidler (2004), *White Noise* illustrates how intellectual pursuits develop masculinity. The narrative also faithfully reproduces the technological wonder of the visual medium. The presentation of authority is calculated and calculatedly manipulated. DeLillo compels readers to draw an obvious conclusion. *White Noise* retains most of DeLillo's fictional themes and theoretical nodal points, such as his analysis of the postmodern society or his interest in the power of images, in language, and in cultural history, but does not aim to tell a story that is centred on the spectacle of terrorism and terror, as Bizzini (2002) puts it. Third-person narration is used at the beginning of the text. The book dramatizes the intertwined issues of a sense of disorder and a lack of comprehension.

## **3. Conceptual Structure:**

In this study, postmodernism serves as the central topic. Several postmodern ideas and insights may be used to make sense of everyday experiences, literary works, and societal contexts. Postmodernism first freed people from the chains of absolute orthodoxy, the pretentious universality of traditional ideas. The postmodern era encouraged a more diverse spectrum of worldviews.

Postmodernist proponent Baudrillard (2005) argues that this movement prepares the ground for simulation. To imply goes beyond feigning possession of what one does not own. One of the major features of postmodern simulation is the use of pretence. However, simulation entails more than just acting as if one has something one does not. Changing conceptions of knowledge provide a gateway to postmodernism's central ideas. In the aftermath of the postmodern situation, knowledge has turned into a commodity. Digitalized or computerized knowledge has replaced traditional manufacturing of goods.

The scenario in which information replaces the creation of tangible things as the primary preoccupation in the most sophisticated economies, as articulated by Bertens (2003). The nature of our knowledge will change as a result of our increasingly computerized culture. Lyotard predicts that the path of future study will be determined by the potential of its final discoveries being translatable into computer language, but he does not specify how precisely human understanding would shift. Here he discusses his firm belief that metanarratives are necessary (Bertens, 2003, p.119). Many linguistic tricks took their place. Models of discourse and different types of speech (denotative, performative, and prescriptive) are all fair game for these linguistic shenanigans. Elements such as deontic assertions dictating what should be done in regard to kinship, the difference between the sexes, children, neighbours, and foreigners may be included in



narrative language games. According to Lyotard, in the rising post-modern society, science and technology have become the weapon of exploitation and deceit.

Lyotard (2007) offers a somewhat different definition of postmodernism. His postmodernism is quite different from that of other theorists. Postmodernism, according to Lyotard, is the breakdown of the grand narrative. It seemed like dominance might be achieved via the use of science as a big narrative. Lyotard views in his seminal work *The Postmodern Condition* advances in science and technology as a sort of dominance. Science and technology continue to improve, and with it, the cheating and exploitation of consumers.

#### **4. Analysing the Text:**

The tale follows Murray Jay Siskind, a visiting professor who finds himself in a difficult situation. He's conflicted because he has to choose between giving in to the allure of cyber culture and pursuing and protecting his dignity. He values maintaining his honour and credibility in the workplace. But he is affected by the cult of developing an unhealthy obsession with modern consumerism, social media, and fashion. Murray is working on his intellectual growth. He starts frequenting movie theatres and has an unhealthy obsession with music. Murray partakes in the musical garbage produced by the commercial, consumer-focused music business without question. It's not just one professor here; there are others who have never been beyond the pages of a cereal box. Murray exemplifies the dedication that instructors like him seem to have. Murray is a freshman at Hill College this year. He looks like he has a hunchback; he wears small, round spectacles; and he has an Amish beard. He's always one step ahead of the next cultural wave. He is relentless in his pursuit of cyber cultural conformity. Gladney, a fictional figure in the book, is praised by Murray for creating the unique field of Hitler Studies. According to Murray, Gladney is solely responsible for establishing this new division at Hill College. Gladney gave in to Murray's persistent prodding because he just had to satisfy his insatiable curiosity about the pictured barn. Gladney, the narrator, freely confesses that the uninterested Murray is the spark that ignites his enthusiasm for trendy online hangouts.

The attractiveness of artificial artefacts designed to approximate reality tempts him. They ignore the allure of naturally beautiful things and instead stand near a group of trees to see the photographers at work. Murray stays quiet for a very long time. He makes an attempt at equating digitally animated objects with objects of natural beauty. Gladney's enigmatic and exotic wife, Babette, is fascinated by the unknown. She relaxes on her bed and reads erotica classics. To the narrator's amazement, she is planning a ski excursion. Gladney's alarm may easily set her off. Why she acts the way she does is beyond his comprehension. She acts as though she is conversing with her dog and cat. She runs, she shovels snow, and she caulks the bathroom sink and bathtub, the narrator says. She enjoys reading erotica aloud to Wilder before bed and playing word games with him. Please advise. I swim lengths of the college pool while twisting and tying waste bags (13). Babette is able to communicate with animals, especially felines and canines. Babette has a morbid preoccupation. Whether or not death is imminently threatening in her life, the prospect of dying terrifies her. She unexpectedly brings up the topic of who will die first with her spouse. If she is anxious about dying, it is difficult to resolve and conclude matters. Babette's fascination with death stems from her exposure to violent and death-laden television shows and her ardent love of pornographic sites replete with sexual brutality. In addition, other causes are just as responsible for the development of Babette and her husband's fear psychology. They are living in a society where danger lurks around every corner. Babette continues, "Sometimes I think our love is inexperienced." A contemplation of mortality serves as a sobering reminder. It dispels our naiveté about the future. "Do simple things always fail, or is it an urban legend? Again, we saw the females circle back around" (13). Gladney explains that he and all of his kids like watching TV together. However, he is very aware of how the sedative effect of has a devastating impact on Babette. Television, Gladney writes,

That night, a Friday, we ordered Chinese food and watched television together, the six of us. Babette had made it a rule. She seemed to think that if kids watched television one night a week with parents or stepparents. The effect would be to de-glamorize the medium in their eyes (14).

Babette turned it into a clean, fun family activity. The Gladney kids are weird in their routines and preferences. The television holds a lot of their attention. The implications of their actions are lost on them. They can't be blamed for how they feel: nebulous and hollow. They like watching shows with plenty of blood and gore. The pleasure of the vehicle and the excitement it provides for escapism and wild, disorganized living that mocks the rigorous and controlled way of life is far more appealing to them. Murray, Gladney, Babette, and others are teased by the supermarket allure and temptations. The narrator admits that he has learned a lot from his trips to the store.

Supermarkets, large and clean and modern, are a revelation to me. I spent my life in small steamy delicatessens with slanted display cabinets full of trays that hold soft wet lumpy matter in pale colors. High enough cabinets so you had to stand on tiptoes to give your order (23).



Consumer crowds, fluctuating consumption patterns, and loud, disorderly shoppers who are easily thrilled by new products are inevitable aspects of modern life. Consumers are torn between the need to shop and renew their consuming habits and the rising dread of dying. Gladney and his wife Babette are archetypes in this sense. This is best described by the following excerpt:

In cities no one recognizes particular deaths, and this is an aspect of city life that the atmosphere. It's in all places and all places. Men scream as they expire, hoping to be heard and remembered if only for a moment. One's spirit may carry the sadness of having died in an apartment rather than a home for many reincarnations to come. There are bay windows and plants in a neighborhood. Dead people drive cars and have faces (23).

It combines an unhealthy preoccupation with food with a morbid dread of dying. Consumption is tied to our vitality and essential to our continued existence. All of the major characters in this book have easy access to a wide variety of alcoholic beverages and strong appetites. They have enough disposable income to afford the newest gadgets. They give you more of a chance to experience the cutting edge of style and culture. The subject of mortality, however, is not expected to arise in such a setting. Gladney and Babette's fear of dying has drastically reduced their strength, which runs counter to their expectations. Their lives are consumed by a relentless terror of annihilation, and nothing else matters to them. They hear the message of violence again and over again. They discuss the violent actions of disturbed and frantic young people. The kind of independence that teenagers have opens the door to the potential for violence. Young people nowadays are encouraged to accept life at face value by their exposure to media such as violent video games, computer simulations, and TV shows. Because of this, the likelihood of violence increases dramatically.

Death and crime are more likely to occur in a free society where consumerism and cybernetic activities are prevalent. This clip from *We Send Notes Sometimes* depicts this type of troublesome issue in cyber culture. The ability to withdraw money from a bank account electronically has greatly simplified our regular shopping, eating out, and other mercantile routines. Money is withdrawn through electronic methods like Mastercards, credit cards, and others so that people's lives may be vastly improved. There is a negative aspect to life as well as a positive one. Numerous criminals and hackers can crack the encrypted pins that use Mastercard. The PIN code might be hacked and used to steal money. The narrator continues by explaining how he comes to witness the heist of a bank deposit, which not only improves everyday living but also has serious consequences. He explains, "I went to the bank first thing in the morning. To see how much money I had in the bank, I used an ATM. I swiped my card, punched in my passcode, and typed in my request" (26). The number you see on your screen is comparable to an unbiased estimate in most cases. "Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me," the narrator continues. My life had been enriched by the system. I sensed its encouragement and validation. Murray, the narrator's buddy, is concerned about the influence of TV on his kids. He claims that his kids are smarter for not watching TV. Gladney's kids, in contrast to his own, are unable to function in a household without the television. Murray states, "The boy is growing up without television," to which I replied, "which may make him worth talking to, Murray, as a sort of wild child, a savage plucked from the bush, intelligent and literate but deprived of the deeper codes and messages that mark his species as unique" (28).

TV shows provide comfort and relief to Murray, who laments the all-pervasive nature of cyber culture while watching them. "It's entered the food chain. Maybe it's the gum I chew. Is that too farfetched? Maybe it's something else. What do you mean? You're taking something besides chewing gum. Where did you get that idea?" (29).

Babette has several difficulties and terrors as a direct consequence of chaos and deviance. Unbeknownst to him, Gladney begins to reflect on the tragically predictable deaths of young adults. He goes through a litany of fatalities. His next words are that Mr. Treadwell lost his sister. She went by Gladys as a first name. After spending four days and nights at the Mid-Village Mall with her brother while they were both bewildered and confused, the doctor ruled that she died of "lingering dread" (48). This suggests that unrestricted absorption in the practice of cyber culture has an unforeseen tragic outcome. Despite what most people would think, a cheap marketing word may become something very lovely. People are inclined to break down into a feeble mass when confronted with adverse realities. True information cannot be accessed. Dry data and uninteresting facts are constantly being disseminated.

## 5. Conclusion:

DeLillo's *White Noise* demonstrates how the overconsumption of cyber culture among people has negative effects on human dignity and creativity. Digital modes of communication, mimicked realities, and artificial forms of entertainment all have fatal consequences in this. DeLillo's *White Noise* exemplifies the unintended outcomes that might result from people's overexposure to cyber culture. It has had a devastating effect on people's psyches, turning them into helpless victims of technology.



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