การวิพากษ์ลัทธิบริโภคนิยมในยุคหลังสมัยใหม่ในนวนิยายของดอน เดลิลโล

นางสาว สมพฐู หวังทอง

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาอักษรศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ ภาควิชาภาษาอังกฤษ
คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
ปีการศึกษา 2552

A CRITIQUE OF CONSUMERISM IN THE POSTMODERN AGE IN DON DELILLO'S NOVELS

Miss Sompatu Vungthong

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in English
Department of English
Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University
Academic Year 2009

Thesis Title	A CRITIQUE OF CONSUMERISM IN THE POSTMODERN AGE IN DON DELILLO'S NOVELS
By	Miss Sompatu Vungthong
Field of Study	English
Thesis Advisor	Assistant Professor Darin Pradittatsanee, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

..... Dean of the Faculty of Arts
(Assistant Professor Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, Ph.D.)

THESIS COMMITTEE

..... Chairman
(Associate Professor Pachee Yuvajita, Ph.D.)

..... Thesis Advisor
(Assistant Professor Darin Pradittatsanee, Ph.D.)

..... Examiner
(Assistant Professor Simon J. P. Wright)

..... External Examiner
(Assistant Professor Chalermsri Chantasingh, Ph.D.)

สมพธู หวังทอง: การวิพากษ์ลัทธิบริโภคนิยมในยุคหลังสมัยใหม่ในนวนิยายของดอน เดลิลโล (A CRITIQUE OF CONSUMERISM IN THE POSTMODERN AGE IN DON DELILLO'S NOVELS) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: ผศ.ดร. ดารินทร์ ประดิษฐทัศนีย์, 120 หน้า

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ศึกษาประเด็นต่างๆของลัทธิบริโภคนิยมในยุคหลังสมัยใหม่ ซึ่งถูกนำเสนอไว้ในนวนิยายทั้งสามเรื่องของ ดอน เดลิลโล ได้แก่ *Americana* (1971), *White Noise* (1986), และ *Underworld* (1997) งานชิ้นนี้ได้นำทฤษฎีลัทธิหลังสมัยใหม่มาใช้เพื่อศึกษากระบวนการทั้งหมดของลัทธิโภคนิยม โดยมุ่งเน้นที่บทบาทของสื่อ บทบาทของลัทธิบริโภคนิยมต่อผู้บริโภค และภัยคุกคามของลัทธิบริโภคนิยมต่อมนุษย์และสิ่งแวดล้อม วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้นำเสนอว่า ดอน เดลิลโลวิพากษ์ลัทธิบริโภคนิยมในยุคหลังสมัยใหม่ โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่า สื่อกระตุ้นผู้บริโภคให้บริโภคสินค้าที่มีรูปลักษณ์น่าดึงดูด แต่ผู้บริโภคกลับต้องเผชิญกับความรู้สึกว่างเปล่า เดลิลโลยังชี้ให้เห็นอีกว่า ผลิตภัณฑ์ที่เราบริโภคท้ายที่สุดจะกลายเป็นขยะซึ่งเป็นภัยต่อทั้งผู้คนและสิ่งแวดล้อม วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ศึกษาวิธีที่ลัทธิบริโภคนิยมใช้สื่อในรูปแบบของภาพยนต์และโฆษณาเพื่อที่จะดึงดูดผู้คน ใน *Americana* วิเคราะห์ผลกระทบของลัทธิบริโภคนิยม ต่อผู้คนใน *White Noise* และศึกษาประเด็นของขยะซึ่งเป็นผลลัพธ์ที่หลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ ในสังคมบริโภคนิยม ใน *Underworld*

ภาควิชา ภาษาอังกฤษ ลายมือชื่อนิสิต สมพธู หวังทอง

สาขาวิชา ภาษาอังกฤษ ลายมือชื่ออ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก Darin Pradittasan

ปีการศึกษา 2552

4980235222 : MAJOR ENGLISH

KEYWORDS: DON DELILLO / AMERICAN LITERATURE/ CONSUMERISM / POSTMODERN/

SOMPATU VUNGTHONG: A CRITIQUE OF CONSUMERISM IN THE POSTMODERN AGE IN DON DELILLO'S NOVELS. THESIS ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. DARIN PRADITTATSANEE, Ph.D, 120 pp.

My thesis aims to study various aspects of consumerism in the postmodern age which are presented in Don DeLillo's three novels: *Americana* (1971), *White Noise* (1986), and *Underworld* (1997). Employing postmodern theories, it will examine the whole process of consumerism, focusing on the role of the media, the influence of consumerism on consumers and the threat of consumerism to humans and the environment. This thesis will argue that Don DeLillo criticizes consumerism in the postmodern age by demonstrating that through the media consumers are constantly stimulated to revel in the consumption of innumerable products with desirable images but are actually afflicted by the feelings of emptiness and uncertainty. He also points out that the products we consume will finally become garbage that can harm humans and the environment. This thesis will analyze ways in which consumerism uses the media in the form of films and advertisements to influence people in *Americana*, discuss the effects of consumerism on people and the environment in *White Noise* and examine the theme of waste as an inevitable product of consumerism in *Underworld*.

Department : English Student's Signature สมพตุ หวังทอง

Field of Study : English Advisor's Signature Darin Pradittatsanee

Academic Year : 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express profound gratitude to my advisor, Assistant Professor Darin Pradittatsanee, Ph.D., for her invaluable support, encouragement, supervision and useful suggestions throughout the writing of this thesis. Her support and continuous guidance enabled me to complete my work successfully. I am also very grateful to Associate Professor Pachee Yuvajita, Ph.D., Assistant Professor Simon J.P. Wright, and Assistant Professor Chalermsri Chantasingh, Ph.D. for being on the thesis committee and for their insightful comments. I am also indebted to the Graduate School, for selecting me as a recipient of the Chulalongkorn University Graduate Scholarship to Commemorate the 72nd Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. This enabled me to have the opportunity to pursue my graduate studies.

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Consumerism can be seen as the practice of equating personal happiness with the purchasing of material possessions and consumption. This act of consuming materials in excess of basic needs is not a new practice by any means; consumerism has occurred since the first civilizations. However, consumerism in the twentieth century has become increasingly widespread, especially in recent decades. Generally, consumerism is used to describe the tendency of people to identify with products, commercial brand names, or services that they consume. Any culture dominated by consumerism can be referred to as a consumer culture. There are both critics who support consumption and those who are against it.

Mary Douglas, Baron Isherwood, and Daniel Miller represent critics holding a positive attitude towards consumerism. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood in their book *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (1996) argue for consumerism stating that, from an anthropological and economic point of view, people use goods as a useful means of communicating with each other. Mary Douglas, in particular, maintains that a consumer is a rational actor using goods as markers of rational categories and making visible statements about the values to which the consumer subscribes. She also asserts that commodities constitute lifestyle choices and the identity of a consumer. Extending her argument in "In Defence of Shopping" in *The Shopping Experience* (1997), Douglas argues that consumers are not passive characters manipulated by those who produce and sell products and maintains that retailers alter themselves to take account of consumer preferences, rather than the other way round. Daniel Miller in *A Theory of Shopping* (1997)

similarly offers a positive view towards consumerism, further suggesting that the act of consumption expresses more than just identity or position. His ethnography of a shopping street in north London describes ways in which "shoppers develop and imagine those social relationships which they most care about through the medium of selecting goods" (5). He argues that commodities are used to constitute the complexity of contemporary social relations. Miller also rejects the idea of passive consumers and maintains in "Consumption and its Consequences" in *Consumption and Everyday life* (1997) that the notion that consumers are duped by manufacturers who construct the demand is false. Miller asserts that it is actually the consumers who control the process.

Whereas some critics hold a positive attitude towards consumerism, other critics exemplified by Thorstein Veblen, Vance Packard, Richard Hoggart, and Paul L. Wachtel examine the negative aspects of consumerism. Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1994) criticizes consumer culture by arguing that the emerging ruling class or the "leisure class" displays a higher status than others through conspicuous consumption or the wasting of money and resources. Vance Packard, in *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), examines the use of consumer motivational research and other psychological techniques, including depth psychology and subliminal tactics, and he argues that advertisers manipulate consumers' expectations and induce their desire for products, particularly in the American postwar era. In this way, people become the passive victims of advertisers. Packard also maintains that consumption serves the interest of manufacturers whose goals are aimed at seeking additional profits. Similarly pointing out the ills of the media in the consumerist world, Richard Hoggart believes that marketing and advertising strategies constantly legitimize people's false need to consume more. Hoggart in *The Uses of*

Literacy (1998) further argues that commodities cannot fulfill people's needs because they lack authenticity. This belief argues that people are manipulated to buy products without ever actually having the chance to gain a sense of fulfillment through those products. In addition to the media aspects, Paul L. Wachtel in "Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life" (1985) discusses the psychological and environmental effects of consumerism. He strongly maintains that the consumerist way of life is psychologically and ecologically flawed. Specifically, he claims that America's national obsession with growth has caused individuals to be unhappy because of the spiritual limitations of material accumulation and the use of competition as the driving force behind obsessive growth and the accumulation of goods. Moreover, he argues that a consumerist life further harms our environment.

Interestingly, many critics also associate the term "postmodern" with the term "consumerism". David Lyon in "Consumerism: The Shape(lessness) of Things to Come?" in *Postmodernity* (1999) argues that "[t]he postmodern is rightly associated with a society where consumer lifestyles and mass consumption dominate the waking lives of its members" (57-8). In this kind of society, consumption, and its focus on the production of needs and wants, is central. Everything is commodified and TV advertising reinforces this process. Mike Featherstone in his book *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991) also points out some parallels between consumerism and postmodernism through the discussion of some postmodern critics' ideas.

Even amongst the postmodern critics themselves, many different views on the postmodern condition are represented. Frederic Jameson sees the postmodern condition as being capable of providing a euphoric experience for consumers while Jean Baudrillard portrays the postmodern condition as powerful and inescapable. According to Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

(1992), postmodernism is the cultural logic of the third stage of capitalism. He sees postmodern culture as the culture of the consumer society and argues that capitalist thinking has dominated all other forms of thought. Jameson pinpoints a number of symptoms that he associates with the postmodern condition. For example, the schizophrenic structure will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships (6). As Jameson explains, the schizophrenic suffers from a "breakdown of the signifying chain" in his/her use of language until the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time (26 -7). For another characteristic, there is a breakdown of the distinction between high and low culture. Moreover, there is "a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (6). This depthlessness manifests itself through the postmodern rejection of the belief that one can fully move beyond the surface appearances of ideology or "false consciousness" to some deeper truth; we are left instead with "multiple surfaces" (12). In addition, Jameson aligns the depthlessness with schizophrenia and a culture of drug addiction which can give, as described in Jameson's words, "euphoria, a high, and intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (28-9) to consumers.

Furthermore, Jean Baudrillard depicts a postmodern hyperreal world as inescapable. In the hyperreal condition, reality has been replaced by simulacra, which can be defined as the copy without the original. Images in the media can be seen as one form of simulacra. Baudrillard maintains that postmodern culture is constituted through a continual flow of images in the media and argues that a culture of consumption has dominated our ways of thinking so much that all reality is filtered through the media channels such as advertising. As Baudrillard writes in *The*

Consumer Society: Myths and Structures (1998), "Our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea. Advertising is the triumphal paean to that idea" (193). Consumption in the postmodern world is involved with the active manipulation of signs in the media. This becomes central to late capitalist society where sign value is attached to a commodity. Signs are able to float freely from objects and are available for use in a multiplicity of associative relations. Therefore, there is an endless reduplication of signs, images, and simulations through the media (Featherstone 15). Consequently, people are trapped in the hyperreal world of endless signs with no fixed meaning.

As the twentieth century marks a period of consumerism, many American writers are interested in examining this theme in their work. In "Consumerism and the 'Great American Novel'" (2007), Holly Hassel examines how American writers from the early to the late twentieth century address the issue of consumerism. Hassel argues that modern American authors criticize consumerism and portray it as destructive, alienating, and depressing. For example, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) reflects the aforementioned new concern regarding the negative effect of consumerism. Portraying the life of a beautiful but poor woman, *The House of Mirth* is both a social critique of the shallowness of the New York social group and a commentary on the damaging power of wealth (qtd. in Hassel). Published 20 years later in the age of excess of the 1920s, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) offers a critique of the excesses of the Jazz age and the emptiness of mass culture and conspicuous consumption. The novel reveals the corruption of the American dream, which at first referred to the discovery of the American continent, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness but later became transformed into consumerism and greed,

pointing out that the idealism that Gatsby represents can no longer exist in a world dominated by consumerism (qtd. in Hassel). Another great American novel attacking consumerism is Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). As a celebration of anti-consumerism, this novel captures characters who choose a life on the road rather than living a life conforming to the consumerist norm (qtd. in Hassel). Finally, Don DeLillo's1985 novel *White Noise* explicitly attacks the consumer culture and the advertising-saturated American society (qtd. in Hassel). As Hassel maintains, these American writers are concerned with the negative effects of consumerism. Hassel also further suggests that the answer to the consumerist problem may lie in literature that serves as a tool for counteracting the deadening effects of consumer culture.

In *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (1998), James Annesley argues that many contemporary novels can be read as critiques of a modern capitalist society. For example, analyzing Patric Bateman who is the psychotic killer and stock broker in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Annesley maintains that there is a link between mass consumption and the protagonist's brutality. On the surface, Bateman's crimes seem motiveless, but in reality consumerism drives him to commit his violent acts. He cannot differentiate between commodities and human life and has an unlimited desire to consume more. As a result, he buys women in the same way as he does cameras and treats these women brutally without considering their humanity. When he sees other people possessing things he does not have, he impulsively reacts by wanting to commit a murder. Moreover, his money enables him to buy victims and legal protection (qtd. in Annesley). Similarly, in Richard Hell's *Go Now* (1996), the story of a junkie musician and a drug addict named Billy Mudd who has a violent sex life, and Dennis Cooper's *Try* (1994), the story of Ziggy McCauley who is adopted and sexually abused by a

gay father, Annesley sees the tendency towards the depiction of extreme sexual acts as a commentary on the objectification of the human body in the commodification of late consumer capitalism (qtd. in Annesley).

Furthermore, some critics are interested in analyzing the theme of consumerism in chick lit, which refers to a genre of fiction written for and marketed to primarily single young women and working women in their twenties and thirties. For example, Caroline J. Smith in *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit* (2007) focuses on the way in which chick lit interfaces with magazines, self-help books, romantic comedies, and domestic-advice publications. This recent trend in women's popular fiction began with the publication of British author Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), a novel that uses a first person narration to chronicle the romantic tribulations of its young, single, white, heterosexual, urban heroine (qtd. in Smith). Smith argues that chick lit questions the consume and achieve promise offered by advice manuals marketed towards women, a promise guaranteeing that if women consume, they will achieve their goals. Smith maintains that many other chick lit novels challenge the consumer industry and cultural expectations of women who become consumers, readers, and writers of popular fiction.

As one of the attempts to engage in the critical examination of the theme of consumerism, this thesis focuses mainly on Don DeLillo's works. His work is very interesting and has become quite popular in the contemporary period. Profoundly influenced by the arts, music, and film cultures of New York, DeLillo's novels discuss the prominent forces in American society: consumerism, the media's omnipresence, waste, threats and fears of environmental toxins. These themes are relevant to the contemporary world. In 1985, DeLillo received the National Book Award for *White Noise* and a nomination in 1988 for his novel *Libra*. *Mao II* (1991)

brought DeLillo the coveted PEN/Faulkner Award. In a recent novel, *Underworld*, DeLillo conjures up a dazzling picture of cold-war America. His latest play, *Valparaiso*, was premiered in January of 1999. *The Body Artist*, a novel, was published in February 2001 and *Falling Man*, his latest novel, was published in 2007. He is also the recipient of the Aer Lingus/ Irish Times Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

DeLillo's novels, plays, and short stories have been widely discussed and analyzed by a diverse group of critics; therefore, his works have been analyzed and interpreted through various approaches. Most popularly, many critics have analyzed the postmodern culture in DeLillo's work. Some critics have focused on the theme of consumerism and capitalism; other themes that have also been explored are environmental issues and religious or spiritual issues.

Firstly, it is necessary to note that the most widely examined issue that critics have analyzed in Don DeLillo's works is the postmodern culture[1]. Critics have analyzed various topics in DeLillo's works through the lens of postmodernism. Tamara Kemp exemplifies critics who have matched DeLillo's works with the ideas of Jean Baudrillard while Scott Rettberg's article discusses the issues that DeLillo's fiction relates to the idea of Jean-Francois Lyotard.

Tamara Kemp notes in "Information Overload and a Supermarket?" (2007) that *White Noise* offers striking postmodern characteristics that are similar to Jean Baudrillard's theories. Firstly, in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (2006) which contains postmodernist theories, Baudrillard argues that the world is in a state of hyperreality in which the real disappears and what people perceive as real is just a reflection of

---

1 For more examples, see Leonard Wilcox's "Baudrillard, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative" (1991), Laura Barrett's "How the dead speak to the living: Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*" (2002), and Jesse Kavadlo's "Recycling Authority: Don DeLillo's Waste Management" (2001).

what once was called reality. As a result, in postmodern culture, there are only copies without the original (qtd. in Kempt). Kemp claims that this state matches the environment in *White Noise*. Kemp also points out that in "Hypermarket and Hypercommodity" Baudrillard argues that the city center shifts to the supermarket or the university. Today's metropolitan cities are only hyperreal models of a city. Similarly, DeLillo formulates Blacksmith, a suburban town in *White Noise*, around the supermarket and the university. Moreover, in "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media" Baudrillard describes how the abundance of information leads to the disappearance of the information's significance. When people face too much information, the effect that it has on them decreases. In the same way, the Gladney family in *White Noise* when faced with a bombardment of information cannot accurately judge the meaning or importance of what they are hearing. As a result, the characters cannot differentiate between valuable information and advertising phrases. In *White Noise,* information loses its meaning to the extent that the power of suggestion becomes even more powerful than humans' own direct experiences.

Moreover, Scott Rettberg argues in "American Simulacra: Don DeLillo's Fiction in Light of Postmodernism" (1999) that, in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, there are aspects of postmodernity noted by Jean-Francois Lyotard. He mentions the ideas of Jean-Francois Lyotard, who notes that we live in a time when metanarratives and grand schemes of thought such as science and religion cannot account for all aspects of human experience. Rettberg claims that in *White Noise* consumerism is considered to be "a metanarrative of the Twentieth Century," claiming that science, and religious systems cannot help people at the crucial moments of life and death. Rettberg believes that DeLillo examines the symptoms of post-modernism in his works without taking a political stance in regard to the contemporary culture.

Whereas most critics see the relationship between DeLillo's works and postmodernism, Cornel Bonca differently contends in "Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: The Natural Language of the Species" (1996) that the white noise described in *White Noise* does not match Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and also that DeLillo's idea about language is "something more than a ceaseless flow of signifiers with no resting place" (425). Bonca maintains that this novel is not really about consumerism, mass media, or high technology, but is actually about humans' deepest expressions of death fear, a response to the fear of mortality. He thinks that DeLillo sees language as a way for humans to cope with mortality. The speech of one character in DeLillo's novel makes others laugh and redeems the moment of fear of death (425-44).

In addition, one of the most discussed themes in DeLillo's works is consumerism or capitalism. David Clippinger, Michelle Rene, and Marx Osteen exemplify critics who argue that DeLillo's novels attack consumerism. David Clippinger analyzes consumerism and capitalism in detail in "Material Encoding and Libidinal Exchange: The Capital Culture Underneath Don DeLillo's *Underworld*" (1999). He maintains that *Underworld* manifests American postmodernity in which certainty and value have drifted away from the real. The values we assign to products are not steady or real. Furthermore, the force of capitalism erases the spirituality in American culture. He concludes that America, in this novel, is not a land of peace because people choose to yield to the consumerist world of images creating a desire within the capitalist culture that cannot be quenched (79-91).

Moreover, Michelle Rene argues in her essay "Dissenters Are Never Superheroes" (2005) that *White Noise* is a warning against the threat of consumerism. She maintains that in Baudrillard's world of media and simulation, DeLillo suggests a possible way out. In this novel there are some humane qualities such as the human

death fear and the presence of human relationships. These humane qualities offer us some hope to live in the consumerist world.

Whereas Rene sees some possible way out, Marx Osteen sees that people cannot escape the consumerist manipulation in DeLillo's novels. Osteen chooses to examine consumerism and reaches the conclusion that consumerism is very manipulative and that we cannot avoid its power. In "Children of Godard and Coca-Cola and Consumerism in Don DeLillo's Early Fiction" (1996), Osteen analyzes the relationship between consumerism and the cinema, one specific kind of media, and finds that, in DeLillo's *Americana*, the quest for authenticity or identity in a world of consumerist representation is impossible. Osteen also points out that there is an essential link between the power of media and consumerism.

Furthermore, some critics look at DeLillo's religious background and examine his notion of religion in the contemporary world. Amy Hungerford places DeLillo in the context of mid-century American Catholicism within her essay "Don DeLillo's Latin Mass" (2006); she maintains that DeLillo transfers a version of mysticism from the Catholic context into a literary one through the form of the Latin mass. DeLillo uses Catholicism to understand immanent transcendence. Her essay describes how religion, which is abandoned in most respects of life, can persist in a literary form. Specifically, Hungerford's argument is that DeLillo's novels employ the religious element of the use of Latin in the mass in his literary works. Similar to the Latin mass in which most people do not really understand the Latin of the mass but can gain some mystical feeling, characters who cannot really read and write can receive or offer some mystical sensation through language. Hungerford also points out that a kind of language that we do not understand can transcend the ordinary and make us able to gain access to raptures. Therefore, the Latin mass is a way for DeLillo

to use fiction as a religious meditation.

Mikko Kallionsivu also examines the topic of religion or spirituality in “We Simply Walk Toward the Sliding Doors” (2007) maintaining that *White Noise* is a postmodern *Ars Moriendi* or a book that instructs people to die as good Christians in the postmodern world. In this novel, Jack Gladney tries to solve his sense of emptiness and fear of death. Consumerism is not a cause of trouble but rather a reaction to troubles such as the fear of death. Jack’s idea of death has changed and evolved over time. At first, for Jack, death is a threat that needs a solution. Later, he begins to see death as a natural phenomenon and does not fear death following Murray’s dictation regarding the Tibetans’ idea of death. Kallionsivu argues that if we stop denying death, we can calmly accept death as the end of the attachments to things and attain the Judeo-Christian experience of rebirth.

The next topic that some critics such as Elise Martucci and David B. Morris examine in DeLillo’s works is the environmental problem in the contemporary word. David B. Morris realizes that, nowadays, people live in a new kind of environment, a man-made environment. We are surrounded by media, electronics, and advanced weapons. He expresses his concern in “Editor’s Introduction Environment: The White Noise of Health” (1996) that there is a new threat harming human health and the environment known as “the white noise of health” in *White Noise*, a threat from the new environments of technology, media, and consumerism. Ultimately, the things we create come to destroy us in the form of toxic waste. The unstable relationship between humans, technology, and the natural world causes this correlation. Morris associates the human-made and commodified landscape with the postmodern environment and strongly argues that consumer culture cannot exist in tandem with health.

In addition, Elise Martucci offers an ecocritical reading of DeLillo's novels and asserts in her book, *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (2007), that DeLillo's fiction explores how new technologies change perception and mediate reality. Her book discusses the influence of postmodernism and environmentalism through close readings of *Americana, The Names, White Noise,* and *Underworld,* as well as discussions of postmodernist and ecocritical theories.[2] Martucci examines DeLillo's novels by analyzing traditional American literary representations of the environment using the theory of Leo Marx to discuss the conflict between technology and nature that appears in traditional American literature.

However, it should be noted that not all critics admire DeLillo's works. Some critics find the novels pessimistic and difficult to understand. Dale Peck and Jonathan Yardley represent those critics who attack DeLillo's works. Dale Peck in his book review "The Moody Blues" in *The New Replublic* (2002) criticizes DeLillo's novels as "the white man's ivory tower" even though some people consider them as "the highest of high canonical postmodernism." Peck maintains that DeLillo uses incomprehensible flow of words and condemns his works as "the stupid — just plain stupid — tomes of DeLillo." Asserting that DeLillo lacks an ability to comment on anything, Peck also argues that he expresses an overwhelming sense of despair at the state of the world but does not give valuable comments or useful solutions to the problem. Jonathan Yardley in the *Washington Post* also attacks DeLillo for his gloomy subject matter and confusing writing style. Yardley's review of DeLillo's *The*

[2] Similarly, in "Don DeLillo & Diane Ackerman *White Noise* & *A Natural History of the Senses*" (2007), Nadine Murray analyses the theme of environment in *White Noise* and maintains that the novel makes us understand our environment. The environment in *White Noise* is produced by advanced technology such as holographic scanners at the supermarket, computers, stereo sets and radios which all determine characters' lives. Nature in this novel is reduced to being on cable and is available to those who have access to a television.

Names on October 10, 1982 postulates that the novel is incoherent as it attempts to address too many issues. In his review of *White Noise* on January 13, 1985, Yardley characterizes this novel as monotonously apocalyptic. Similarly, Yardley reviews *Libra* on July 31, 1988 and states, "No doubt *Libra* will be lavishly praised in those quarters where DeLillo's ostentatiously gloomy view of American life and culture is embraced" (qtd. in Gardner).

This thesis will focus on the issue of consumerism in the postmodern age as presented in Don DeLillo's three novels: *Americana* (1971), *White Noise* (1986), and *Underworld* (1997). Many critics have already discussed the theme of consumer culture in DeLillo's work through the lens of postmodern theory by Baudrillard and Jameson and have reached various conclusions. While approaching DeLillo's work from postmodern perspectives, this thesis specifically concentrates on examining the full circle of consumer culture in order to reveal its multifaceted dimensions; from the ways consumerism turns people into passive consumers to the influence of consumerism on people and its devastating impact on both humans and the environment. More interestingly, critics have offered divergent interpretations in regard to DeLillo's attitude towards consumerism in the postmodern world. Some critics attack DeLillo for simply presenting the problem without offering a means or way out. This thesis will argue that DeLillo criticizes consumerism in the postmodern world by presenting media and advertising as the means and process of consumerism in *Americana*, portraying the effects of consumerism on postmodern consumer health and behavior in *White Noise*, and finally exposing waste as an inevitable product of consumerism in hyperreality in *Underworld*.

Focusing on the role of the media in *Americana*, the second chapter analyzes ways in which consumerism uses the media in the form of films and advertisements to

influence people. People are constantly bombarded by advertised information that reaches them through the media and this information is typically geared solely at selling products. As the sign values or the images attached to them are not fixed, the products are free to take on a wide range of cultural associations and illusions. People no longer care about the real materials or quality of the products. They desire only the image of the products presented through the media. Advertising in particular is able to attach images of fulfillment and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as toothpastes and drinks. Consumers, therefore, are constantly manipulated through the floating signifiers appearing in the media. This chapter's analysis of *Americana* will also expose the tricky techniques of advertisements to induce people to buy certain products and simultaneously reveals the ills of the media that has become a necessary and effective tool of consumerism in the postmodern age.

The third chapter will discuss the negative effects of consumerism on people in *White Noise*. This chapter argues that consumerism physically and mentally affects consumers. On the physical level, people living in the consumerist society cannot avoid environmental hazards. Even simple products, such as chewing gum, can harm them. Moreover, after being bombarded with advertised information, consumers relentlessly buy products and feel that the products they buy determine their identity. The characters rely more on the media than they do on their own perceptions. They use the media and consumer products to mediate all their experiences and relationships. Although consumers are surrounded by many products, they never really achieve happiness. They are still faced with a sense of emptiness and uncertainty in their lives. Ultimately, consumerism turns people into passive consumers who are in a desperate search for something but are offered no real sense of fulfillment through the act of consumption.

While the second chapter and the third chapter discuss the media as a necessary tool of consumerism and the influence of consumerism on people respectively, the fourth chapter analyzes the theme of waste as an inevitable product of consumerism in *Underworld*. DeLillo points out that the hyperreality of the consumer culture encourages more and more consumption and makes the waste problem unsolvable. In hyperreality, where reality is believed to exist only in advertised products, people cannot stop buying products and therefore continuously create more and more waste. When waste is all around and becomes a reality of life, characters in the novel differently try to find ways to cope with the waste problem. Waste management is one of the responses employed towards the waste as the attempt is made to manage the rapidly mounting waste. However, waste managers in the novel are so conditioned by the logic of consumerism and so trapped in hyperreality that they do not see that consumer culture is the root cause of the waste problem. In consumer culture and hyperreality, it seems, there is no realistic way to confront the waste problem.

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to a better understanding of consumerism in the postmodern age through DeLillo's novels. Focusing on the full circle of consumerism, the ways in which we are turned into postmodern consumers, consumerism's influence on people, and waste as the ultimate product of consumerism, this thesis further strives to help make readers more aware of the ills of consumerism and instill in them a desire to avoid its negative influence.

CHAPTER II

MEDIA AS A TOOL OF CONSUMERISM IN *AMERICANA*

"All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perceptions and arbitrary values."

Marshall McLuhan

Media nowadays is not only useful for simply providing information and entertainment for people but also as a powerful tool of consumerism shaping and conditioning the human mind and behavior. The media which can be accessed by a large number of viewers significantly influences people in many ways. For example, TV advertisements provoke the irresistible desire to buy advertised products by presenting their appealing images. In this case, the media does not just give useful information to viewers for consideration but lures people to buy products for their images that are not really related to them. Even worse, the media can tremendously distort people's perception of their lives. For instance, people may mistake the act of buying brand name products represented in the media as the only way to gain true happiness and identity. From this perspective, the media serves as a useful tool for a company to sell its product, transforming viewers into consumers.

Americana, Don DeLillo's first novel, discusses the theme of the media and its influence on people. It illustrates the physical and mental aspects of David Bell's life under the influence of the media. Bell is depicted as a victim of the media, encouraged to impetuously buy things without a chance of actual fulfillment. The consumerist life, rife with the most expensive and fashionable commodities, cannot make him feel happy but it leads him to incessant restlessness. As a way of finding

the source of his problem, Bell begins a journey and films his life as an attempt to find his own "self". Through his journey and the scripts he writes for filming, we can see that David Bell's problems actually arise from the consumerist postmodern condition in which images or any other kinds of superficiality rule supreme and that he is conditioned by the media in such a way that he cannot go beyond that superficiality. Because the novel ends with Bell's inability to escape the consumerist influence and his decision to go back to New York and to resume his normal life at the network, we can interpret the novel as criticizing the powerful, manipulative, and inescapable force of consumerism.

Apart from the theme of the media, critics have also been interested in exploring the themes of selfhood and identity from different perspectives. In "For Whom Bell Tolls: Don DeLillo's *Americana*" (1996), David Cowart, for example, examines the themes of identity and alienation and maintains that David Bell has a slippery personality, fails to find the stable "self," and becomes a pathetic man. Exploring the theme of identity, Benjamin Bird in "Don DeLillo's *Americana*: From Third-to First-Person Consciousness" (2006), however, reaches the different conclusion that Bell can gain a substantial, stable self or is at least partially successful in his wish to rid himself of the third-person consciousness through Zen Buddhism's notion of no-self.

Taking a totally different approach from existing criticism, this chapter will specifically examine the relationship between the media and consumerism and the media's effects on people by employing semiotics and postmodern theory. It will argue that *Americana* not only concretely portrays how the media turns people into relentless consumers but also depicts the devastating effects of the media on each individual: hindering one from establishing healthy relationship with others, distorting

one's perception of oneself, and destroying one's moral judgment. In "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (2006), Baudrillard argues in the postmodern media-laden condition, we experience something called the death of the real; in other words, we live our lives in the realm of "hyperreality of communication and of meaning" (81). He defines "[t]he hyperreality of communication and of meaning" as "[m]ore real than the real, that is how the real is abolished" (81). Devin Sandoz in "Simulation, Simulacrum" (2003) further explains Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. The rise of the media, especially television which rapidly broadcasts signs and simulacra in every realm of everyday life, is an important factor contributing to postmodernity. Simulacra here refer to signs in the media that arbitrarily construct what is naturally perceived as reality. In the postmodern society the simulacra precede the original and replace all reality and meaning. The human experience is thus a simulation of reality rather than reality itself. Hence, the media here become key simulation machines which reproduce images, signs, and codes which constitute a realm of hyperreality. Similar to the idea of simulacra, hyperreality here is defined as a state in which the distinction between the "real" and the representation disappears. This hyperreal condition can lead to endless reproductions of empty signs when people no longer care about reality and unavoidably immerse themselves in the simulation of reality created by signs in the media. For them, fulfillment or happiness is found only through simulation and imitation of a simulacrum of reality.

In addition, consumer objects people consume constitute a system of signs that can be decoded. As Baudrillard states in "Towards a Theory of Consumption" in *The Consumer Society: Myth and Structures* (1998), "the system of consumption is in the last stance based not on need and enjoyment but on a code of signs (signs/objects) and

differences" (79). Doug Mann further elaborates in "Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction" that we no longer consume products just for their "use value" in Marxist terms but for their symbolic value. That is, the products symbolize distinction, taste, and social status. A BMW car, for example, has use value for driving and its exchange value is tantamount to a certain sum of money. However, in the postmodern age, a BMW can function as a sign in the code of consumer values and signifies social distinction. To an extreme extent, in "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media", Baudrillard claims that the proliferation of signs and information in the media eliminates meaning and this process leads to a collapse of meaning and the destruction of the distinction between the media and reality (75-86). Accordingly, people rely more and more on the media as the only form of "reality" and simultaneously believe media information even more than their own perception. As a result, the image that the media presents to the public becomes the most important element that induces consumers endlessly to buy services and products. Moreover, through the perspectives of structuralism and semiotics, this chapter will analyze consumer objects as a system of signs that have to be decoded to illustrate why people desire to buy advertised products. It will also reveal the unnatural nature of the mythic meaning, the symbolic meaning, or the sign value that advertisers attach to simple products.

Buying the Image, Buying the Dream: Ways the Media Turns People into Consumers

In *Americana*, the media in the forms of TV advertisements and films turns people into consumers. As the media presents pleasant images of consumer products

and movie characters, the image is central in the process of consumerism. The image here refers to the impression that a product or a person gives to the public. People will identify with the good image in advertisements and films. This kind of image operates in the same way as the symbolic value that is added to products. People in the postmodern world no longer buy products because of their use value. Instead, the symbolic value that is not intrinsically related to the products is the main factor contributing to people's decision in buying.

Americana portrays TV as a tool that transforms people into passive consumers. TV is full of advertisements seducing people to buy products for their desirable image. During the journey, David Bell tries to examine the relationship between TV as well as its advertisements and consumerism. As he puts it, "The TV set is a package and it's full of products. Inside are detergents, automobiles, cameras, breakfast cereal, other television sets. . . . A television set is an electronic form of packaging. . . . Without the products there's nothing" (270). TV is nothing but the package of many products. Its purpose is not to give education or information as Bell thinks that "[e]ducational television's a joke" (270). All TV programs exist because of support from sponsors who aim at selling their products. Once a TV program, like Bell's program "Soliloquy", fails to attract prospective consumers, it will be dropped. When people watch TV, they cannot avoid bombardment by consumer products thrust into their consciousness. For example, when Bell sits in front of TV for half an hour, "[t]hen a commercial [comes] on, one [he] ha[s] seen and heard dozens of times" (43). It is obvious that advertisements entice Bell and other viewers to buy products. The statement of Bell's father that "[i]t doesn't matter how funny or pretty a commercial is . . . if it doesn't move the merchandise off the shelves, it's not doing the job; it has to

move the merch" (85) also emphasizes the fact that that advertisements are created mainly to provoke the desire to buy the advertised products.

We can employ semiotics to disclose how the media imposes artificial perceptions and arbitrary values on each viewer. From a semiotic perspective, we can see that advertisers employ the process of signification to attach mythic meaning to each product. To illustrate this point, we have to consider Ferdinand de Saussure's idea about how signs communicate meaning. According to Saussure, a sign is composed of the "signifier" or the form which the sign takes and the "signified" or the concept it represents. The relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary and unnatural; in other words, there is no logical connection between signifier and signified. Signs can communicate meaning but only by their difference from all other signs within the same linguistic system. For example, for the word "rose", the signifier is composed of the sounds /r/, /o/, and /z/ while the signified is the concept of this particular kind of flower. In addition, the signifier "rose" can communicate its meaning because it is not "pose", "nose", nor "hose". This points to the fact that signs are primarily defined by what they are not. However, the signification process does not exist at the language level alone. Much more interestingly, Roland Barthes goes beyond Saussure's notion of signs by further discussing the mythic or the connotative meaning attached to signs. On the language level, the signifier "rose" can communicate its basic meaning as a particular kind of flower. On the mythic level, the sign "rose" can become a signifier whereas the signified is love or passion. Here, the sign "rose" is attached with the mythic meaning of love. Barthes also tries to point out that this process of signification is not so natural as it appears to be and that this mythic meaning is socially constructed (Bignell 5-27).

Similarly, consumers buy products for their image or mythic meaning. Advertisements enable the customers to identify with the image of a particular advertised product by buying and consuming it. As Bell states, "The consumer never identifies with the anti-image. He identifies only with the image. The Marlboro man. Frank Gifford and Bobby Hull in their Jantzen bathing suits" (272). In the new era of advertising, the image is everything. Advertisements always give impressive images without any real logical connection with the product. People are tempted by pleasant images which are engraved in their minds and made to believe that the only way to attain these attractive images is to buy the advertised products. For example, if we smoke "Marlboro", we will look as masculine as the model in the advertisement. If we wear Jantzen bathing suits, we will look as handsome as Frank Gifford and Bobby Hull. Here the signification process is automatically at work in viewers' minds. The image of a masculinely attractive man is attached to one brand of cigarette while the image of a healthy and handsome man is attached to certain swimming suits. It is noticeable that the mythic meaning is assigned to each product in such a natural manner that people do not stop to question the logic of the signification process. This is the way in which advertisements on TV make use of the arbitrariness of signs to manipulate viewers' minds.

To illustrate the working of advertisements more clearly, we can analyze examples in *Americana*. The first example is the advertising technique of David Bell's grandfather, Harkavy Clinton Bell. By creating an effective image for the products, David Bell's grandfather can help Fort McHenry, a pajama company owner on the verge of bankruptcy. As a way of assigning the image of patriotism to the pajamas, Bell's grandfather draws a battle scene, ships, rockets, a fort, hundreds of troops and a big flag flying on the battlements with a single line at the bottom of the

layout, *McHenry*—the Star-Spangled Pajamas. He also suggests sewing forty-eight stars on every pair of McHenry's pajamas. After that, McHenry pajamas sell very well and Harkavy Clinton Bell becomes famous (197). Actually, pajamas do not really relate to the image of battlefields or the American flag. The only link is that, the owner's name, Fort McHenry, is the name of the place where Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner" which refers to the American flag. Therefore, the *McHenry*—the Star-Spangled Pajamas campaign implies the notion of patriotism. Here, Bell's grandfather attaches the mythical meaning of patriotism to the pajamas. These pajamas sell better because they have acquired a sense of prestige that accompanies their new mythic meaning of patriotism. People who buy this product do not simply buy a pair of pajamas, but they buy the feeling that they are patriotic. This association does not sound logical, but in real life advertising employs this kind of signification to make an effective advertisement.

Another example is the advertisements David Bell used to see when he was young. In one advertisement selling a drink, parents having an argument in the house are interrupted by a teen-age daughter who brings a small bottle to them. Both parents look at the bottle and then embrace and sing. It is implied that this product represents understanding, warmth, and love in the family whereas the real quality of this drink has nothing to do with these abstract feelings. Similarly, in another ad, Madge is suffering and the solution to this is "[d]rink this stuff" (271). Although this logic sounds completely absurd, people still believe that this drink can help them and buy this product when they are faced with depressing problems. Nowadays, it is the image of the product, not the material itself, that has become central. From these two advertisements, the media's manipulation of signs is obvious. To explain, advertisers can choose any sign value to attach to their products. For the same kind of drink, they

can create the image of love, sex appeal, healthiness, or even intelligence. In the first advertisement, a drink is the signifier added with the mythic meaning of warmth and happiness in the family. For the second one, again, a drink is the signifier attached with the constructed concept of freedom from all kinds of depression and frustration. All of these examples can clarify that advertisements in the postmodern age try to sell the image or the mythical meaning of certain products, not their real material or quality.

Shifting from the semiotic perspective to the postmodern one, one sees that the play of endless signifiers on TV can lead to a state of hyperreality and simulacra. Nicholas Oberly in "Reality, Hyperreality" (2003) maintains that, according to Jean Baudrillard, people no longer see the difference between the original and the duplicate. Because the simulation can contribute to a circular world where the sign is exchanged not for meaning but merely for another sign, people are spellbound by the visible and disregard anything beneath the surface. That is, the "real" has disappeared and the only reality is thus the superficiality and simulacra. As David Lyon in *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Postmodernity* (1999) maintains, the simulacra that have become the only reality are created by the media.

> Television and consumer culture belong together. . . . And TV is all about the production of needs and wants. . . . Consumer objects are actually a system of signs that differentiate the population. Signifiers, like TV ads, "float" freely, with only the loosest connection with actual objects. (58)

In this case, consumer products operate as signs, and in the manipulation of signs in the media and advertising, signifiers are able to float freely and thus are not fixedly tied to any meaning. This can lead to the endless reduplication of signs and images in

the media as well as the elimination of the distinction between the image and reality. This condition is characteristic of the postmodern depthless society where people who are trapped in a web of floating signifiers and the superficial no longer care for the real or the deep beneath the surface. As advertisements entice consumers with image-laden products and convince them that buying the products is equivalent to wearing the images, it turns out that these constructed images are, in reality, illusions devoid of meaning. The images as well as the products thus cannot provide the consumers with the happiness or fulfillment that they dream of. *Americana* points out very clearly that the image is far more important than the "real" or the object itself. People care most about the image and the appearance. As Bell says, "The chemical firm was trying to improve its image" by merely buying the art work (106). Here, the art work is bought not because of its basic function or the owner's real appreciation of art. Instead of improving the company's performance, the art work is used to show the public that it is fashionable and looks artistically sophisticated. Similarly, when Brand is asked about the theme of his novel, he answers, "The theme is whatever you want it to be because appearance is all that matters" (205).

Apart from advertisements, films as one form of media can also transform people into persistent consumers through the construction of the mythic meaning or the image. People addicted to films can be recognized as consumers. In this case, it is the act of consuming the services of entertainment provided by the capital market. Actors or actresses with pleasing images can tremendously impress viewers and entice people to visit the cinema regularly. Similar to the case of advertisements, viewers identify with the image of their favorite characters. The image or the mythic meaning attached to each character is an important factor causing people to be addicted to the movies. David Bell, as a very clear example, has always been

fascinated by films and has frequently been to the movies since he was young. He identifies with the appealing image of Burt Lancaster, a famous American actor. Burt Lancaster himself was well known for his physical appearance as he has been referred to as "Mr. Muscles, Mr. Teeth" by many critics including Kate Buford, the author of the latest Lancaster biography. Especially remembered for his good looks, physical flexibility, and muscular strength, he played in a number of action adventures and some romantic movies. Bell recalls, "There was an immensity to Burt which transcended plot, action, characterization. In my mind he would be forever caught in that peculiar gray silverness of the movie screen, his body radiating a slight visual static" (135). The shining image of Burt Lancaster is always engraved on Bell's mind, and this kind of image is so impressive that Bell would like always to see it. We can see that David Bell never says much about the plot or the characterization of each movie but only the image:

> When I was a teenager I saw Burt in From Here to Eternity. He stood above Deborah Kerr on that Hawaiian beach and for the first time in my life I felt *the true power of the image*. Burt was like a city in which we are all living. He was that big. . . . I carry *that image* to this day, and so, I believe, do millions of others, men and women for separate reasons. Burt in the moonlight. It was a concept; it was the icon of a new religion. . . . I began to wonder how real the landscape truly was, and how much of a dream is a dream. (12-3) (emphasis added)

It should be noted that Burt Lancaster in this movie performs like a product to which is added the mythic meaning or the image of his extremely attractive look that every man wants to identify with. From the quotation, David Bell remembers the scene in *From Here to Eternity* in which Sergeant Warden, played by Lancaster, and the

captain's wife are making love on the beach amidst the crashing waves. This scene is even acknowledged by the American Film Institute as the “iconic” romantic scene. Not only David Bell but also “millions of others” carry this image in their mind and cannot let it go. The beautiful images of characters and scenes impress such viewers as David Bell, thereby making them keep visiting the cinema.

From the postmodern perspective, David Bell cannot help but always relate the images of Burt to his everyday life because in hyperreality the “cinema produces an image which shapes and predominates over the reality it reproduces” (Bignell 30). He thinks what exists in the movie and other kinds of media gives him the real sense of identity. Therefore, he takes the image presented in the media as even more real than what he can directly perceive with his own senses. In other words, the experience only becomes real or acceptable when it is mediated through the media. To some extent, Bell even thinks, “I thought all of us at the network existed only on videotape. . . . We seemed to be no more than electronic signals and we moved through time and space with the stutter and shadowed insanity of a TV commercial” (23-4). This implies that Bell thinks people exist only in the media. They live in the media and move in their real lives from one advertisement to another. This can also be interpreted as declaring that people think they are visible or their identities exist only through the media. The scene in which Bell focuses his camera on seven women in the parking lot can clearly support this point. These women are extremely glad to know that they are being filmed because “[m]aybe they sensed that they were waving at themselves . . . . What better proof (if proof is ever needed) that they have truly been alive?” (254). These women believe that the media can confirm their own existence.

Interestingly, Bell also believes that in order to understand himself and solve problems in his life, he has to examine his "self" through the lens of film. His attempt to make an "autobiographical-type film" (205) signifies that in the postmodern consumerist world only the image in the media or life on the screen, such as in ads and films, is considered to be real. We no longer believe in the existence of our originality since we believe only in what is offered to us through the media. All activities can be made understandable or acceptable only through the media. Another example that demonstrates this point is the scene when Brand asks his friend if they want to appear in his novel, one kind of media, by paying him an amount of money in exchange. Jack Wilson Pike can be "a brain surgeon" in Brand's novel by paying 80 dollars. When Bell asks to appear as a great lover, Brand says, "A hundred and fifty dollars gets you into bed with the female character of your choice" (255). Bell and Pike want their characters in the novel to realize their dream which will never come true in real life. This suggests that people think the media can confirm their sense of being and that consumers can use some money to possess the image they want to wear.

Related to the role of the image in the advertising and media business, *Americana* also presents the idea of buying advertised products as dreaming. Bell's script for his movie maintains that a successful television commercial makes a viewer dream of wearing the image the product offers:

> It moves him from first person consciousness to third person. In this country there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising has discovered this man. It uses him to express the possibilities open to the consumer. *To consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream.* Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of

> entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled." (270) (emphasis added)

To dream here is to crave to possess the attractive image presented in the media or advertisements. As Mike Featherstone states in *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991), "consumer culture uses images, signs and symbolic goods which summon up dreams, desires and fantasies" (27). Advertisements make use of many images to arouse consumer desire for the products. To consume is not simply to buy a product for practical use but to dream that they can gain the desirable image presented in the media. Similarly, Bell's statement that "I was living in the third person" (224) can be interpreted as meaning that he thinks he does not really live his own life. The third person here can refer to "a universal third person, the man we all want to be" (270) in advertisements. Sometimes Bell identifies with Burt's image and sometimes with the advertisement's image, but he never lives his own life or perceives the world through his own unmediated perception.

When the act of buying is not simply buying commodities for basic use but dreaming to gain the image or sign value, it is impossible for the dream to be fulfilled because it is illusive and unattainable. David Bell ponders the deceptive nature of this dream:

> It encompassed all those things which all people are said to want, materials and objects and the shadows they cast, and yet the dream had its complexities, its edges of illusion and self-deception, an implication of serio-comic death. . . . *The dream made no allowance for the truth beneath the symbols*. Better living through chemistry. The Sears, Rosebuck catalog. Aunt Jemica. All the impulses of all the media were fed into the circuitry of my dreams. (130) (emphasis added)

The dream to gain the good life as presented in the media occurs as soon as Bell knows the media and this dream is innocent on the surface; however, this dream or this desire is illusory. It also implies self-deception. The act of buying products to gain the desirable image is useless because the image is not real. It does not really relate to the products people buy. Moreover, the sign value or the image assigned to the product is not fixed. It is just consumer self-deception. The statement, "The dream made no allowance for the truth beneath the symbols," also reflects the fact that the symbols or signs are empty and thus cannot fulfill consumer dreams. Eventually, people have a dream to gain the image that the product offers without any chance of attaining actual fulfillment.

Ultimately, through the media viewers are unavoidably turned into consumers who have bought and are surrounded by many products but never find actual fulfillment because the media can offer only an illusive promise that cannot really be fulfilled. David Bell exemplifies these viewers. His description of himself reveals that he is a consumer who is addicted to buying and using many commodities:

> I shaved, sprayed on some deodorant, ferreted some food particles out of my teeth with dental floss, then sandblasted with the electric toothbrush and gargled with mouthwash. I put on a pair of green chinos with slash pockets, my mandarin opium-shirt and Tobruk desert boots. Then I slipped into the stained leather Montana grizzly-hunting stud-coat I had just bought at Abercrombie's. (46)

Although some products, such as deodorant, dental floss, and mouthwash, in this passage are not assigned with brand names, they are also consumer products that people are persuaded by advertisements to buy. As a faithful consumer with the power

to buy, Bell also fills his apartment with very modern brand name furniture and expensive commodities. As Bell recalls:

> I visualized my apartment then, empty and dark and quiet, furniture from John Widdicomb, suits from F.R. Tripler and J. Press, art books from Rizzoli, rugs from W&J Sloane, fireplace accessories from Wm. H. Jackson, cutlery from Bonniers, crystal by Steuben, shoes by Banister, component stereo system by Garrard, Stanton and Fisher, ties by Countess Mara, towels by Fieldcrest, an odd and end from Takashimaya. (353)

Bell's portrayal of his apartment in this quotation clearly points out that even though the room is full of brand name products, these luxurious products do not provide Bell with happiness. To him, the room is gloomy, dark, and quiet. The comfortable commodities cannot help Bell gain true happiness. It is ironic that Bell's room is decorated with brand name furniture but he still considers it as "empty". It can be inferred that Bell buys these products for the mythic value attached to them but as this sign value, image, or mythic meaning of the products is arbitrarily constructed and thus illusive, Bell ends up surrounding himself with products which are empty of meaning.

Moreover, it is the media that continually seduces people to buy products for their empty sign value. Bell views the media as inflicting chaos on people and makes a film contemplating the role of advertisements in the consumerist society. Chaos here can be interpreted in two senses. Firstly, it is the mental condition which consumers experience when they buy products for the image or mythic value but actually get only a sense of restlessness and emptiness. Secondly, chaos can refer to the chaotic chain of signifiers in the media that are supposed to signify abstract concepts, such as

happiness and the good life, but actually signify nothing. Consumers are thus trapped in this chaotic chain of empty signifiers. In the script Bell writes for other actors and actresses, Bell reaches the conclusion that the media, especially advertisements, spell chaos for people and he realizes the media's manipulative power when he recognizes that his life is surrounded by consumer products from which he gains no sense of fulfillment. As he says, "I take a mild and gentle Palmolive bath, brush my teeth with Crest, swallow two Sominex tablets, and try desperately to fall asleep on my Simmons Beautyrest mattress" (274). Although he possesses a lot of expensive things, he still feels uncomfortable. Even the sleeping pills and the brand name mattress which are supposed to make purchasers have a nice sleep cannot make him feel relaxed or sleep happily. What happens to Bell here points to the manipulation of the media to control people's consumption behavior.

The Effects of the Media on the Human Mind

In *Americana,* the media not only serves as a tool of consumerism turning people into consumers but also distorts human relationship, one's self perception, and one's moral judgment. Firstly, consumers, exemplified by David Bell, who are tremendously manipulated by the media are unable to have a genuine relationship with other people. Bell is the supreme example of a man with problematic relationships. He has a superficial relationship with his women, family, and even colleagues. Bell has sexual affairs with many women at the network and those he meets along his journey. He also has an extramarital affair and has to end his marriage with Meredith Walker which has lasted only three years. As for the relationship with his father, Bell repeats many times that he would prefer his father to be dead. As for his relationship with his colleagues, he does not like his boss's hypocrisy and has no

genuine relationship with his friends. Bell complains that people at the network always make vague invitations. They invite people to their places, but they do not really mean it. This is a custom that people at the network know. Bell's statement, addressed to one of his colleagues who is not married, that "[s]ay hello to your wife for me" (28) suggests that people interact just for the sake of being polite without truly caring about others' feelings.

Readers may ask why David Bell flirts with a lot of women and has a problematic relationship with his father. Mark Osteen in "Children of Godard and Coca-Cola: Cinema and Consumerism in Don DeLillo's Early Fiction" (1996) and Benjamin Bird in "Don DeLillo's *Americana*: From Third- to First-Person Consciousness" (2006) are two examples of critics who argue that Bell has an oedipal encounter with his own mother, Ann. David Cowart in "For Whom Bell Tolls: Don DeLillo's *Americana*" (1996) further argues that Bell loves his own mother and hates his own father. As a result, he has sexual affairs with many women without serious relationships with them because they are the representatives of his mother.

This chapter differently interprets Bell's problematic relationship with other people as arising from the media. Everything in Bell's life is mediated through the media. Bell has never lived his life through his own perception without the mediation of the media or consumer products. In other words, he always identifies with the characters and refers to scenes in the movies or advertisements. As Bell puts it, "I've spent twenty-eight years in the movies" (283). This signifies that the whole life of this twenty-eight-year-old man cannot escape the movies' influence. This is a hindrance to the possibility for Bell to establish good relationships with others.

Firstly, Bell tries to construct his identity by identifying himself with the heroes in movies or connecting himself with the attractive image of advertised

products. The fact that Bell always imitates actors in films or quotes from his favorite movies makes him unable to establish healthy relationships with others. To explain, when he has the chance to get to know a new person in his life, he cannot go beyond the media which conditions his mind. Other people cannot understand Bell's thinking and personality because he has been trapped in the influence of media. For example, when one woman tries to get to know Bell by talking to him at a party, he does not properly answer her question but instead comes up with a terrific line from some great old Randolph Scott movie which is, however, irrelevant to this context. So, this woman decides that she will not talk to him anymore. In another scene, Bell tries to impress B.G. Haines, his date, "by speaking French to the waiter with the intimacy of a hero of the Resistance greeting an old comrade-in-arms" (7). He should have talked with his date to get to know her but he just tries to act like a hero in the movie, *Resistance,* to impress her. Not only does his date dislike him but the waiter senses his pretentiousness as well.

In addition to movies, advertisements play a role in distorting David Bell's relationship with others. For instance, advertisements with models taking a bath cause Bell to impulsively ask the woman he is interested in if she acts as sensually as in the advertisements. He asks Sullivan, "When you wash your legs, do you lift one leg way up out the water and sort of scrub it slowly and sensually like the models in TV commercials?" (208). Similarly, Bell asks Carol Stoner, "do you like to lift one leg out of the water and wash it sort of slowly and sensually?" (226). Neither a woman wants to associate with him any longer. Sullivan rather pities Bell and chooses Pike as her lover instead. As for Stoner, she refuses to talk to Bell except when she acts in his film. To further illustrate this point, we can see that Bell tries to imitate the heroes in movies in order to look masculinely attractive and he believes that his date will

admire him. However, his attempt to identify with a handsome hero to impress women is useless and even makes them want to stay away from him. Moreover, he is so impressed with the sexy image of the models in advertisements that he simply wants to have a sexual relationship with women who wear this image. Finally, Bell is portrayed as a pitiful man whose mind is manipulated and conditioned by the media in such a way that he cannot escape their influence and cannot have an intimate relationship with others.

The second reason why David Bell does not succeed in developing meaningful relationships with others is that the superficial relationship that stems from the feeling of being impressed with another person's beautiful image which is like that presented in the media can never bond two people together. Bell chooses to have a relationship with women just because for him they match the preferable images in movies or advertisements. The relationship of a couple does not last long because it is based not on the depth, which is lost in the postmodern world, but on superficial aspects, which are the only important thing in the postmodern condition. Bell cannot have a fulfilling and long-lasting relationship with his wife, Meredith, because he likes and chooses to marry her just because of the power of the image. It is noticeable that the media shapes Bell's understanding of relationships. Therefore, he does not really understand what the real relationship is like. For him, the relationship between lovers occurs when they romantically hold each other's hands as he has seen in his favorite movies. To understand this point more clearly, we can analyze Bell's decision to marry Meredith Walker. Bell admits that when he holds Meredith's hands, he is stirred by "the power of the image" (31) of that scene and then wants to share his life with her. The image of this scene is like that presented in a romantic movie. Bell does not state that he marries his wife because of her admirable characteristics and his love for her.

As a result, his marriage lasts only 3 years. Similarly, Bell's extramarital affair with Jennifer Fine does not last long because he just likes Fine's image which is like "a librarian-mystic" (38) in the movies.

Furthermore, those who are influenced by the media and always associate other people with consumer products can never achieve a real relationship. When one links other human beings with commodities, not with what they really are, one cannot develop a genuine relationship with them. Unsurprisingly, Bell has a problematic relationship with his father because he knows neither the meaning of a true relationship nor his father's true personality. It is important to note that his description of his father, which signifies his perception of him, is mediated by consumer products:

> My father drank Irish stout. He bought most of his suits in England. He liked Dutch cigars and drove Italian and British automobiles. Most of the books in his library were about London before the Great Fire and the American West before the Little Bighorn. . . . He favored German cameras and smoked Danish pipes that cost almost two hundred dollars each. (152)

Instead of describing his father's personality or his habits, Bell can only think of what his father buys and owns. As Jonathan Bignell's states in *Media Semiotics* (2002), "ads contribute to the myth that our identity is determined not by production but by consumption" (37). To put it differently, advertisements proclaim the belief that "you are what you buy". As part of consumer culture, Bell cannot describe his own father without referring to movies or consumer objects. This suggests that his relationship with his father is defined only by products and that the media succeeds in shaping human understanding of relationships. If people watch TV too much, they will be

brainwashed into believing that their identities and existences are recognized only through products. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bell, a media addict, cannot think of the warmth and intimate bond between father and son but conceives of his father through the commodities he buys.

The logic that one's image or identity totally depends on the consumer products one owns affects not only Bell's perception of other human beings but also his perception of himself. For example, with the belief that owning a very expensive stereo reflects that he is rich and dandy, Bell tries to seduce a girl by telling her, "I have almost a thousand dollars' worth of stereo equipment" (53). In the same way, Meredith's new boyfriend also mainly talks about "his stereo system and E-type Jaguar" (55). This myth of the consumer culture therefore transforms people into materialists who neither understand spiritual values nor look for intrinsic values beneath the surface.

In addition to distorting human relationships, the media alters consumers' perception of the world and their sense of self. When the media makes the image or appearance the only important thing, consumers usually think only of the superficial. David Bell represents this kind of consumer. He is concerned with his looks, his age, and his position. The following passage of his self-reflection can illustrate this point:

> I was an extremely handsome young man. . . . Physical identity meant a great deal to me when I was twenty-eight years old. . . . When I began to wonder who I was, I took the simple step of lathering my face and shaving. It all became so clear, so wonderful. I was blue-eyed David Bell. Obviously my life depended on this fact. (11)

Bell is very proud of his good looks and pays much attention to his clothes. At work Bell always dresses himself "in the establishment manner" (36). When he is still

married, he and his wife always wears certain clothes to certain movies. Furthermore, when he begins to doubt his “self” or “identity,” he shaves his face in order to see his handsome face clearly. This indicates that his sense of “self” totally depends on his physical appearance.

Apart from being obsessed with his appearance, Bell is very concerned about his success at a young age. He conceitedly thinks that, “[a]lthough Carter was thirty years old, or two years older than myself, he was one of my subordinates at the network” (7). Therefore, Bell is very upset when he learns that at the network, Harris Hodge, a newly hired man of 26, is preferred by his boss. Bell becomes even more irritated when he knows that people at the network think that Hodge looks like Paul Newman, a very handsome actor. This signifies that in the consumerist society people ignore “the deep” such as human relationship and pay exclusive attention to the superficial such as appearance and achievement in working life. This is one reason why David Bell feels unhappy although he is rather successful. Moreover, Bell always compares himself with others. He wants to look the most handsome and is glad when people who mistake him as a star ask for his autograph. For Bell, his appearance and social status are everything. Therefore, when a person is held to be more handsome and more successful, he cannot stand it. Depending totally on the appearance cannot lead Bell to the true happiness.

In addition to contaminating the human relationship and each individual’s perception, the media can deprive people of the ability to think of morality and decency. Many examples in *Americana* illustrate this point. The first example is Bell’s sleeping with Page Talbot, his friend’s lover. Bell is influenced by the movie *From Here to Eternity* in which Lancaster has a love affair with a married woman. For Bell, the scene in which Lancaster comes to see a married woman is so

impressively powerful that he feels moved by their love rather than criticizing them for their immoral act. As a result, Bell visits Talbot, stands in the doorway of Talbot's room and imagines himself as Burt Lancaster in that particular scene of the movie. Bell feels he is like "Burt Lancaster standing in the rain waiting for Deborah Kerr to open the door" (144). Bell cannot realize that he is betraying his friend who loves Talbot very much. His desire to imitate what appears in the movie seems to deprive him of his moral sense.

Another piece of evidence showing the effect of the media on an individual's moral judgment is that Bell has an extramarital life with many women without feeling guilty at all. Bell impulsively has an affair with Jennifer Fine just because he thinks in "the movie set atmosphere" she is like a librarian-mystic and very attractive (38). Bell can only think that Fine's image is similar to the appealing image he likes in the movie and is unable to see his act of immorality. Bell also always tries to match his life of adultery with his favorite movies. When he leaves his lover or breaks her heart, he can just wonder "whether Burt or Kirk had ever acted in an office film, one of those dull morality tales about power plays and timid adulteries" (20). Similarly, Meredith, Bell's wife, cannot think of a proper moral judgment but sees only the information the media offers. Meredith does not care much after learning that her new boyfriend is a married man who has three sons because she reasons, "someone like Kurt would have all boys" (57). She just matches her boyfriend with the image of her favorite actor, Lancaster, whom she thinks should have sons too. Actually, her act of having a relationship with a married man is immoral; she should realize that her act could destroy her boyfriend's family. A lot of characters in this novel lack proper moral judgment because what dominates their mind is the image presented in movies and advertisements.

A Desperate Attempt to Flee Consumerist Manipulation

David Bell does not at first realize his problem with consumerist manipulation and the media. On the surface, it seems that Bell feels upset with his life at the network and is overwhelmed by an urge to leave because he is being pressured; as his colleague, Carter, warns him, "Weede said he's going to put your ass in a sling if you're not careful" (77) and his favorite program, Soliloquy, is dropped. However, the real cause of his continual distress is much more significant than this and later he begins to examine it.

The root of Bell's problem lies in the media and consumerism. The ills of the media are analyzed throughout the novel. Firstly, Bell interestingly raises the question why all the people he has known in the advertising industry want to get out of this business and to go to a remote place. He knows a man in this business who wants to sail to the Tasman sea and a copy writer who one day starts to cry at lunch. Evidently, he himself feels that he is going to go insane as he says, "I felt I was going insane," (81) and wants to get out of his normal life at the office. It seems that there is something wrong with this business. Similarly, Bell talks about his two colleagues who collapse or die at their desk. The first person, Stobe Botway, has a heart attack and dies at his desk. The other is Ted Burton who also collapses at his desk and dies later. Bell's statement about Botway's death that "He is conventionally dead" (13) is interesting. Actually, dying at office is violent and severe but Bell says it is normal. It is implied that a lot of people die in this way at the office. Much more to the point, in a figurative sense, they are emotionally or spiritually dead because they only live lives through what the media offers. Another clear example indicating that people are manipulated by the media to the extent that they cannot even live their own lives but only live a life mediated through the media is Bell's remark that he wants to go out,

"to smash [his] likeness, prism of all [his] images, and become finally a man who lives by his own power and smell" (236). This shows that Bell realizes he has and wears several images which do not really belong to him. Consequently, he wants to get rid of them in order to live his own life or to live in this world through his own senses and free from the media's influence.

Although his decision to leave life at the network and set out on a journey to find his true self enables David Bell to make a film that examines his problem in relation to consumerism and the media as its necessary tool, it seems that, at the end, David Bell cannot successfully flee consumerist manipulation. Bell tries to hitch-hike instead of using a lot of money to buy the ticket. However, finally after having a ride with a strange man, Bell decides that he must use his credit card to get a plane ticket back to New York. Bell cannot simply live a life "on the road" free from consumerist norms without using money. The novel ends with the sentence, "[t]hen, with my American Express credit card, I booked a seat on the first flight to New York. Ten minutes after we were airborne a woman asked for my autograph" (377). Ironically, Bell's journey to find out the real cause of his distress ends with his realization that the manipulative power of TV and advertisements unavoidably spells "chaos for all of us" (274). We assume that Bell goes back to resume his normal life and undergoes the distress which he earlier struggled to run away from. This is the plight of postmodern man who is imprisoned and conditioned by the media in such a way that living a life free from the power of consumerism seems unattainable.

However, *Americana* suggests that actually the condition in which people do not care about the real and indulge themselves in what they consider to be consumerist ecstasy is not a normal phenomenon that we cannot avoid. In fact, it is a state that should be carefully scrutinized. In the postmodern condition, marketers and

product advertisers can conveniently manipulate consumers through the play of floating signifiers. Advertising in particular is able to attach a mythic meaning or the image of fulfillment and the good life to ordinary consumer goods, such as soap, pajamas, and drinks. Furthermore, after people are enticed by the advertised information into believing that their identity and existence depend on the media and have surrounded themselves with consumer products, they can never achieve a sense of fulfillment because the image or the mythic value for which they bought the products is illusive and unreal. In addition, in its portrayal of the effects of the media on people, the novel also suggests that if we do not care for the real which seems to have disappeared in postmodern society, true relationships and self-realization cannot occur and true happiness cannot be achieved. Don DeLillo exaggerates the disastrous effects of the media on characters. He clearly presents David Bell as an example of a consumerist who adorns his life with luxurious brand name products but who is unable to discover his identity, connect with other people, and find a way to lead a happy and meaningful life. Ultimately, DeLillo does not criticize David Bell as much as the postmodern consumerist condition itself that manipulates consumers and deprives them of actual fulfillment and true happiness beyond the superficiality the media offers.

CHAPTER III

CONSUMER CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS IN *WHITE NOISE*

In the twenty-first century, the threats that we fear are not as transparent as the nuclear bomb that wiped out the entire cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II. On the contrary, contemporary culture faces a new kind of threat, which David B. Morris in "Editor's Introduction—Environment: The White Noise of Health" (1996) refers to as "white noise":

> The new danger from environmental degradation is less alien than total nuclear war. We live with its damage everyday. We cannot demonize an all-purpose villain—like the bomb—to serve as the target for our protest and frustration. The enemies are everywhere and include us, especially in our social roles as hapless, but far from innocent, consumers. Environment is the unnoticed, inescapable white noise that surrounds and interpenetrates human health. (11-2)

Normally, white noise is a type of noise that is produced by combining sounds of all different ranges of frequencies together. However, in this quotation, David B. Morris defines white noise as the environmental threats derived from consumer culture. According to Morris, we live with these kinds of threat all the time, whether realizing it or not, and the enemies are ourselves, the relentless consumers. Perhaps, those who are affected by man-made disasters are not innocent victims of unforeseen tragedies, but themselves instigators who must be held responsible for their inconsiderate action of joining the endless consumerist cycle.

White Noise, Don DeLillo's 1985 novel which received the National Book Award, further portrays white noise as the inescapable toxic environment. However, I argue that white noise in this novel refers to environmental threats derived from the postmodern consumerist condition which can be defined in two ways: firstly describing the toxicity of the postmodern consumerist environment from which no one can escape; and secondly referring to the logic of consumerism that penetrates all beings and all places. This kind of white noise exists everywhere and in everything, manipulating people's minds and behavior. DeLillo's novel particularly depicts the postmodern consumerist society as being full of toxic threats through the lives of the Gladneys: Jack Gladney, a college professor in the small town of Blacksmith, Babette Gladney who is the mother of the family, and four of their children from previous marriages: Heinrich, Steffie, Denise, and Wilder. The novel is structured around two major incidents: an airborne toxic event and Jack's discovery of Babette's participation in the trial of a new drug called Dylar.

Interestingly, critics have employed various perspectives when examining *White Noise* and have reached very different conclusions and interpretations. For example, in "American Simulacra: DeLillo's Fiction in Light of Postmodernism" (1999), Scott Rettberg maintains that *White Noise* is distinctly postmodern in that it presents the stories of characters who face life in a post-modern, post-industrial, televisual culture and matches many of the aspects of postmodernity defined by Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. By contrast, in "Dissenters Are Never Superheroes" (2005), Michelle Rene argues that *White Noise* is not entirely postmodern, but instead attempts to unravel issues of humanity such as love, danger, and death around the protagonists. In addition, some critics have chosen to focus on environmental issues in DeLillo's fiction. For example, focusing on ecocriticism, risk

theory, and narrative, Ursula K. Heise in "Toxins, Drugs, and Global System: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel" (2002) chooses to explore a particular type of risk, exposure to chemical substances, and postulates that *White Noise* is a portrayal of a technologically at risk society. Moreover, in *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (2007), Elise Martucci uses ecocritical theories, particularly Leo Marx's discussion of the conflict between technology and nature found in traditional American literature, to explore how technology changes perceptions and mediates reality. Nadine Murray in "Don DeLillo & Diane Ackerman: *White Noise* & *A Natural History of the Senses*" (2007) similarly analyses the theme of environment in *White Noise* and maintains that the novel illustrates our environment as being produced by advanced technology that determines human lives, such as holographic scanners at the supermarket, computers, stereo sets, and radios.

This chapter focuses on the effects of consumerism on consumer health and the ways in which the consumers in *White Noise* respond to these new kinds of threats: the unavoidable toxicity in the postmodern consumerist society and the logic of consumerism which manipulates consumers. It argues that the consumer's ignorant act of turning towards consumerist ecstasy contributes to increasing environmental hazards, which in turn inevitably harm physical and mental health. Furthermore, this chapter examines the vicious cycle of consumerism. Firstly, people are enticed into believing that the products they consume determine their identities. As a result, they perpetually buy and surround themselves with many commodities generating suffering from the toxicity of those products. Since these postmodern consumers cannot escape the postmodern consumerist environment, they ignorantly resort to consolation from consumerist ecstasy. They are thus inextricably enmeshed in this vicious circle. The interesting question raised here is whether this kind of response is

really effective and if there isn't any other more appropriate way of coping with the situation.

Consumerism's Effects on Consumer Health

The second chapter focuses on the concept of buying advertised products in order to construct identity, and how people are induced into the role of consumers by the media which lures them to buy products for illusive images. This chapter further examines consumerism's effect on people's mental and physical health. It defines the new form of postmodern threat referred to as white noise in *White Noise* in two ways: as the toxicity of the postmodern consumerist environment and the logic of consumerism.

The first meaning of white noise is the inevitable toxicity that prevails in the postmodern consumerist condition. DeLillo vividly depicts this toxicity as being found in daily products, existing everywhere within society, permeating existence, and being unidentifiable. As a result, people are unable to avoid this kind of threat and are forced to suffer both physically and mentally.

In the novel, the toxicity is presented as existing everywhere. The airborne toxic event is a clear example to illustrate this point. In this event, a train car has derailed and caught on fire, releasing a poisonous toxic substance into the air. The deadly cloud of Nyodene D, a byproduct of insecticide, is blown throughout Blacksmith. As a result, people in this town have to leave their homes and are ordered to evacuate to a Boy Scout camp. Not only the air but the soil is contaminated. As Heinrich claims, "Once [Nyodene D] seeps into the soil, it has a life span of forty years" (131).

This aforementioned toxicity lies in the consumer products themselves as all the products contain chemical substances. For example, the fact that Babette's favorite chewing gum causes cancer in rats reflects the terrifying fact that toxicity exists in foods. The Stovers, Jack's neighbors, also inhale the spray mist from their own stain remover and have to visit a doctor although their disease is not clearly stated. Another example given of threats from everyday objects is that the tables we eat our daily meals on can lethally harm us. Heinrich points out that "when plastic furniture burns, you get cyanide poisoning" (103). The furniture designed to give comfort can thus be fatally dangerous. Jack also notices threats from simple commodities, pointing out that Vernon Dickey, Jack's father-in-law, likes to travel around in order to run away from chemical substances found in simple goods. As Jack puts it, "I have a friend who says that's why people take vacations. Not to relax or find excitement or see new places. To escape the death that exists in routine things" (248). The condition in which even routine things and everyday products in people's own homes can kill them provides postmodern consumers with no place of refuge from toxic threats.

Furthermore, not only does the toxicity infiltrate all kinds of existence, but it is invincible and irreversible as well. There is no safe way to eradicate the toxic substance. During a toxic event at the school, inspectors come to inspect the scene wearing Mylex suits. Jack "associate[s] these outfits with the source of our trouble and fear" (173). Even the inspectors with Mylex suits suspect the material itself of being a source of toxic problems; therefore, people do not see these suits as things that can protect them but as things that can potentially harm them. Later, we learn that one inspector who wore this kind of suit dies following the event. It is implied that there is no possible way of preventing or ending the toxic problem. In the toxic cloud event,

microorganisms released in order to eat up the toxic cloud of Nyodene D are also suspected of being toxic. Minnie Richards states that, “Some people think these organisms, not Nyodene D, affect the environment” (173). Mylex materials cannot protect the inspector from the poisonous environment, and microorganisms are also feared by people as a source of the toxic threat. It is thus obvious that no substances—natural or synthetic—can help solve the toxic problems.

Moreover, what makes this toxicity—white noise in the first sense—more fearful is that it cannot be identified. The first toxic event at the school clarifies this point. In this event, students show symptoms of headaches and eye irritation forcing them to evacuate the school; however, no one is able to identify the real cause of this incident. Investigators can only guess at the possible source:

> Investigators said it could be the ventilating system, the paint or varnish, the foam insulation, the electrical insulation, the cafeteria food, the rays emitted by microcomputers, the asbestos fireproofing, the adhesive on shipping containers, the fumes from the chlorinated pool, or perhaps something deeper, finer-grained, more closely woven into the basic state of things. (35)

Although the school is supposed to be a safe place where harmful toxic threats are unthinkable, it is revealed here that all kinds of consumer products and appliances in the school could cause harm. The simple paint on the walls may contain toxic substances, the rays from computers could be dangerous, and the ventilation fumes may be poisonous. This illustrates that even in schools, or any other places thought to be free of harmful substances, there is no real sense of safety. Much more dreadfully, officers cannot exactly pinpoint the real source of this problem. It is possible that the students may have to continue living in this dangerous environment while the next

toxic event could occur at any moment. In the same way, when Jack sees the abnormal symptom of hair loss in his son, Heinrich, he tries to figure out the real cause of the symptom. He wonders if Heinrich's mother's intake of toxic substances is to blame, or if he himself could be the cause by choosing to raise his son near a dump site filled with poisonous industrial waste. Jack begins to consider all the different and numerous kinds of chemical substances that surround his life. The reason for his son's symptom could be anything. The only thing Jack can do is to wonder, and even by the end of the novel the answer remains unclear.

As the toxicity exists in products we use every day, appears everywhere, penetrates all kinds of existence, and becomes untraceable, people are unable to run away from this kind of threat and they inevitably face many kinds of health problem. Many characters are confronted with some type of health problem or mysterious disease. For example, in the case of Jack's 14-year-old son, Heinrich, his hairline is mysteriously receding. Jack himself has a lot of health problems as well. At first, he has the mysterious myclonic jerk, which causes him to begin to think about death. Further, Jack has vision problems, seeing colorful dots because of wearing dark glasses. Finally, Jack is exposed to the Nyodene D cloud as a result of a toxic leak and this exposure prompts the diagnosis of a quickly approaching death.

The toxic threats affect people not only physically but also mentally. One obvious manifestation is paranoia. Paranoia is defined as a thought process characterized by excessive anxiety or fear, often to the point of irrationality. This term is also associated with people who tend to feel that harm is going to occur to them. The characters in *White Noise* suffer from such a symptom. They are overwhelmed by a sense of uncertainty, deep concern for their health, and an irrational fear of death. Steffie, Jack's daughter, for example, routinely examines her chest for lumps because

she fears that she is going to develop breast cancer after she realizes that toxic threat is all around her. Although examing the breasts is a useful thing for health, being too obsessed with or too worried about the threat can be seen as a symptom of paranoia. Paranoia is also seen in Jack's neighbors, the Stovers. After the airborne toxic event, "the Stovers had been keeping their car in the driveway instead of the garage, keeping it facing the street, keeping the key in the ignition" (302). The Stovers believe that harm could occur at any minute, and therefore have to make themselves ready for it. Similarly, following the toxic event, Heinrich begins to wear a reflector vest as a way of shielding himself from the chemical.

In addition to toxicity, white noise conveys an additional meaning: the logic of consumerism and its mesmerizing power. This white noise is far more fearful than white noise in the first sense as it can control consumers' actual minds and behavior. As Heinrich states "[t]hese spills are nothing" and "[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). Waves and radiation from TVs, radios, and other electronic appliances can potentially harm people's physical health, causing such symptoms as headaches. Much more interestingly, not only the physical health, the white noise can affect consumer mind and behavior. As Heinrich says, "Forget headaches and fatigue. . . . What about nerve disorders, strange and violent behavior in the home?" (175). The "nerve disorders" and "strange and violent behaviors" that Heinrich refers to imply that the media adversely affects people's minds and behavior. Murray Siskind, Jack's friend, further discusses the idea of waves and radiation by associating them with television:

> TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. . . . Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jungles, the

> slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. 'Coke is it, Coke is it, Coke is it.' (51)

The essence of white noise discussed here is not simply its toxicity, but the noise of consumerism mesmerizing people to buy more and more. This quotation describes how media, such as TV, becomes an important tool for turning people into consumers. When people hear the repeated voice of TV advertisements, they will then unavoidably buy the advertised products. Moreover, people are so dependent on the media that they believe the media information is even more real than what they actually perceive through their own senses. All things, including people's identities, depend on the media to some extent. Consumers believe that they can gain desirable images or identities through the consumption of advertised products. Therefore, they obediently listen to the "white noise" of the media, which consistently invites them to buy consumer products in order to fill their lives.

This logic of consumerism can cause people serious mental problems, leading people towards faulty perceptions, a consumerist type of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia in the clinical sense is a psychotic disorder or group of psychotic disorders marked by severely impaired thinking, emotions and behavior causing a patient to lose touch with reality. Schizophrenia in postmodern theory, however, is different from that in the clinical sense. The characteristics of schizophrenia have been defined by many postmodern critics but can be categorized into two main aspects. Firstly, Jonah Peretti, by referring to Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1992), asserts in "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" (1996) that schizophrenia is marked by the inability to see the proper boundaries between meanings, or in other words, between signified and signifier. For the other

characteristic, Mark Currie explains in his essay, “Culture and Schizophrenia” (1998), that according to Jacques Lacan, schizophrenia is defined as a linguistic disorder and is normally seen as disunity within the personality, where different states of mind cannot be unified in the pronoun “I”. When the relationship between signified and signifier breaks down, the schizophrenic will be deprived of personal identity. In other words, the personal identity is the effect of a certain temporal union of the past and the future with the present, one in which the process of signification can occur. However, with the breakdown of the signifying chain we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of sentences in the language, and are thereby, deprived of an ability to unite the past, present, and future of our own biographical experiences or psychic lives. Thus, a schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, a series of pure and unrelated present moments. Similarly, in terms of consumerist practices, consumerism and the media brainwash people into believing that their identity is not fixed and can be changed at will by consuming the products, causing them to indulge themselves in the eternal present of consumerist ecstasy. Consumers in the postmodern world therefore possess a disunified identity (96-114).

The inability to see the boundaries between meanings, the first characteristic of schizophrenia, resembles one of Dylar’s effects. Dylar, the experimental drug which is introduced to kill fear of the death, functions as a product providing only an illusive promise to desperate consumers such as Babette and Jack Gladney. It should be noted that the side effect of this drug is confusing “words with the things they referred to” (309) or the inability to see the difference between the word and its real meaning. Willie Mink, the project manager of this drug, is himself a clear example illustrating this point. He is a schizophrenic who sits in front of the TV, continually consuming products in the form of Dylar, and seeing no difference between language

and reality. Mink fixes his eyes on the flickering TV screen emitting no sound. The way Mink unknowingly acts in response to what Jack says is indicative of the way consumers blindly believe what the media tells them. When Jack says, “hail of bullets,” and “fusillade,” Mink acts in a manner as if he were really being shot. “He hit the floor, began crawling toward the bathroom . . . showing real terror. . . . He tried to wriggle behind the bowl, both arms over his head, his legs tight together” (311). Here, Mink believes completely in what others say, ignoring logic and his own senses. In the same way, mindless consumers believe unquestioningly in the media even more so than their own perception. In the depthless society where the real has disappeared, the media as a form of simulation is upheld as the most important perspective. The influence of the media is so powerful that people ignore their own senses, do not consider the original or the real source, and believe everything the media entrusts to them. For instance, Steffie, with this schizophrenic symptom, insists that “we have to boil our water” just because “it said on the radio” (34). In fact, there is no need to boil water at all, but Steffie who likes to watch TV and listens to the radio is convinced she should follow what the media instructs her to do. In this kind of society the media has become an absolute authority that people are totally dependent up on. Another clear example is shown in the toxic spill scene. The radio first says the symptoms caused by the toxic spill are skin irritation and sweaty palms. As a result, Denise and Steffie complain that they have symptoms of sweaty palms. After Heinrich tells them that the information from the radio has changed, announcing that the actual symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and shortness of breath, Denise feels like throwing up and keeps running to the toilet. We can view these characters as schizophrenics who develop the symptoms that are announced and confirmed by the media. They cannot differentiate the signifier from the signified and therefore turn to the floating meaningless

signifiers in the media. Even though the information in the media as the meaningless signifier sounds senseless and signifies nothing, they totally believe it. These characters are just like Willie Mink, who blindly believes what Jack says and becomes obsessed with the flickering TV, a metaphor for meaningless media information.

As for the second characteristic of schizophrenia, consumerism causes a disunified personality. In other words, it deprives people of a real personal identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the media conditions people so strongly that their identity becomes dependent on the image of the products they buy. Therefore, Jack has to shop in order to fill himself with desirable images. As Jack states:

> I began to grow in value and self-regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of my self, located a person I forgotten existed. . . . Our images appeared on mirrored columns, in glassware and chrome, on TV monitors in security rooms. (84)

Jack feels that he himself has no real identity and that he must buy products for the images he wants to wear in order to find his personality. In *White Noise*, the way to gain identity in the postmodern consumerist society is to buy and display products as a representation of one's own image. Nigel Watson states in "Postmodernism and Lifestyles" in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (2005) that:

> People actively wish to join in and actively desire the opportunities for self-expression and display which are provided by the choices of the pink shopping malls. . . . We like to identify with the style that best represents the way that we wish to be seen. (37)

This description matches that of Jack Gladney, the father of the Gladney children and a university professor, who attempts to boost his confidence and create his authority by consuming products and altering his appearance. Jack admits, "I am the false

character that follows the name around" (17). To become an effective teacher of Hitler Studies, Jack has to invent an extra initial for himself as J. A. K. Gladney and wears this name like "a borrowed suit" (17). He must gain weight and wear the glasses with thick black heavy frames and dark lenses as well as a black gown in order to create his image as a reliable expert of Hitler Studies. Likewise, Denise, Jack's daughter, feels that she has no unified identity and has to depend on the images of products. She believes that a visor can present her image or identity. She has been wearing a green visor fourteen hours a week because "something about the visor seemed to speak to her, to offer wholeness and identity" (37). In reality, a visor's function is to protect the eyes and face from strong sunlight. However, Denise does not use it for its real pragmatic function. For her, it is fashionable to wear it all the time: in her room, at school, on the dentist's chair, at the dinner table, and even in the toilet. In short, in the postmodern world people are made to believe that they need to fulfill their identity with the images of consumer products and become schizophrenics who have no stable or real identity.

Self-Delusion as a Way Out

Although the people in *White Noise*, or at least Jack Gladney, seem to realize that they are surrounded by the imminent death brought upon them by the products they buy, causing suffering both physically and mentally, they try to ignore this fact and turn to the illusive comfort that consumerism provides. In reality, deep down in their hearts, they desire a sense of stability, safety, and peace. Many characters, especially Jack, try to find a way of wiping out their feelings of uncertainty and the fear of death. At the old burying ground in Blacksmith Village Jack feels he "was beyond the traffic noise, the intermittent stir of factories across the river. . . . I

breathed deeply, remained in one spot, waiting to feel the peace that is supposed to descend upon the dead" (97). Jack deeply wants a sense of peaceful that is beyond "the traffic noise" and "the intermittent stir of factories" (97). In other words, he wishes to experience peace that is beyond the noise of consumerism. The noise described here reflects the white noise, including both the toxic environment and the logic of consumerism. Similarly, Jack's German teacher, Howard Dunlop, teaches meteorology because he feels lost despite his desire for a sense of peace and security. As he tells Jack, "I collapsed totally, lost my faith in God. . . . I turned to meteorology for comfort. . . . I realized weather was something I'd been looking for all my life. It brought me a sense of peace and security I'd never experienced" (55). Dunlop can obtain a sense of certainty in the world of uncertainty only through the ability of meteorology to provide a reliable weather forecast.

However, when they find out that there is no way to escape the white noise or to gain a sense of peace and safety, the characters in *White Noise* turn to ignorance, consumerism, and romanticization. Jack Gladney asks himself, "Were we a fragile unit surrounded by hostile facts? Would I promote ignorance, prejudice and superstition to protect my family from the world?" (94). Jack Gladney, like other consumers, is surrounded by the hostile facts that their lives are always at risk. As the head of his family, Jack Gladney is thus prompted to wonder if he can resort to ignorance, a kind of illusion, as a way of enabling himself and his family to endure the surrounding threat and its inevitable results of health problems.

When facing the threats, the postmodern consumers in *White Noise* tend to respond to the situation by turning to ignorance. Jack Gladney clearly exemplifies this point. He repeatedly denies that the toxic event is extremely dangerous for his family. He comforts his children and himself by saying that the event is insignificant and

cannot harm them. On numerous occasions Jack Gladney tells his children that "[it] won't come this way" (110) because "I just know" (111). Here he simply tries to convince himself and his children to ignore the threat without giving any plausible reasons for his claims. Similarly, Babette tries to promote ignorance to protect her children. When the loudspeaker asks all people to evacuate to escape the clouds of deadly chemicals, Babette says, "I'm sure there's plenty of time . . . or they would have made a point of telling us to hurry" (119). Similarly, in a noxious odor incident in which there is no sign of official help, people turn to denial as their defense mechanism, refusing to believe that the threat is even evident. Some people convince themselves that the incident couldn't be dangerous seeing that no officials have taken any action. Others even deny their own senses, claiming that they smell nothing at all.

In relation to ignorance, the characters in the novel also turn to consumerism as a way of evading their fear of death and environmental threats. Consumerism manufactures many products offering an illusive promise of comfort and a solution to toxic problems to the desperate consumers trapped in the toxic and consumerist environment. Consumers believe that consumer products can help them in their hopeless situation. The drug Dylar is a clear example of this point. Dylar represents the ultimate form of consumer product as it is believed to eliminate the fear of death itself. Although it proves ineffective with Babette, Jack wants to take this drug to get rid of his fear and anxiety. Dylar is similar to any other consumer product in the way that it makes an illusive promise to fulfill consumers' needs and relieve them from mental and physical health problems. Even though the promise is illusive and impossible, desperate people are willing to take it as a last refuge they can cling to in the postmodern world where threats are ubiquitous. In the same way, Jack believes that if he thinks Dylar will help him, it will help him no matter how strong or weak

Dylar is. Jack tells Denise, his daughter, that “the power of suggestion could be more important than side effects” (251). Although Denise thinks this sounds stupid, Jack says, “I am eager to be humored, to be fooled. . . . This is what happens . . . to desperate people” (251). This conversation indicates that the people are so hopeless that they are eager to be fooled. They are ready to believe anything and indulge themselves in consumerist ecstasy.

Apart from Dylar, tabloids are another form of product that offers an illusive promise in the toxic society. The tabloids contain stories that claim to relieve consumers of their physical and mental suffering. As Jack ponders, “The tabloid future, with its mechanism of a hopeful twist to apocalyptic events, was perhaps not so very remote from our own immediate experience. . . . Out of some persistent sense of large-scale ruin, we kept inventing hope” (146-47). Tabloids here function as a way of turning disastrous events into pleasurable ones and help alleviate people’s anxiety in the presence of fatality and uncertainty. Stories in tabloids, such as star gossip and the articles discussing miracle drugs to cure toxic-related diseases, can distract people from their misery. In one tabloid, it is stated that “mouse cries have been measured at forty thousand cycles per second. Surgeons use high-frequency tapes of mouse cries to destroy tumors in the human body” (236). Moreover, in another tabloid, one story points out that there is the Holy Shroud of Turin, which is famed for its sacred curative powers. Another similar story describes wonder drugs that are produced in the weightless environment of space and can cure anxiety, obesity, and mood swings. Although this kind of story creates a rather false and illusive hope that people can cure themselves when they face inevitable toxic threats, it does successfully offer the hope that postmodern people are desperately searching for.

In addition to the stories about miracle drugs, tabloids also provide the comforting idea of death. While escaping from the toxic cloud, Babette reads the article "Life After Death Guaranteed with Bonus Coupons," which deals with life after death and reincarnation. A 5-year-old girl, Patti Weaver, claims that in her previous life she was a secret KGB assassin and depicts the moment of her death: "at the moment of my death as the Viper, I saw a glowing circle of light. It seemed to welcome me, to beckon. It was a warm spiritual experience. I just walked right toward it. I was not sad at all" (143-44). In a fatal situation, people want some assurance regarding life after death. In this case, the girl says that her death was not fearful but rather peaceful. This story functions as a kind of spiritual solace. Jack notices that people in the circle are listening to this story and wholeheartedly believing it. Jack imagines that "little Patti's walk toward the warm welcoming glow found [him] in a weakened and receptive state" and admits that "[he] wanted to believe at least this part of the tale" (145). Although for Jack Patti's story is unbelievable, he does want to believe that death is neither frightening nor painful. Moreover, this article also attaches the bonus coupon for other supernatural stories about life after death to comfort those who desperately fear death.

Furthermore, another kind of supernatural story frequently published in the tabloids that is believed to relieve people's fear of uncertainty and death concerns UFOs. To illustrate, one tabloid states, "UFOs will raise the lost city of Atlantis from its watery grave in the Caribbean by telekinetic means and the help of powerful cables. . . . The result will be 'city of peace' where money and passports are totally unknown" (145). People hopefully yearn for the city of peace, but it can appear only in the tabloids. Another example stems from the rumor that the moon will explode and dreadfully affect our planet. While this event would be catastrophic, the tabloid

story claims that UFO cleanup crews "will help avert a worldwide disaster, signaling an era of peace and harmony" (146). Again, when a disaster could occur at any time, people hope and believe that some supernatural power will come to help them and give peace and harmony to the turbulent world.

People not only consume such products as Dylar and the tabloids but also resort to the idea that wealth and commodities can prevent them from facing environmental hazards. Jack, for example, tries to convince himself that the disaster will not happen to the upper middle class, the privileged class with the power to buy and thus to take refuge in consumerist ecstasy. Jack ponders on natural and man-made disasters:

> These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornadoes. (114)

Jack believes that, as a college professor, his social and financial status can protect him from all kinds of disasters. He tells himself: "I'm the head of a department. I don't see myself fleeing an airborne toxic event" (117). His assumption is that if he has a strong house in a good location and the power to buy products, he will not be affected by environmental hazards.

Although wealth and all the ideas of the good life represented through consumer products are ways for people in this novel to deal with an undesirable idea such as death, these ways are not effective and lead to even more people instigating more environmental threats. Consumer products cannot truly provide them with comfort and safety. In fact, they are the true cause of the toxic hazards. One example

is in Babette's words: "I have trouble imagining death at that income level" (6). Believing that wealth and commodities can keep them away from death, the Gladneys constantly buy consumer products. As a result, their house is filled with many products. Except for the kitchen and the bedroom, Babette and Jack "regard the rest of the house as storage space for furniture, toys, all the unused objects. . . . Things. Boxes" (6). Interestingly, these consumer products that are supposed to help them evade the fear of death have in actuality a "sorrowful weight" and "a darkness" (6). Actually, these everyday products cannot help them from the threat; on the contrary, they can be fatal to them. Running away from toxic hazards by turning towards products permeated with toxicity must be considered the ultimate ignorant act—the worst possible solution. The act of allowing oneself to fall into consumerist ecstasy is in itself a form of self-destruction. To clarify this point, we can consider the scene in which the Gladneys are fleeing the toxic cloud. Jack sees some people at a home furnishing mart and thinks, "Why were they content to shop for furniture while we sat panicky in slowpoke traffic in a snow storm?" (120) This instance reflects that the people in the mart do not recognize that their act of buying is contributing to not only their health problems but also their death, because toxicity, in reality, exists in every product. Another example supporting the idea that people ignorantly turn to consumerism when facing a miserable life is indicated by the characters turning towards the consumption of food, products, and even services to make them feel better and to confirm their sense of being alive. The idea of consumption is prominent; people believe that consumption can help them escape bad situations. "When times are bad, people feel compelled to overeat" (14). For example, Denise keeps many things because in "a world of displacement" it is "a way of fastening herself to a life" (103). Here, Denise uses products as a way of reminding herself that

she is still alive in the world full of uncertainty. In another similar example, when the deadly cloud is nearing her home, Steffie reads a coupon for Baby Lux and cries softly. Strangely, this act "brought Denise to life" (119). This scene signifies that Denise initially feels scared of the imminent death and is later relieved when she can find something to cling to. She believes that reading a coupon that she can use to get Baby Lux products for free can help her escape a distressing situation, but in actuality, of course it cannot.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that consumerism distorts the ideas of death, life, and existence. In a society relatively free from consumerism, such as Tibet, the way to respond to death is different from that in the consumerist society. Tibetans see death as a natural phenomenon that one cannot avoid; thus, they accept death for what it is. For them, life and death are not different in the way that they both are part of human life. "It is the end of attachment to things. This simple truth is hard to fathom. . . . We don't have to cling to life artificially, or to death for that matter" (38). For Tibetans, brand name products are not an important aspect of life. When we die, we cannot take them with us and are forced to abandon all things, even our own bodies. However, in America, Murray, Jack's friend, says, "Here we don't die, we shop" (38). In the consumerist society people reject death and try to run away from it by turning to consumer products. People cannot easily accept death because death in this kind of society is unnatural. As Jack states, "There's something artificial about my death. It's shallow, unfulfilling. I don't belong to the earth or sky" (283). Jack's death is artificial because he has been exposed to human-made toxic substances. In addition, death in this kind of society is fearful because it is inevitably premature. To illustrate, people can die any minute because of the toxic environment. This reality reflects the fact that death in the consumerist society is not natural but happens to

consumers through their own act of relentless buying. Furthermore, consumerism distorts the consumers' ideas of existence. In Tibet, people learn that they can find true happiness by letting go of everything. In contrast, in America, people are brainwashed into believing that their existence and happiness depend on consumer products. Consequently, they think that they can evade death by buying goods. It should also be noted that right after the toxic event at the school and one caused by a leak of a Nyodene D tank, the Gladneys immediately go shopping. The juxtaposition of these toxic scenes and the supermarket scene implies that after being threatened by fatal incidents, Jack's family tries to grope after the sense of fulfillment, security, and replenishment through consumerism. Jack's reflection on his consumerist consumption further elaborates this point:

> It seemed to me that Babette and I, in the mass and variety of our purchases, in the sheer plentitude those crowded bags suggested, the weight and size and number, the familiar package designs and vivid lettering, the giant sizes, the family bargain packs with Day-Glo sale stickers, in the sense of replenishment we felt, the sense of well being, the security and contentment these products brought to some snug home in our souls—it seemed we had achieved a fullness of being that is not known to people who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening. (20)

Whereas some critics, such as B. R. Myers, find this scene nonsensical and attack DeLillo for presenting the American supermarket as "a haven of womblike contentment, a place where people go to satisfy deep emotional needs," this thesis argues that this portrayal of the supermarket where consumers seek comfort shows that people rely on consumerism so much that in order to gain happiness they have to

resort to the products which are provided by the supermarket. To Jack, the senses of replenishment, security, and contentment come only from buying; furthermore, he believes that those who neither need nor afford these products cannot achieve this kind of feeling. Ironically, the truth is the exact opposite. Actually, Jack and his family have never derived any sense of security or well-being from consumption. It can be interpreted that those "who need less, expect less, who plan their lives around lonely walks in the evening" (20) are likely to have a better chance of simple contentment. At least, they are neither exposed to hazardous threats that come from consumer products nor lost in what is mistaken as consumerist ecstasy.

In the postmodern society, all aspects of culture including religion are transformed into commodities. People do not rely on religion for its moral and spiritual teachings, but consume it as a commodity in the same way that they use Dylar and tabloids in order to relieve their death fear. For instance, the black man with the tracts depends on God as a way of comfort and claims that he does not fear the toxic cloud. He believes God sent this thing, and other catastrophes, such as floods, tornados, and epidemics, as warnings of Armageddon. He is ready and eager to "run into the next world" (137). He never stops to think that all disasters are actually man-made and maybe he himself, through his role as a consumer, and not God, is responsible for them. Moreover, postmodern consumers try to attach the mystic power of God and religion to consumerism and its products. In the toxic cloud event, when Jack is in flight and sees the toxic cloud, he feels scared of the possibility of death but still mystified by the idea of the cloud as a death ship full of legendary creatures that can evoke a sense of religious awe and grandeur:

> The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral

> wings. . . . But it was also spectacular, part of the grandness of a sweeping event. . . . Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. (127-28)

Religion in a traditional sense has no place in the postmodern world. Instead of applying Christian teachings in their lives, people in *White Noise* superficially use the idea of God as a way of allaying their insecurity. For Jack, the dark cloud with the cosmic power to wipe out everything is tantamount to the omnipotent power of God. The toxic cloud, which is actually a deadly by-product of insecticides, can therefore be transformed into a beneficial or spectacular thing. As a result, Jack and his family do not feel upset and depressed that they may be unable to flee the fatal cloud in time, but instead they just fight "for the possession of the binoculars" in order to see this "splendid" scene clearly (128).

An ATM is also attached with the power of God and becomes an important refuge for consumers. For example, Jack idolizes the ATM. After feeling worried that Heinrich's receding hairline may be due to toxic substances, Jack tries to find a way to comfort himself. He turns to an ATM as a powerful invisible mystical thing:

> Waves and relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. . . . What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. . . . The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies. (46)

The ATM, with its invisible system as an integral part of the whole network of consumerism, is described as possessing God-like omnipotent power. Jack believes

that the system of the ATM confirms his existence and personal value. However, it is revealed that turning to the consumerist system cannot really help Jack or any other consumers. The scene right after the ATM scene, in which Jack wakes up at night and feels overwhelmed with the fear of death, solidifies the fact that an ATM cannot really help Jack feel better. It is an example of the way in which consumerism lures people into believing that all kinds of consumerist practices can offer them a good and secure life while in actuality they cannot.

Apart from resorting to ignorance, consumption, and commodification of religion as ways of evading the fear of death, consumers romanticize the toxic events as bringing a sense of communality. When Jack sees hundreds of people fleeing the cloud and moving across the bridge, he romanticizes the scene, thinking "they seemed to be part of some ancient destiny, connected in doom and ruin to a whole history of people trekking across wasted landscapes. There was an epic quality about them that made me wonder for the first time at the scope of our predicament" (122). Seen in this light, his experience is part of a great epic in which a number of sufferers, including himself, share the same destiny. In the scene of the evacuation camp during the toxic cloud event, "this large gray area, dank and bare and lost to history just a couple of hours ago, became an oddly agreeable place, filled with an eagerness of community and voice" (129). The fact that the toxic cloud could loom at any time becomes bearable and even pleasant for Jack, as he perceives it as creating a sense of community. When death is approaching and threats are everywhere, people turn to crowds as a means of coping with imminent death. Jack contemplates how "crowds came to form a shield against their own dying. To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone" (73). This passage illustrates the belief that being part of a crowd can help

people evade death, or at least a lonely death, as there are many other people who share the same fate. Likewise, Jack refers to the sunset, which is polluted by toxic substances, as a "wholesome communal pleasure" (61) and appreciates its beauty, stating that "the sunsets had become almost unbearably beautiful" (170). It is obvious that the sunset here is viewed as a beautiful and comforting scene that all people in the community can watch and appreciate together rather than an ominous and forbidding threat.

Characters in this novel romanticize not only the toxic threat but also the act of buying that helps create a sense of community among consumers. In the station wagons scene, in which parents come to send their children to a university, Jack Gladney states that he has witnessed this annual scene for twenty-one years and finds it to be a spectacle and a brilliant event:

> The roofs of the station wagons were loaded down with carefully secured suitcases full of light and heavy clothing; with boxes of blankets, boots and shoes, stationery and books, sheets, pillows, quilts; with rolled-up rugs and sleeping bags; with bicycles, skis, ruckbacks, English and Western saddles, and inflated rafts. . . .
>
> I've witnessed this spectacle every September for twenty-one years. It is a brilliant event. (3)

This scene reflects that Jack is delighted to see the shared consumerist practices of all parents whose station wagons are full of a long list of commodities. Although Jack cannot really see what is inside the suitcases, he can imagine that the students' products are very likely the same. The commodities range from clothes and all kinds of equipment, to junk food and sweets of certain brands. This scene suggests that both the parents and students are relentless consumers. Even a normal car is not big enough

to carry their belongings, and they all have to use station wagons, cars with a lot of space behind the back seats and a door at the back for loading large items. Jack's observation that the parents see "images of themselves in every direction" indicates that the images of all parents are identical because of what they own and display. In addition, this kind of scene impresses on the parents' minds the belief that "they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation" (3). Parents can recognize that although what they buy may not be exactly the same thing or the same brand, their similar act of persistent consumption creates a bond among them through their shared consumerist faith. Consumers are happy to be reconfirmed in the belief that they are not alone, but spiritually akin and connected in the invisible consumerist system. Interestingly, they all "feel a sense of renewal" (3) and the scene is repeated every year. This scene implies that the parents yearn for and cling to the endless cycle of consumerism as a means of belonging to the community of consumers.

Similarly, when Jack looks at Steffie, who utters the words Toyota Celica, a brand name car, Jack thinks the words have a spiritual and communal power:

> The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in uniform. It made me feel that something hovered. . . . How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. . . . Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence. (155)

It should be noted that some critics feel uncomfortable with this scene. Especially, Myers argues that DeLillo tends to exaggerate the effects of advertising and that "[t]here is so little apparent wonder in [Steffie]'s words that only a metaphor drawn from recognizable human experience could induce us to share Jack's excitement." However, readers are not supposed to share Jack's excitement. Instead, they should recognize that Jack's romaticization of the comsumerist practice or influence is rather pathetic and inappropriate. Instead of being frustrated with the fact that even in his daughter's sleep the manipulation of consumerism is still at work, Jack feels that the popular brand name gives him "a moment of splendid transcendence" and makes him feel "selfless and spiritually large" (155). This can be interpreted as Jack derives a sense of security from the belief that his personal self melts into the communal self, participating in the same consumerist acts.

The Vicious Circle of Consumerism

However, it should be noted that characters in *White Noise* are not totally blind to the truth that consumerism is dangerous to their health. At least Jack seems to be aware of this fact. After seeing the pathetic images of schizophrenic postmodern consumers, such as Willie Mink, Jack thinks that he sees things anew. When Jack is in Mink's room, he hears "a noise, faint, monotonous, white" (306). The white noise here can be interpreted as both the consumerist toxic environment and the logic of consumerism that lures people impulsively to buy products causing mental and physical suffering from consumption of the products. The white noise is described as being everywhere in the supermarket, on the highways, and in people's homes, but Jack can only hear and see it clearly after seeing Mink immersed in the pathetic state of consumerism. Jack as well as the reader begins to become aware of the ills of

consumerism that cause consumers to inexorably consume products, represented by Dylar, which transform them into schizophrenics who mindlessly believe all the information furnished by the media.

Even prior to the scene of meeting Willie Mink, it seems Jack recognizes that the real cause of his chronic distress is the commodities that surround him. There are three scenes in which Jack feels depressed by toxic threats and angrily throws away a lot of his consumer products. While Mark Osteen in *American Magic and Dread* (2000) interprets Jack's disposal of his consumer merchandises as a divestment ritual or the purgative rite towards gaining the spiritual transcendence that Tibetans obtain from religious practices (165-91), this scene can also be interpreted as the moment of Jack's possible disillusionment. Jack begins to realize that his problems, fear of death and fatal diseases, come from the products he consumes. When Jack cannot find Dylar he feels very upset and starts throwing things away. It is interesting that DeLillo describes what Jack throws away in detail. Jack throws things away not only to simply release his frustration, but also because he begins to realize that these consumer products are the real source of his disease and his fear of death. In the second scene, after seeing a doctor, Jack goes home and again begins to throw things away and see the truth:

> The more things I threw away, the more I found. The house was a sepia maze of old and tired things. . . . I just wanted to get the stuff out of the house. I sat on the front steps alone, waiting for a sense of ease and peace to settle in the air around me. (262)

The passage suggests that Jack's feeling of restlessness comes from the products he has acquired. The paradoxical sentence, "the more things I threw away, the more I found" signifies that Jack begins to realize that only by throwing his consumer

products away or symbolically turning away from consumerism can he possibly escape the toxic threat and mental problems and regain a sense of peace.

In the last scene following Jack's discussion of death with Murray, Jack again begins throwing things away. Jack admits to himself that "I bore a personal grudge against these things. Somehow they'd put me in this fix. They'd dragged me down, made escape impossible" (294). This statement reveals that Jack has acquired a hatred for all of his commodities. He even claims that disposal of these products will create a potential escape from the white noise.

Following these scenes, however, the toxic threat is still there. Men in Mylex suits are still in the area. Although Jack seems to realize that products are the real cause of his anxiety and death fear, the fact that he cannot run away from it makes him feel hopeless. He despondently turns to consumerism and self-delusion as a means of evading the fear of death. Jack may know that dark glasses cause his eye problems, but he cannot stop using them because postmodern man without consumerist products becomes nothing, a man without identity. Jack and other characters throw their lives to the mercy of the media and consumerist culture.

Consumers try to ignore the imminent threats and convince themselves that everything will be fine if the supermarket and consumerism as a cosmic force do not change. For them, the consumerist system is well ordered and can always be relied on. However, in actuality, consumerism can also cause confusion. For example, at the end of the novel, when the supermarket shelves have been rearranged, consumers feel confused and panic emerges everywhere:

> They see no reason for it, find no sense in it. . . . There is a sense of wandering now, an aimless and haunted mood. . . . In the alternated

> shelves, the ambient roar, in the plain and heartless fact of their decline, they try to work their way through confusion. (325-26)

In a world of uncertainty, consumers try to seek a sense of certainty and reliability from the supermarket and consumerism. However, when the shelves are rearranged and they cannot find the same products on the familiar shelves they feel confused and panic. The last thread they felt they could always cling to cannot give them a real sense of security. However, finally all the customers begin to feel better when they reach the terminals. The novel ends with the following passage:

> 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. . . . And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with the brightly colored goods. . . . A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloid racks. The tales of supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead. (326)

The novel ends with a portrayal of postmodern consumers. They choose to revel in the consumer world because consumerism itself and various products it provides give them hope and meaning although they are illusive and empty. Tabloids and holographic scanners are both the products of consumerism, offering illusive hopes for consumers that everything is fine. The scanners are described as a mystic entity that people can always depend on. For desperate consumers attacked by toxic threats, tabloids provide the realm of superstition and other kinds of distractions such as stars' stories and false advertisements of amazing drugs that can cure all kinds of diseases

caused by consumerism. No matter how severe the confusion and the panic are, consumers try to seek comfort in consumerism.

In *White Noise*, Don DeLillo presents a vivid picture of the postmodern toxic world that provides people with no real certainty, but rather a fear of death and fatal diseases. It is a world where people's minds and behaviors are manipulated by the logic of consumerism. Consumerism provides consumer products that can lethally threaten people's lives on the one hand, and offer the illusive promise of escaping from that fatal threat or death fear through the act of consuming products such as Dylar and tabloids on the other. However, ignoring the fact that consumerism is the real cause of the fatal threats and turning to it as a means of seeking comfort is not a wise choice. Although some argue that no one can escape the poisoning postmodern consumerist environment, we can at least change our way of life, neither surrounding ourselves with the threat in the form of consumer products nor supporting the consumerist circle. Through these practices we may have a glimpse of some solution for this depressing society. Each individual act can contribute to either more severe environmental hazards, or the restoration of the environment. Perhaps, one possible answer to the question raised above lies within our awareness that the consumerist threat is continually caused by ourselves: our own ignorance and our irresponsible acts of relentless buying. We can help save the world and our lives if we are fully awakened from the consumerist maze.

CHAPTER IV

CONSUMERISM, HYPEREALITY, AND THE WASTE PROBLEM IN *UNDERWORLD*

In almost all consumerist societies, waste is a major problem. In the consumerist world, where the media endlessly entices people to buy and consume products, waste is unavoidable because products and their manufacturing process inevitably lead to waste. The more we consume, the more waste we generate. Waste, as a direct result of consumerism, can pollute the environment and harm people's health. Consequently, a system of waste management is organized to deal with waste and is believed to be able to handle it effectively. *Underworld*, Don DeLillo's 1997 novel, which was nominated for the National Book Award, analyzes the topic of the waste problem. The novel ties together three focuses that serve as its framework: the fate of a homerun baseball from a game in 1951, the threat of the atomic bomb, and the proliferation of garbage created by consumerist culture.

Underworld contains not only the theme of waste, but also many other attention-grabbing themes that have been subsequently examined by critics. For example, Jennifer Pincott in "The Inner Workings: Technoscience, Self, and Society in DeLillo's *Underworld*" (1999) chooses to explore the role of technology and science. She maintains that in *Underworld* technology and scientific progress oppress the human condition. Peter Knight in "Everything is Connected: *Underworld*'s Secret History of Paranoia" (1999) examines the theme of paranoia in postwar American culture and argues that DeLillo's *Underworld* presents a secret history of this paranoia over the last half-century. Knight also asserts that *Underworld* revises the anatomizing of popular American paranoia that DeLillo has conducted in his previous

novels, pushing back the inquiry to the time before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and jumping to the world beyond the end of the Cold War. Similarly interested in the theme of paranoia, Tony Tanner in "Afterthoughts on Don DeLillo's *Underworld*" (2002) proposes that in the novel there are many forms and manifestations of paranoid consciousness and he further states that this paranoia is related to the Puritan obsession with signs which he perceives in everything, particularly the signs of an angry God. In addition, Molly Wallace in "'Venerated Emblems': DeLillo's *Underworld* and the History-Commodity" (2001) examines the theme of commodity and history in the section entitled "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry" and postulates that *Underworld* can be read as a critique not only of the role of commodities in the construction of history but also of the production of history as a commodity. As for the theme of waste, Ruth Helyer in "Refuse Heaped Many Stories High: DeLillo, Dirt, and Disorder" (1999) discusses how Don DeLillo explores the boundary between what is a waste product and what is not in *Underworld* and claims that DeLillo portrays borders as fluctuating, rather than being fixed, in order to demonstrate the difficulty of identifying waste and the problems of waste disposal. Regarding the theme of shared experiences that help to connect people, Jesse Kavadlo in "Celebration and Annihilation: The Balance of *Underworld*" (1999) asserts that the novel offers ways of redemption, both in the world of hopelessness, through human relationships, shared experiences, and the single baseball that comes to represent a shared moment in history. The connections between people and events make the world seem smaller and safer although within these very connections lies the possibility of conspiracy and danger. She also claims that the homerun ball acts as a comfort symbol of the collective experience and a nostalgic remnant of an era in which no videotape was available for endless reruns,

repeated news footage, or the sports instant replay. The ball represents life before the aura of simulacra or the copy, and before the creation of the technology that leads to the proliferation of hyperreal simulacra, as presented in the image of the most photographed barns in *White Noise*.

Most critics interpret waste and the homerun baseball as signifying certain abstract notions, such as repressed history, nostalgia for the past, and shared experiences that connect people. Few critics address waste in *Underworld* as the direct result of consumerism. Differently from other critics, this chapter examines the topic of the waste problem in the postmodern condition of hyperreality. It argues that DeLillo criticizes consumerism through the issue of waste and waste management and the fact that, in the hyperreal world where only sign value or the advertised image is perceived as a new kind of reality and where people are induced to endlessly buy products for their illusive images, the waste problem is inevitable and cannot be solved. As people endlessly repeat their consumerist acts in order to acquire the sense of happiness and fulfillment, which advertised products claim to offer, consumer products consequently lead to increasing waste that harms the environment and people's health. Obviously, hyperreality and the logic of consumerism make the waste problem insoluble. Caught in this inescapable condition, the characters in *Underworld* try to come up with different ways of coping with the prevalent and escalating waste.

Hyperreality and Consumption of Signs

Jean Baudrillard states in "The Procession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (2006) that "[s]imulation is . . . the generation by models of a real without

origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1). He defines hyperreality as a condition in which reality has been replaced by simulacra (the reproduction, the copy, the signs, or the images in the media) or a phenomenon where one can no longer tell the difference between the real and reproductions of the real. Reproductions even become more real than the real. Moreover, hyperreality can be seen as the third order of simulation. The first stage of simulation is the pre-modern era in which images were clearly copies or representations of some original. The second stage of simulation is the industrial revolution, characterized by photography and mass reproduction technologies of the nineteenth century. In this stage, the image obscures the real and threatens to displace the real. As for the third stage of simulation, the simulacrum precedes the original and the distinction between reality and representation breaks down (1-40).

Signs in hyperreality have interesting characteristics. According to Ferdinand de Saussure in "General Principles" in *Course in General Linguistics* (1981), a sign consists of the signifier and the signified (66-7). He asserts that there is a form of stability in signification. Although the relationship between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary, signs can communicate a secure meaning in the differential relation, a distinction within a system of opposites and contrasts (67-72). However, as Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker point out, Jean Baudrillard's concept of signs in hyperreality differs from Saussure's concept of signs. To Baudrillard, signs no longer communicate a fixed meaning. The signifier does not refer to the signified and there is a free-floating exchange of signifiers. Baudrillard further argues that because of their arbitrariness, signs can communicate nothing and the signifier never refers to one stable signified (204-5).

In the media world of hyperreality, where a sense of originality or an old kind of reality disappears, simulacra or the images in the media are seen as the only reality.

As a result, people in this condition care only about what is presented in the media. For a specific example to clarify this point, Marian Shay, Nick's wife, devotes all her attention to what appears in the media, such as on TV and in magazines. While watching TV, she fears that the female protagonist in the movie will be killed. However, she thinks it is fine if this character is killed off camera, because the act of killing does not appear on the screen and she does not witness it. She says, "Off camera, fine. He can use a chain saw. As long as I don't have to see it" (116). In addition, Brian Glassic, Nick's friend, realizes his state of entrapment in hyperreality where what is presented in the media becomes a reality of life. When he is driving past the billboards for Hertz, Avis, Chevy Blazer, Marlboro, Continental and Goodyear, he realizes that:

> all the things around him, the plane taking off and landing, the streaking cars, the tires on the cars, the cigarettes that the drivers of the cars were dousing in their ashtrays—all these were on the billboards around him, systematically linked in some self-referring relationship that had a kind of neurotic tightness, an inescapability, as if the billboards were generating reality, and of course he thought of Marvin. (183)

The idea of hyperreality where only reality is derived from the media is evident in this scene. Glassic begins to realize that all reality around him comes from the billboards. Literally, it means that people buy the products as they are advertised in the media. Much more interestingly, it can also be interpreted that what people construct and perceive as real comes only from the media. In the postmodern word, reality exists only in the media as represented by the billboards in this quotation. As a result, people cannot help turning to the consumer products presented in the media and consumption

becomes a necessary action for them. Furthermore, according to postmodern theory, in a sign which is believed to be composed of the signified and the signifier, the signifier is not really related to the signified. Therefore, signs do not represent other things but refer only to themselves, as described in DeLillo's words as "some self-referring relationship" (183). For example, we buy an expensive brand name bag because we expect to gain its sign value of prestige. However, once we have purchased it, it turns out that the brand name bag, as a signifier, cannot supply us with its signified of high social status but refers solely to itself. Left with an unfulfilled desire, we yearn to buy a new bag again based on the same illusive hope. Consequently, people are trapped in "a kind of neurotic tightness" (183) as they are consistently induced endlessly to buy more and more products for their empty sign value. For another interpretation of this scene, "a kind of neurotic tightness" (183) can refer to the moment in which people trapped in hyperreality, such as Glassic, feel confused as to what is more "real," the media information represented by the billboards or the immediate experience that they are facing in everyday life. Interestingly, this scene reminds Glassic of Marvin Lundy, someone who is obsessed with the homerun baseball and spends a lot of money and many years in search of the ball. It can be interpreted here that Lundy is also trapped in this kind of neurotic tightness, having a strong desire to possess the ball used in the memorable game that was played and broadcast in the past. The baseball is not different from other consumer products with the illusive sign value. It similarly invokes the desire to consume but cannot provide Lundy with a sense of fulfillment. Lundy always asks himself why he desires to own this ball and still feels empty after the ball is in his possession.

DeLillo plays with the constantly changing value of the baseball in *Underworld* to indicate that the ball as a signifier does not refer to any signified. The sign value is empty because we can attach any illusive signified (the sign value) to the signifier (the baseball). The free-floating meaning of the ball is apparent; it can be anything depending on each of the owners who imposes an illusive value on it. This can reflect that, in hyperreality and in a chain of free floating signifiers, a signifier cannot refer to one fixed signified. For Nick Shay, the present owner, the ball is attached with the idea of failure because it reminds him that his favorite team lost as he claims the ball is "all about losing" and he buys it "[to] commemorate failure" (97). Moreover, the ball can symbolize the nostalgic past he longs for. It refers to the pre-postmodern time when there is no endless rerun of tape and there is a sense of originality beyond the cycle of simulacra that consumerism and the media offer. Charlie Wainwright thinks that the ball has a spiritual value and gives it to his son, Chuckie Wainwright, as a sign of "a trust, a gift, a peace offering, a form of desperate love and a spiritual hand-me-down" (611). However, interestingly, some people do not see the sign value of the ball and consider it to be junk. This point can help emphasize the emptiness of the sign value. For example, Chuckie does not see the sign value of the ball as his father does. He is not even aware that he accidentally lost it in the trash or that his wife snatched it when they split. Likewise, Simeon Biggs does not see the value of the ball and calls it "melancholy junk from yesterday" and "a worthless object" (9).

The interplay between products and waste in *Underworld* can also point to the illusive value of signs or products in hyperreality. In hyperreality, products can be seen as waste and waste can be seen as products. The status depends on the people who attach value to them. A very expensive product can be seen as useless rubbish if

its illogical sign value of luxury or happiness is stripped away. Likewise, a disgusting product can be considered a valuable one when it is assigned a certain sign value. For example, the baseball that many people spend years and a large sum of money looking for is treated by others as trash. For Nick, the ball is the most valuable item; as he states, "it's the only thing in my life that I absolutely had to own" (97). However, at the same time, it can be considered useless waste due to the fact that Charlie's wife finds it in a junk shop in Vermont, a place where waste is collected and sold.

Moreover, the interplay between products and waste can be seen in the fact that Nick and Marian think about products as waste:

> Marian and I saw products as garbage even when they sat gleaming on store shelves, yet unbought. We didn't say, What kind of casserole will that make? We said, What kind of garbage will that make? . . . First we saw the garbage, then we saw the products as food or lightbulbs or dandruff shampoo. (121)

Normally, we see products as products firstly, and then think of them as waste when the products become useless for us. However, Nick, as a waste manager, sees products as waste even as they are sitting on the shelf. This is because as a waste manager Nick realizes that all products inevitably lead to waste.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the ball representing all consumer products and garbage can also prompt readers to relate products with useless waste. In the moment of contemplating or selling the ball, the visual or auditory imagery comes to interrupt the moment. This can be interpreted as the inseparable link between the product and rubbish. For example, when Manx Martin sells the ball to Charlie, the

sound imagery of waste is obvious as "[he] hears the rumble and grind of a garbage truck around a corner somewhere" (655).

In addition, waste can be seen as the object of consumption. The following quotation reveals the similarity between waste and products. As Nick thinks:

> They are trading garbage in the commodity pits in Chicago. They are making synthetic feces in Dallas. You can sell your testicles to a firm in Russia that will give you four thousand dollars and then remove the items surgically and mash them up and extract the vital substances and market the resulting syrupy stuff as rejuvenating beauty cream, for a profit that is awesome. (804)

This passage, though amusing, actually points to the serious fact that disgusting waste and gleaming products on the shelves are very similar. In hyperreality, or the world of image representation, any sign value can be attached to anything and a commodity will become a sign that can be sold. The substances extracted from a testicle, which can be considered useless waste, can become a sign or the object of consumption after they are assigned with the idea of youthfulness and presented as cosmetic products. The play of ideas between desirable products with a very good image on the shelves and disgusting waste here emphasizes the arbitrariness and emptiness of the sign value in the hyperreal world.

The Consumption of Signs and the Waste Problem

Underworld portrays hyperreality not as a state in which people simply enjoy the floating signifiers but as a state in which the relentless consumption of signs victimizes people and causes the waste problem. Not only are consumers affected in the way that they face the mental sense of "neurotic tightness" (183) but those who do

not consume also have to suffer from this way of consumption. More specifically, underprivileged people in impoverished areas fall victims to the waste problem which is manifested in the form of the escalating waste in impoverished areas and in the form of impoverished people who suffer from the waste.

The impoverished places marginalized by mainstream society become the site of waste disposal, especially toxic waste. The consumerist society has the monetary power to dispose of the waste as a result of its people's consumption in impoverished areas. The first piece of evidence is the Bronx. The Bronx is filled with waste. One scene to illustrate this point is when Sister Alma Edgar and Sister Gracie visit The Wall, a decaying area in the Bronx, and face a scene of waste.

> The two women looked across a landscape of vacant lots filled with years of stratified deposits—the age of house garbage, the age of construction debris and vandalized car bodies, the age of moldering mobster parts. Weeds and trees grew amid the dumped objects. . . . There were networks of vermin, craters choked with plumping fixtures and sheetrock. (239)

From this quotation, all kinds of desirable products become disgusting waste attracting vermin. The novel depicts the prevalence of waste to the extent that no place in the Bronx is totally clear of the influence of waste. Waste is not properly kept in the designated space but actually exists in every inch of the Bronx. When Klara Sax and Teresa, her daughter, walk in the streets of the Bronx, "[e]verywhere they walked there was garbage stacked in black bags. . . . Teresa said nothing about the mounds of trash . . . a hundred bags on one corner and a smell so summer-lush it enveloped the whole body, pressing in like a weather system" (376). The waste is also encroaching and pressing upon people to the point where it invades their personal space such as

their cars. In Antonie's car, Manx Martin "looks in the window at the rear seat and it is filled with garbage" (361). There is no place for Manx to sit. When Manx manages to find a space to sit in the car he feels that he is uncomfortably being pressed upon by the trash around him:

> The trash is bumping and mashing around and it has a life of its own, a kind of seething vegetable menace that pushes up out of the cans and boxes, it's noisy and restless, or maybe that's just the vermin moving around, on the verge of being carsick. (363)

Waste here is portrayed as disgusting and annoying. Manx feels so uncomfortable and frustrated that he wants to get rid of it by throwing it on to the street or anywhere but in the car.

In addition to the Bronx, "LDCs" or less developed countries also become a place for waste disposal. Sims, a landfill engineer, tells Nick about how toxic waste is dumped in these countries:

> Those little dark-skinned countries. Yes, it's a nasty business that's getting bigger all the time. A country will take a fee amounting to four times its gross national product to accept a shipment of toxic waste. What happens after that? We don't want to know. (278)

It is obvious that in the consumerist system the countries with less monetary power fall victim or are taken advantage of. This is a new kind of waste business leading to economic oppression. With a sum of money in exchange, many less developed countries agree to accept the toxic waste that certainly affects people's health and the environment. The waste problem presented here is not simply the manifestation of a large amount of waste, but a signifier of economic inequality. The richer countries

send dangerous waste to the poorer ones which may not be involved in creating it at all.

In this novel, the waste problem is presented not only in the form of decaying materials dominating the landscape but also in the form of impoverished people who become victims of the waste or the waste management process. To illustrate, many people in Kazakhstan, a less developed country, where Tchaika, a company that blows up waste in exchange for money, is located, physically suffer from the effects of the nuclear explosions of toxic waste and nuclear radiation, becoming frighteningly deformed like cyclops. That is, their eye is centered, their ears are below the chin, and their mouths as well as their brains are missing (799).

DeLillo criticizes people who care only about the waste business and overlook the following problem described in Nick's comment regarding Victor Maltsev who established Tchaika:

> This is a man who is trying to merchandise nuclear explosions—using safer methods . . . to prove himself he is not blind to the consequences. It is the victims who are blind. It is the boy with skin where his eyes ought to be, a bolus of spongy flesh, oddly like a mushroom cap, springing from each brow. It is the bald-headed children standing along a war in their underwear, waiting to be examined. (800)

Satirically, people who are blind to the consequences of commercialization of waste are severely criticized. Here, Maltsev claims that he is not blind to the consequence that his business causes many severe deformations in people by trying to find "safer methods" (800) to process this kind of waste. However, it is implied that there is no safe way of processing the toxic waste. The best way to solve this problem is stop buying and selling products or creating toxic waste. Ironically, Maltsev refuses to

accept that he is blind to the consequences and therefore innocent people are forced to become literally blind instead.

The Dead End of the Waste Problem

Consumerism in hyperreality makes waste endless and unavoidable. Notably, the logic of consumerism conditions people in the hyperreal world in such a way that they cannot escape the consumerist spell and that they thus cannot deal with waste properly. To illustrate, in consumer culture it is believed that people can experience the world only through advertised products which can be seen as simulacra in the hyperreal world. As a result, people inevitably buy more and more products which, in turn, lead to more and more waste. Moreover, many characters in *Underworld* do not see waste as a depressing problem causing severe damage to the environment and people's health because they believe waste can usefully be reprocessed as products and then sent again into the consumerist cycle. In *Underworld*, the people who live in hyperreality try to find a way to deal with waste and believe that they can use their knowledge and expertise to solve the waste problem. However, because they themselves are still trapped in consumerism in hyperreality, they are unable to solve the problem of constantly escalating waste.

Firstly, many people involved in the waste management business in this novel romanticize the process of waste management into an effective means of solving the waste problem. However, this process, in reality, perpetuates the cycle of consumerism. Waste management can be defined as the collection, transportation, processing, recycling or disposal, and monitoring of waste materials to reduce their effect on health and the environment. According to Eva Pongrácz, Paul S. Phillips and Riitta L. Keiski in "Evolving the Theory of Waste Management: Implications to

Waste Minimization" (2004), waste management can prevent waste from causing harm to human health and the environment through waste minimization measures such as the reduction of waste by the application of more efficient production technologies and re-use of products. Industries should get most of their needed materials through recycling streams rather than through raw materials. However, these measures do not really solve the core source of the problem—consumerism constantly enticing people to endlessly consume. This indicates that the theory of waste management does not go against the logic of consumerism but encourages more consumption by feeding the reused material into the consumerist process again.

Nick Shay, a waste manager, clearly represents those who believe that waste management can effectively solve the waste problem. Many passages in *Underworld* depicting Nick's careful act of separating or categorizing junk before disposing of it show that he believes his actions can really help to reduce waste. To illustrate, Nick carefully separates waste into glass, cans and paper products, then clear glass versus colored glass, and then tin versus aluminum so that they can be reprocessed and sent into the manufacturing line more easily and efficiently. Nick mystifies even the minor practices of waste management. He believes that "[we] faithfully removed the crinkly paper from our cereal boxes. It was like preparing a pharaoh's for his death and burial. We wanted to do the small things right" (119). The act of separating waste in order for it to be recycled easily is elevated to the great ceremony of a pharaoh burial; it shows that this act requires very careful and delicate attention.

Therefore, having a consumerist mindset, Nick highly regards waste as having redemptive powers because it can be reprocessed, transformed into useful materials, and fed into the consumerist chain again.

> The tin, the paper, the plastics, the styrofoam. It all flies down the conveyor belts, four hundred tons a day assembly lines of garbage, sorted, compressed and baled, transformed in the end to square-edged units, products again, wire-bound and smartly stacked and ready to be marketed. . . . Maybe we feel a reverence for waste, for the redemptive qualities of the things we use and discard. (801)

Proud of the efficiency of waste management practices, Nick further believes that the waste products considered by others to be useless can become products "ready to be marketed" (801). His attitude towards waste and waste management points to the fact that the process of waste management itself is an integral element in the whole chain of consumerism.

One scene in which Nick contemplates the beauty of waste and waste management at the landfill suggests that his focus on the consumerist aspect alone deprives him of the chance to realize the negative effects this process has on the environment. He describes the picturesque scene of the five hundred foot deep hole in the earth, whose sloped bottom is covered with polyethylene, a kind of plastic, and is covered by a snub-nosed machine:

> The sight of this thing, the enormous gouged bowl lined with artful plastic grandeur, was the first material sign I'd had that this was a business of certain drastic grandeur, even a kind of greatness, maybe—the red-tailed hawks transparent in the setting sun and the spring stalks of yucca tall as wishing wands and this high-density membrane that was oddly and equally beautiful in a way, a prophylactic device, a gas-control system, and the crater it layered that would accept thousands of tons of garbage a day, your trash and mine, for desert burial. I listened

> to Sims recite the numbers, how much methane we would recover to light how many homes, and I felt a weird elation, a loyalty to the company and the cause. (285)

In this quotation, the beautiful imagery of the scene is obvious and the usefulness of garbage is emphasized. Through Nick's eyes, everything in the scene is romantically beautiful such as the flying red hawk whose color complements the color of the setting sun, the tall trees nearby which seem to be as magical as wands, and the strikingly beautiful plastic covering the sloped bottom of the big hole. Nick highly praises the scene because he feels proud that the company he works for and his work in waste management are so useful. Waste here can be used to produce methane energy supplying many houses. For Nick, it is miraculous that waste, a substance normally considered useless, can be managed by a modern machine which turns it into a product again. However, it is widely known that methane plays an important role in global warming. Although Nick believes that this is the way of efficiently coping with the waste problem, it actually causes more damage to the environment. It should be noted that Nick's consumerist mindset prevents him from stopping to consider the disastrous effects the waste management practices have on the environment. Although it is very useful to reuse garbage, the waste problem is still prevalent in the society because the root of the problem, the logic of consumerism and the idea of consumption of signs in hyperreality, has not yet been solved. As Nick thinks, "We design these organized bodies to respond to the market, face four square to the world" (89). This statement indicates that the system of waste management exists just to feed more products into the market and actually supports the consumerist chain.

As for Jess Detwiler, another character who works in the waste business and whom Nick calls a garbage archeologist, he not only sees waste as beneficial, but his attitude towards waste further indicates that he is trapped in the consumerist chain. Detwiler is impressed with waste management practices because they show the power of scientific technology and human mastery over the environment as well as offer another possibility for tourism, an additional consumerist activity:

> The more toxic the waste, the greater the effort and expense a tourist will be willing to tolerate in order to visit the site. . . . Isolate the most toxic waste, okay. This makes it grander, more ominous and magical. But basic household waste ought to be placed in the cities that produce it. . . . Let people see it and respect it. . . . Design gorgeous building to recycle waste and invite people to collect their own garbage and bring it with them to the press rams and conveyors. . . . And the hot stuff, the chemical waste, the nuclear waste, this becomes a remote landscape of nostalgia. Bus tours and postcards, I guarantee it. (286)

Here Detwiler celebrates the value of waste and the power of the machines with their ability to transform waste. Moreover, Detwiler, with his consumerist mindset, does not consider toxic waste as a depressing problem but considers it as a tool for attracting tourists who will spend large sums of money in order to see it.

Interestingly, according to Detwiler, people visit the site of the toxic waste because they want to consume the experience of the past represented by the nuclear waste. As Detwiler puts it, people still long for "the banned materials of civilization, for the brute force of old industries and old conflicts" (286). The "old conflicts" here refer to the cold war conflicts between the Soviet Union and America who competed to acquire nuclear weapons. Even though the past here is a ruined one, it is

nevertheless able to provide a sense of "totality," "originality," and "stability." Whereas it is claimed that in the postmodern world people have no nostalgia for a sense of totality that has disappeared, this passage can be interpreted as offering the image of postmodern consumers who are dissatisfied with the presence of hyperreality and its superficiality; this type of consumer still gropes after the deep and the stable. Much more interestingly, it can be further argued that tourists who visit this place cannot fulfill their desire of experiencing a sense of stability that existed during the time before the postmodern age because the toxic waste site is merely an arbitrary sign of the past, one that is devoid of its promised signified. This serves as a critique of the postmodern theory itself that claims that people are happy with the superficial and are no longer concerned about a sense of originality or stability.

Moreover, although some characters in the waste business seem to be aware that the waste problem comes from the endless desire of consumers to consume, they are so trapped in the consumerist world that they do not think of consumerism as a grave problem. DeLillo satirizes these characters in the waste business who believe that they fully realize the waste problem, whereas actually they do not. Brian Glassic, one of waste managers, helps to clarify this point. When he sees the Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island, he seems to know that the waste problem comes from an endless desire to consume, but he still romanticizes this desire to consume as reflecting the grandeur of human civilization:

> He imagined he was watching the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza—only this was twenty-five times bigger, with tanker trucks spraying perfumed water on the approach roads. He found the sight inspiring. All this ingenuity and labor, this delicate effort to fit maximum waste into diminishing space. . . . Brian felt a sting of

> *enlightenment*. He looked at all that soaring garbage and knew for the first time what his job was all about. Not engineering or transportation or source reduction. *He dealt in human behavior, people's habits and impulses, their uncontrollable needs and innocent wishes, maybe their passions, certainly their excesses and indulgences* . . . and the question was how to keep this mass metabolism from overwhelming us. (184) (emphasis added)

Although Glassic thinks that he is enlightened when he comprehends that what he is managing is not just waste but people's unquenchable desire to consume more, he is actually experiencing a false enlightenment. He proceeds to romanticize the process of waste management and admires the efforts of people in waste management rather than perceiving and comprehending that waste is detrimental to a consumerist society. He compares a large amount of waste with the Great Pyramid at Giza. This analogy implies a sense of greatness and an element of mystique to the waste. Moreover, instead of looking at waste as a distressing problem, he believes in the efficiency of waste management and the managers' efforts to achieve the formidable task of fitting the enormous amount of garbage into a small space. Glassic is also proud that he is a member of an esoteric group who has knowledge of the presence of the mountains of garbage:

> [N]o one knew it existed except the engineers and teamsters and local residents . . . and no one talked about it but the men and women who tried to manage it, and he saw himself for the first time as a member of an esoteric order, they were adepts and seers, crafting the future, the city planners, the waste managers, the compost technicians. (185)

Despite his possession of the knowledge unknown to most people, Glassic does not learn that waste is a severe problem. Glassic's knowledge does not make him any different from most people who do not have this knowledge. In the latter case, they are unaware of their complicity in the waste problem. The consumers do not realize that they are creating more and more waste as they allow themselves to be driven by their unlimited desire to consume, encouraged by the logic of consumerism.

It is obvious that Glassic is under the consumerist spell and therefore cannot see that the logic of consumerism is the real source of the problem. His consumption behavior illustrates this point. Glassic cannot stop buying because in hyperreality the only reality of life is gained through the act of buying products. When he would like to establish a relationship, he does it by using consumer products. Glassic is conditioned by consumerism in hyperreality in such a way that his friendship with Nick is mediated through the products. Glassic always calls Nick and tells him about "a movie he wanted [Nick] to rent, guns, and drugs—he thought it made [them] better buddies" (108). In the postmodern consumerist world, the desire to consume is endless because the simulacrum represented by the media becomes the only reality and all forms of activity including human relationships must be mediated through products. Although Glassic seems to realize the presence of waste and consumers' desire to consume, he himself cannot extricate himself from the logic of consumerism and hyperreality.

The idea of the false enlightenment of waste managers under the consumerist spell, who do not recognize waste as the problem, is also evident when Sims, an engineer who designs landfills, tells Nick that, after working as a waste manager, he sees waste everywhere. "From the first day I find that everything I see is garbage." Nicks says, "You are enlightened now. Be grateful" (283). Nick means that Sims

should be happy to know a truth that few people know; garbage is everywhere and every product contributes to more and more garbage. However, it is interesting to note that Nick is not really enlightened. Although he seems to know that products make waste, he does not realize that waste management is not the real answer to the problem. Nick, a consumerist who wants to advance materially, says boastfully to his brother, "We can't build enough landfills, dig enough gaping caverns" (205) as a means of trying to impress his brother with his career success. Actually, it can be inferred that there is more and more garbage, even to the extent that waste managers cannot construct sufficient landfills to keep up with the rapid growth of escalating waste due to the fact that in the consumerist world people are constantly encouraged to buy more and more.

Not only people in the field of waste management or business but also those in the field of art fall under the consumerist spell, and are unable to find a way out to solve the waste problem. Klara Sax, an artist, believes that her art projects, in which war waste such as old planes is repainted and represented as valuable art, can be considered as a means of escaping the consumerist simulacra in hyperreality and trying to deal with waste appropriately. However, she is actually still trapped in the consumerist chain.

At first, we can interpret that Sax's art project is used as a critique of the consumerist assembly line and its mass production that generates a large number of identical products. Firstly, Sax points out that aircraft come off the assembly line in the same way as other products. She claims that she and her people try to give some life to the consumerist product:

> See, we're painting, hand-painting in some cases, putting our puny hands to great weapon systems, to systems that came out of the

> factories and assembly halls as near alike as possible, millions of components stamped out, repeated endlessly, and we're trying to unrepeat, to find an element of felt life, and maybe there's sort of survival instinct here, a graffiti instinct—to trespass and declare ourselves, show who we are. (77)

In the consumerist world of simulacra and the copy, commodities are a part of mass production that lures people to misperceive that these objects of consumption can provide them with a unique identity. However, actually products are merely signs with an empty sign value and the choices that we believe we have are not available. Sax, therefore, tries to "unrepeat" (77) this process by trying to give life or individuality to waste by transforming it into art. She is inspired by the painting of "Long Tall Sally," a picture of a young woman in a flouncy skirt and a narrow halter, found on the nose of a very old plane and is impressed by the individuality it represents. She tells Nick:

> I thought we will title our work after this young woman, after the men who fixed her image to the aircraft, after the song that inspired them to do it. . . . She inspired the songwriter or the nose painter or the crew that flew the plane. Maybe she was a waitress in an airman's bar. Or somebody's hometown girl. Or somebody's first love. But this is an individual life. And I want this life to be part of our project. (78)

This aircraft with the "Long Tall Sally" painting is different from other aircraft that come off the same assembly line in the sense that it has an element of life and individuality that cannot be found in other products. Sax tries to undo the system of simulacra of consumerism by stopping the process of endless simulations and giving an individual name and meaning to waste that is considered useless and meaningless.

In this aspect, Sax not only recycles the ignored waste by making it into valuable art but also challenges the consumerist paradigm of simulacra without originals.

However, Sax is not much different from the waste managers in that she is still influenced by hyperreality and the logic of consumerism. Firstly, Sax's attempt to transform waste is a failure because she is under the hyperreal spell. The publicity of her art project confirms this point. In hyperreality, there are only simulacra or the copies of mass products without the original. Sax, in contrast, tries to give individuality to waste but the way she mediates her artwork through many forms of media such as magazines and TV programs illustrates that she cannot escape hyperreality—where it is believed that only reality comes from the media. Sax feels proud of her work and believes that the way to show it to the world is to broadcast her projects through a hyperreal means, the media. In this respect, Sax's art project is also a simulacrum in a chain of floating signifying signs without originality or individuality. As a result, her attempt to go beyond the postmodern condition is unfulfilled.

Furthermore, an analysis of her life also reveals that hyperreality influences her tremendously. Hyperreality is a condition in which people ignore the deep and care only about the superficial because there is the belief that the deep, or the signified, does not exist in the hyperreal world. Being mesmerized by the simulacra in the media and trapped in the superficiality of hyperreality, Sax pays all attention only to appearance, fame, and material advancement and disregard the deep such as real relationships with others. She leaves the Bronx and ignores her ex-husband and her daughter. To be more specific, Sax cares about appearance so much that she tries to support Albert Bronzini, her ex-husband, to advance in his career to become a department head or even a dean while, in actuality, he would prefer to live a simple

life. Although the will to support her husband's career advancement may not be considered a bad thing, Sax pays too much attention to the social status to realize that Bronzini will not be happy to do the thing against his nature. This reflects that she cares only about the superficial and overlooks Bronzini's feelings. Similarly, Sax tries to push her daughter to achieve material success, causing her to feel uncomfortable and think that her mother, unlike her father, cannot love her for who she is.

In addition to hyperreality, consumerism also influences Sax. It is also revealed that Sax has a consumerist mentality. The way in which she pushes her husband, Bronzini, to advance in his career against his will shows that she cares greatly about the material world and tries to seek a luxurious life. As far as Sax's own life is concerned, she never feels satisfied with her simple life in the Bronx and always tries to find a way to leave it. Although the novel does not clearly depict Sax's luxurious life, it can be assumed that Sax in her old age will revel in the superficiality of her fame for the art project and her material luxuries in life. After considering these points, it is clear that her attempt to overcome the consumerist hyperreality is impossible.

A Glimpse of Hope

Although in hyperreality and the consumerist world the waste problem cannot be solved, the novel also offers an alternative way of living beyond hyperreality and consumerism through the character of Albert Bronzini, a science teacher and Klara Sax's ex-husband, who lives in the Bronx. Many people in the Bronx live impoverished lives and have no money to partake in the consumerist ecstasy or buy luxurious products to gain the sign value of happiness and a good life. Therefore, they pay no attention to simulacra, images, signs, or advertised products. Marginalized in a

poor area overwhelmed with waste, people turn to find happiness in everyday experiences and good relationships with other people which can be interpreted as the deep that is lost in hyperreality. Bronzini is a clear example of this type of person.

It should be noted that Bronzini's way of life is beyond the influence of consumerism and hyperreality. He pays no attention to the simulacra, images, or advertised products. He is so satisfied with a simple walk that he does not want a car and even if someone gave him one, he would not take it. "Bronzini didn't own a car, didn't drive a car, didn't want one, didn't need one, wouldn't take one if somebody gave it to him" (662). This does not literally mean that, in order to gain happiness, one should stop using a car or throw away all material things that give comfort. Actually, Bronzini's refusal to have a car symbolizes the way of life and thinking that does not coincide with consumerism that brainwashes people into believing that happiness can be gained only through material success or luxurious and fashionable lives surrounded by products. Moreover, Bronzini cares about his relationships with people. He can be happy with his life simply by observing life around himself and having good relationships with other people. Bronzini, in his old age and with heart and liver diseases, looks after his sister, Laura, who becomes ill and depends on him, regularly visits Eddie Robles, his friend, in order to help cut Eddie's hair, always keeps in touch with his beloved daughter, Teresa, who lives in Vermont, and joins the social club where he plays cards and sometimes takes a glass of wine. Later in the novel, we learn that when Bronzini was younger, he also lived with his mother, who suffered from a neuromuscular condition and therefore became helpless, to effectively take care of her.

Bronzini also believes that his life gains meaning through walking, which can provide him with thee opportunity to meet many people. He even thinks, "Stop

walking . . . and you die" (662). This does not only refer to the fact that walking is good for his physical health and thus can make him live longer; actually, his walking also helps him to see the world and interact with many people, and this is considered by him to help create a real meaningful life which if he were deprived of it, he would consider himself to be mentally and spiritually dead.

> Bronzini thought that walking was an art. He was out nearly everyday after school, letting the route produce a medley of sounds and forms and movements, letting the voices fall and the aromas deploy in ways that varied, but not too much, from day to day. He stopped to talk to card players in a social club and watched a woman buy a flounder in the market. (661)

Bronzini can find simple pleasure in witnessing everyday life along the street and talking to people. When Bronzini walks, he tries to find a chance to talk to others. For example, he stops to talk to George the Waiter about the game the children are playing in the street and about Matthew Shay, a boy to whom Bronzini used to teach chess. After finishing the conversation, Bronzini continues on walking across the street "so he could wave to George the Barber" (666) and then greets the butcher as usual. Bronzini's walking is really an art because he walks consciously and happily. People in the city whose minds are overwhelmed with work, money, and material advancement cannot walk in this way. The importance of relationships and interacting with people is also emphasized when Matthew asks Bronzini in his old age why he still lives in the old apartment in the decayed area like the Bronx, Bronzini answers that "[t]here are things here, people who show the highest human qualities, outside all notice, because who comes here to see?" (214). The highest human qualities here can refer to the generosity and friendship that people in this area give to one another.

However, people outside this area cannot notice these good characteristics because they never set foot in, nor realize, the existence of such an area as the Bronx. Bronzini also advises Matthew to refresh his sprit through appreciating every delicate aspect of life and scenes in the area:

> Go to Arthur Avenue, Matty. Look at the shops and the people shopping and the people weighing the fish and cutting the meat. This will restore your spirits. I took your mother into the pork store to show her the ceiling. Hundreds of hanging salamis, such bounty and fullness, the place teeming with smells and textures, the ceiling covered completely. I said, Rosemary, look. A gothic cathedral of pork. (214)

The things that cause people to regain their spirit are not consumer products, but the act of noticing the delicate details of life leading to true happiness in a simple way of living. Although this scene is also about people shopping, the products are basic food items necessary for life. People in this market do not buy products for their sign value or to gain happiness. They buy necessary products for their use value and find happiness through interacting with people instead. The ability to appreciate the simple life and everyday surroundings always makes Bronzini happy; he can find beauty in everything. For others, this pork shop may look filthy and dirty, but for him, it is as beautiful as a luxuriously decorated cathedral.

While Bronzini can illustrate that sustainable happiness can be gained through other things than advertised products in the media, Nick Shay's mother can show that those products cannot lead people to real happiness. Nick and Marian Shay, his wife, "fixed her up in a cool room where she watched TV" (85) and they "fixed her up with the humidifier, the hangers, the good hard bed and the dresser" (119). Nick believes that he is helping his mother be happy by taking her out of the Bronx and giving her

comfortable facilities like an air conditioner, a good bed, and a TV. It should be noted that the way Nick buys these products as a means of gaining a sense of happiness is like consuming signs with an illusive value. We learn that in actuality, Rosemary Shay, Nick's mother, is not happy with life surrounded by these luxurious products at all. She consistently refuses to leave the Bronx. She loves her neighbors, the church, and the memories there. However, when she stays with Nick, she just sits in front of the TV watching her favorite programs. Obviously, products or physical comforts that Nick and Matthew Shay, Nick's brother, provide for her do not make her happier than her neighbors. "She had more material things than most people she knew, thanks to sons who provided. She had nicer furniture, a safer building, doctors left and right. . . . But she still couldn't say, Who's better than me?" (207). Rosemary still envies her poor neighbors, the Italians who just sit on the stoop with paper fans and orangeades and say happily "Who's better than me?" (207).

It is interesting to note that consumerists' notion of death is very different from Bronzini's. To Bronzini, death is associated with the lack of good relationships. In contrast, Detwiler, representing the mainstream voice, believes that in the consumerist world, death is an inability to consume:

> Consume or die. That's the mandate of the culture. And it all ends up in the dump. We makes stupendous amounts of garbage, then we react to it, not only technologically but in our hearts and minds. We let it shape us. We let it control our thinking. Garbage comes first, then we build a system to deal with it. (287-8)

Waste here is given importance as a reminder of consumer culture. The more waste we have, the more we participate in the consumerist system and the more civilized we prove to be. The mandate of the consumer culture that one must either consume or die

points to Detwiler's belief that those who do not join in the consumerist ecstasy are considered to be dead in terms of their socio-economic status. Underprivileged people, like those living in the Bronx or the underdeveloped world, are alienated from the mainstream society as well as considered dead socially and economically.

Finally, *Underworld* criticizes consumerism through the issue of waste in hyperreality. In the hyperreal condition, what we perceive as reality is gained only through advertised products. As a result, waste and consumption are inevitable. However, the novel suggests that if we remove the sign value that is attached to the product, the expensive commodity will not differ from useless waste. *Underworld* can help us stop and think of the arbitrariness and emptiness of signs as well as the meaninglessness of our consumption under the influence of hyperreality and consumerism. Moreover, it is apparent that when waste is prevalent, it not only affects the environment but underprivileged people will also become victimized. Interestingly, although in hyperreality and the consumerist world the waste problem cannot be solved, the novel offers a glimpse of hope and life beyond hyperreality through Bronzini who finds real and sustainable happiness in his simple life. Demonstrating that the waste problem stems mainly from consumerism, the novel thus urges readers to stop and think of their own consumerist acts as the direct cause of the waste problem harming themselves, other people, and their environment.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis's interpretation of *Americana*, *White Noise*, and *Underworld* demonstrates that DeLillo criticizes consumerism not only by portraying consumerism's manipulation of people and its adverse effects on their health and the environment but also by attacking the postmodern condition which makes an escape from this consumerist society impossible. To begin with, *Americana* shows the way consumerism provokes people's desire to consume. The media becomes an indispensable tool that turns people into consumers. To illustrate, the media, of which TV advertisements are one form, bombards people with the appealing images or the sign values of advertised products. As a result, people impulsively buy the products in order to gain their presented images. However, consumer desire can never be fulfilled because the sign value attached to these products is illusive and arbitrary. Moreover, the novel discloses the ills of consumerism in the postmodern condition. Consumerism deprives people of real happiness because its tool, the media, distorts their healthy relationships with others, their perception of themselves, and their moral judgment. Evidently, many characters in *Americana* cannot achieve good relationships with others because of the hyperreal condition where a new kind of reality can be gained only through simulacra, i.e. signs and images in the media. David Bell, for example, always mediates all kinds of relationship through consumer products as presented in the media. Even when he describes his own father, Bell can do so only by enumerating the products his father owns. With this way of thinking, Bell cannot maintain a healthy relationship with his father. Even with regard to his own self-perception, the logic of consumerism and the media information blind him

with the idea that his identity depends solely on his appearance that is derived from the brand name products. As for the point about morality, Bell cannot think beyond the superficiality the postmodern condition offers. When he commits adultery, he thinks only about how his life is similar to a character in one of his favorite movies. In addition to depicting media as a consumerist tool in *Americana*, DeLillo portrays the inevitable toxicity of the postmodern consumerist society and the logic of consumerism that have the negative effects on the consumers' physical and mental health in *White Noise*. For the physical aspect, it is made clear in *White Noise* that all kinds of commodities can be fatal. For example, Jack Gladney in *White Noise* experiences vision problems because of his glasses. As for the mental aspect, consumers become schizophrenics in the sense that they cannot distinguish signifieds from signifiers. Willie Mink, representing the postmodern consumer, is a blatant example. He unconditionally believes what other people say and does not use critical thinking to question the validity of their statements. When Jack Gladney says "a bullet," he reacts as if he were really shot by a bullet. Here the confusion between a word (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is obvious. The word "a bullet" does not really signify that a bullet is being shot at that time, but a schizophrenic like Mink cannot realize this fact. Furthermore, Steffie Gladney, another character in this novel, also makes it clear that consumerism turns people into schizophrenics in the sense that they totally believe the media information. Steffie impulsively boils the water, although she has no need to do so, simply because the radio tells her that it is necessary.

As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, DeLillo also further criticizes consumerism through the issue of the waste problem in the postmodern condition of hyperreality in *Underworld*. In the hyperreal world, where only sign values or

advertised images are perceived as a new kind of reality and where people are induced to endlessly buy products for their illusive images, the waste problem is inevitable and cannot be solved. Moreover, the waste problem is manifested in the form of the escalating waste in the impoverished areas and in the form of impoverished people who suffer from the waste. In *Underworld,* many people become severely deformed because of the nuclear radiation which one company uses to eliminate the toxic waste in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, consumerism conditions people in the hyperreal world in such a way that they cannot deal with waste properly. For example, Nick Shay, a waste manager in *Underworld,* tends to romanticize waste and the process of waste management as an effective means of solving the waste problem. Specifically, he is impressed by the redemptive quality of waste which can be transformed into products again. In fact, the process of waste management belongs to the whole chain of consumerism.

It should also be noted that in order to convey those ideas, some of DeLillo's novels are quite aggressive in tone. That he employs techniques of exaggeration, overstatement, and satire causes dissatisfaction among some critics. For example, Bruce Bawer in "Don DeLillo's America" in *The New Criterion* in April, 1985 asserts that most of DeLillo's novels convey nothing except the single theme of the deterioration of contemporary American society: "these novels . . . are tracts, designed to batter us, again and again, with a single idea: that life in American today is boring, benumbing, dehumanized" (qtd. in Gardner). However, DeLillo's exaggerated, or even aggressive, portrayal of manipulative society dominated by consumerism and hyperreality can be seen as his attempt to awaken readers to recognize the ills of the consumerist society in the contemporary world. We, readers, like many characters in his novels, may not recognize the bad effects of consumerism on us in terms of our

health and perception of the world. DeLillo's novels can be seen as satire in which the ills of the society are magnified and depicted as larger than life in order to jerk readers' minds out of their habitual consumerism.

Much more interestingly, although DeLillo's portrayal of the postmodern world in the three novels matches many features that Jean Baudrillard, Frederic Jameson, and Jean-François Lyotard attribute to postmodernity, DeLillo offers some strikingly different aspects regarding postmodern theory. Although such characters as David Bell in *Americana,* The Gladneys in *White Noise,* and Nick Shay as well as Brian Glassic in *Underworld* fall victim to Baudrillard's hyperreal condition, DeLillo suggests that this condition is not as inevitable as Baudrillard believes. To explain, in contrast with Baudrillard, DeLillo shows through his novels that there is still an alternative way of life beyond the influence of consumerism and hyperreality. Winnie Richards in *White Noise* and Albert Bronzini in *Underworld* can further illustrate this point. Firstly, Winnie Richards celebrates humanistic characteristics such as the fear of death. She believes that this fear makes humans more humane and that one should learn to accept death and confront the fear of death so that one will be able to profoundly discern the value of one's existence. However, as for Jack Gladney, he cannot simply accept death as it is. He goes shopping in the supermarket or tries to find consumer products such as Dylar in order to get rid of fear of death. As for Albert Bronzini in *Underworld,* he lives a life independent of the logic of consumerism and hyperreality. Bronzini considers the deep that are believed to be non-existent in hyperreality as the most important thing whereas other characters such as Nick Shay and Marian Shay are trapped in the superficial in the way that they try to seek happiness through materials. Because of this, Bronzini is the only character who is able to gain real happiness. Through Bronzini's good relationships with people around

him and his life free of the consumerist norm, readers begin to question the consumerist lifestyle that in reality cannot offer people sustainable happiness. It is notable that DeLillo disapproves of the hyperreal condition that negatively affects people and makes an escape from the influence of consumerism unattainable. In the hyperreal world, people are brainwashed into believing that their identity depends on advertised products. Consequently, although those products give them nothing but environmental and health hazards, they cannot stop buying.

Moreover, opposing Frederic Jameson who holds a positive view of the experience of schizophrenia in the postmodern condition, DeLillo portrays Willie Mink as a pathetic schizophrenic. At the conclusion of *White Noise*, instead of gaining a euphoric sense, Mink, who believes everything that is presented in the media, seems to be out of his mind. Obsessed with the blurring screen, he mindlessly takes Dylar, a drug attached with the illusive sign value of a remedy for the fear of death. This character serves as a caution any example against the ills of the postmodern consumerist world that can turn people into schizophrenics.

As for Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the postmodern sublime, the concept which is described as the experience of pleasurable anxiety that we are exposed to when confronting great and threatening sights, whereas some critics such as Patricia Yaeger and John Frow suggest that the manifestation of the postmodern sublime in DeLillo's novels is positive, this thesis argues for the opposite. Patricia Yaeger in "Editor's Column: The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of Trash; or Rubbish Ecology" (2008) argues that, in the postmodern world where there seems to be the death of nature and where every scene is dominated by waste as a result of modern technology and consumption, people cannot find uncontaminated nature and as a result learn to accept the ubiquity of waste and even romanticize waste as sacred.

Yaeger also cites Brian Glassic's romanticization of the waste scenes in *Underworld* as examples. However, this thesis reads Glassic's romanticization of waste as DeLillo's attempt to criticize consumerism in the hyperreal world and to satirize mindless waste managers who are unable to see that consumerism is the root cause of the waste problem. Focusing on DeLillo's graphic depiction of Kazakhstans victimized by waste, this thesis interprets the novel as indicating that waste can be fatally dangerous to people's health. Similar to Yaeger, John Frow in "The Last Thing Before the Last: Notes on *White Noise*" (1999) argues that the sunset caused by an airborne toxic event in *White Noise* is an illustration of Lyotard's notion of the sublime. However, this thesis interprets the contaminated sunset as a threat to people's health. The way in which many people, including the Gladneys, deem this sunset to be spectacular and beautiful can also reflect the despair of postmodern consumers who cannot escape the toxic postmodern environment. When they think there seems to be no way out, they simply take refuge in their ignorance and romanticization.

Under the manipulative power of consumer culture in the postmodern age, it is very difficult for people to avoid consumerism's influence. However, by showing the disadvantages of life in the postmodern consumerist world, DeLillo's works can be seen as a means of epitomizing the way out from the depressing situation and also as an attempt to free himself and his readers from the dominant manipulation of consumerism. As DeLillo stated in a 1988 interview with Ann Arensberg, the writer is one "who stands outside society, independent of affiliation and independent of influence. . . . There are so many temptations for American writers to become part of the system and part of the structure that now, more than ever, we have to resist." Under the prevalent influence of consumerism and the incessant wave of media

seducing us to buy more and more in order to gain pleasurable images, we may never stop to think about the consequences of our consumption. DeLillo's novels disclose that the very act of consumption is not an individual's innocent choice. His novels make us aware of the fact that we are induced by the media to consume more and that our consumerism has a disastrous effect on our own lives and the environment. Such literary works as DeLillo's novels can help waken readers to be more mindful and stimulate them to start questioning their position in the consumerist world and reflecting on how to consume more responsibly.

WORKS CITED

Annesley, James. *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998. Print.

Barrett, Laura. "How the dead speak to the living: Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 25 (Winter 2002): 97-113. Print

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2006. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Sage Publications, 1998. Print.

Bignell, Jonathan. *Media semiotics*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2002. Print.

Bird, Benjamin. "Don DeLillo's *Americana*: From Third-to First-Person Consciousness." *Critique* 47.2 (Winter 2006): 185-200. Print.

Bonca, Cornel. "Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: The Natural Language of the Species." *College Literature* (June 1996): 425-44. Print.

Clippinger, David. "Material Encoding and Libidinal Exchange: The Capital Culture Underneath Don DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 39 (1999): 79-91. Print.

Cowart, David. "For Whom Bell Tolls: Don DeLillo's *Americana*." *Contemporary Literature* 37.4 (Winter 1996): 602-19. Print.

Currie, Mark. "Culture and Schizophrenia." *Postmodern Narrative*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1998. 96-114. Print.

DeLillo, Don. *Americana*. New York: Penguin Books, 1971. Print.

---. "Seven Seconds." Interview with Ann Arenberg. *Conversations with Don DeLillo*. Ed. Thomas DiPietro. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2005. 40-6. Print.

---. *Underworld*. New York: Scribner's, 1997. Print.

---. *White Noise*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

Douglas, Mary. "In Defence of Shopping." *The Shopping Experience*. Eds. Pasi Falk and Colin B Campbell. Sage, 1997. 15-30. Print.

Douglas, Mary, and Baron Isherwood. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. Routledge, 1996. Print.

Featherstone, Mike. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage, 1991. Print.

Frow, John. "The Last Thing Before the Last: Notes on *White Noise*." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 89.2 (Spring 1990): 413-30. Print.

Gardner, Curt. "DeLillo Detractors." 28 July 2002. Web. 20 June 2008.

Hassel, Holly. "Consumerism and the Great American Novel." Web. 30 May 2007.

Heise, Ursula K. "Toxins, Drugs, and Global System: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel." *American Literature* 74.4 (2002): 747-78. Print.

Helyer, Ruth. "Refuse Heaped Many Stories High: DeLillo, Dirt, and Disorder." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.4 (1999): 987-1006. Print.

Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. Print.

Hungerford, Amy. "Don DeLillo's Latin Mass." *Contemporary Literature* (Fall 2006): 343-80. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke U, 1992. Print.

Kavadlo, Jesse. "Celebration and Annihilation: The Balance of *Underworld*."

Undercurrent. 1999. Web. 25 April 2009.

---. "Recycling Authority: Don DeLillo's Waste Management." Critique 42.4 (Summer 2001): 384-401.

Kallionsivu, Mikko. "We Simply Walk Toward the Sliding Doors." Web. 30 May 2007.

Kemp, Tamara. "Information Overload and a Supermarket?" Web. 30 August 2007.

Knight, Peter. "Everything is Connected: *Underworld*'s Secret History of Paranoia." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 811-36. Print.

Lyon, David. *Concepts in the Social Sciences: Postmodernity*. London: Open UP, 1999. Print.

---. "Consumerism: The Shape(lessness) of Things to Come?" *Postmodernity*. Buckingham: U of Minnesota P, 1999. Print.

Mann, Doug. "Jean Baudrillard: A Very Short Introduction." Web. 25 Nov 2009.

Martucci, Elise. *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo*. Routledge, 2007. Print.

Miller, Daniel. *A Theory of Shopping*. Polity P, 1997. Print.

---. "Consumption and its Consequences." *Consumption and Everyday life*. Ed. Hugh Mackay. The Open U, 1997. Print.

Morris , David B. "Editor's Introduction Environment: The White Noise of Health." *Literature and Medicine* 15.1 (Spring 1996): 1-15. Print.

Murray, Nadine. "Don DeLillo & Diane Ackerman's *White Noise* & *A Natural History of the Senses*." Web. 30 August 2007.

Myers, B. R. "A Reader's Manifesto." *Atlantic*. 26 Oct. 2008. Web. 25 July 2009.

Oberly, Nicholas. "Reality, Hyperreality." The University of Chicago. Winter 2003. Web. 30 July 2008.

Osteen, Mark. *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000. Print.

---. "Children of Goddard and Coca-Cola and Consumerism in Don DeLillo's Early Fiction." *Contemporary Literature* (Fall 1996): 439-70. Print.

Packard, Vance. *The Hidden Persuaders*. Pocket, 1957. Print.

Peck, Dale. "The Moody Blues." *The New Replublic*. 2002. Web. 20 May 2009.

Peretti, Jonah. "Capitalism and Schizophrenia." *Negation*. Winter 1996. Web. 25 Nov 2009.

Pincott, Jennifer. "The Inner Workings: Technoscience, Self, and Society in DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Undercurrents* 7 (Spring 1999). Web. 30 May 2007.

Pongrácz, Eva, Paul S. Phillips, and Riitta L. Keiski. "Evolving the Theory of Waste Management: Implications to Waste Minimization." 2004. Web. 20 May 2008. Print.

Rene, Michelle. "Dissenters are Never Superheroes." *Mujer Palabra*. 2005. Web. 30 May 2007.

Rettberg, Scott. "American Simulacra: Don DeLillo's Fiction in Light of Postmodernism." *Undercurrents* 7 (Spring 1999). Web. 20 May 2007.

Sandoz, Devin. "Simulation, Simulacrum." 2003. Web. 25 Nov 2009.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. "General Principles." *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. Suffolk: Fontana, 1981.

Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 4th ed. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall-Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997.

Smith, Caroline J. *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Tanner, Tony. “Afterthoughts on Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*.” *Bloom’s Modern Critical Views*: *Don DeLillo*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 2002. Print.

Veblen, Thorstein. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Penguin Classics, 1994. Print.

Wachtel, Paul L. “Poverty of Affluence: A Psychological Portrait of the American Way of Life.” *Political Psychology*. 6.4 (1985): 753-54. Print.

Wallace, Molly. “‘Venerated Emblems’: DeLillo’s *Underworld* and the History-Commodity.” 2001. Web. 30 May 2007.

Watson, Nigel. “Postmodernism and Lifestyles.” *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Stuart Sim. Routledge, 2005. 35-44. Print.

Wilcox, Leonard. “Baudrillard, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative.” *Contemporary Literature* 32:3 (1991): 346-65. Print.

Yaeger, Patricia. “Editor’s Column: The Death of Nature and the Apotheosis of Trash; or, Rubbish Ecology. *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008): 321-39. Print.

WORKS CONSULTED

Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1993. Print.

Berger, Arthur Asa, ed. *The Postmodern Presence: Reading on Postmodernism in American Culture and Society*. AltaMira P, 1997. Print.

Bertens, Hans. "The Idea of the Postmodern: A History." *MLN* 110.4 (1995): 974-77. Print.

Bignell, Jonathan. *Postmodern Media Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh P, 2001. Print.

Cahoone, Lawrence, ed. *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2003. Print.

Conroy, Mark. "From Tombstone to Tabloid: Authority Figured in *White Noise*." *Critique* 35.2 (1994): 97-110. Print.

Denzin, K. Norman. *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema*. London: Sage, 1991. Print.

Docherty, Thomas, ed. *Postmodernism: A Reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. Print.

Engles, Tim."'Who Are You, Literally?': Fantasies of the White Self in *White Noise*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 755-78. Print.

Evans, David H. "Taking Out the Trash: Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, Liquid Modernity, and the End of Garbage." Web. 30 August 2007.

Gane, Mike. *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

---. *Baudrillard's Bestiary: Baudrillard and Culture*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Green, Jeremy. "Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction".

Modern Fiction Studies 45.3 (1999): 571-99. Print.

Horrocks, Christopher. *Baudrillard and the Millennium*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999. Print.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Jenkins, Keith, ed. *The Postmodern History Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Justus, Jeremy. "Surveillance, Paranoia, and Abjection: The Ideological Underpinnings of Waste Management in the EPA's Measuring Recycling Guidelines and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*." *Americana*. Web. 5.1 (Spring 2006). 25 May 2007.

Kellner, Douglas, ed. *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. Print.

---. *Jean Baudrillard From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Polity, 1989. Print.

Kumar, Krishan. *From Past-Industrial to Post-Modern Society: New Theories of the Contemporary World*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. Print.

Kwon, Miwon. "The Wrong Place." *Art Journal* 59.1 (Spring 2000): 32-44. Print.

Lentricchia, Frank, ed. *Introducing Don DeLillo*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. Print.

Levin, Charles. *Jean Baudrillard: A Study in Cultural Metaphysics*. New York: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1996. Print.

Lucy, Niall, ed. *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. Print.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Cambridge: Polity P, 1993. Print.

---. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997. Print.

MacClure, John A. "Postmodern/Post-Secular: Contemporary Fiction and

Spirituality." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41.1 (1995): 141-63. Print.

Malpas, Simon. *Jean-Francois Lyotard*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

---. *The Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Maltby, Paul. "The Romantic Metaphysics of Don DeLillo." *Contemporary Literature* 37.2 (Summer 1996): 258-77. Print.

McGowan, John. *Postmodernism and its Critics*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994. Print.

Morris, David B. "Editor's Introduction Environment: The White Noise of Health: *White Noise*." *Literature and Medicine* 15.1 (1996): 1-15. Print.

Nel, Philip. "A Small Incisive Shock: Modern Forms, Postmodern Politics, and the Role of the Avant-garde in *Underworld*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 724-52. Print.

O'Day, Marc. "Postmodernism and Television." *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*. Ed. Stuart Sim. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1998. 112-20. Print.

Packer, Matthew J. "'At the Dead Center of Thing' in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: Mimesis, Violence, and Religious Awe." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 51.3 (2005): 648-66. Print.

Proctor, Stella. "A Post-Modern Perspective on Advertisements and their Analysis." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 8.1 (2002): 31-44. Print.

Rojek, Chris and Bryan S. Turner, eds. *Forget Baudrillard?* London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Sim, Stuart. *Derrida and the End of History*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 1999. Print.

Tabbi, Joseph. *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk*. Ithaca: New York: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.

Tanner, Tony. *The American Literature from Emerson to DeLillo*. Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.

Thomas E. Breene. *Postmodern Optics (Don DeLillo)*. State U of New York: Buffalo, 2005. Print.

Vasara, Jerry A. "The 'Saturated Self": Don DeLillo on the Problem of Rogue Capitalism." *Contemporary Literature* 46.1 (2005): 78-107. Print.

---. "Terrorism and Art: Don DeLillo's '*Mao II*' and Jean Baudrillard's '*The Spirit of Terrorism*'." *Mosaic* 39.2 (June 2006): 89-105. Print.

Woods, Tim. *Beginning Postmodernism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999. Print.

VITAE

Sompatu Vungthong was born on September 21, 1984 in Bangkok. She received her Bachelor of Arts (1st class honors) in English from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 2006. In 2006, she was granted a with Chulalongkorn University Graduate Scholarship to Commemorate the 72nd Birthday Anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej to further her studies for a Master of Arts in English in the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.