

The World as a Sequence of Present Moments: The Spatialization of Social Time in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

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Abstract

This paper highlights the issue of consumerism in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), as well as its representation and its effects on the construction of postmodern identity. It also reveals how consumers resort to spatialized time as a way to overcome the fear of death. Since consumerism goes along with mass media, this paper discusses simulation and hyper-reality in relation to consumerism and the spatialized social time. In addition to this, it pays attention to simultaneity as another aspect of spatialized time. In incorporating the figure of Hitler in the narrative, DeLillo juxtaposes the past with the present and thus creates a spatialization of time. The figure of Hitler represents another aspect of consumerism. The protagonist of this novel, Jack Gladney, tends to consume Hitler's image in order to acquire power as will be analyzed in the coming pages.

Keywords: Spatialized Social Time, White Noise, Don DeLillo, Consumerism, Present Moment.

Introduction

In *White Noise* (1985), Don DeLillo provides a vivid picture of the postmodern world that resonates with the atmosphere of uncertainty and fear of death. It shows how society becomes affected by the logic of consumerism that threatens people's lives on the one hand, and offers them an illusionary and momentary comfort on the other. Consumerism that is inherent in the capitalist system becomes a dominant social phenomenon that permeates every aspect of life in postmodern times. It is one of the main factors that lead to the spatialization of time since it foregrounds the significance of reaching self-gratification and self-contentment in the present moment. Accordingly, consumers' immersion in the perpetual present forms the kernel of the spatialization of time in which the present moment is the womb of all moments. The spatialization of time has been originally defined in Joseph Frank's study "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" (1945) where he argues that this concept finds its roots in high modernism. He maintains that writers like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce "are moving in the direction of spatial form" (10). According to Frank, modernist literature opposes the sequential

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organization of conventional plots. Instead, the reader must apprehend the work “spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence” (10). He mentions further that the modern novel aims to juxtapose the past and present events simultaneously rather than sequentially. Such an act of juxtaposition eliminates any sense of sequence and transforms time into a continuum in which differences between past and present are wiped out.

Unlike Frank who devotes major space to discuss the apprehension of juxtaposed times in a moment of time, Jameson and the other postmodernists concentrate more on the significance of the present moment as the central timescape of the text in which the different events takes place, taking into consideration the multiplicity and simultaneity within it. One may suggest that Frank’s spatialization of time is metaphoric because it mainly takes place in one’s consciousness. Frank’s use of statements like “apprehend their work spatially, in a moment of time” (10) reveals that spatialization occurs mainly in the reader’s mind. However, postmodernism widens the scope of the spatialization of time. It is not only related to the reader’s consciousness, but it is more vivid and concrete in the structural organization of the text, and in both public and private spheres. It is Jameson who first announces that postmodernism shows interest in the spatialization of time, by focusing on the importance of ‘the perpetual present’. In his conversation with Anders Stephanson regarding postmodernism, Jameson argues that “time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial” (Jameson & Stephanson 1989, 6). Social time is one of the prominent forms of time in postmodern narratives that undergo spatialization. In fact, consumerism is one of the postmodern themes that make the social time spatial as it centers on the present moment as the only timescape of the consumer culture. Accordingly, consumerism as the total social phenomenon dominating the postmodern age leads to the spatialization of social time, for both consumerism and spatialization lock the individual into the present moment.

Georges Gurvitch defines social time as the time of convergency or divergency of movements of the total social phenomena (Cited in Hassard 1990, 64). Since Gurvitch explains convergency as the coincidence and simultaneity of times (cited in Hassard 1990, 36), divergency signifies the linear ordering of time. Importantly, social time can never be defined without defining the term ‘total social phenomena’. The latter is coined by Marcel Mauss to indicate “the different social activities (religious, magical, technical, economic, cognitive, moral, juridical, [and] political)” (cited in Hassard 1990, 67). In contrast to measuring time by succession of physical events, time can be humanized by making temporal references to social events. To illustrate this, Gurvitch presents this following example: “when we say, ‘I will meet you after the game’, we are using social time rather than physical or mechanical mathematical time, as would be the case if we were to say ‘I [will] meet you when the sun is at its apex’” (cited in Hassard 1999, 78). Thereupon, one may experience time both as a physical passage and as a social process.

Social time is a relative concept; the divergency (linearity) and convergency (simultaneity) of its movements vary from one age to another, according to the prevailing total social phenomenon. For instance, the divergent social time characterizes the nineteenth century novel since it depicts the era of social progress whereas the convergent social time characterizes the postmodern novel since it tackles

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capitalism as the dominant social phenomenon of postmodernism, which encourages the simultaneity of times in the present moment. Under capitalism, social time relies not on the idea of progress, but “is conceived as a perpetual present, so fast are the processes of production and exchange” (Smethurst 2000, 178). This indicates that social time, in postmodernism, proceeds towards spatialization. The spatialized social time is bound up with social relations, and with the requirements of commodification and consumption that are inherent in capitalism.

In this context, David Gross (1981) argues that one of the dominant causes of the spatialization of time is the pervasive influence of the culture industry that has a great interest in the consumer culture (71). Since capitalism has created feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and dependency, people attempt to seek relief and compensation in the sphere of consumption whereby commercial goods become “objects of gratification” (Dunn 2008, 25). This indicates that consumerism bears the essence of momentary pleasure through the commodity that turns to be the means by which the consumer can identify himself in the eyes of others.

Consumerism is generally regarded as a positive value in contemporary societies and is supposed to play an important part in the constitution of identity. According to Bary Smart (2010), “I shop therefore I am” becomes the slogan of the growing global world. Looking at consumer magazines, trawling through shopping malls as well as subsequent processes of selection, choices, and purchase of particular goods and services, are widely considered to be a source of pleasure and contentment in postmodern consumer societies (148). Participation in consumer activity is represented as a means of achieving a sense of social inclusion and of producing beneficial therapeutic effects on individuals by offering a temporary escape from the stresses and anxieties of a capitalist society. Hence, one may suggest that individuals are conditioned so as to believe that consumerism improves the consumer's mood, and provides him with comfort, amusement and consolation. Indeed, capitalism as an economic activity becomes the overarching social phenomenon of the postmodern age. In this case, social time experiences the simultaneity or the convergency of different events in the present moment. That is all times and events dissolve into, what Jameson calls, the perpetual present. Hence, under capitalism, the social time is spatialized. Accordingly, this paper demonstrates how the characters in DeLillo's *White Noise* turn to consumerism as an everyday experience in order to escape their fear of death and environmental threats. It equally maintains how consumerism helps to brainwash people into believing that their identity can be changed by consuming more products, which makes them immerse in the eternal present of consumerist ecstasy.

Few critics have mulled over the question of selfhood that preoccupies the character Jack Gladney in *White Noise*. Leonard Wilcox, for instance, makes reference to Jack's search for “authentic selfhood” (100) in a postmodern context. Wilcox plausibly suggests that Jack's difficulties are exacerbated by the collapse of modernist notions of selfhood as self-identical, but is pessimistic about the possibility of a postmodern subjectivity (99). In addition to this, Frank Lentricchia (1991) observes that DeLillo's *White Noise* “is a kind of anatomy, an effort to represent [his] culture in its totality; and ... desire[s] to move readers to the view that the shape and fate of their culture dictates the shape and fate of the self” (1). Here,

he maintains that DeLillo has created an anatomy of life in 1980s America where he demonstrates how postmodern society shapes the characters' selves.

Christopher Linder(2003) gives a concise and interesting description of the novel: "*White Noise* describes a world bombarded with subliminal advertising, invaded by muzak, bathed in television rays, waves, and radio tidbits, flooded with commercial jingles, punctuated by media speech—a world, in short, consumed by white noise"(138). Here, Linder critiques DeLillo's *White Noise* as a representation of consumer culture in the postmodern era. He examines the world of simulation, surface and the fever of shopping.

On the other hand, some critics attempt to read *White Noise* from spatial and temporal dimension focusing on the trauma of the individual in the postmodern world. For instance, Katrina Harackin "Embedded and Embodied Memories: Space, and Time in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Falling Man*", DeLillo engages more concretely with "questions of embodiment, memory, the experience of space and time, and individual and cultural trauma" (321). DeLillo reveals the struggle to define the self through Gladney's experiences in the indoor spaces of the novel, which reflects his fears about death and the loss of a stable identity(314). DeLillo shows how relationships are governed by the media and consumption. The people of Blacksmith cannot even link their problems to a well-defined place (316). DeLillo's later work remains focused on the individual and the subjective, but it simultaneously works to evoke what is shared in human experience - embodiment in time and space. DeLillo reveals the stories of individuals in such a way that the reader is led to ask "what if" (322).

This current study sides with the aforementioned critical views in the way it highlights the postmodern condition, mainly consumerism. However, it provides a new reading to consumerism by connecting it with the spatialization of social time.

In other words, unlike the previous critics who dealt with the effects of consumerism on the absorption of the individual or those who interrelated the fate of the individual with the spatial and temporal coordinates of the postmodern world, this study reveals how this consumerist environment immerses postmodern people in the perpetual present of the social time. This paper equally sheds light on other postmodern phenomena that helped in creating a spatialized social time like time-space compression, Simulacra and Schizophrenia.

Discussion

T. Frank (1998) remarks that participation in consumer activity can enable consumers to feel 'cool', and allows them to escape the routines, insecurities and more restrained values pertinent to their workplaces by immersing themselves in the 'non-stop carnival' of consumerism (232). In *White Noise*, Jack Gladney spends much time in a supermarket. He observes the experience of buying as transcendental, describing it as a practice that brings "the sense of replenishment" (20). In spite of the fact that consumer commodities offer some pleasure, their ability to deliver pleasurable experiences diminishes over time. The pleasure expected by marketing proves to be illusionary, fleeting and temporal.

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Consumers attempt to make purchases that seemingly promise to convert their fantasy into reality, but they quickly fall to disillusionment (Smart 2010, 147).

In *White Noise*, DeLillo states that “the world [is] a series of fleeting gratifications” (196). This quote maintains that reaching fleeting or momentary gratifications through consumerism becomes the main object of the postmodern world. Indeed, the feeling of gratification resulted from consumerism is temporal; it starts and ends in the present moment. Therefore, any novel that is structured around the theme of consumerism concentrates on the present moment as its main timescape. In this vein, Ursula K. Heise (1997) states that the focus on the present or the moment at hand links contemporary fiction to consumer culture “with its relentless emphasis on the present as the only time phase available for gratification, planification and control” (64).

White Noise, which is composed of three parts entitled “Waves and Radiation,” “The Airborne Toxic Event” and “Dylarama,” recounts the story of Jack Gladney, the chair of the department of Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill, a discipline invented by Jack himself. Jack, who has been married five times, lives with his last wife Babette and several of their children from previous marriages, namely Heinrich, Steffie, Denise and youngest child Wilder. The novel portrays scenes from the Gladney family’s everyday life, including their regular adventures in the supermarket and the shopping mall.

Indeed, the theme of consumerism asserts its powerful existence in the novel through the title itself. The term ‘white noise’ has multiple interpretations that are pertinent to the act of consumption. It originally appears in Don DeLillo’s *The Names* (1982): “We take no sense impressions with us, no voices, none of the windy blast of aircraft on the tarmac, or the white noise of flight, or the hours waiting” (7). Here, white noise refers to the sounds of the mechanical products. By the same token, Jack portrays the white noise in the supermarket by revealing how he becomes “awash in noise. The toneless systems, the jangle and skid of carts, the loudspeaker and coffee-making machines, the cries of children. And over it all, or under it all, a dull and unlocatable roar, as of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension” (DeLillo 1985, 36). Such voices allow Jack to taste off his fear of death and sense of alienation. Hence, the characters in *White Noise* consume sounds in the same way they consume supermarket products.

In “Editor’s Introduction—Environment: The *White Noise* of Health”, David B. Morris (1996) makes reference to white noise:

The new danger from environmental degradation is less alien than total nuclear war. We live with its damage every day. We cannot demonize an all-purpose villain—like the bomb—to serve as the target for our protest and frustration... Environment is the unnoticed, inescapable white noise that surrounds and interpenetrates human health. (11)

Instead of depicting white noise as the sounds produced by combining sounds of all different ranges of frequencies, Morris identifies white noise with the environmental threats derived from the postmodern consumerist environment. According to him, one lives with such kind of threat all the time, and we, the relentless consumers, are the enemies of ourselves. Hence, white noise describes the toxicity of the consumerist environment that no one can evade. DeLillo’s novel particularly describes the consumer

society as being full of toxic elements threatening the lives of the Gladneys: Jack Gladney, a college professor in the small town of Blacksmith, and Babette Gladney, the mother of the family.

In *White Noise*, the protagonist finds himself cast into the moment, into a kind of eternal present, into a spatialized social time because of the eruption of the consumer culture in the postwar American society. The supermarket, with its spectacle of goods puts the consumer in a delirious state. People do not buy commercial goods because they are truly in need, but they shop because they feel an ecstasy aroused by the spectacle of the goods. The supermarket represents an open space for meticulous designs and huge varieties of goods, which seduces the consumer into buying goods even if he is not in need. Accordingly, Jean Baudrillard (1998) maintains that the supermarket “goes far beyond consumption, and the objects no longer have a specific reality there: what is primary is their serial, circular, spectacular arrangement.” (55) In the opening pages of *White Noise*, Denise and Steffie refer to Babette’s habit of purchasing consumer goods though she is not in need of eating them. Denise says that “she thinks if she keeps buying it, she’ll have to eat it just to get rid of it. It’s like she’s trying to trick herself” (7).

Shopping for shopping’s sake becomes the main slogan of the postmodern consumer culture, which is evident in Jack’s words when he shops with his family at the mall. He states, “I shopped for its sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandize I had no intention of buying, then buying it” (84). The ecstasy which consumers feel while shopping makes them virtually reach “a sense of well-being, the security and the contentment” (20). Furthermore, when Jack faces discomfiture and anxiety, shopping provides him great comfort. As an illustration, he goes to the supermarket immediately after the airborne toxic event, concluding that “[e]verything was fine, would continue to be fine, and would eventually get even better as long as the supermarket did not slip” (170). Here, one may notice that after being threatened by fatal incidents, Jack’s family tries to grope after the sense of security and replenishment through consumerism. Furthermore, Jack attempts to convince himself that environmental hazards will not threaten wealthy people who hold the power to buy. He contemplates natural and man-made disasters, stating that:

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)

In addition to this, 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” (DeLillo 1985, 117).

Consumer culture has manipulated TV and other mass media to turn the whole world into a consumer village. Influenced by mass media, the young child, Steffie, starts to internalize the consumer culture to the extent that her unconscious becomes monopolized by commodity. Jack finds her in front of the TV set, looking attentively and moving her lips, “attempting to match the words as they were spoken” (DeLillo 1985, 84). Afterwards, Jack astonishingly sees her mumbling brand names in her sleep: “She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida” (DeLillo 1985,

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155). Steffie's muttering the name of an automobile in her sleep is an explicit example of the sinister way in which "consumerism and commodification infect everything" (Slethaug 2000, 93), even a child's unconscious. Thus, this scene is of a paramount significance in demonstrating how the most personal experiences, like dreams, are subject to colonization by consumerism.

People start to seek refuge in the simulated TV because they become disappointed by their absurd reality. The title of *White Noise* may point to the white noise of TV which dominates the postmodern world with its noise that is empty of meaning and depth. Mass media constantly intrudes into the lives of the characters and determines their choices and values. The shopping habits of the Gladney family result from the messages they have been receiving from TV advertisements, proving that the mediated signals have a great impact on people's identities as consumers. In a technique echoing this intrusion, TV fragments pop up randomly every now and then to disrupt the events of the novel. Accordingly, Leonard Wilcox (1991) contends that "*White Noise* is bathed in the eerie glow of television" (355). Murray Siskind, Jack's colleague at College-on-the Hill, is one of the characters that embrace TV as a source of knowledge in contemporary life, stating that:

You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth. It welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. There is light, there is sound... look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles ...the medium practically overflows with sacred formulas if we can remember how to respond innocently. (DeLillo 1985, 51)

Here, Murray's description reveals that television is considered as more real than the real. It seems to be a chief source of guidance and information. People rely on TV to explain everything in their contemporary lives.

The Gladneys believe all what is seen on TV or said on the radio. Heinrich, Jack's son, declines to trust his senses in observing the weather and inclines to believe that all what is broadcast on the radio is true. Heinrich says:

"It's going to rain tonight".

"It's raining now", I said.

"The radio said tonight", (DeLillo 1985, 22)

Here, though it is raining, Heinrich believes that it is not because the radio says it rains tonight. This is an example of how people blindly obey mass media. The influence of mass media on people is also manifested when the Gladney family and their community feel devastated when their evacuation during the Airborne Toxic Event has not been covered by media. Their frustration ostensibly derives from their belief that events need media validation in order to be significant. Relatively, one character wonders whether their experience seems devalued in the public eye since it has not received any coverage on TV news: "Does this kind of thing happen so often that nobody cares anymore? Don't those people know what we've been through?... Are they telling us it was insignificant, it was piddling? Are they so callous?... Do they think this is just television?... Don't they know it's real?" (161-2) In fact, when the subject is

overwhelmed by the overabundance of media information, his life becomes meaningless. This idea is put forward by Jean Baudrillard (1994) who stresses the “radical loss of meaning” resulting from the proliferation of information through the media (80). In line with this, he states: “we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning... Information is directly destructive of meaning and signification or it neutralizes them. He further mentions that the loss of meaning is directly linked to the dissolving, dissuasive action of information, the media and the mass media” (81).

Television transmits all information in an immediate and urgent manner that transforms the globe into a global village, influencing its inhabitants simultaneously. Indeed, television is a vivid manifestation of David Harvey’s concept of “space-time compression” (1990, 243) that points to the simultaneity of events by condensing the temporal and spatial parameters of the globe through technological devices. Since television maintains the simultaneity of events and locks the viewer into the present moment that is the moment of watching attentively, it consequently leads to the spatialization of social time. Television goes beyond its existence as a mere device since it has become a social phenomenon that colonizes and controls people’s minds through encouraging consumer culture.

The novel demonstrates how the contemporary is overshadowed by a sense of impending disaster due to the spread of toxic spills involving such deadly chemicals as “cancerous solvents from storage tanks, arsenic from smokestacks, radioactive water from power plants” (DeLillo 1985, 174). However, as Heinrich points out, the real threat stems less from toxic spills than from the seemingly technological devices that people daily use. He states: “your radio, your TV, your microwave oven... it’s the things right around you in your own house that’ll get you sooner or later” (DeLillo 1985, 174-175). Heinrich’s words provide an insight into what may be termed “the technological paradox” (Melley 2006, 78). Technological innovations promise to improve the quality of human life. However, they generate even more insidious new threats. For instance, the airborne toxic event is the embodiment of the threatening power of technology that haunts the novel from the start.

White Noise projects an explicit examination of the deadly anxiety that haunts the atmosphere of Blacksmith. Jack informs the reader that in *White Noise* “all plots tend to move deathward” (DeLillo 1985, 26). The characters are trapped within a society where the fear of death is ever-present in the background of consumerism. The characters in this novel resort to consumerism as a way to overcome their fear of death and environmental threats. This temporal condition in which the characters are buried in the present moment is determined in the novel by death. Jack, as both narrator and character, seeks immersion in the present moment as an antidote to his fear of death.

The attempt to escape from death produces a plotless narrative. Jack makes reference to the novel’s episodic plotlessness, its lack of drive and tension. He states: “Let’s enjoy these aimless days while we can, I told myself, I fearing some kind of deft acceleration” (DeLillo 1985, 21). In another instance, he says: “May the days be aimless. Let the seasons drift. Do not advance the action according to a plan” (DeLillo 1985, 116). Plotlessness leads time to die, to become its own ghost. Hence, the text becomes timeless, collapsing to the present moment or the spatialized time. Fearing what he describes as “some

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deft acceleration”(DeLillo 1985, 21) that is some incremental speeding towards death, Jack tries to slow things down, to wallow in consumerism in which he feels grounded, spatialized in the present moment.

For instance, the fear of death shapes the identity of both Babette and Jack, but they handle their fear in different ways. This fear intensifies when a train accident causes a toxic chemical spill, an “airborne toxic event”, which leads to the evacuation of the whole town of Blacksmith. Babette has become addicted to an experimental drug called ‘Dylar’ that relieves the fear of death. She agrees to sleep with Willie Mink, the drug researcher, in exchange for Dylar. Consequently, her addiction to Dylar leaves her with the side-effect of memory loss. Importantly, Dylar represents the epitome of consumer products as it is believed to eliminate the fear of death. Even though the promise is illusive and impossible, desperate people are willing to take it as a last refuge. Here, Babette resorts to Dylar in order to live the present moment of gratification and contentment. That is, she chooses to live in a spatialized social time. Jack seems to be infected by the Nyodene Derivative, a toxic substance that causes lumps in rats. After being informed that he would die within fifteen years, his fear increases, and he starts looking for Dylar. He believes that Dylar will help him to recover regardless of its strong side effects that consist in: “outright death, brain death, left brain death, partial paralysis, other cruel and bizarre conditions of the body and mind.”(DeLillo 1985, 251) Jack tells his daughter that the power of suggestion he obtains from consuming Dylar “could be more important than side effects” (DeLillo 1985, 251).

Apart from Dylar, tabloids are another form of products that offer a delusive hope in the toxic society. 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” (DeLillo 1985, 147). Tabloids function as a way of transforming disastrous events into pleasurable ones in order to alleviate people’s anxiety and psychological suffering in the age of fatality and uncertainty. Stories in tabloids, such as star gossip and the articles discussing miracle drugs to cure toxic-related diseases, have created amusement for the characters, and therefore have distracted them from their miserable life. However, these products are only illusions that last for a moment.

Consumerism creates a disunified identity because the person depends on perishable commodities, as his ‘other’, to define himself. Accordingly, Robert G. Dunn (2008) mentions that postmodernism draws on the idea of performativity to define identity, which suggests that identity is not constituted of innate traits, but rather of performance (163). Performativity ties identity to the more superficial features of personality, to “the collection of observed behavioral traits at the self’s surface” (163). He further argues that in consumer culture, identity is enacted through the ownership and use of commodities. According to Dunn, they rush into the supermarket because they achieve there “a fullness of being”(DeLillo 1985, 24). Indeed, their identity is constructed through the products they consume. However, when they “feel estranged from the products [they] consume”, they put their identities at stake. Jack’s identity is not only influenced by the spectacle of consumer goods, but also affected by the outward appearance of Hitler. To resemble Hitler, Jack wears glasses, a dark robe with thick black heavy frames and a bushy beard. He says, “I am the false character that follows the name around”. In fact, he is aware of his fake identity but

he prefers living this role in order to defeat his fear and to gain more depth and strength. For Jack, “[s]ome people are larger than life. Hitler is larger than death” (DeLillo 1985, 287). Hence, both consumer goods and the character of Hitler lead to the erasure of Jack’s self because they value his external appearance at the expense of his innate traits.

Consumerism creates schizophrenic subjects who struggle to assert their authentic selves against a network of fleeting products. Mark Currie (1998) suggests that there is an illuminating link between consumer society and schizophrenia. He argues that time experienced in the supermarket is suspended and spatialized, collapsing in a present moment of consumer choice. By the same token, the schizophrenic exists out of time and is reduced to a series of pure and unrelated present moments (103). Therefore, schizophrenia and consumer culture harbor the seeds of the spatialization of time since both of them focus on the present moment. The schizophrenic is unable to see the proper boundaries between things; he experiences the world “spatially as a babble of voices” (103) not in linearity and sequence. That is, the schizophrenic inhabits a disunified universe where things are simultaneous and instantaneous. In line with this, Baudrillard (1994) describes schizophrenia as “the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things” (133). Accordingly, one may see Jack as a schizophrenic because his consumerist world is composed of “a series of fleeting gratifications” (DeLillo 1985, 196) and thereby of a series of unrelated present moments. He is, in the words of Currie (1998), unable “to sustain the linearity of things” (103).

Drawing on Baudrillard’s opinion, “Tell me what you throw away and I’ll tell you who you are” (1998, 43), Jack finally realizes the danger of consumerism and decides to get rid of consumer goods. As he starts to behold mortality in things, he attempts to reach meaning and to get control of his life by throwing these things away. Accordingly, he states:

I went home and started throwing things away... The more things I threw away, the more I found. The house was a spia maze of old and tired things. There was an immensity of things, an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality... it took well over an hour to get everything down to the sidewalk. No one helped. I didn’t want help or company or human understanding. I just wanted 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. (DeLillo 1985, 301)

Here, Jack expresses the difficulty of overcoming the consumer culture that has widespread effects on society by divulging that the more he throws things the more he finds. However, he decides to take the responsibility of throwing things individually without the help of others, which demonstrates that he is on his way to construct his meaningful individuality. Seemingly, Jack finally realizes the absurdity of consumerism, which cannot bring a fullness of being but rather an illusionary pleasure. This becomes evident when he sits in front of the door waiting for peace to settle down after the process of throwing commodities.

DeLillo points out how spaces such as the supermarket and the mall, despite their apparent capacity to generate a momentary comfort, are in fact quite dangerous because they serve not the needs of the individual, but rather those of the capitalist system. Smart (2010) argues that anyone living within a

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consumer capitalist economic system demonstrates his tendency to absorb “the values of a fiercely individualistic, narcissistic, and materially acquisitive consumption-driven way of life” (144). He goes further to maintain that the good life that is understood in terms of the acquisition of commodities and services lead people to commit crimes (144). Toward the end of *White Noise*, Jack Gladney acts out violently. His death sentence and his insecurity toward his own identity exacerbated by Babette’s unfaithfulness culminate in his attempt to kill Mink. However, the crime is not only a debilitating effect of his consumerist ecstasy, but is another strategy to overcome his fear of death. Accordingly, his colleague ‘Murray’ explains that “violence is a form of rebirth” (DeLillo 1985, 290). Since Mink represents “the pure American product” (Lentricchia 1999, 112). Jack attempts to retrieve himself from the insecure paranoia, and to consolidate his identity by killing Mink who is representative of the consumer culture.

Importantly, postmodernism is filled with an explosion of images and signs. People start to consume images and signs. For instance, the characters in *White Noise* do not go off to the countryside to see the oldest barn in America, the original barn, a barn with specific historical significance. Instead, tourists are caught up in a simulated aura; they have chosen to see ‘The Most Photographed Barn in America’. When Murray takes Jack to visit “The Most Photographed Barn in America” they could not experience the real existence of the barn, as if the real barn is replaced by signs of it. Murray tells Jack, “no one sees the barn...once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn” (DeLillo 1985, 12). The postmodern era, according to Baudrillard(1994), is the age of hyper-reality. It witnesses a triumph of the image over the real in which “the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real” (170). Baudrillard equally argues that in postmodernism, the whole system of signification has collapsed and become weightless, “it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum”(170). Similarly, in the scene of the barn, the image has declared its triumph over the real. DeLillo, in his description of the barn, focuses on images, signs, cameras, photographs, and photographers more than the real barn itself. In a nostalgic moment of the loss of the real, Murray says:

What was the barn like before it was photographed? He said. What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can’t answer these questions because we’ve read the signs, seen the whole people snapping the pictures we can’t get outside the aura. We’re here, we’re now. (DeLillo 1985, 13)

Murray’s final words “we’re here, we’re now” show that the era of simulation or hyper-reality has led to the spatialization of time since it foregrounds the importance of the ‘now’ or the present moment. While taking pictures, the crowd immerse in the timelessness of the photographic image. In other words, what the visitors see is a barn out of time where the past and the future are juxtaposed in the present moment. Murray says: “We see only what the others see... the thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future” (DeLillo 1985, 12). Like the supermarket that is “sealed off, self-contained, timeless,” (DeLillo 1985, 38) the photographed barn also is timeless, offering entry into a perpetual present. Both of the supermarket and the photographed barn are products of a capitalist culture whose

technological advances have led to the spatialization of time in which the past and the future have collapsed into the perpetual present. Baudrillard, in his famous book *America* (1986), implicitly asserts the relatedness of simulation and the spatialization of time by claiming that the postmodern man lives in “a perpetual present... in a perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs” (18).

The tendency to prioritize hyper-reality is supported by SIMUVAC event in this novel. When Jack and his family evacuate their home due to the Airborne Toxic Event, an atmospheric contamination that covers the area of Blacksmith, they are tested by a team of technicians called SIMUVAC, a short form for simulated evacuation, whose job is to rescue people in disasters. Jack later finds out that though the accident is real, this team is doing the real evacuation “in order to rehearse the simulation” (DeLillo 1985, 200). The real evacuation that is caused by Airborne Toxic Event is used as a mere rehearsal for the simulated evacuation, which means that hyper-reality has become more real than the reality. Obviously, this real evacuation seems chaotic and disorganized, whereas the simulated evacuation looks organized and very orderly. The SIMUVAC team explains this process of simulation as the new rescue procedure through which future disasters will be easily evaded. It is the danger of the real that makes people wish for simulations and hyper-reality to take over their daily lives. One of the team technicians says: “The more we rehearse disaster, the faster we’ll be from the real thing” (DeLillo 1985, 205). Therefore, people live the perpetual present or the spatialized time of hyper-reality in order to eschew their harsh reality.

In his attempt to portray the postmodern America, DeLillo demonstrates that a phenomenon as Hitler and Nazism has become possible in it. One may presume that Hitler emblemizes all the irrational and dangerous forces that have destabilized postmodern man, but for Jack, it seems the opposite. Hitler provides him with solidity and strength. When one of Gladney’s former wives ask politely, “How is Hitler?” he replies: “Fine, solid, dependable” (DeLillo 1985, 89). This astonishing transformation of the tyrant into someone dependable is the result of the increasing reproducibility of his image in media. Television brings Hitler into people’s homes and thus domesticates him, integrating him into the mainstream of postmodern life: “He’s always on. We couldn’t have television without him” (DeLillo 1985, 63). As the postmodern world is “full of abandoned meanings” (DeLillo 1985, 184), Gladney resorts to the powerful image of Hitler as a way to restore significance and value to his life. Accordingly, Siskind explains to Jack: “Helpless and fearful people are drawn to magical figures, mythic figures, epic men who intimidate and darkly loom... Hitler is larger than death... On one level you wanted to conceal yourself in Hitler and his works. On another level you wanted to use him to grow in significance and strength” (DeLillo 1985, 287).

In affiliating himself with Hitler, Jack gives his elder son the name of Heinrich because “He thought it was a forceful name, a strong name. It has a kind of authority” (DeLillo 1985, 74). Heinrich is born shortly after Jack has launched Hitler’s studies. Heinrich’s name calls to mind the chief of the German police, Heinrich Himmler. Jack states that he “wanted to do something German. I wanted to shield him, make him unafraid. People were naming their children Kim, Kelly, Tracy... There’s something about German names, the German language, German things... In the middle of it all is Hitler, of course” (DeLillo 1985, 76). Jack demonstrates his interest in Hitler and German culture with his studies and with

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his son's name. Dealing with German culture or language makes him feel stronger. Having built his career upon the figure Hitler, who is responsible for the deaths of millions of people, Jack feels "secure in his professional aura of power, madness and death" (DeLillo 1985, 72).

The spatialization of social time occurs because DeLillo structures his novel around the perpetual present that is the proper time of consumer culture. However, simultaneity, as another sign of spatialization, is also demonstrable in *White Noise*. In his attempt to simultaneously juxtapose the past with the present, DeLillo inscribes the figure of Hitler in the narrative. By doing so, he imbues the social time of the novel with an embedded historical timeline. The historical context that inhabits the novel reaches back from the immediate moment of the mid 1980s, to the end of the Second World War. Germany, Hitler, and the mass death for which Hitler was responsible haunt the 'now' of *White Noise* and offer a spectral backdrop to Blacksmith in the 1980s.

What Jack describes as his decision to invent Hitler as an intellectual commodity in the US academic marketplace loops 1940s Europe and 1980s America together. In fact, DeLillo implicitly points out that the deathly atmosphere that dominates 1940s Europe is re-experienced in 1980s America. The fear of death haunts the atmosphere of Blacksmith, which pushes Jack to look like Hitler and thus develops a fake identity in order to overcome his fear. Jack starts to consume the image of Hitler in order to seem strong and fearless in public. He understands his engagement with Hitler as a means of grounding himself in a history that seems to him more enduring than the eternal present or the spatialized social time in which he lives.

When Jack introduces himself in the novel, he says that he 'invented Hitler studies in North America in March of 1968' (DeLillo 1985, 4). This date, the date on which Jack has invented a form of correspondence between Germany and post-war North America, has a number of interrelated associations related to American domestic and foreign policies. March 1968 is the month that Lyndon B. Johnson declared his decision not to run for re-election for the US presidency, and to retreat from Vietnam (Addington 2000, 113). It is also the month of the My Lai massacre (March 16th, 1968), in which US troops murdered between 200 and 600 Vietnamese men, women and children, in a motiveless attack (Boxall 2006, 120). Furthermore, March 1968 is the month in which the student demonstrations began in France. The demonstrations were linked to US activity in Vietnam – they spread from the Nanterre campus on March 28, 1968– but they were also driven by wider concerns about the location of power and the distribution of capital (Readings 1968, 135-149).

Correspondingly, *White Noise* showcases how the reader witnesses history in its absence. Indeed, Jack's present moment is crowded with spectral histories that need to be voiced. By inventing the faculty of Hitler Studies at this specific date, Jack wants to make his career as worthwhile as the events happening in this date in order to gain more appreciation from others. Therefore, by looking like Hitler and establishing his faculty in this important date, Jack wants to be stronger and more self-confident in the eyes of others, especially as he is constantly haunted by feelings of emptiness and inauthenticity. The juxtaposition of this historical environment with the perpetual present of consumer culture causes the spatialization of social time.

Conclusion

White Noise portrays the postmodern world as a series of fleeting gratifications due to the effects of consumerism. As a total social phenomenon, consumerism immerses consumers in the present moment, the moment in which they reach illusionary pleasure and self-contentment. Indeed, with its emphasis on the present moment, consumerism paves the way to the spatialization of social time. Accordingly, one may deduce that the social time of *White Noise* follows convergent rather than divergent movements of the total social phenomenon, which is consumerism in this case. It is structured around the present moment in which different events occur simultaneously.

The spatialized social time in *White Noise* aims to reflect to what extent postmodern identity becomes absorbed by the logic of consumerism accompanied by the phenomenon of simulation that advocates the image over the real. Moreover, simulation takes place by making reference to Television and the Most Photographed Barn of America through which the viewers escape from the absurd reality and seek refuge in the image. The timelessness of the image submerges the viewers in the perpetual present, which makes the time of the novel spatialized. Furthermore, simultaneity also plays a paramount role in spatializing the social time of the novel. Establishing the Faculty of Hitler studies in 1960s reminds the reader's mind of the major historical events that took place at the time. In addition to this, the reference to Hitler echoes the deathly atmosphere that was prevailing in his age. Therefore, the simultaneous juxtaposition of the historical past with the perpetual present of capitalist America leads to the spatialization of social time.

الزمن سلسلة من اللحظات الحالية: تحييز الوقت الاجتماعي في رواية
(الضوضاء البيضاء) لدون دييلو

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الملخص

تسلط هذه الورقة الضوء على قضية النزعة الاستهلاكية، وتمثيلها، وتأثيراتها في بناء هوية مابعد الحداثة في رواية (الضوضاء البيضاء) لدون دييلو. كما تكشف كيف يلجأ المستهلكون إلى الوقت المكاني بوصفه وسيلة للتغلب على الخوف من الموت، وبما أن النزعة الاستهلاكية تتماشى مع وسائل الإعلام، تناقش هذه الورقة المحاكاة والواقع المفرط فيما يتعلق بهذه النزعة والوقت الاجتماعي المكاني. زيادة على ذلك، فإنها تهتم بالتزامن باعتبارها جانباً آخر من جوانب الوقت المكاني. بدمج شخصية هتلر في السرد، يقارن دييلو الماضي بالحاضر، ومن ثم يخلق تحييزاً للوقت، وتمثل شخصية هتلر جانباً آخر من جوانب الاستهلاك. يميل بطل هذه الرواية، جاك جلادني إلى استهلاك صورة هتلر من أجل الحصول على القوة كما سيتضح في الصفحات التالية من البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الوقت الاجتماعي المكاني، رواية الضوضاء البيضاء، دون دييلو، النزعة الاستهلاكية، اللحظة الحالية.

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