

LITERATURE'S RESPONSE TO INFORMATION OVERLOAD IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE*

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ABSTRACT. *Literature's Response to Information Overload in Don DeLillo's White Noise.* The present article examines the novel *White Noise* through the intersecting theoretical frameworks of Paul Virilio's dromology, and Jean Baudrillard's simulacral theory, proposing that DeLillo constructs an epistemological model of modern life as mediated risk perception. Virilio's theories on the acceleration of information flow frame the novel's temporal anxiety, whilst Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality explains the characters' dependence on simulated knowledge. Together, these frameworks reveal how DeLillo's fiction translates abstract theoretical notions into lived experience, positioning narrative as both a mirror and critique of late modern consciousness. This paper argues that in *White Noise*, DeLillo transforms narrative fragmentation and sensory saturation—both formal strategies and moral critiques of late-capitalist modernity—into a distinctive literary aesthetics of excess. By examining how his style enacts a crisis of perception, the study demonstrates the impossibility of coherence in a hypermediated age, drawing on theoretical frameworks from Virilio and Baudrillard to illuminate the sociocultural stakes of perceptual excess.

Keywords: *postmodern fiction, consumerism, digital culture, media saturation*

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REZUMAT. Răspunsul literaturii la supraîncărcarea informațională în *White Noise* de Don DeLillo. Prezentul articol examinează romanul *White Noise* prin intermediul cadrelor teoretice intersectate ale dromologiei lui Paul Virilio și ale teoriei simulacului formulate de Jean Baudrillard, propunând că DeLillo construiește un model epistemologic al vieții moderne ca percepție mediatizată a riscului. Teoriile lui Virilio privind accelerarea fluxului informațional conturează anxietatea temporală a romanului, în timp ce noțiunea lui de hiperrealitate a lui Baudrillard explică dependența personajelor de cunoașterea simulată. Împreună, aceste cadre evidențiază modul în care ficțiunea lui DeLillo traduce noțiuni teoretice abstracte în experiență trăită, poziționând narațiunea ca oglindă și critică a conștiinței modernității târzii. Lucrarea susține că în *White Noise* DeLillo transformă fragmentarea narativă și saturația senzorială — atât strategii formale, cât și critici morale ale modernității târziu-capitaliste — într-o estetică literară distinctă a excesului. Prin examinarea modului în care stilul său înscenează o criză a percepției, studiul demonstrează imposibilitatea coerenței într-o epocă hiper-mediată, valorificând cadre teoretice din Virilio și Baudrillard pentru a ilumina mizele socioculturale ale excesului perceptiv.

Cuvinte-cheie: ficțiune postmodernă, consumism, cultură digitală, saturație mediatică

Introduction

According to recent scholarship on DeLillo, *White Noise* has been reexamined through the lenses of algorithmic governance, postdigital anxiety, and ecological precarity. Such readings suggest that DeLillo's insights into media saturation have grown even more resonant in the twenty-first century. The novel is situated within the emergence of what Boxall (2012) and Osteen (2023) describe as "the data sublime," a condition in which information itself becomes an agent of ontological uncertainty. This line of interpretation has been further developed in the context of digital surveillance by Kavadlo (2022), who argue that DeLillo's recurring motifs of the supermarket and television anticipate the algorithmic architectures of the cloud era.

White Noise has been extensively examined in relation to consumerism, mass media, and simulation (Toth 2021). However, few studies have investigated how DeLillo's stylistic techniques—his polyphonic narrative, tonal flattening, and recursive syntax—formally enact the sensory and interpretive saturation his prose depicts. By offering a detailed formal analysis of overload as both a theme and narrative strategy, this study addresses that gap. Moreover, it engages with recent developments in media ecology and cognitive literary studies (Zunshine 2021; McCann 2023; Melley 2024) to argue that DeLillo's representation of perceptual excess anticipates the attention crises and algorithmic mediation characteristic of twenty-first-century life.

In an age defined by algorithmic saturation, environmental crisis, and the fragmentation of public discourse, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* continues to serve as one of the most incisive explorations of informational excess in late capitalist culture. The novel's prescient depiction of media excess—television, radio, computer screens, and the constant hum of background data—has only gained relevance in the digital era. DeLillo's world, in which information circulates endlessly and meaning collapses under its own weight, anticipates what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) identifies as the “age of surveillance capitalism,” where knowledge and identity are commodified into data streams.

Recent DeLillo scholarship (Boxall 2012; Duvall 2008; Kavadlo 2022; Cowart 2022; LeClair 2020; Osteen 2023) has renewed attention to *White Noise* as a novel that anticipates twenty-first-century information economies. By synthesizing these critical insights with Virilio's, and Baudrillard's theories, this article situates *White Noise* at the intersection of media ecology, risk epistemology, and posthuman subjectivity.

Ultimately, this paper argues that *White Noise* transforms the experience of *white noise* from a technological symptom into an existential condition—a state in which identity, perception, and mortality are redefined through mediation. The novel enacts, rather than merely describes, the saturation of human consciousness by external data systems. Through its fragmented narrative, recursive dialogue, and ironic tone, *White Noise* invites readers to inhabit the dissonance of meaning in an era where information itself becomes the primary substance of reality. This argument both extends and revises existing DeLillo scholarship by proposing that *White Noise* models the informational subject as the defining figure of postmodern and postdigital life.

A common theme in many works that examine media saturation, and fragmented consciousness is the metaphor of *noise*, which can be generally interpreted as sensory, informational, linguistic, or existential clutter. Don DeLillo provides a prophetic literary description of a cultural phenomenon, capturing the chaotic and fractured texture of late twentieth-century life. The characters are surrounded by an unrelenting stream of information, which includes everything from emergency announcements to supermarket price tags, from academic jargon to consumer advertising, and from television broadcasts to store signs. The lines separating meaningful communication from meaningless noise are blurred in this noisy setting. The idea of information overload is not new, however, new forms of cognitive, affective, and cultural exhaustion have been brought about by the specific forms this situation has taken in the late 20th and 21st centuries, which are marked by the widespread use of digital communication, electronic media, and advertising. *White Noise* is remarkably prescient in capturing these settings.

The media ecology tradition, especially Marshall McLuhan's well-known statement that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 2021, 7), is in line with DeLillo's work. In *White Noise*, media technologies influence not just how information is disseminated but also how people think and feel. The novel depicts the breakdown of the boundaries between representation and reality, which Jean Baudrillard defined as the emergence of the simulacrum in a hypermediated society:

Postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals (Baudrillard 1994, 19).

However, *White Noise* does more than just portray these events; it enacts them through its own formal methods, such as its recursive structures, paratactic narrative, and characters' fixation on pictures, codes, and signals. At the core of this novel is the belief that literature continues to be an essential platform for contemplating and navigating the intricacies of modern communication, either in spite of or as a result of its interaction with these forces. Literary narratives emphasize the qualitative experience of living in these conditions, while some critical views of excess concentrate on the quantitative proliferation of data. The impact of noisy information on relationships, memory, identity, and even mortality perceptions is masterfully dramatized. The well-known "airborne toxic event" literally depicts the subject's widespread but imperceptible contamination by invisible forces, whether they be ideological, chemical, or informational: "The flood of information and distraction constantly reshapes the way our minds work" (Carr 2010, 19). By foregrounding the relationship between narrative fragmentation and cultural saturation, this study expands the field's understanding of how DeLillo's prose mediates the psychological consequences of postmodern excess.

Methodology

While four decades of criticism have canonized *White Noise* as the quintessential postmodern novel, the originality of this paper lies in reframing its narrative form, rather than its content, as the primary site of cultural critique. Earlier scholars—such as Duvall, Cowart, Boxall, and LeClair—have interpreted DeLillo as a chronicler of systems and mediated experience, yet their analyses often remain at the level of thematic or sociological observation. In contrast, this

study argues that DeLillo's stylistic and rhythmic excess constitutes a literary enactment of cognitive and informational overload, transforming form itself into critique.

By integrating Virilio's theory of acceleration and Baudrillard's concept of simulation, this paper adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that bridges literary form, cultural theory, and the philosophy of technology. This framework situates *White Noise* simultaneously within postmodern aesthetics and within contemporary debates on digital culture, attention economies, and the phenomenology of media saturation.

The contribution of this study is therefore twofold: first, it extends the formalist interpretation of DeLillo's prose through the lens of late-modern theoretical paradigms; and second, it demonstrates the novel's continued relevance for understanding the ontological and perceptual conditions of twenty-first-century mediated life. Ultimately, this approach builds upon the foundational insights of DeLillo scholarship while introducing a new conceptual vocabulary—the literature of excess—to describe the persistence of overload aesthetics in the postdigital age.

The literature of excess

Literature has used a variety of artistic techniques to address the dilemma of information overload. In postmodernism, pastiche, intertextuality, and narrative recursion—forms that mirror the saturation of signs without attempting to resolve it—supplanted the fragmentation of modernism. The novel's serial format, rambling conversations, and use of media snippets serve as excellent examples of these tactics. Its plot resists conclusion, reflecting the continuous flow of information, and its characters communicate in soundbites, lists, and slogans. Last but not least, this article addresses the larger issue of literature's place in an era of excess as well as DeLillo's book. Literature continues to be an essential discipline for slowing down, attending, and reflecting in a time where data threatens to surpass meaning, attention is a limited resource, and noise spreads more quickly than signal. One such technique is provided by *White Noise*, a story that struggles with the impossibility of creating meaning in a world full of tools for doing so.

This idea appears to be an unavoidable aspect of contemporary living in the era of big data, continuous notifications, and digital surveillance. However, authors and theorists understood the cultural, cognitive, and existential ramifications of living in an information-rich environment long before smartphones and social media. One of the most insightful literary reactions to this phenomenon

is Don DeLillo's novel, which captures the confusion and concerns of a culture overrun by advertising, media signals, technical noise, and competing narratives. As a novel that reflects, embodies, and critiques the fragmentation of meaning, the erosion of subjectivity, and the crisis of epistemology brought about by the saturation of media and data in postmodern culture, this study argues that *White Noise* is a paradigmatic work in this sense. DeLillo's portrayal of media saturation is represented as the pervasiveness of radio and television creates a semiotic environment where the lines separating representation and reality become increasingly hazy.

The fear of too much information existed before the twentieth century. The speed, saturation, and ubiquity of information, which are made possible by electronic media, are what set the late 20th century—and by extension, *White Noise*—apart from other periods. This change is encapsulated in Jean Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum, which describes a world in which images circulate as self-referential signs within a closed system of media and commodities rather than referring to any underlying reality. Through their never-ending streams of messages and signs, the supermarket, television, and radio are not only incidental elements; rather, they are active agents that shape perception and create reality: "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard 1994, 19).

From the disintegration of modernism to the parodic pastiche of postmodernism, DeLillo's novel is one of a long tradition of literary reactions to cultural burden. *White Noise*, however, is a prime example of the postmodern state that Fredric Jameson defined as the cultural logic of late capitalism—a world of shallowness, fractured subjectivities, and commodified experience in which mass media codes permeate narrative:

I believe that the emergence of postmodernism is closely related to the emergence of this new moment of late, consumer or multinational capitalism... its formal features in many ways express the deeper logic of that particular social system (Jameson 1991, 9).

This condition is addressed both formally and philosophically in DeLillo's novel. Jack Gladney, the main character, teaches Hitler Studies at a generic American college and leads a life that is influenced by television commercials and grocery store aisles just as much as by academic endeavors. Media intrusions, such as disembodied radio voices, ads that are chanted like incantations, and tabloid headlines that are taken as fact, interrupt his family's daily rituals. The novel's central "airborne toxic event" literalizes the unseen dangers that permeate contemporary life, whether they be data, poisons, or ideas. Information is not just too much; it is unavoidable, pervasive, and a part of reality.

This state of overburden is reflected in the narrative structure. Coherence is continuously postponed in the textual context created by fragmented episodes, paratactic patterns, and digressive dialogues. The abundance of product labels, brand names, and technobabble fills the text with excessive semiotics, mirroring the media environment it portrays. Despite being set in 1980s America, the observations on media, communication, and the decline of meaningful discourse are still incredibly timely. The novel seems to anticipate 21st-century algorithmic worlds, where DeLillo's diagnoses are expanded by data-driven personalization, targeted advertising, and tailored feeds. The dynamics of overload makes it harder to distinguish between distraction and information.

Furthermore, Shoshana Zuboff argues that data mining and behavioral prediction permeate daily life: "Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" (Zuboff 2019, 7). The critic emphasizes how predictive analytics and data extraction mold behaviors, eroding autonomy and causing anxiety: "The problem of postmodernism ... this problem is at one and the same time an aesthetic and political one" (Zuboff 2019, 56).

Although DeLillo's characters aren't specifically subjected to digital surveillance, they nonetheless live in societies that gather, classify, and commercialize data, influencing their anxieties and wants in ways they can hardly understand. They go through similar experiences, despite the fact that it predates digital surveillance: they are haunted by the mediated depictions of death, disaster, and violence; they are terrified by threats they cannot fully perceive; and they are overtaken by data they cannot control. Our contemporary obsession with invisible data flows, algorithmic profiling, and invisible infrastructures of control is foreshadowed by the novel's concentration on the invisible toxic event—a threat whose existence is only acknowledged through technological mediation.

White noise refers to both the background hum of technological gadgets and the mental fog of too much information—an atmosphere in which it is impossible to discern what is significant from what is meaningless. The interconnectedness of technology, media, and subjectivity is highlighted by this background noise, which permeates both the storyline and the experiences of the characters. Furthermore, the novel reflects the breakdown of stable forms under the weight of informational abundance by engaging with genre conventions—academic satire, catastrophe narrative, and domestic fiction—only to destroy them. The repetitive patterns, ironic detachment, and humorous tone reflect what Jameson refers to as the decline of affect in postmodern culture, where authenticity and depth vanish in the midst of the deluge of signals and pictures.

Narrative distance and the illusion of objectivity

Rather than merely depicting the saturation of human consciousness by external data systems, the novel performs this saturation formally and stylistically. Through its fragmented narrative structure, recursive dialogue, and pervasive irony, *White Noise* immerses readers in the dissonance of meaning characteristic of an age in which information itself becomes the dominant substance of reality.

Information excess has significant psychological and existential ramifications that go beyond cultural and aesthetic aspects. The home is depicted as being heavily influenced by the media throughout the novel. In the Gladney household, radios and televisions are kept on not because of their programming but rather because of their ambient presence, or how they add to the background sounds of daily life. DeLillo already shows how media gadgets invade home spaces, altering the texture of perception and the rhythms of existence (Akers and Martin 2021).

This dynamic is best illustrated in one of the novel's passage where the Gladney children huddle in front of the TV and watch commercials, news stories, and trivia with equal disinterest. Jack's teenage son Heinrich exhibits the ability to engage with media in a detached manner, demonstrating a postmodern subjectivity influenced by ongoing exposure to conflicting streams of information that produce hyperreality. The absurdity of mediated life is captured by DeLillo in a sardonic tone, as institutional life as both meaningless and self-important: "I've got a German department that's small but proud. It's a status department, a money department. They're all out to get tenure before the place falls apart" (4). Jack's voice occasionally becomes unaffectionately bland and rhythmically sparse. His detached narrative style, which expresses emotional intimacy through ironic mimicry rather than sentiment, is typified by the exchange's recurring symmetry, as in:

Who will die first?' my son said.
'It's a toss-up,' I said.
'I hope it's me,' he said.
'I hope it's me,' I said (100).

As a result of this saturation, the lines separating the real from the simulated are blurred, and media events begin to resemble or even replace lived experience (Brown 2020; Goldberg 2021; Virilio 1998). To Baudrillard, the hyperreal arises when signs circulate in an unending play of images rather than referring to any reality outside of themselves.

The family's speech patterns are influenced by media language, which turns private conversations into a patchwork of catchphrases, commercials, and

pieces of popular culture. Also, techniques such as fragmentation and repetition are abundant: "‘Toyota Celica,’ he said. ‘Toyota Celica,’ I said. He said it again. I repeated it. We said it a third time, then a fourth, still without any hint of irony" (155).

The narrative voice veers between academic jargon and media-inflected clichés, while Babette's recitation of product names and media slogans highlights the decline of private language. The reduction of emotional depth to the monotonous repetition of cultural indicators often referred to as the waning of affect in postmodern society: "The supermarket shelves have been rearranged. I'd always believed there were psychic data in the supermarket—energy waves, information floods" (36).

The supermarket serves as a microcosm of cognitive fatigue and media saturation. It is a place where signs, symbols, and semiotic excess are consumed in addition to things. A dense field of stimuli, including the bright packaging, background music, PA announcements, and promotional signage, overwhelms the senses and confuses the subject:

The supermarket is a fairyland of sorts, an enchanted place of power and ritual. All around us the fluorescent lights hum in the way that the hum of the world's machinery is heard in the early morning, when the streets are empty and the silence is an absence of human sounds (DeLillo 1985, 3).

Noise is the ubiquitous, mechanical hum that pervades human experience from the very beginning of the book. The buzz of the fluorescent lights represents the continuous technical background—a faint yet persistent sound that echoes the "world's machinery". This hum is more than just sound; it is an indication of the infrastructure of modernity, implying that noise permeates daily areas even during quiet times. A microcosm of postmodern existence, where noise is both tangible and metaphorical, is the supermarket, a place of materialism and media saturation. It is the auditory representation of the deluge of goods, signals, and data that will overtake the characters during the course of the book. The "absence of human sounds" emphasizes how the cacophony of technology supplants or undermines the inherent human presence.

Jack Gladney acknowledges the supermarket's function as a theater of signs in his thoughts about it. Brightly colored packaging, recurring product names, and corporate slogans all contribute to what Baudrillard refers to as semiotic saturation in consumer culture, where processing signs is just as important to consumption as purchasing commodities. Choice becomes illusory in this setting; variety obscures the fundamental similarity of goods, and consuming turns into a way to participate in the flow of signals: "You never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs" (Baudrillard 1998, 60).

The way the supermarket affects perception is similar to the wider cultural consequences of information overload, which include the loss of critical thinking skills, desensitization, and cognitive fragmentation. According to Jack, the supermarket is a contradictory place where having too many options gives one a sense of security while also dulling consciousness. It is both reassuring and unnerving. The concurrent attraction and repulsion that define postmodern reactions to media saturation is reflected in this ambivalence.

The depiction of cognitive stress is aided by its linguistic saturation. Throughout the story, DeLillo uses a variety of media-culture-derived lists, repeats, and interjections, such as product slogans, brand names, medical terms, and bureaucratic jargon. This overuse of language is a reflection of information saturation, a state in which language no longer functions as a tool for clarity but rather as a cause of alienation, confusion, and distraction. The novel also considers the loss of narrative coherence in an information-burdened society. The din of media constantly interrupts Jack's attempts to create a meaningful narrative, whether it be about his family, his academic field, or his own mortality. David Harvey's observations regarding time-space compression in postmodernity are reflected in this: conventional narratives of progress, coherence, and meaning are undermined by the acceleration and fragmentation of experience:

Time-space compression is a sign of the intensity of forces at work at this nexus of contradiction and it may well be that crises of overaccumulation as well as crises in cultural and political forms are powerfully connected to such forces (Harvey 1989, 258).

The psychological effects of living in a world full of frightening facts are highlighted by Babette's covert use of Dylar, a fictitious medication intended to reduce fear of death. The yearning to escape not only mortality but also the overwhelming sensations that keep it ever-present is reflected in Dylar's vow to eradicate the fear of death from consciousness. "The white noise of the television murmurs in the other room, a constant presence, a comfort, a signal that life goes on" (DeLillo 1985, 20).

The "white noise" of the television offers a steady background, a comforting buzz that life goes on in spite of uncertainty or dread. However, this sound is also intrusive and unavoidable —it permeates awareness and is constantly present. The metaphor also applies to the psychological domain, where the noise anesthetizes consciousness, fills in internal voids, and diverts attention from existential dread. It implies a coping and denial technique in which sound takes the place of quiet and introspection. This emphasizes the idea that the saturation of contemporary life makes it difficult to distinguish between internal and exterior media.

Through recognizable structures, the characters' reliance on routines—such as shopping, watching TV, and going to lectures—can be interpreted as defence mechanisms. In a world with more knowledge than can be comprehended, these rituals offer momentary steadiness. A loop of reliance and disempowerment is created, though, as these tactics also serve to strengthen the identical systems of consumption and media saturation that first cause a burden: “The television is a machine for thinking with” (DeLillo 1985, 48). This seemingly straightforward statement highlights the ambivalence of noise as it is mediated by technology. The continuous stream of sounds and visuals from the TV affects perception and thought processes. Noisy information crystallizes in the noise of television; it is not merely background but also formative, influencing the characters' mental processes.

The expression frames television, and consequently media noise, as an epistemic instrument that influences the acquisition of knowledge. However, this “thinking” is passive, disjointed, and spectacle-heavy, undermining the idea of logical comprehension and highlighting the damaging impacts of media cacophony.

White Noise provides a foresighted reflection on how excessive communication affects subjectivity, perception, and thought through its portrayal of media-rich settings. Media technologies alter experience by creating the frameworks that allow reality to be understood as well as by disseminating information. The characters inhabit a world where media noise permeates every aspect of daily life, influencing social interactions, emotional reactions, and intellectual processes (Ferguson 2021; Kaufman 2022).

These cultural circumstances are reflected in DeLillo's aesthetic techniques—his use of fragmentation, repetition, and parody—and in the ways that the locations and activities—from the supermarket to *the airborne toxic event*—act as metaphors for the ubiquitous, frequently imperceptible forces of information and media in forming human experience. Through a variety of formal techniques, DeLillo creates a literary aesthetics of excess that mirrors, replicates, and challenges the fragmented, recursive, and confusing aspects of existence in a media-rich society. By doing this, DeLillo contributes to a larger postmodern literary tradition that uses irony, satire, narrative fragmentation, and reflexivity to address societal excess.

The novel's episodic, fractured structure is one of its most remarkable elements; it reflects the interruptions and diversions of modern life. Each of the three sections of the book—“Waves and Radiation”, “The Airborne Toxic Event”, and “Dylarama”—offers a unique but marginally related take on the main topics of mortality, media, and communication. Unlike realist fiction, which follows a continuous, causal path, the story in these sections develops in discrete incidents.

The disarray represents what David Harvey refers to as the time-space compression of postmodernity: conventional narratives of continuity, progress, and coherence are broken by the speed at which cultural and technological change is occurring. Interruptions—advertising, news updates, and family discussions that veer off topic—intersperse Jack Gladney's experiences, echoing the rhythms of channel-surfing, magazine flipping, or scrolling through internet feeds. In line with Frederic Jameson's assessment that postmodern narratives frequently exhibit a "waning of affect" and a collapse of depth into surface, the end product is a text that defies totalizing meaning.

Furthermore, conventional narrative hierarchies are undermined by this structure. Moments that seem insignificant, like shopping excursions, pointless discussions, and product lists, take up just as much narrative space as pivotal or epiphanies. Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which holds that distinctions between the profound and the banal vanish in the never-ending flow of messages, is echoed by this flattening of significance.

One of this novel's primary narrative techniques is repetition, which captures the cyclical patterns of cognitive overload as well as the repetitions of media culture. Phrases, slogans, and images recur throughout the book: the kids mimic commercial jingles; Jack and Babette keep coming back to the subject of death; the signs and brands of the supermarket resurface like song refrains. The non-linear temporality of media environments, where news, entertainment, and advertising cycles produce content loops that supplant narrative progression, is reflected in this recurrence: "That's just noise," he said. "It's white noise. It's a comfort." "Noise," she said. "Just noise" (DeLillo 1985, 52). The paradox of noise as useless and significant is encapsulated in this brief interaction. As language repeats itself in loops, reinforcing and destabilizing meaning, the use of the word *noise* echoes the novel's stylistic motifs.

The term *white noise* refers to a pervasive, sometimes calming, but empty background hum. The characters' differing reactions—perceiving noise as either *comfort* or *just noise*—reflect opposing viewpoints on media saturation: noise as a sign of cultural emptiness or as a necessary buffer against anarchy. Echoing the larger issue of semiotic saturation, this verbal repetition creates a sort of cacophony inside language itself, demonstrating how communication gets saturated and fragmented.

From a formal standpoint, repetition is a thematic and structural technique. It simulates the stagnation of burdened consciousness, in which an abundance of information results in paralysis rather than knowledge. People are reduced to passive consumers of unending, repeating content because there is so much media messaging in modern culture that it overwhelms their ability to think critically. The discussions in the novel serve as an example of this circumstance.

Characters interrupt one another, questions remain unresolved, and conversations often repeat themselves. A feeling of cognitive exhaustion is created by this recursive pattern, which makes it seem as though the characters and the reader are trapped in an endless cycle of unresolved information.

In a similar vein, DeLillo blurs the lines between media reality and narrative fiction by incorporating media fragments such as news bulletins, weather reports, and television conversations. The reader is reminded of the manufactured character of story and the inability to isolate fiction from the media landscapes it reflects by these intrusions, which upend the fictitious universe. This is consistent with Brian McHale's description of postmodern fiction as ontologically unstable, focused more on highlighting the representational processes than on portraying reality:

Postmodernist writing seeks to foreground the ontological duality of metaphor, its participation in two frames of reference with different ontological statuses ... texts often prolong this hesitation ... as a means of foregrounding ontological structure (McHale 1987, 134–135).

Jack Gladney's first-person narrative sheds light on how awareness is shaped by media exposure. His narrative voice fluctuates between media-infused banalities, neurotic contemplation, and scholarly detachment. This hybrid voice represents a subjectivity made up of opposing discourses, including media noise, consumer culture, family life, and scholastic authority. A mediated consciousness, one that finds it difficult to access genuine emotion or unmediated reality, is revealed by Jack's propensity to filter experience through language, whether it be academic, scientific, or media-derived. In order to emulate the informational density of his surroundings, his narration frequently veers into lists, product descriptions, and commentary on television shows. Katherine Hayles noted that information technologies create fragmented, data-saturated identities, which is consistent with this artistic decision.

I understand human and posthuman to be historically specific constructions that emerge from different configurations of embodiment, technology, and culture. My reference point for the human is the tradition of liberal humanism; the posthuman appears when computation rather than possessive individualism is taken as the ground of being, a move that allows the posthuman to be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines (Hayles 1999, 33).

DeLillo's narrative tactics implicate the reader in the feeling of overwhelm. Disorientation, deferral, and saturation are characteristics of the reading experience created by the novel's broken episodes, recursive dialogues, and profusion of

signs. Instead of leading the reader to conclusion or coherence, the novel encourages a reading style that reflects the characters' fragmented, distracted attention just in the way in which the novel thematizes cognitive and cultural disorientations and enacts them through fragmentation, repetition, intertextuality, irony, and mediated narrative. The broader postmodern understanding that conventional narrative forms are inadequate to convey the intricacies of life in a media-rich, information-rich environment is reflected in these tactics.

The aesthetics of overload and the crisis of meaning

The paradoxes of modern life—the simultaneous abundance and lack of meaning, the confusion of representation and reality, and the breakdown of cohesive subjectivity—are brought to light by DeLillo's aesthetic of overload. Thus, the novel serves as both a formal intervention in the literary response to the surplus of information and a representation of its cultural context. From the supermarket to the evacuation center, certain locations and settings are presented as miniature representations of media and information saturation, influencing the story and the characters' perceptions of reality.

The medical center is where DeLillo's spatial investigation of excessive communication comes to a head. It is a place where patients are turned into case numbers, bodies into data, and health into probabilistic results. Readouts, scans, and risk assessments—all types of informational abstraction that supplant embodied experience—are the main focus of medical consultations. These systems act as a mediator for his fear of dying, which is exacerbated by his incapacity to understand the consequences of the information that is being given to him. Informational medicine's dehumanizing consequences are reflected in the center's impersonal interactions, bureaucratic procedures, and antiseptic surroundings.

The contradiction of modern informational systems is best shown by the medical center: they promise control and clarity yet frequently result in uncertainty and powerlessness. A major tension in the novel's depiction of overburdened environments is the gap between existential understanding and informational knowledge, which Jack's experience highlights. The locations, such as shops, shelters, and medical facilities, are metaphors for the larger cultural state of suffocation. Subjectivity dissolves into roles and data points, signs multiply, and attention becomes fragmented in these settings. The conversion of lived experience into mediated, systematized, and commercialized forms is dramatized in these settings.

DeLillo's depiction of information-rich environments forces readers to acknowledge the ways in which systems, media, and architecture influence perception and experience in ways that are frequently imperceptible but significantly

impactful. In order to further explore the impacts of excessive communication on bodies, surroundings, and narratives, the themes of contamination and pollution stand out, both literally and figuratively. Contamination serves as both a physical and figurative motif in *White Noise*. The airborne toxic event, the most obvious example of pollution in the book, dramatizes environmental disaster, but DeLillo is more concerned with a more subtle kind of contamination: the inundation of informational pollutants into human consciousness. DeLillo's connection between environmental toxicity and cognitive and cultural burden shows how the logic of invisibility, ubiquity, and cumulative harm is shared by both types of contamination:

The alert tone pierced the night. It was followed by the voice: 'A hazardous airborne chemical has been released in the vicinity of Blacksmith Village. Residents are advised to shelter in place and await further instructions.' The voice was calm, but the tone was sharp, urgent. The words fell into a static murmur (DeLillo 1985, 109).

The emergency broadcast is a prime example of how, in times of crisis, loudness can both facilitate and obstruct understanding. The "static murmur" and "alert tone" create a sensory burden: the signal is urgent but partially muffled by background noise, representing the disjointed delivery of vital information. The uneasiness brought on by mediated communication is heightened by the contrast between the "calm voice" and the "sharp, urgent tone". Here, the noise represents the epistemic ambiguity that defines contemporary risk, simultaneously communicating danger and confusing comprehension. The characters' general inner struggle is reflected in their incapacity to completely comprehend the nature of the airborne hazardous event.

White Noise is a metaphor for pollution in its widest sense, which includes the overabundance of chemicals, information, pictures, and data that infiltrate human habitats, bodies, and minds in addition to the contamination of air and water. This perspective, which draws from the theories of Paul Virilio (1994, 1998) and Jean Baudrillard (1994), places DeLillo's writing in a tradition that links the technological advancements of modernity to new kinds of danger, uncertainty, and toxicity.

Despite being physically present, the toxic cloud turns into a media event just as much as an environmental one, demonstrating how pollution functions in the postmodern era through both material and semiotic means. The notion of contamination is literalized by Jack's exposure to Nyodene D. His body is marked with invisible particles that are said to shorten his life, creating a site of poisonous inscription. However, this contamination is never completely understandable; it exists as a collection of risk evaluations, medical records, and

possibilities. The situation created is a reflection of larger worries about the body's susceptibility in the information age. The body is no longer only biological; it is now better understood and controlled by informational systems, which turn flesh into data through scans, health records, and risk algorithms. Contamination is not just chemical but also informational, permeating future and sense of self through probabilities and numbers.

A feeling of exhaustion is brought on by the combined effects of informational and environmental pollutants. Jack feels the psychological toll of living inside systems that constantly barrage the body with information about its weaknesses in addition to the fear of contamination. This supports Virilio's claim that as technology advances, the body finds it difficult to keep up with the speed of information, leading to new types of trauma:

The age of paradoxical logic begins with video recording, holography and computer graphics... as though, at the close of the twentieth century, the end of modernity were itself marked by the end of a logic of public representation (Virilio 1994, 63).

In this situation, the fear of dying is inextricably linked to Jack's dread of informational collapse, which is the incapacity to understand, manage, or break free from the institutions that govern his life: "All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots" (26). Like his surroundings, his body is teeming with invisible forces—chemicals, information, and indicators—that conflate the concepts of inside and outside, self and system.

In *White Noise*, language itself turns into a vehicle for contamination. Jargon, slogans, brand names, and bureaucratic speech abound in the novel's linguistic landscape; these types of language mimic the logic of pollution in that they expand, saturate, and obfuscate rather than clarify. The protagonists' cognitive burden is exacerbated by this verbal excess, which reflects the saturation of their surroundings. Language, commercial culture, and the airborne toxic event are all expressions of a more profound existential state. They represent the ways that internal fears are externalized in contemporary life.

White Noise provides a foresighted analysis of how contemporary systems manage, create, and sustain excess, foreshadowing current worries about data pollution, attention economies, and ecological crises. In this novel, contamination shapes the novel's narrative techniques, spaces, and subjectivity representations. It is not just a thematic element, but it reflects, analyzes, and reproduces the conditions of excess and fragmentation that define modern life through its portrayal of media saturation, environmental disaster, consumer culture, and mediated subjectivity. However, the novel does more than simply depict information excess; it aestheticizes it, turning the state of cognitive saturation into a collection of

formal, spatial, and narrative techniques that force the reader to share the characters' bewilderment and confusion. *White Noise* is a literary reaction to the encumbering cultural situation as well as a diagnostic. It also considers the wider ramifications of DeLillo's writings for comprehending the function of literature at a time when the abundance of signs, information, and media environments defines our existence.

The novel employs the logic of excess both structurally and conceptually, as we have seen throughout this study. The feeling of living in a world where information is accumulating more quickly than it can be digested or comprehended is mirrored by fragmented episodes, recursive conversation, lists of signs and products, and the proliferation of narrative voices.

DeLillo's purposeful opposition to narrative closure is seen in his failure to provide closure or coherence, which represents the persistent, unresolved character of excess itself. The novel's ambiguity and open-endedness push readers to the boundaries of understanding and emphasize the psychological and epistemological ramifications of living in a world where meaning is constantly postponed.

White Noise serves as a key work for comprehending how literature deals with the aesthetics of overload. It demonstrates how literature may provide a space for critical reflection in the midst of these pressures and how narrative can express the intricacies of living in environments that are crowded with signs, data, and noise. In reaction to the deluge of information that permeates modern life, DeLillo's novel emphasizes the value of developing awareness, skepticism, and introspection. By doing this, it reaffirms literature's timeless value as a window into cultural circumstances and a tool for readers to regain agency in the excess-filled landscapes that characterize the contemporary world. DeLillo explores the metaphor of noise in these passages on a number of levels: as a symbol of fragmented communication and epistemological uncertainty; as media and linguistic clutter that disrupt and shape cognition; as existential hum that conceals underlying fears and uncertainties; as environmental and technological soundscapes that permeate everyday life and physical spaces. The metaphor is essential to comprehending the novel's indictment of modern culture because of the intimate relationship between real and figurative noise, which allows readers to feel the novel's thematic problems on a visceral level.

Conclusion: implications for literary studies and contemporary culture

Future research could expand on this approach to see how authors continue to balance the aesthetics and ethics of excess in the digital age in contemporary writing that faces comparable issues. In the twenty-first century, these issues

are still very much relevant. DeLillo's description of the dynamics of information surplus has been exacerbated by the emergence of digital technology, social media, and algorithmic societies. The novel's insights into the saturation of bodies and minds by invisible forces are echoed by concerns about data pollution, attention economies, and privacy degradation.

White Noise examines the impact of an abundance of information on narrative, subjectivity, and epistemology in addition to depicting a time of media saturation. It expresses the contradiction of a society where information is abundant yet meaning is elusive through its fragmented form, thematic preoccupations, and repetitive structures. By enacting the state of cognitive and cultural excess through its structure, narrative voice, and stylistic devices, the novel challenges readers to consider not only the issues of media saturation but also the boundaries of narrative coherence in a time of excess. The depiction of media spectacle as a force that reshapes reality itself is among its most remarkable features. The characters in the novel frequently internalize television, advertising, and news reporting clichés as they view their lives through the prism of media narratives. Jack and his family encounter the “airborne toxic event” through a variety of media frames, including news bulletins, emergency announcements, and scientific jargon, despite the very real dangers involved. Their perception of the event is influenced by the ways in which information about it is shared rather than by firsthand experience.

The novel transcends its historical moment, offering profound insights into how literature mediates information saturation and shapes evolving conceptions of subjectivity, mortality, and social cognition. By performing the effects of overload through its narrative, stylistic, and structural strategies, the novel functions simultaneously as a critique of mediated existence and an aesthetic experiment in representing cognitive excess.

Implications for literary studies include: recognition of literature's distinctive capacity to represent cognitive and cultural phenomena that elude traditional realist and linear narrative forms, demonstration of how postmodern techniques—fragmentation, repetition, and intertextuality serve as formal correlatives for the experiential conditions of information saturation, and engagement with current debates surrounding digital culture, algorithmic mediation, and attention economies, underscoring the novel's continuing relevance for theorizing mediated subjectivity in the twenty-first century.

By foregrounding these dynamics, this article advances a more nuanced understanding of DeLillo's achievement, positioning *White Noise* not merely as a cultural artifact of postmodernity but as a conceptual model for analyzing literary responses to the complex informational and technological ecologies that define contemporary experience.

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