

Doomsday

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DOOMSDAY
Смрт̄

Уредници
Марија Лојаница
Драган Бошковић

ФИЛУМ, Крагујевац, 2020.

...јер је јак Госџод Боџ који јој суди.
(Откр 18:8)

...for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.
(Rev 18:8)

Садржај

- Brian Martin**
DEATH TACTICS 13
- Ружица Ж. Петровић**
ПАРАДОКСАЛНИ АСПЕКТИ СМРТИ 27
- Александра В. Јовановић**
КЕРМОД И БОРХЕС: СМИСАО КРАЈА 37
- Владислава Гордић Петковић**
БЛИЗИНА СМРТИ И ПОЕТИЧКИ АСКЕТИЗАМ У РАНОЈ ПРОЗИ
АНТОНИЈА ИСАКОВИЋА И ЕРНЕСТА ХЕМИНГВЕЈА 55
- Игор Перишић**
ИМА ЛИ ЧОВЕКА ПОСЛЕ СУБАЛТЕРНОГ ЧОВЕКА?
РОМАН УПОТРЕБА ЧОВЕКА АЛЕКСАНДРА ТИШМЕ 69
- Vesna Lopičić**
THE MYSTERY OF DEATH IN STEPHEN KING'S *ELEVATION* 87
- Александар Д. Радовановић**
У СЕНЦИ ВЕШАЛА: БАЛАДА О ТАМНИЦИ У РЕДИНГУ
КАО ПОЛЕМИКА О СМРТНОЈ КАЗНИ 101
- Aleksandra Z. Stojanović**
TELEVISIONING DEATH: SIMULATING REALITY IN DON DELILLO'S
WHITE NOISE 123
- Милена Р. Нешић Павковић**
МОТИВ САМОУБИСТВА У РОМАНУ *ИСЕЉЕНИЦИ* В. Г. ЗЕБАЛДА 139
- Жарко Н. Миленковић**
ГЛАСОВИ МРТВИХ: *ПЕДРО ПАРАМО* ХУАНА РУЛФА 155
- Светлана В. Стевановић**
ЖИВЕТИ СМРТ: ЕМИЛИЈАНО САПАТА У РОМАНУ *САПАТА* 169
- Василије К. Милновић**
ДАН ШЕСТИ У СВЕТЛУ ЕРОТИКЕ СМРТИ РАСТКА
ПЕТРОВИЋА ИЛИ: ЛУНАРНИ И СОЛАРНИ ПРИНЦИП
ЈЕДНОГ АВАНГАРДНОГ ДЕЛА 191

Исидора Ана Д. Стамболић

ПРИКАЗ СМРТИ У СРПСКОМ СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНОМ
АПОКРИФУ О СМРТИ АВРААМОВОЈ 207

Марија С. Докић

(БЕ)СМРТНА СУДБИНА ПОЛУБОГА 225

Јелена М. Тодоровић Васић

КУПОВИНА ДУША И БАНАЛИЗАЦИЈА СМРТИ У РОМАНУ *МРТВЕ
ДУШЕ* Н. В. ГОГОЉА 237

Александра В. Чебашек

СУДБИНА КАО АГОН ЖИВОТА И СМРТИ У ПРИПОВЕЦИ
„МАРА МИЛОСНИЦА” ИВЕ АНДРИЋА 253

Јелена Ђ. Весковић

РАЗМИШЉАЊА О СМРТИ НА ПУСТОМ ОСТРВУ 269

Марко С. Аврамовић

ПИСАЊЕ ПОЕЗИЈЕ КАО НАВИКАВАЊЕ НА СМРТ: „УКРОЂЕНА
СМРТ” АЛЕКСАНДРА РИСТОВИЋА 285

БИОГРАФИЈЕ АУТОРА 301

DOOMSDAY SOUNDTRACK 311

Aleksandra Z. Stojanović
University of Kragujevac
Center for Language and Literature Research

sandra.stojanovic95@hotmail.com



**TELEVISIONING DEATH:
SIMULATING REALITY
IN DON DELILLO'S *WHITE NOISE***

**ТЕЛЕВИЗИЈСКИ ПРЕНОС СМРТИ:
СИМУЛИРАЊЕ РЕАЛНОСТИ У РОМАНУ
БЕЛИ ШУМ ДОНА ДЕЛИЛА**

The highly debated and elusive topic of death has served as the central theme for many literary works including Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. The aim of the paper is not only to present the notion of death as seen by DeLillo's protagonists but to attempt to take the interpretation one step further and present a "death" of the Real. Based predominantly on the theories of Jean Baudrillard concerning the delicate relationship between simulations and reality in the postmodern era, the paper displays the prevalence of simulations in DeLillo's fictional world. Namely, the Gladney family lives in an environment which favors simulation to the extent that the boundary between simulation and reality has become blurred. The concept of death shall be presented in connection to postmodernism and the changes it has brought upon the individual while touching upon the significance of technology, i.e. the television set. The importance of television within the everyday lives of the protagonists, as well as its connection to the omnipresent fear of death, will serve as the basis for our analysis of DeLillo's hyperreal environment.

Key words: *White Noise*, Don DeLillo, television, death, Baudrillard, simulation, hyperreality, postmodernism

Појам смрти одувек је представљао централну тему многих књижевних дела, укључујући и роман *Бели шум* Д. Делила. Циљ рада јесте представити појам смрти кроз угао протагониста у роману као и представити „смрт” Реалног. Заснован на теоријама Ж. Бодријара о односу између симулација и реалности, рад приказује превласт симулација у Делиловом фиктивном свету. Наиме, породица Гледнијевих налази се у окружењу у коме се симулације више цене од реалности, до те мере да граница између њих постаје нејасна. Концепт смрти биће представљен у вези са постмодернизмом и променама које је ово доба изазвало код појединаца, уједно се осврћући на улогу технологије, тј. телевизора у роману. Као основа анализе хиперреалности коју представља Делило, узео се утицај телевизора на свакодневни живот протагониста као и веза између уређаја и свеприсутног страха од смрти.

Кључне речи: *Бели шум*, Дон Делило, телевизија, смрт, Бодријар, симулација, хиперреалност, постмодернизам

1. *Fear of Death*

The notion of death has always been intriguing to great thinkers and the average man alike, demanding further investigation into its intricate and mysterious nature. The general preoccupation with death and mortality has not changed, although man's perception of it has been modified as the world around us succumbed to societal changes. Perhaps the most significant change the notion of death has endured is the fear it instills in those who contemplate it. Ernest Baker claims the fear of death is "a mainspring human activity—an activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man" (1973: ix). While primitive civilizations viewed death as a celebration and cause for festivities, modern man seems to have created an obsession with death resulting in an inseparable fear and attempts, through various coping mechanisms, to assuage it. Baker offers us a psychological perspective merged with elements of mythology and religion which establishes the fear of death as "a universal in the human condition" (ix).

The differences in the way a child and an adult internalize thoughts about death are represented in DeLillo's novel through the character of Wilder. The terror of death is innate and "present behind all our normal functioning, in order for the organism to be armed toward self-preservation" (16). For if the fear was constantly at the level of consciousness one would be unable to function in day to day situations. Instead, an effective repression mechanism must be established. Rather than presenting Wilder as the only innocent and pure figure in the novel due to the fact that he is unaware of death because of his age, this paper emphasizes Wilder's screams as his expression of anxiety. Wahl draws our attention to the presence of thanatophobia in children, mainly linked to questions of causality. He states that "it is the child who holds the secrets, if we can but look, to this ancient riddle of death and of our methods of handling and coping with this fearful eventuality" (Wahl 1959: 21). What differentiates Wilder from the rest of the Gladney family is his inability to utilize any of the coping mechanisms against death. In this sense, he is pure since he is the only one who feels the anxiety of death clearly, untainted by repression and denial. When Wilder relentlessly cries and cannot be soothed it is his expression of those fears. He is not susceptible to various coping techniques and thus remains indifferent to the sounds of the television and radio. On the other hand, Jack Gladney views his sons incessant crying as a soothing experience which he "entered" (DeLillo 1986: 78) and allowed to

completely envelop him. Wilder's crying may be equated to the constant noises of household appliances which Jack got accustomed to. The noise becomes pacifying and serves as a deterrent for anxieties related to death. The noise produced by electrical appliances is persistent and omnipresent in the Gladney household. The television is always turned on and may be heard throughout the entire novel, randomly projecting utterances from TV shows, news reports, commercials, etc. (18, 95, 226). These interruptions remind the readers of the prevalence of television and its significant role relating to death.

2. Creating a television-based society

Ever since its invention, television has become the nucleus of the American household. As a result, it gained a prominent role in many domestic activities and watching television become not only a habit but a type of ritual – “a wholesome domestic sport” (16), as DeLillo would describe it. “TV has come to pervade our lives in more profound ways, shaping and constraining our desires, our behavior, and our expectations about others” (McHale 2001: 117). Not only does watching television occur actively and deliberately, but it has infiltrated the home to the extent where most daily tasks become accompanied by the flashing lights, faint murmur and background voices of the television. People take part in various household activities *while* watching television. The television program is defined primarily based on the notion of flow, which “cannot be properly understood without reference to the parallel notion of household flow” (Altman 1986: 40). In many homes the television is always on and, as a result, it starts becoming the center of the household around which all other activities are organized. The television interrupts and integrates itself into all other household activities, including the conversations and thoughts of the home's occupants. The merging of television flow and household flow thus shows the growing importance of television in people's lives. As Altman (1986) discusses, it is not the picture which is central, but the sound. The quantity of people affected by the content on the screen is not measured by the number of people sitting in front of the television set and actively participating in the program, but by the number of those who allow the emitted sounds to influence their daily lives. The television participates in Jack and Babette's conversations and interrupts Jack's musings on death. The constant chatter and hum of the television has become a soothing background noise, an omnipresent sound which figures as a vital aspect of the household.

The basis of *White Noise* is a death-obsessed society whose inhabitants spend most of their days considering the implications of death. For, as Baudrillard states, “to be dead is an unthinkable anomaly; nothing else is as offensive as this. Death is a delinquency, and an incurable deviancy” (1993: 126). The fear of death becomes an overwhelming anxiety for Jack and Babette Gladney as they attempt to find any possible way to soothe their apprehension. Apart from providing an image of a society in which thoughts of death play a prominent role, *White Noise* also offers its readers a look into a postmodern, TV-obsessed, consumer culture. The two obsessions are frequently equated in the novel and it would appear that death is televised:

If death is finally beyond the grasp of our imaginations, then perhaps the only way we can even approach the thought of it, sample or ‘taste’ the thought of it, is by displacement, through the experience of *other* forms of ontological differences; and in our culture, the most readily accessible experience of ontological difference, and at the same time the most comprehensive model of *all other* forms of ontological difference, is provided by the TV. (McHale 2001: 140)

The omnipresence of television in the novel presents the characters’ way of coping with their mortality and death anxiety. By viewing events through a simulation one gains a distanced and displaced view, thus making it possible to grasp the notion of death. “The effect of televised death is, like consumerism, anesthetizing. A seeming confrontation with reality is actually a means of evading one’s own mortality, giving the viewer a false sense of power” (LeClair 2003: 15).

There is a contrast between Jack Gladney’s view of television and that of Murray Siskind. Jack, for whom television possesses a “narcotic undertow and eerie brain-sucking power” (DeLillo 1986: 16), is aware of its status as a medium that propagates the world of simulacra in which reality is concealed. As the properties of the noise-emitting box represent his fear of death, he cannot rid himself of this seductive power. Murray, on the other hand, regards the television as a source of spiritual elation that provides one with “endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras” (51). The difference in their reception of television underlies the main difference in their view of death. Murray is not plagued by fear as Jack is, but rather welcomes and embraces it. He allows himself to be enchanted by it and is seemingly more at peace with his mortality.

Because of its mysterious and irreversible nature, as well as its omnipresence, death instills fear in the majority of the human race. Death, much like the sex drive, has been gradually repressed throughout the centuries, with people finding various mechanisms to control their thanatophobia. The

characters of *White Noise* are trapped in a television-obsessed consumer society in which a perpetual fear of death prevails. Jack forms his personality around the reputation and image of Hitler. It is important to note that he is not drawing from the actual Hitler, but from the media image that has been created of him. Hitler, a man that is “larger than death” (287) is the key to overcoming Jack’s fear, as he himself states. By creating this persona and allowing himself to become engulfed by it, Jack becomes a walking simulation. His Hitler persona is riddled with inauthenticity, as he does not even speak German and must fake his way through his career and build on a simulated reputation. He is “the false character that follows the name around” (17), thus consequently becoming a “SIMUPROF” (Duval 2003: 179).

Television is frequently used as a repression mechanism against the fear of death, and as previously mentioned, Wilder is immune to it since he does not yet understand its implications. This is why he is the only one who remains indifferent upon seeing his mother on the television screen, while the rest of the family members have an unnerving experience.

One consequence of our everyday interaction with TV is that we are apt to think of the boundary between our domestic space and the space *inside* the TV screen, between the word ‘out here’ and the world ‘in there’, as a relatively porous one; thus TV viewers may address the figures on the TV screen, or otherwise behave towards TV figures as though their space were continuous with ours. (McHale 2001: 118)

The family felt the divide between their physical location and Babette’s projection on the television screen which ultimately led to their unfamiliar experience as they were used to seeing her “out here” instead of “in there”. DeLillo describes Babette’s appearance on the television screen as follows:

It was the picture that mattered, the face in black and white, animated but also flat, distanced, sealed off, timeless. It was but wasn’t her [...] She was shining a light on us, she was coming into being, endlessly being formed and reformed as the muscles in her face worked at smiling and speaking, as the electronic dots swarmed. (1986: 104)

She is unrecognizable, displaced and distanced from their perception of her. The television set distorts images, affecting the way its viewers grasp the reality of the situations it presents. The television may be seen as a form of desensitization and a means of obscuring reality. “Reality and fear go together naturally” (Baker 1973: 17). If the reality of the event is removed, then the fear will follow.

That night, a Friday, we gathered in front of the set, as was the custom and the rule, with take-out Chinese. There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes [...] We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping. (DeLillo 1986: 64)

The constant flow of disasters veils the reality of their lives and perpetuates the simulation that the television asserts. Baudrillard argues that all events have been reduced to simulation and the horrors of war, crime and death presented on the television screens “have come increasingly to be reduced to the status of gruesome side-effects, strictly ancillary to the real business of TV representation, or rather simulation” (McHale 2001: 128). Namely, “the closer one gets to true documentary, to ‘live coverage’, and the more closely the real is pursued with colour, depth and one technical improvement after another, the greater does the real absence from the world grow” (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Medium is Message*).

Jack Gladney and his fellow colleague, a college professor of popular culture named Murray Siskind visit the tourist attraction known as “THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA” (DeLillo 1986: 12). The barn’s aura¹ has been destroyed and its essence cannot be reconstructed or reached by Jack or Murray. The vast number of photographs taken on a regular basis creates a sort of pseudo-aura and helps establish the barn’s reputation. The barn itself is a simulation. According to Benjamin, “technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself” (2007: 220), which in this case is the barn’s value. The barn was just a regular barn before it received its title and started being photographed immensely. Paradoxically, the barn is photographed only because of its reputation, but the reputation would not have been created had it not been for the photographs. The barn itself as such does not exist in reality. DeLillo writes: “No one sees the barn [...] Once you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn [...] We’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one.” (1986: 12).

While W. Benjamin’s thesis about the mechanical reproduction of art argues the destruction of an aura surrounding a work of art, DeLillo’s novel

1 Benjamin defines *aura* as “the authenticity of a thing” (2007: 221). The aura is what defines the work of art and presents us with its essence. The aura may only be found in the original and “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (221).

presents us with the opposite, namely, “that the commodification of culture has worked to preserve the myth of origins and of authenticity” (Frow 2003: 40). People partake in maintaining the myth of the barn and contributing to its reputation and simulated aura. DeLillo describes television as “a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dream-like preconscious way” (1986: 51). The television functions similarly to the barn as its significance has been established by viewers, solidifying its position as a myth. It is dreamlike and pre-conscious, like a *déjà vu* providing us with a sense of security and spectacle of simulated events according to which we may view the reality around us. The representation, in all its simulated glory, and maintaining its “image” takes precedence over reality. Baudrillard believed in the triumph of images over originality as a main characteristic of the postmodern era.

The deep-seated fear of dying and subsequent anxiety connected to this notion has become even more prominent in an era of simulation which frequently draws our attention to the instability of our surroundings. Paradoxically, we feel more empowered than ever in this era of technical advancement, all the while having a false sense of security. Overcoming death thus becomes a priority and for some, such as Jack Gladney, an obsession. The looming fear of death which had previously been abstract and distant becomes palpable following the airborne toxic event. The ominous atmosphere of the novel and frequent conjuring of death finally gain shape. The connection between death and television becomes clearer when Dylar is first found in the Gladney home. “Without a word we replaced the radiator cover, bottle intact, and went back to Denise’s room. The voice at the end of the bed said: ‘Meanwhile here is a quick and attractive lemon garnish suitable for any sea food.’” (178). Voices coming from the television interrupt this scene, connecting television to the fear of death for which Dylar is a supposed cure. Television, as well as all other media and simulations in the novel, can be seen as the solution for the fear of death. “The consummate enjoyment [jouissance] of the signs of guilt, despair, violence and death are replacing guilt, anxiety and even death in the total euphoria of simulation” (Baudrillard 1993: 74). The television is in fact Dylar as it provides a form of euphoric release and distraction. There is already a means of forgetting death, or at least becoming engrossed by it, and that is television.

The kitchen and the bedroom present the power sources of the house (DeLillo 1986:6) as the presence of electronic devices throughout the novel is most visible in these rooms. The kitchen is filled with sounds of various

gadgets and distant voices emerging from the television set. The bedroom, on the other hand, is central to the topic of death as most of Jack and Babette's discussions on the topic occur there. Thus the two power sources, that is, driving forces of the novel, may be said to be electronic devices (mainly the television set) and death. Ironically, the only place where we may observe the absence of white noise (whether it is understood as the sound of electronic appliances or thoughts of death) is the graveyard. "The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have entirely taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of death. If the great operational metropolis is the final form of an entire culture, then, quite simply, ours is a culture of death" (Baudrillard 1993: 127). There is no fear of death at the cemetery because it is already present, unlike the feeling of impending doom one experiences thinking about it. When standing at the graveyard death is the reality, whereas it is a simulation when presented on television or in one's thoughts.

Television is a double-edged sword in the novel, both the disease and the cure for thanatophobia because it brings death closer while producing a distraction. It is technology that distances Jack Gladney from death, simultaneously providing a constant reminder of its inevitability.

3. *Simulating reality – Simulations as the new Real*

The postmodern era has greatly impacted society, creating, as Frederic Jameson would term it "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (1991: 60). Distancing themselves from reality through the various simulations, the characters of *White Noise* frequently display this sense of "depthlessness." By introducing a comparison between Vincent Van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Boots* and Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*² Jameson draws our attention to the superficiality and contextless existence of the postmodern culture, as well as to the endless commodification and annihilation of reality. The environment of the novel may be said to resemble Warhol's painting. When discussing the state of our

2 When presented with Van Gogh's painting, Jameson states that one may penetrate into its essence and realize not only what is on the canvas, but what is omitted as well. The content of the painting can thus be reconstructed and internalized deeply. Warhol's painting, on the other hand, "no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear: indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all" (Jameson 1991: 59). The difference between the two paintings draws our attention to the difference between the modernist and postmodernist movement.

contemporary society in regards to the ever-expanding amount of simulations Baudrillard does not imply a disappearance of reality in terms of an *unreality*. Reality very much still exists, but it has become replaced by the hyperreal in a culture in which creations of media and technology have come to be more real for us than our own natural experiences.

Baudrillard's shares with Jameson ideas of a loss of reality which has been brought on by changes that have taken place in technology and economics. For Baudrillard, a central premise is that "in contemporary culture, the object and the sign have become indistinguishable, and we have thereby replaced reality with simulation and the hyperreal" (Malpas 2005: 122). The simulation, therefore, serves to prevent the public from recognizing that the real is in fact no longer the real. *White Noise* is characterized by the "collapse of the real and the flow of signifiers emanating from an information society, by a 'loss of the real' in a black hole of simulation and the play and exchange of signs" (Wilcox 2003: 98).

Jean Baudrillard discussed at length the implications of simulacra and simulations in the postmodern society. *White Noise* in a sense presents an image of the world as conceptualized by Baudrillard, a world in which reality is in crisis. The main point of Baudrillard's works is not only that simulations have overpowered reality, but that they have in fact become the new reality. "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"³ (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, The Precession of Simulacra*).

DeLillo reinterprets notions of reality in his novel *White Noise* by presenting the line between simulation and reality as a blurred one. The television's constant interruption within the household flow and the very structure of the novel show that reality is often interfered with, to the point that the numerous voices are merged into one seemingly coherent event. Conversations between the novel's characters are riddled with interruptions from media broadcasts and as such present two different planes in the novel – the simulated realm of television and the reality of the Gladney's lives. The

3 Baudrillard uses Disneyland to exemplify a perfect model of simulacra. What one may think is the cover for a simulation is in fact being used to hide the real. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation" (Baudrillard *Simulacra and Simulation, The Precession of Simulacra*).

seamless manner in which these utterances are introduced makes it all the more difficult to differentiate between the voices of the television and the voices of its viewers, and as such blurs the boundaries of reality. Paradoxically, what they consider the realm of reality cannot be viewed as such due to the interference of a simulated medium, thus creating a hyperreal environment. The real has been so aggressively displaced that its simulations (i.e. televised events) have become the new reality.

The difference between reality and simulation and the impact such disparity has on the characters is exemplified by the simulation of catastrophes carried out by SIMUVAC:

‘But this evacuation isn’t simulated. It’s real.’

‘We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model.’

‘A form of practice? Are you saying that you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?’ (DeLillo 1986: 139)

The absurdity of using a real event as practice for an artificial, staged, simulated event shows the priority of simulation in the postmodern society. The fact that reality has a secondary role in the novel and is used merely as a rehearsal for hyperreality, leads to the idea that the new order of reality is one where simulations prevail, but they are not recognized as such. Instead, this new order is recognized as even more real than the reality we have previously known.

It becomes difficult to perceive whether the novel is presenting a real situation or its simulation. The society presented in the novel is a postmodern one, resting solely on simulation, proving time after time that a hyperreal world is the new norm. Jack ultimately does nothing to alter the society he lives in, nor does he attempt to curb his fear of death, which alludes to the inability to impact the society. DeLillo presents his readers with the inevitable truth of our surroundings.

The chemical spill that occurs in the second part of the novel gradually grows in significance as its name changes in the media reports. What started out as “a feathery plume” (111) quickly escalated into “a black billowing cloud” (113), followed by “the airborne toxic event” (117). The way the public perceived the gravity of the situation corresponds to the name it was given. Although the magnitude of the disaster was equal throughout, the reactions of those affected were simulated by the name of the event. The symptoms pending exposure were broadcast on the radio and kept changing as the situation progressed. Baudrillard notes a difference between simulation and pretending:

But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: ‘Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms’ (Littre) Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality in tact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’. (Baudrillard *Simulacra and Simulation, The Precession of Simulacra*)

The most notable symptom in our Baudrillardian discussion of *White Noise* is déjà vu. Steffie experiences déjà vu (DeLillo 1986: 125) which brings up the question of whether it is in fact a real symptom or a trick her fickle mind was playing on her because she had heard that this symptom was expected. This further leads to a discussion on the suggestibility of the masses, as each symptom starts being displayed following its announcement on the media. “Are we talking about mere symptoms or deeply entrenched conditions? Is a symptom a sign or a thing? What is a thing and how do we know it’s not another thing” (126). All of these questions may be applied in our attempt to pinpoint the origin of simulation and the definition of reality. It is ultimately irrelevant whether something is simulated or a part of reality because the boundary has been so blurred that simulations may appear to be even more real than the real thing.

It is unclear whether the déjà vu in the Gladney children is a real symptom of the airborne toxic event or a simulation stemming from the information about the symptoms in the media. Déjà vu is itself a simulacrum because a mental image precedes the original event. We first create an image of the situation and later recognize the real event based on the simulation. The reality of an event is measured according to its simulation.

Following the airborne toxic event, the Gladney children participated in a simulation of a noxious odor. “Three days later an *actual* noxious odor drifted across the river. A pause, a careful thoughtfulness, seemed to settle on the town. There was no sign of official action [...] there were those who denied smelling anything at all” (270). Reality has lost its significance as simulation gains precedence in people’s minds. Jack Gladney “confronts a new order in which life is increasingly lived in a world of simulacra, where images and electronic representations replace direct experience” (Wilcox 2003: 97). If one is presented with something that has been defined as real, they will not doubt its credulity and realness. As such, simulations will gain even more power since they will become less conspicuous.

John Duval notes that *White Noise* serves as a critique of DeLillo's contemporary society because "each element of Jack's world mirrors back to him a postmodern, decentralized totalitarianism" (Duval 2003: 170) which he is unable to grasp. Television is the faithful medium of postmodernity, signifying both its inherently decentralized and chaotic nature and due to parade of flashing images emitted from it. Television plays a key role in relating the characters' experiences and psychological conditions:

Is it possible nobody gives substantial *coverage* to such a thing? Half a minute, twenty seconds? Are they telling us that it was insignificant, it was piddling? Are they so callous? Are they so bored by spills and contaminations and wastes? Do they think this is just television? (DeLillo 1986: 162, emphasis added)

The evacuees have an insatiable desire for simulation, believing the terror of their lived experience may only be adequately presented through television and will not be validated in any other way apart from an electronic medium. Their calamity has no significance unless broadcast. In this situation "television, the intertextual grid of electronic images, creates the Real" (Duval 2003: 173). The airborne toxic event cannot be a real disaster if the media shows no interest. The public has no way of grasping what has happened to them and understanding the severity of the situation. The Real can only be reached through simulated images.

Television and its constant broadcasting of catastrophic events serves as a means of desensitizing people to the horror of the world, as well as bringing them further in the simulated reality it presents. "Every day on the news there's another toxic spill. Cancerous solvents from storage tanks, arsenic from smokestacks, radioactive water from power plants. How serious can it be if it happens all the time?" (DeLillo 1986: 174). As we can see, death and television are frequently intertwined in the novel which ultimately leads to the novels' protagonists being desensitized to the notion of death.

4. *Dying a postmodern death*

With the advancement of technology, there have been numerous changes in the way death is perceived. As well as dealing with death in the literal sense, *White Noise* tackles topics such as the "death" i.e. end of reality and the emergence of a new hyperreal environment. The novel also "situates the discourse of death in relation to other social discourses to show that, far from being a universal condition, 'postmodern death' is a highly particularized

cultural construct, ultimately subject to corporations, the market and capital” (Clare 2014: 116) The postmodern death here entails “living (dying) amid the strangeness of new technologies” (119). Jack’s entire life flashes before him on the computer screen and he is confronted by his own mortality. But the artificiality of this situation causes one to be distanced from the experience of dying, almost as if it were not actually happening, but merely being simulated in front of him.

It is when death is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak, that you sense an eerie separation between your condition and yourself. A network of symbols has been introduced, and entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying. (DeLillo 1986: 142)

The awareness of the boundary between reality and simulation becomes corrupted and, as a result, death becomes an integral part of life. The “televised death” lacks intimacy and authenticity, leading to the conclusion that in the postmodern society of DeLillo’s novel even death is simulated. Jack is no longer able to experience a natural death because “postmodern’s simulated death implodes the distinction between ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ death” (Clare 2014: 122). The only death he is able to experience is in fact the artificial, postmodern death – the death of the symbolic order as he knew it and the disappearance of prior notions of reality. The concept of modern death is discussed by Murray in the novel:

It [modern death] has a life independent of us. It is growing in prestige and dimension. It has a seep it never had before. We study it objectively. We can predict its appearance, trace its path in the body. We can take cross-section pictures of it, tape its tremors and waves. We’ve never been so close to it, so familiar with its habits and attitudes. We know it intimately. But it continues to grow, to acquire breadth and scope, new outlets passages and means. (DeLillo 1986: 150)

By contrast, postmodern death with which the characters of *White Noise* are faced cannot be predicted or tamed. It cannot even be located as its trajectory and boundaries are so intertwined. The notion of death has been greatly altered in the postmodern society. Postmodern death is characterized by technological advancements that distance people from reality and allow them to drift even further into a postmodern hyperreality.

Our true necropolises are no longer the cemeteries, hospitals, wars, hecatombs; death is no longer where we think it is, it is no longer biological, psychological, metaphysical, it is no longer even murder: our societies’ true necropolises are

the computer banks or the foyers, blank spaces from which all human noise has been expunged, glass coffins where the world's sterilized memories are frozen. (Baudrillard 1993: 185)

Even death is not exempt from a hyperreal environment dominated by simulations since dying is also controlled by technology. The appeal of Dylar is its promise to eradicate the fear of death. Jack Gladney's fear and anxiety may be understood figuratively as the uneasiness he feels in the changing postmodern world in which a dominance of symbols is present. He often succumbs to the simulations around him, ultimately dying a man-made and postmodern death.

5. Conclusion

Upon careful consideration of the society described by DeLillo, we may conclude that the fear of death has grown exponentially with the advancement of certain technologies. As the world around us is rapidly changing and we struggle to keep up, it is possible to become unaware of these circumstances. Perhaps one of the reasons why one remains oblivious to the dominance of simulations is precisely their covert nature. It is becoming more difficult to spot these simulations, thus affecting our grasp of reality. In the postmodern, hyperreal environment one can never be certain whether an event is simulated or real. This distinction has become even more inconspicuous with the widespread expansion of television. Serving not only as a constant reminder of simulacra, the television also figures as the cure for thanatophobia. The function of the television is similar to that of Dylar – soothing, distracting and anesthetizing. What must be mentioned is the fact that not even Dylar effectively alleviated the fear of death. The television has been providing the novel's protagonists with an outlet for their death anxiety but bringing the notion closer to them through various representations of its occurrence. Just as the fear of death is looming and lurking around every corner of the Gladney household, so is the sound of the television program. Hence the noise may be understood as more than just the television but as the totality of technology in its never-ending path of advancement. The postmodern death previously referred to mainly reflects upon the death of all previously conceived notions of reality and the emergence of a new order. Simulations are replacing reality, thus creating a hyperreal framework for the functioning of humanity. Not only will simulations prevail, resulting in the "death" of the Real, but our awareness of said events will have perished.

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