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Awash in white noise : Don DeLillo, Martin Heidegger and technology

Brett Foster James
San Jose State University

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**AWASH IN WHITE NOISE:
DON DELILLO, MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND TECHNOLOGY**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Brett Foster James

May, 1995

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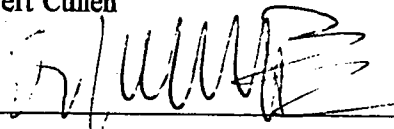
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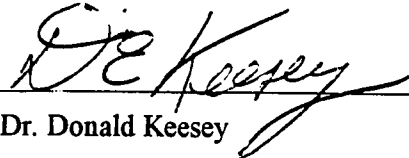
APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



Dr. Robert Cullen



Dr. David Mesher



Dr. Donald Keesey

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



ABSTRACT

AWASH IN WHITE NOISE: DON DELILLO, MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND TECHNOLOGY

by Brett Foster James

This thesis uses Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" to illuminate issues of technology and its domination of humankind in Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. The thesis illustrates how technological "progress" has enslaved the novel's main characters. It also shows how they fight to live healthy, "natural" lives in a technological society where simulacra have replaced nature and natural processes.

When Heidegger wrote "The Question Concerning Technology" in 1949, he warned humankind about the dangers of being "Enframed" by technology – that is, made a mere resource or cog for the technological process. Heidegger argues that humankind is either Enframed by technology, or is living at peace with it, in a state of *poiesis*. The characters in *White Noise* are living Enframed lives because they misunderstand the role technology plays in their postmodern culture.

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Introduction

“And all this science I don’t understand, it’s just my job five days a week.”
— Elton John

We may never know if Don DeLillo read Martin Heidegger’s “The Question Concerning Technology” before writing *White Noise*, but so many similar themes occur in both pieces of writing that it seems likely. Applying “The Question Concerning Technology” to *White Noise* reveals a significant number of important issues dealing with society’s complicated relationship with technology. Heidegger was both warning and criticizing us about the dangers of technology, and DeLillo furthered Heidegger’s warnings by proving the types of technological manipulation that occur when we do not understand our relationship with it. Heidegger bitterly attacks humankind for allowing technology to overpower us. DeLillo continues that attack by focusing on a family controlled by technology.

Heidegger stated that technology is not a neutral factor in human life, and that we must accordingly be aware of its influence and power. The Gladneys of *White Noise* are unaware of its power and influence. Ironically, after the novel’s airborne toxic event occurs, the Gladneys turn to the media and technology for help, when these forces contributed to the danger they are in. After the toxic spill, no one can immediately identify the spilled chemical. The Gladneys use this lack of knowledge to convince themselves that they are safe. They never appreciate the seriousness of the situation, thus risking their lives, and fatally poisoning Jack.

Technological advances have fostered the lack of information in the Gladney’s postmodern home. The same sources of information that provide the Gladneys with daily

weather reports and world news fail to help them when they need information the most. Worse—and this is just as important as understanding how technology affects the Gladneys—the very nature of nature has changed. This commentary lies at the center of both Heidegger's essay and *White Noise*. DeLillo's satiric style and absurdly funny scenes must be looked at very seriously, for they usually comment on an important aspect of what has become "natural" for the Gladneys and, by extension, postmodern America.

Heidegger warns that we must understand our relationship with technology, for if we do not, we are in danger of letting it take authority over us. For the Gladneys, and specifically for Jack, technology is not only misunderstood, but is the cause of many of the family's tragedies.

Heidegger wrote "The Question Concerning Technology" as a commentary on the importance of our relationship with nature, technology, and art. A significant amount of his philosophy seeks to understand how we relate to the essence of technology, for only when we relate to its essence can we understand ourselves. Heidegger introduces his thesis of the nature of our relationship with technology and how that must be questioned: "We shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it" (28). Heidegger asks his readers to understand the essence of technology, and through doing so, to build an understanding with art and nature (287). Heidegger uses idiosyncratic language that must be understood before one can fully understand the essay and connect it with *White Noise*. The primary terms of importance are these: *destining*, *bringing-forth*, *revealing*, *causality*, *enframing (ge-stell)*, *standing-reserve*, and *poiesis*.

Heidegger is correct when he argues that modern society pays too much homage to technology for the invention and advancement of a particular item, when in actuality, the item is brought about by the need for it. In his essay, Heidegger uses a sacramental chalice to explain how a technological device, or “thing,” is needed, and how people usually go about getting it, or “bringing it forth.” Heidegger begins by challenging Aristotle’s rubric *causality* that has been accepted as the process of bringing something into being since its declaration. The first stage, *causa materialis*, is the matter out of which an item—in this instance, a chalice—is made. The next step, *causa formalis*, is the final product and shape that the chalice becomes. The third, *causa finalis*, is the purpose for which the chalice is made, such as for sacramental purposes. Finally, *causa efficiens* is the means by which the chalice is brought about, that is, the silversmith who makes the chalice out of the basic elements provided by nature. When the silversmith makes the chalice, he is thankful to the silver and to technology for the ability to craft the chalice. Heidegger argues that the sacramental need of the chalice is what brought it about, not technological advances, however primitive they be. Heidegger’s criticism of Aristotle’s concept of *causality* is important because it has always been the accepted rubric. Heidegger argues that *causality* is not only outdated, but also incorrect.

Heidegger criticizes *causality*, stating that “bringing-forth,” that is, pulling forth the resources from nature necessary to make the chalice, not *causa efficiens*, is the foundation of the chalice. Once the item is brought forth, we have established a relationship with it. The relationship’s outcome can be positive or negative, depending on how much we want the item, versus how much we need and will rely on it. This

complicated relationship is *destining*. *Destining* dictates how much trust we place in this item. William Lovitt, in his introduction to *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, writes that *destining* is the basis of how much trust we put into something brought-forth: “What man truly needs is to know the *destining* to which he belongs and to know it *as a destining*, as the disposing power that governs all phenomena in this technological age” (xxxiii). Lovitt explains that according to Heidegger, we must consider what we need (versus what we want) and how *destining* will impact the relationship between the item and us before the full result of the production of the thing can be known. Society must develop only what it needs, making certain to use what it produces, and be deftly resourceful in doing so.

Bringing-forth (also called “revealing”) comes from society’s needs, not nature or technology. While society may credit technology for the making of the chalice (*causa efficiens*), if it did not provide the fundamental need for the chalice, no need would exist for the *causa efficiens*. Therefore, according to Heidegger, society places too much emphasis on modern technology as the *causa efficiens* when it should remember that the need for an item is what brought it forth. This ability is provided exclusively by people, not technology.

Once bringing-forth occurs, we must be wary of *destining*, for if we do not understand the power or effect of the item, we will allow the item to become used for something else, or placed on call as “standing-reserve.” Heidegger uses an airplane sitting on a runway as his example of a valuable revealing. Yet an airplane sitting on a runway so it can be boarded and flown at some unknown time involves a manipulation of both people

and the plane. When the plane sits on the runway waiting to be used at some unspecified time, it is a wasted resource. Certainly we need planes to stand on reserve should one break down, or should one be needed for an emergency, but when the plane sits on a runway waiting to be used at some unknown time for an unknown purpose, it is now being manipulated and abused; it is not serving its purpose and has become a wasted resource. At the same time, the plane manipulates people because it is demanding their attention despite the fact that it is not needed or used.

Enframing, or *ge-stell*, is the calling forth that occurs when using resources to make a product of technology. Through this natural evolution, the very resources are placed at standing-reserve for the technological process. “Enframing is fundamentally a calling-forth. It is a ‘challenging claim,’ a demanding summons, that ‘gathers’ so as to reveal. This claim *enframes* in that it assembles and orders. It puts into a framework or configuration everything that it summons forth, through an ordering for use that it is forever restructuring anew” (Lovitt 19). When chalices can be mass produced and the finished products sit on a storeroom shelf not being used, the chalices are then in a state of *ge-stell*. No longer are they brought-forth to be used, but like the plane on the runway, they are brought-forth to be used at some undisclosed time. Technology is capable, but only if we allow it to be, of enframing us so long as we continue to hold to the idea that technology is responsible for the bringing-forth of “things.” Babette, in an attempt to fight her rational fear of death, puts herself in a state of *ge-stell*—becoming a resource for a technological process—when she volunteers to take Dylar. She does not know if the drug will work for her, but she puts her family in danger to get the drug. As we learn at the end

of the novel, Willie Mink is also a guinea pig for the technological process and is too enframed by the process that brings the drug into being.

To completely understand *ge-stell*, one must first understand *physis*, related to *phyein*, which means “to give birth to” (Ballard 39). *Phyein*, a Greek term, has the dual meaning of participating in one’s own self-discovery while continuing to be aware of the self as the participation occurs. *Ge-stell* becomes negative when someone fails to understand its danger. As stated above, a plane waiting to be used at an unknown time is a negative resource, but wood next to someone’s fireplace is a positive *ge-stell*, for the person with the wood will probably employ its resources very soon. Firewood that is sitting cut and split in a grove of trees somewhere waiting to be loaded on a truck so that it will someday end up in a store, and then sometime later in someone’s home is *ge-stell*. Since the firewood is not being cut to be used immediately, like the chalice on the store shelf, it is enframed.

According to Heidegger, it is important for us to understand the process through which a resource is brought forth and placed at *ge-stell*. As Heidegger states, coal is mined for a purpose, despite the fact that it might not be used right away. If it is not being used, it is put into standing-reserve, ready to deliver the natural elements. When revealed resources are properly challenged into use, they can properly serve their intended purpose: “The sun’s warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running” (Heidegger 297). But so long as the coal has been mined and is sitting in a pile somewhere, its resources are being wasted, and it is enframed. When we are not aware of enframing, we cannot understand

the true relationship with technology and are ourselves left in a state of standing-reserve. Only when we understand this relationship can we have an open and free relationship with the essence of technology. This open relationship is *poiesis*.

Understanding the environment one lives in is *poiesis*. More importantly, *poiesis* is a somewhat poetic relationship with the essence of technology that does not allow one to be placed at standing-reserve. When one understands the essence of technology, one lives in a state of *poiesis* where *ge-stell* and standing-reserve do not interfere. *Poiesis* also supports bringing-forth, for *poiesis* allows one to move about freely with technology and nature to reveal whatever one needs, is destined to need, do, or want. In *White Noise*, Heinrich's relationship with technology is the antithesis of Babbette's. At fourteen years of age, Heinrich understands the technological process better than any of the Gladneys. When the airborne toxic event threatens the family, Heinrich is aware of the spill's effects on the family and attempts to motivate them to protect themselves. Heinrich questions technology and, at best, more than any of the other of the novel's characters, lives in *poiesis*.

Heidegger warns us that we must be careful when we reveal a needed thing: "the destining of revealing is in itself not just any danger, but *the* danger," and that "when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger," for enframing is capable of manipulating societies (308). Revealing, performed to meet a specific need of humankind, is the most important and safe form of revealing. It becomes a danger when those doing the revealing are mass-producing items that people may not immediately need, or are being produced purely for status or profit. When those products are enframed in a

negative way, the danger of destining and revealing is at its highest point. Almost none of the Gladneys recognize this fact, and as a result, they live where dangerous revealing and enframing occur daily.

Heidegger extends his argument by exploring a quotation from poet Friedrich Hölderlin, who writes, “but where the saving danger is, grows / The saving power also” (310). Heidegger asks his readers, “what does it mean to ‘save’?” The saving power gives us freedom. When we understand the saving power, we will understand where the danger is, and also where the power lies. Like a double-edged sword, the saving power originates in having a free relationship with the essence of technology, but also in understanding where the danger exists. When we comprehend the saving power, then, “the saving power lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence” (Heidegger 313). We must be aware of technology’s negative factors, so that Enframing cannot occur.

Heidegger then links the saving power to his original question of understanding the essence of technology. To understand the essence of technology is ambiguous—humankind must really understand its relationship to nature. Only when this relationship is understood can we understand truth: “the question concerning technology is the question concerning the constellation in which revealing and concealing, in which the coming to presence of truth comes to pass” (315). The presence of truth coming to pass is vital, for only then can we understand Hölderlin’s poetry: “we look into the danger and see the growth of the saving power” (Heidegger 315). This is the key question of the essay, for when we understand the saving power, we understand the essence of technology, which is,

as Heidegger writes, nothing technological. Heidegger tells his readers that art is much like technology in that we must have a free relationship with it to understand its essence. When this essence is understood, we will have a free relationship with art. Moreover, when these relationships are understood, we can live a life free of any negative *ge-stell*, thus living a more “natural” life that does not allow Enframing. So long as questioning the essence of technology and understanding art do not close our eyes to any dangers, then we may understand “the constellation of truth concerning which we are questioning” (Heidegger 317). Postmodern America does not understand this relationship. The Gladneys are DeLillo’s response to this lack of understanding. A fundamental gap exists in the Gladneys’ understanding of art and nature, so much so that they are enframed and no longer live “natural” lives.

Heidegger warns his readers that neither technology nor its essence is neutral to humankind. Sadly, as Heidegger observes, we have accepted technology as a neutral element of our lives. According to Heidegger, we perceive the progression of technology as natural, when in actuality it is not. If we do not question this, we will not be able to understand the essence of technology and how its essence affects our everyday lives. Heidegger includes himself in this trap, stating, “everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral” (287-8). Heidegger’s example is physics. Physics is the basis upon which scientists are able to build any number of technological processes, but in the twentieth century, they have perceived that

technology dominates physics, and that progress occurs only when physics agrees with the technological.

Understanding our relationship with technology involves understanding our relationship with physics, for it is nature that provides us with the tools necessary to develop physics. Neanderthal societies were the first to calculate how to trap, how to figure distances, how much food and water they would need to travel x number of miles, and how they could best use their natural resources to live. In contrast, Heidegger felt that modern society puts too much emphasis on technology and physics, when in actuality, nature provides the basics for physics, which in turn develops technology. This is similar to the chalice, where the need for it brought it forth, not technological advances. Were clay ovens not early forms of microwave ovens? Primitive societies were able to calculate the burning of substances under the right temperature for a certain amount of time, to get any number of delectables.

Physics is not a series of formulas we were born with, nor a set of formulas we developed to extract elements and resources from nature. Therefore, we must understand that we ourselves and nature are the reasons the physicist can develop a better microwave oven, the space shuttle, or a better-tasting, new and improved, laboratory-tested soft drink. Heidegger states that it is people who should get credit for bringing-forth: “The silversmith considers carefully and gathers together the three aforementioned ways [*causa materialis, causa formalis, causa finalis*] of being responsible and indebted. The silversmith is co-responsible as that from whence the sacred vessel’s bringing forth and subsistence take and retain their first departure,” not physics or technology (291). In his

book *Lectures and Essays*, Heidegger challenges the Cartesian way of thinking, which is that everything, including the human body, belongs to a mathematical calculation that explains the human body. Heidegger rejects Max Planck's claim that "Reality is what can be rendered measurable," arguing that we rely too much on physics for our understanding of nature. There is no doubt that Heidegger reaped the benefits of physics as the Nazi party used its formulas to advance technology and their own power. However, as Heidegger scholar Edward Ballard writes, physics is not a formula that includes all of nature: "Physics unveils objective nature, and other sciences take their cue and their ideal from physics. At the same time, physics conceals or forgets the non-physical; it forgets the life-world" (43). Heidegger wanted to make certain his readers understood that were it not for people, physics would have no purpose, nor would it have even been discovered.

Heidegger comments on how natural resources have changed because of the trust modern society puts into the technological process. This trust has destroyed many natural aspects of peoples' everyday lives, including some of the most aesthetically inspirational landmarks. Heidegger explains that bringing-forth is a fine and necessary act, but that taken too far, it will lead to *ge-stell*. For example, people have for centuries been using the seasonal changes to cultivate vegetables and fruit. To take this one step further, they invented the windmill to move water and increase irrigation as well as provide a drinking source for villages. The wind that services the windmill, however, is not on standing-reserve as one might think. The wind is the natural element from which the windmill gets its power. Heidegger explains that we must understand that the windmill does not bring out the best resources in the wind, but vice versa; it is the wind that employs the windmill.

From this invention, we move to exploring other options for expansion and growth. The same knowledge that allowed a tribe to plant corn 200 years ago now allows us to mine that field to bring forth other resources. Yet as we mine, other resources are destroyed. As technological progress continues, so does the destroying of resources. In an effort to extract items to suit our needs, we destroy what may someday be more useful to us than what we are currently revealing. As stated earlier, Heidegger challenges the Cartesian notion of mathematically controlling resources and those “men who are possessed by the Cartesian motive to become the masters and possessor of nature” (Ballard 47).

Having said this, Heidegger critiques the Rhine as a source of electric power. Because of this exploitation, the river’s aesthetic beauty no longer exists; thus the river serves a different purpose than it ever has before. Heidegger declares that the river is no longer a moving body of water that provides practical and aesthetic beauty for Germany, but has become a resource for technology. An ancient river that once supplied the water for thousands of people and was aesthetically pleasing has been enframed, and exists “in no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry” (Heidegger 297). *White Noise*’s Murray Jay Siskind would disagree with Heidegger. Murray believes in technology and tells Jack, “you could put your faith in technology. It got you here, it can get you out. This is the whole point of technology. It creates an appetite for immortality on the one hand, it threatens universal extinction on the other. Technology is lust removed from nature” (*White Noise* 285). People have set the Rhine at standing-reserve so it no longer acts as a river with many functions, but is

stopped up so that its water can be used in any way necessary to obtain what we want it to. So like the mined coal, a massive natural resource has been reduced to a mathematical structure which is managed and controlled for maximum output. For Heidegger, there are now two Rhine Rivers, one that has been placed at standing-reserve and another whose beauty, strength, and power Hölderlin writes about in his poetry.

This idea of over-manipulation has been criticized by modern writers as well. Celeste Olalquiaga's novel *Megalopolis* acts as a bridge between Heidegger's age and DeLillo's. She writes of the many different forms of simulacra found in contemporary society. She also heavily criticizes television for acting as reality with no line between the actors acting out fiction, or non-actors recreating their own lives. Much of her argument critiques technological changes that blur the line between reality, television, and simulacra.

She focuses part of her book, "Nature Morte," on the technological providing simulacra as a form of nature manipulation. Her argument centers on recently popular boutique shops, found mostly in New York and England, that sell animal artifacts. These boutiques offer the distinguished collector human skeletons, stuffed bats, or one of any number of dead animals that, as Olalquiaga argues, should have been put to rest when they died. They should not be stuffed and placed in some store (in a state of standing-reserve) so that a consumer will be able to decorate his house. A significant difference exists between an artifact that belongs in a museum on display for people to learn from versus a piece of history that is an item of conversation for the over-indulgent consumer. She feels that it is not the collection of such artifacts nor the display of them that is the worst atrocity, but the consumerism that drives people to mummify dead animals for the self-

indulgent pleasure of others. As Olalquiaga writes in the closing of her chapter, “the return of *nature morte* is an allegory of the extinction of natural life” (74). The store owners and operators have taken natural elements (like the Rhine) and manipulated them for consumers who “need” them. The various artifacts available for purchase have been brought-forth, but only because the modern technology of preserving a dead animal allows the “discriminating collector” to capture a part of nature that, like the Rhine, is better left alone in its natural state.

For the Gladneys, technology is not a neutral power, nor is it anything that the Gladneys understand. In spite of Jack and Babette’s efforts to make their children aware of technology’s power and influence, they are so overwhelmed and enframed by technology that they pull themselves and their children into the danger of revealing what Heidegger has warned us about. The novel’s characters are guinea pigs and resources who become enframed by technology and those who let technology control them. DeLillo leaves his readers haunted with the feeling that even the people who are attempting to help Jack and the Gladneys through various struggles are also enframed by the technological process, and that they enjoy the part they play in their often fatal technological world.

Chapter I

The Broken Triangle: Heidegger, Technology and the Gladneys

“Physics does not change the nature of the world it studies, and no science of behavior can change the essential nature of man, even though both sciences yield technologies with a vast power to manipulate their subject matters.”

— Frederic Skinner

DeLillo said that his novels could not have been written before John Kennedy’s assassination, and because of this, his novels often explore the complicated relationships we have with our natural and technological environment and the manipulation of those resources that have been manipulated to falsify the truth of the assassination. All of DeLillo’s novels are set in America; most of them take a confrontational attitude toward technology and the dangers surrounding its use. Fused with technological advances are the continued criticisms and questioning of the media. DeLillo does not ask whether or not the media has an important role in contemporary America, but rather, he writes a commentary on what the media has become and how people allow it to influence them. *White Noise* is his most popular and effective novel to deal with the role of technology in modern America. This topic is not new for DeLillo, however. His writing career begins with a confrontational and satiric approach to technology, culture, and the American individual as he faces these struggles.

DeLillo’s first novel, *Americana*, approaches the news media and the false world created by its power. David Bell, an unusually young television executive, leaves his east coast office of safe spatial boundaries to explore the true realities of America. Bell takes two friends, a fellow employee, and a 16 mm camera on his vacation, ready to make a

movie about what America is. Bell ultimately realizes how much the network he works for manipulates its viewers, so he leaves his friends to explore on his own, searching for some type of frontier. Not too surprisingly, Bell discovers that “Americana” is a culture of dissatisfied, lost, and frustrated youths not unlike the Lee Harvey Oswald of DeLillo’s *Libra*. There is no frontier, and in the closing pages of the book, Bell is forced to take a plane back to New York to beg for his old job.

In his next book, *End Zone*, DeLillo carefully and effectively approaches the topic of nuclear destruction. Published in 1972, one year after *Americana*, *End Zone* is narrated by Gary Harkness, a college football player who becomes energized by the thought of nuclear war. Harkness suffers from fits of holocaustic glee. His obsession begins with a textbook:

It started with a book, an immense volume about the possibilities of nuclear war—assigned reading for a course I was taking in modes of disaster technology. I enjoyed the book. I liked reading about the deaths of tens of millions of people. I liked dwelling on the destruction of great cities. Five to ten million dead. Fifty to one hundred million dead. Ninety percent population loss. Carbon 14 and strontium 90. Escalation ladder and subcrisis situations. I read several chapters twice. (*End Zone* 20-21)

Harkness’ role model and source of nuclear war information is a general who, like many of DeLillo’s characters, remains shaky and unstable. While we are never given a complete picture of why a general is living on the outskirts of a small town in a seedy motel, we get the impression that some sort of passionate extremism has ended his career as an active general, and he is now being punished. The general continually tries to break Harkness’ fantasies, but the harder he tries, the more Harkness becomes uncontrollably obsessed with nuclear devastation.

End Zone brilliantly and frighteningly compares war to football. The terminology often overlaps, and during the big homecoming game at the center of the book, it becomes hard to tell if DeLillo is describing war or a football game. By the novel's end, Harkness has put himself through so many imaginary nuclear holocausts that he has lost control of his body, and must spend the rest of his life being fed intravenously and monitored. DeLillo leaves his readers wondering whether Harkness has in fact lived through a nuclear war, thus becoming one of the charred victims he often dreamed about, or whether the power of the mind has so dominated him that he can no longer discern reality from fantasy.

It is important to connect *Americana* and *End Zone*, for their thematic issues are unified in *White Noise*. DeLillo's ability as social commentator to help people become aware of the dangers of technology is perhaps best displayed in *White Noise*. *Americana* and *End Zone* are commentaries on what technology has brought to America, and how modern technological advances and media manipulation control people's perceptions. *White Noise* further extends the graphic realities, malfunctions, and misunderstandings that often occur in today's technologically advanced society. Many of the issues DeLillo discusses surfaced in Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology." Written in 1949, this essay foreshadowed much of what DeLillo's characters experience.

Michael Valdez Moses, in his essay "Lust Removed from Nature," writes that in today's postmodern world, we are dominated and controlled by technology, and that DeLillo has very clearly shown the way of thinking for the 20th century and beyond. Citing various philosophers, he proves that *White Noise*'s characters are sometimes

controlled by technology, and that they do not realize the role technology plays in their lives:

The world in which postmodern reality is taken to be the only “true” one is a product of technology. Of all contemporary American novelists, including Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo has most fully dramatized this state of affairs, given its most detailed, expressive, and philosophically powerful representation. *White Noise* is DeLillo’s exploration of an America in which technology has become not merely a pervasive and mortal threat to each of its citizens, but also, and more importantly, a deeply ingrained mode of existing and way of thinking that is the characteristic feature of the republic. (63)

As Moses states, technology is the “characteristic feature” of the Gladneys’ lives. It enframes them and does not allow them to live the “natural” lives they should. They are at fault, however, for no one is forcing them to accept the role technology plays in their lives. They do not live in *poiesis* with technology, and thus serve as a strong example of Heidegger’s warning.

Heidegger opens “The Question Concerning Technology” with a declaration: “In what follows we shall be *questioning* concerning technology. Questioning builds a way” (287). This is precisely what Jack and Babette Gladney fail to do. They do not question the technological environment they live in. As Heidegger predicted of those who do not open themselves up to the dangers of technology, they become enframed—that is, used as a negative resource by technology for the technological process.

The Gladneys may view technology as most of the world does, as a means to an end. They are continually taken in by its seemingly new power. They do not understand that the technology they live with began hundreds of years before they lived. Therefore, they do not understand its essence or the history behind it. The Gladneys are a strong

example of Heidegger's declaration that understanding technology's essence is the only way to understand technology: "The advent of technology—and it is this historic, essential unfolding or provenance that Heidegger means by 'essence'—is something destined or sent our way long before the eighteenth century" (Krell 285). Technology's natural evolution does not mean that it cannot have a negative impact on society, or that it is, in any way, natural. As Heidegger states, "technology is a contrivance" (288). Because Jack and Babette do not question that which has tremendous influence over the most basic of their daily actions, their children also become enframed by technology, and will probably not understand it any better than Jack and Babette. Only Heinrich understands the technological world he is a part of. Jack and Babette view technology as something natural, a part of their lives like eating or sleeping. Jack's closest friend, Murray Jay Siskind, furthers his own trust in technology by openly embracing its power. He urges Jack to do the same. These "natural" approaches to technology and its essence lead these characters to put too much trust in technology, so that it ultimately threatens their lives and shortens Jack's.

Heidegger writes that the importance of understanding technology lies in understanding what it is: "Because the essence of modern technology lies in enframing, modern technology must employ exact physical science. Through its so doing the deceptive illusion arises that modern technology is applied physical science. This illusion can maintain itself only so long as neither the essential origin of modern science nor indeed the essence of modern technology is adequately found out through questioning" (304-5). The role of modern technology and the illusion Heidegger speaks of are illustrated in

White Noise. The technology that simplifies life for the novel's characters also manipulates them and has been too readily accepted. DeLillo's white noise comes about through the passive acceptance of technology. People have so allowed the illusion that technology is applied physical science necessary for life in a modern world, that they do not understand the possibility that technology may ultimately be destroying them. For DeLillo's characters, one form of white noise appears as technological manipulation.

White noise appears throughout the novel—sometimes obviously and sometimes more subtly—as part of DeLillo's commentary on how peoples' senses are being manipulated. In the more obvious examples, DeLillo gives his readers product names blatantly placed in the middle and endings of paragraphs. Having no explicit ties to anything else on the page, or even in the book, “they appear mysteriously in the midst of the mundane world of novelistic narrative, detached, functionless, unmotivated. At the end of a paragraph on Babette's fear of death, ‘the emptiness, the sense of cosmic darkness,’ occurs the single line: ‘MasterCard, Visa, American Express’” (Frow 425). Of these strange interruptions, John Frow writes: “The sonorous, Miltonic names lack all epic content, and they are intruded into the text without any marker of a speaking source” (425). Other “Miltonic names” such as “Kleenex Softique. Kleenex Softique” appear on the page as if the reader were hearing a television or radio advertisement. Much like the subliminal messages of Muzak—“Do not steal. Stealing is wrong”—or theater images of popcorn and drinks, DeLillo uses his messages to show how deeply technology combined with consumerism manipulates people's lives. The use of Muzak and the theater images proves how much humankind has let technology enframe him. Television commercials

ingrain images and product names into our heads. People no longer “see” the actual product when they enter a store, they see the image. No one needs to read the red and white Coke can on the shelf to know what the product is. The image precedes the product.

In one of *White Noise*'s many comical scenes, a live band plays Muzak in the middle of a supermarket. People fail to notice the band, much as they would canned music on a loudspeaker. Have people become so brainwashed by the subliminal manipulation that they do not notice the messages they are receiving? Consumers do not realize the band is there, but what is worse is their acceptance of the store as a place of cultural reward. DeLillo makes it appear that the store owners feel that people view the store not only as a place to buy groceries, but as a kind of cultural center. Consumers can buy the necessary foods for their families, and at the same time hear the soothing, natural sounds of Muzak. When the store owner provides the Muzak live for its shoppers, he is really providing an event, much like people attend on national holidays where there is live music, vendors, and food booths. At the same time the comedy of the scene is presented because Muzak is an oxymoron and people are failing to realize the difference between what is reality and what is technologically created.

Other, more subtle white noise comes from phrases like “blue jeans tumbled in the dryer” and occupy seemingly random places throughout the novel (18). DeLillo leaves the impression that this action continually occurs and has become a part of the house's unheard noise. In the supermarket, Jack does the impossible and hears the white noise: “I realized the place was 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, of some form of swarming life just outside the range of human apprehension” (36). These forms of white noise are technology- and consumer-driven; they fill Part I of the novel, “Waves and Radiation.” The white noise created by technology and consumerism constitutes the waves and radiation of this part of the book, of the book overall, and of today’s shopaholic society. Moreover, the “dull unlocatable roar” acts as a metaphor for the main struggles defined in the novel. The roar comes to represent consumerism, white noise, television, disaster, death, and finally, the “nebulous mass” that grows inside Jack. For the Gladneys, white noise is a source of trouble and reward. They have to struggle with the white noise created by technology that they are persistently challenged by. The Gladneys’ most serious problem exists in trying to break free of this technological white noise.

The television has become a source of white noise in most homes today, and Jack and Babette feel that if they expose their family to it for a long enough period of time (four hours every Friday night along with take-out Chinese food), they will help their children to understand how controlling and manipulative television is. Yet Jack and Babette cannot pull themselves away from the very medium they are trying to stop their children from becoming addicted to. The Friday ritual does not satiate Jack’s desire for destruction, but fuels it instead. To satisfy his needs, Jack retreats to his room where he can read about the twentieth century’s largest producer of death and destruction, Adolf Hitler. The tragedy Jack sees on television needs to be augmented by more of the same. Jack serves as a brainwashed example for his family; the longer the Gladneys attempt to break from

the medium, the more they are pulled to it. As hard as Jack may try to break from the technology that brings him the disasters he sees on television, he cannot get enough destruction. Much like Gary Harkness in *End Zone*, Jack needs to see more natural chaos. He needs more disaster on a daily basis to make him feel “whole” again. He needs to see that he is okay, and that the dying is happening elsewhere. Moreover, television addiction demonstrates how much the Gladneys rely on technology to make them feel safe. Technology brings them what they see on television, most of which is itself a result of the technological.

The television is more than white noise. It is an icon in the Gladneys’ home; it relates them to the world; it lets them understand and want more of the world they cannot relate to. Like nothing else in their lives, the TV soothes and helps them believe in peace and unity in the universe. The chaos brings a much needed order into Gladney home. The technological advance of television soothes the Gladneys, but it also places them at *gestell* because they wait for it to give them the information they need. The TV waits for them to view it so it can use them. Television brings tragedy from unknown parts of the world; it also employs the consumerist images that tempt both the conscious and the subconscious. In addition, the television enframes the Gladneys when it is not in use. At the same time, the TV is at standing-reserve, that is, a “discovered” resource waiting to be used. Television networks are also enframed by television, for they rely heavily on its use to get their messages and programs out to the public. When a technological failure occurs, the network must wait for the problem to be solved. Meanwhile, the Gladneys lose their ability to communicate with the world outside their home. Jack can completely

submerge himself in Hitler studies, but his work cannot help him escape the fear of death and include him as part of the world like the television is capable of doing.

The television is continually viewed as a means to necessary information, reward, and guidance. After coming home from a supermarket trek, Jack tells us the family “went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone. A little later, I watched Steffie in front of the TV set. She moved her lips, attempting to match the words as they were spoken” (84). The television acts as a god for Steffie, who attempts to relate to it as if it were speaking prophetically to her. DeLillo echoes George Orwell’s warning that too much manipulation leads to brainwashing. In *The Mode of Information*, Mark Poster argues that television is redefining language by redefining social relationships: “The more a language/practice is removed from the face-to-face context of daily life in a stable culture in which social relationships are reproduced through dialogue, the more language must generate and reproduce those features from within itself; in other words, the media must simulate its context and ventriloquize its audience” (46). Technology is now manipulating language, and at the same time controlling the manner in which people speak, thus having a powerful impact on its viewers. Poster furthers his criticism of television by crediting the purpose of TV ads, but at the same time criticizing it for the power it carries: “Surely the TV ad is designed to sell the product but in doing so it remakes language” (63). *Libra*, DeLillo’s novel about the John Kennedy assassination, expands on how much television controls language. When Marguerite, Lee Harvey Oswald’s mother, takes the witness stand in his defense, she speaks in television sound bites. DeLillo quotes her exact

testimony from the Warren report, and her speech pattern is scary. Her word choices and sentence structure all come straight from television.

This manipulative fulfillment through technology continues throughout *White Noise* as the television and radio become personified and actually speak on their own, once again reflecting Orwell. The television speaks to the family in such a way that they cannot operate without it. Jack says, “after dinner, on my way upstairs, I heard the TV say: ‘Let’s sit half lotus and think about our spines’” (18). These messages appear throughout the novel acting as a source of important information that the Gladneys cannot do without. At the same time, they reflect DeLillo’s idea that these two forms of media are controlled by some unknown person or force in some unlocatable location that dictates how people should live.

Part of the Gladneys’ problem exists in their need for television. DeLillo presents the television as a self-contained medium. Often times a family member, usually Jack, will walk past a room that a television is in, and hear *it* say something seemingly important and new. Near the end of the book, the voices have come closer to Jack: “The voice at the end of the bed said: ‘Meanwhile here is a quick and attractive lemon garnish suitable for any sea food’” (178). Whether the messages he hears are commercials or actual television shows, there is no separation between reality and the TV. According to Poster, television advertisements are still powerful enough to redefine culture: “TV ads are things one leaves room[s] for, fastforwards past, curses at with impatience. They are truly degraded phenomena, universally scorned, resented, mocked and at best tolerated. And yet, I contend, they are crucial semiotic indices to an emerging new culture” (47). The

technological advance of the television has brainwashed Jack's generation. As Steffie has proven, it has also captured and enframed the younger generation. Jack is not able to move away from the television despite the fact that its invention has come into national use since he was born. Steffie's addiction to it demonstrates how much the new generation is absorbed by it and how much they rely on it for reward and guidance.

The Gladneys are continually drawn to and amazed by television's power. When the family sees Babette teaching a night course on TV, they cannot tell whether she is alive. The television's aura entrances and captivates the family into a state of suspended reality. No longer having the ability to judge for themselves, Jack's family is thrown totally out of balance. They cannot understand the technology that surrounds and defines their lives. Jack, for one short second, realizes that this is not the real Babette, but in an instant his perception changes and he accepts what he is seeing as her. Jack states that the family was being "shot through" with Babette. The children watch the screen helplessly as Wilder, their youngest child, calls out his mother's name, unable to realize that he is not actually seeing her, just a false representation of her. Babette has become a simulacra, and no one knows how to relate to what they have just seen. When the scene ends, Wilder just sits in front in the television crying while Murray takes notes. Jack regresses back to Wilder's age: "A two-syllable infantile cry, *ba-ba*, issued from the depths of my soul" (104).

Perhaps if the Gladneys canceled their Friday ritual they could understand what has just happened. They always turn to the television for disaster, a family activity that unifies them and makes them realize how "lucky" they are. Because most of the images they see

on television are of mass destruction and chaos, they understandably think that Babette has been through some sort of terrible accident. What separates Babette from the mass deaths they are accustomed to seeing is that she is alive and looking well. She is not fleeing from her flooded mobile home, nor is her body being pulled from a burning-car-pileup in the Holland Tunnel. It is not just living their lives through others that make the Gladneys such a classic postmodern family. Because they have not taken an active role in questioning the influences in their lives, they have let technological advances like the television control who they are as well as give them a sense of identity. Remote controlled cameras now continually watch people as they shop, ride in elevators, and sit at their desks working. This type of voyeurism is not uncommon in today's world, and it marks the introduction of people gaining their sense of self through technology. People look to television as a sort of mirror that gives them an identity (Olalquiaga 4). The Gladneys continually look for themselves in the video images they see. It comes as no surprise that Jack has a hard time dealing with Babette on the television screen, for he does not know which version of her is real. Is Babette the woman in the television screen, or is she the woman whom he loves and respects?

White Noise is not the only novel of DeLillo's to deal with the strange and awkward relationship we have with television and self-identity. In *Libra*, Oswald is portrayed as a character striving for any type of attention he can get. DeLillo presents Oswald as a postmodern symbol when he looks into the camera as he is shot, for he knows his image is being shown around the country on millions of television sets. Unlike

Oswald, a man who recognizes the power of technology, Jack and his family are too close to the medium. They are so absorbed by it that they are unaware of its power.

The technological media manipulation the Gladneys are so much a part of carries over to Bee, Jack's daughter by his former wife Tweedy Browner. When Bee flies in to see Jack, the airplane loses power, falling a few thousand feet from the sky. As Jack is waiting for his daughter to get off the plane, he sees the rest of the passengers frightened, disheveled, and crying. Bee departs the plane seemingly totally unaffected by this near death, and asks, "Where's the media?" Jack responds, "There is no media in Iron City" to which Bee rhetorically replies, "They went through all that for nothing?" (92). Already this six-year-old girl realizes the power of the media and how much people stage events and activities to seem realistic or authentic. Jack would have been scared beyond recovery from this incident, but Bee views it as something the airlines have planned to boost their image. Consumer capitalism is fed by the fear factor, and this boosts the airline's image. People flock to the airlines to buy tickets hoping for the possibility that they too might be able to participate in some type of media exploitation, when in reality the plane's loss of altitude may have been authentic. Bee is so jaded by the deceitful acts of advertisers to get media attention that she never realizes that her life was truly in danger.

Early in the novel DeLillo informs his readers of the power the media has and its ability to promote images when Jack and Murray visit "The Most Photographed Barn in America." The scene is cyclical as Murray speaks of the continually reinforced aura of the barn because people repeatedly visit it. Simply because of its name, people continually come and take pictures. More important is Murray's commentary on what the barn has

become. According to Murray, it is impossible to see the barn because visitors have been so inundated with its image for so long. He tells Jack, "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. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies" (12). As the discussion continues, "a man in a booth sold postcards and slides—pictures of the barn taken from the elevated spot" furthering the image Murray has discussed (12). Murray tells Jack that because of the barn's image, when people are taking pictures of the barn, they are really only "taking pictures of taking pictures" (13). It is at this point that DeLillo establishes the importance of image in our postmodern twentieth century that continues in everything from the grocery items we buy to the vacation sites we see to the professors from whom we take classes.

DeLillo cannot, however, let the issue of media and image stop here. Because the link between the media and consumerism is so strong, DeLillo's characters often turn to the supermarket to alleviate stress and renew cultural boundaries. Jack's stature as professor of Hitler studies does not exempt him from having to project a certain image. In DeLillo's postmodern family, a person cannot be accepted or trusted based on who he or she is; rather, each person must fulfill part of or be an image of someone they are not. The dean of Jack's college has already had Jack change his name to "J. A. K. Gladney," as if that extra initial makes a tremendous difference. The satirical commentary here is that the initial "K" just makes "J. A. K. Gladney" sound like his real name. So there is no real

change in his name: his name just looks better on paper, and might sound a little more “academic” when he or anyone else says it.

And Jack lives inside of his image: “I am the false character that follows the name around” (17). While reluctant to take on the extra initial, he becomes the dark, often mysterious character, much like Hitler was, who roams the campus with the fear that someone is going to discover that he does not speak German. Jack’s sunglasses and robe are just as important as his new initial, and regardless of where he is on campus, he is always in the same outfit, attempting to put forth the same image. While at the hardware store one afternoon, Jack runs into a colleague who barely recognizes him without his sunglasses, robe, and extra initial. When Jack’s colleague does not recognize him, Jack turns to the same consumer-driven force that makes him carry the image that he lives inside of:

He looked me over, felt the material of the water-repellent jacket I was carrying draped across my arm. Then he backed up, altering his perspective, nodding a little, his grin beginning to take on a self-satisfied look, reflecting some inner calculation.

“I think I know those shoes,” he said.

What did he mean, he knew these shoes?

“You’re a different person altogether.”

Different in what way, Eric?

“You look so harmless, Jack. A big, harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy.”

The encounter put me in the mood to shop. I found the others and we walked across two parking lots to the main structure in the Mid-Village Mall, a ten story building arranged around a center court of waterfalls, promenades and gardens. (82-3)

Jack can shop all day, but he cannot escape the reality of who he is. The images of things as presented by television have so influenced his life that he is too insecure to be himself. He must continually try to fight his nature to be someone he is not.

Jack's oblivion to the power of machines reaches much further than television. As the number of people who bank through their automated teller machines increases, Jack feels gratification and respect toward the machine for rewarding him with the information he wants:

In the morning I walked to the bank. I went to the automated teller machine to check my balance. The figure on the screen roughly corresponded to my independent estimate, feebly arrived at after long searches through documents, tormented arithmetic. Waves of relief and gratitude flowed over me. The system had blessed my life. I felt its support and approval. The system hardware, the mainframe sitting in a locked room in some distant city. What a pleasing interaction. I sensed that something of deep personal value, but not money, not that at all, had been authenticated and confirmed. A deranged person was escorted from the bank by two armed guards. The system was invisible, which made it all the more impressive, all the more disquieting to deal with. But we were in accord, at least for now. The networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies. (64)

Jack has put so much trust in technology that his searching for a comforting reward in an ATM acts out the enframing Heidegger details. Because Jack relies too heavily on a machine that gives him important information, he lives as a "standing-reserve" for technology. Imagine the emotions Jack would feel had the machine been too far off from his own balance. Jack's ATM balance does not match his own, but the fact that it "roughly" matches Jack's calculations shows his unquestioned trust in the machine. Jack is not the kind of person who would stir up an already calm situation, so he would probably accept almost any number the computer would give him. While we never learn

why the deranged person is leaving the bank, it is entirely possible that his account balance did not match the machine's, that the machine, "the system," did not bless his life as it has Jack's. Jack fully trusts this machine, giving in to "the system." He no longer relies on his own calculations and the balance in his checkbook to tell him how much money he has. If the machine were to make a mistake in the bank's favor, Jack would never question it, nor would he ever know that he had lost his money to a machine.

As Jack states, the computer has blessed his life. Having such a close relationship with a machine has become a divine act; thus the ATM has given him reason to feel happy and allows him to be an active part of his technologically postmodern society. The phrase "automated teller machine" is an example of technology replacing people. The idea that a machine can replace a human has become so commonplace that Jack seeks reward in it. Had Jack gone into the bank to check his account balance with a live teller, he would still have been rewarded by a machine. Technology allows banking to run too smoothly, so even if Jack had wanted personal interaction, he would have been rewarded by "the system."

Needing its support and approval, Jack is enframed by technology and is at the furthest possible point from *poiesis* (the "poetic" understanding of technology where one is free of enframing). Jack fails to realize that it is he who should be controlling the machine because modern technology theoretically makes the machine more powerful and intelligent than people. Jack's balance should be the one he trusts, and the bank's should be the one he questions. Everyone knows that humans make mistakes, but we perceive that computers do not. Postmodern America no longer checks to see who is correct; we

just rely on the computer. The automated teller was built to make banking easier, but do people *need* it? Is it a device that people *have* to have in order to bank? People had been banking for hundreds of years before the ATM, but the invention of it makes banking easier. It is this type of invention that Heidegger warns us about. We have (or maybe technology has) created a machine that makes banking more efficient, but it is not necessary, and because we have allowed the progression of technology to make activities and daily chores easier for us, it is machines like the ATM that enframe their users because people like Jack rely on them for personal reward.

In Heidegger's terms, Jack has been placed at standing-reserve by the computer: "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve" (298). The machine that is blessing Jack and Jack himself are both in a state of standing-reserve. The machine often sits waiting to be used, and Jack is often used by the machine. This cyclical process feeds other nodes of technology that will continue to influence the Gladneys' lives. DeLillo scholar Tom LeClair writes that most of DeLillo's characters live within loops created by governments and technology. DeLillo's characters (and this is especially true of the characters in *White Noise*) will never be able to leave the loops they are trapped in. The Gladneys need technology to fulfill their lives, and they are so sold on its benefits that they are not able to function without it.

All of *White Noise*'s characters are most enframed by technology when the airborne toxic event occurs. They treat the spill very casually, thinking that technology

will help them out of the crisis when it is technology that caused it. Heidegger warns of this type of manipulation when he writes, “Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology” (288). The Gladneys rely on technology to make them feel safe and out of danger immediately after the airborne toxic event. The technology behind Nyodene D. has threatened their lives, but they turn to it and rely on it to get them out of danger. Even though Murray tells Jack to give himself over to technology and to let it help him, if it were not for technology, the Gladneys and the town of Blacksmith would not have to evacuate their homes and would not be threatened by a chemical that poses unknown dangers to its users.

The toxic event is part of a dark literary genre about modern technology. In the 1835 novel called *The Fire and the Sea*, Turner calls the developing skyscrapers “broad towering ruddled visionary skylscapes” that pollute the sky. While we think of these developments as progress, writers such as Turner, DeLillo, Pynchon, Gaddis, Barth, Sukenick, Gibson and others critique this “progress.” Frow expands on this type of criticism when he writes of the way that DeLillo crafts his sentences to describe the types of progress that he and other writers criticize: “The conditional clause structure and the repeated negation convey a pessimistic sense of undecidability, but it seems clear that industrial poison is a crucial component of the postmodern aesthetic, ‘rich in romantic imagery’—and vice versa” (414). Frow supports his observation by noting that Turner

described his “skylscapes” as “tinged with dread,” noting the trend that DeLillo is continuing to support. Frow explains the contradictory technological effects DeLillo focuses on as part of humans’ “uncanny nature”: “the twist here is that the sense of the inadequacy of representation comes not because of the transcendental or uncanny nature of the object but because of the multiplicity of prior representations. Priority of writing, priority of television, priority of the chain of metaphors in which the object is constructed” (414). Frow finishes this section of his essay with Jack’s description of the sunset: “we stood there watching a surge of florid light, like a heart pumping in a documentary on color TV” (414).

The airborne toxic event exemplifies all that the Gladneys want when the Friday ritual ends. The destruction the Gladneys want is now threatening their lives, but they fail to realize this. They are now the families they have seen on television evacuating and running to save their lives, but they are so absorbed in relying on technology to save them that they neglect to note that it is technology that got them where they are. Much like Oswald seeing himself in the camera at his death, the Gladneys will now get more fear and disaster than they wanted without realizing they are in the middle of it. Jack’s family misses out on a prime opportunity to open themselves up to self-pity and deprivation. This is the “more” death and destruction Jack wants every week, only now he fails to enjoy it.

Not until the Gladneys are herded like animals to various shelters does Jack realize his family is part of the media circus of glorification of horrific and deadly accidents: “We’d become part of the public stuff of media disaster. The small audience of the old

and blind recognized the predictions of psychics as events so near to happening that they had to be shaped in advance to our needs and wishes. Out of some persistent sense of large-scale ruin, we kept inventing hope,” just as the people who lose everything to a natural disaster are continually seen on the news (146-7). The paradox here is that the airborne toxic event could have been prevented through the close monitoring of technology. Natural disasters are not preventable, but this could have been. Technology has enframed the citizens of Blacksmith and Iron City. This is how the Gladneys have lived. Jack’s family fails to question anything around them, and through so doing they shut themselves out to what threatens them. The Gladneys are a perfect example of Heidegger’s thesis that if our relationship with technology is not understood, we cannot live in *poiesis*.

“Standing-reserve,” Heidegger’s term to explain what happens when a product is invented and then sits waiting to be used, is what leads to the airborne toxic event. Nyodene D. has been “revealed,” that is, brought about by humans for human use, but because it sits in a train car waiting to be used, it is at “standing-reserve.” This fact is further proven when the spill occurs and no one knows what the chemical is. A long time, possibly hours, passes before anyone knows what is in the container. This is exactly the type of technological manipulation Heidegger warns his readers about. The postmodern irony of Nyodene D. lies in its invention. The pesticide is not brought forth in a natural way, but as the chemical remains from other technologically developed chemicals.

As the airborne toxic event transpires, DeLillo shows that the people who are trained in disaster preparedness have been living in standing-reserve, and are unable to

deal with this spill. They too are enframed by the technological process and can no longer understand what they are dealing with. As Heinrich tells Jack, if we were to suffer through some type of disaster that stripped mankind of his technological resources, we would be unable to explain to a caveman what we have invented since the technological revolution. As Heinrich observes, the Greeks invented trigonometry and the word “atom,” so to tell them that we have invented match sticks might be useful, but would we be able to explain how a match works? “Can we make a refrigerator? Can we explain how it works? Could you make a simple wooden match that you could strike on a rock to make a flame? We think we’re so great and modern. But what if you were hurled into a time warp and came face to face with the ancient Greeks. They did autopsies and dissections. What could you tell an ancient Greek that he couldn’t say, ‘Big Deal’” (147-8). Technology has brought about the advent of some useful items, but as Heinrich proves, most of us do not know how they work. Most often, we do not know how the simplest appliances in our homes work, so how could we possibly explain their usage after a fallout? We cannot. We are too enframed by technology to understand what we have invented. Overall, modern societies are too far from *poiesis* to understand the danger they live in.

The information about the spill is so sparse that no one knows the danger anyone is in. The side effects of the spill continually change, and as they do, Jack’s daughters suffer from them all—from nausea, sweating, and shortness of breath, to sweaty palms and a dry mouth, and finally to *déjà vu*. As Steffie and Denise hear the list of effects change, their own suffering changes. Neither they nor anyone else knows if they really have been

exposed to Nyodene D., or if their minds are working against their bodies. Much like Gary Harkness, who is left an invalid at the end of *End Zone*, Jack cannot figure out if his daughters are truly suffering, or if technology is so far out of control that the scientist or the technological process that invented Nyodene D. does not know what to tell anyone. No one knows whether or not Steffie's and Denise's reactions are psychosomatic, for they cannot discern reality from technological predictions.

When the Gladneys are evacuated to the Boy Scout camp, Jack is comforted when he hears Steffie recite a Toyota commercial in her sleep:

She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.

Toyota Celica.

A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. It made me feel that something hovered. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe. Whatever its source, the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence. (155)

The family's lives have been risked, Jack has been poisoned by Nyodene D., but he is able to sleep because television has so invaded his daughter's mind that her recitation of a commercial is a healthy sign. This is not a surprising comfort for the patriarch who views the television as a box that delivers needed tragedy, and who believes it lives and talks on its own. Arnold Weinstein focuses his chapter "Don DeLillo: Rendering the Words of the Tribe" on the "inside," that is, the systems that people may choose to live in, versus the "outside," or the individual freedom people once had. According to Weinstein, there is no

longer a distinction between the two. Weinstein argues that all that was once “outside” is now “inside,” as can be proven when Steffie recites the Toyota commercial:

These epiphanic moments when DeLillo transmutes dross into gold, makes out of the pollution of advertising a beautiful postmodern lyricism and tenderness. But we can hardly fail to see that, once again, “outside” has gotten “inside,” that the TV is no longer “out there” at all; it is PacMan writ large: we are the machines gobbled up by other machines. (306)

We almost expect Heidegger to pipe in at this point to say “I told you so.” All that Heidegger so passionately and sometimes angrily spoke of is echoed in Weinstein’s criticism. In this scene as well as in many other scenes, there is no difference between the “outside” and the “inside” as the Gladneys attempt to fight the technology that has become such an authoritative factor in their lives.

One of the most absurdly comical scenes is Heinrich’s coming of age in the midst of all this technological confusion. He is the one character in the book who most lives in *poiesis*. While his reasoning sometimes falters, he understands technology’s dangers. He is the first to sight the spill, and the first to tune into the radio in an effort to understand what has happened. Once everyone settles down at the shelter, it is Heinrich whom Jack finds in the middle of a large group of people explaining the crisis. Heinrich tells them what little information is known about Nyodene D. He takes a serious but comical approach with the people he is talking to, and builds a rapport with them. He tells them information they want to hear, but more importantly, Heinrich understands the spill’s dynamics, and does not let all the media misinformation cause panic and false scares. As the rumor spreads that the governor has been killed while flying through the toxic cloud in his helicopter, Heinrich knows this has not happened, and focuses on the reality of the

spill. Heinrich would agree with Heidegger's statement that the danger of technology lies in giving it too much power: "The essence of technology lies in enframing. Enframing belongs within the destining of revealing. These sentences express something different from the talk that we hear more frequently, to the effect that technology is the fate of our age, where 'fate' means the inequitableness of the unalterable course" (307). Heinrich would agree with Heidegger because he realizes this course and is the one character in the novel who best understands his relationship with technology.

Heinrich's ability to work with technology and understand it surfaces early in the novel while discussing the weather forecast with Jack. Heinrich tells Jack that rain is expected when it is actually raining at the time of the conversation. Jack tells Heinrich that simply because he heard on the radio that it is supposed to rain that night does not mean that it cannot be raining at the time of their conversation. Heinrich supports his argument with the common types of generalizations that often occur when people hear news. Heinrich states, "our senses are wrong a lot more than they're right. This has been proven in the laboratory. Don't you know about all those theorems that say nothing is what it seems" (23, emphasis added). And he has heard from "the radio" that the forecast calls for rain. Heinrich does not say that he has heard from a person or a weather forecaster that it is supposed to rain, but from "the radio." The radio, a technological device much like the TV, speaks to Heinrich as much as it speaks to Jack. Separating Heinrich from Jack is Heinrich's understanding of technology's power and the change of language that has come from the radio and television media. Heinrich knows that technology's influence changes words and language so that people can use the same

words they have used their entire lifetimes, but the meanings may no longer be the same. Heinrich's logic is sometimes as clouded as Jack's perception of technology, but the fundamental difference remains that Heinrich lives more in poesis than Jack because he better understands it.

Jack and Babette's response to the spill show how self-contradictory they are, while at the same time, their reactions show how much they rely on television and technology to give them what they need. When the spill occurs, they are so brainwashed by the Friday news clips they have seen that they do not believe that anything like this could be happening to them. Jack places too much trust in the people informing him about the spill when the spill's name changes from "feathery plume" to "black billowing cloud." Upon hearing this name upgrade, Jack tells Heinrich, "they're coming to grips with the thing. Good" (113). Jack's reasoning is completely backward here, for he should be relieved if the spill's name were going from "black billowing cloud" down to "feathery plume." Jack's technologically naive nature is masked in these remarks that may temporarily help him feel safer, but will later change as the information surrounding the spill becomes worse.

This denial of warning surfaces early in the novel when the family's lunch is briefly interrupted: "The smoke alarm went off in the hallway upstairs, either to let us know the battery had just died or because the house was on fire. We finished our lunch in silence" (8). This lackadaisical response to a technological device designed to save their lives defines how the Gladneys view technology and natural disasters. Just like the warnings they receive from the media when the spill occurs, the Gladneys ignore what they should

most be listening to. The difference between ignoring the smoke alarm and ignoring the warnings that follow the airborne toxic event is that this time there is nothing wrong whereas the next time they ignore the warning signs the family is in real danger.

Combined with the Gladneys' lack of response is the acceptance of chemicals as a natural part of their lives. When the town's grade school is evacuated because of some sort of chemical leak, Jack does not question the future safety of the school or even why something like this happened to begin with. Jack lists the possible chemicals: "paint or varnish, the foam insulation, rays emitted from micro-computers, the asbestos fireproofing, the adhesive on shipping containers, the fumes from the chlorinated pool," and he finishes his list with, "or perhaps something deeper, finer-grained, more closely woven into the basic state of things" (35). Ironically, the elements Jack lists are not in "the basic state of things" because they are technologically produced. He accepts the dangers that come with technological change without ever questioning whether the changes are necessary or if they are putting himself or his family in danger. He continually ignores some of the most important warning signs that could protect him and his family.

Even though the Gladneys know about the spill, they take no measures to get information on how to protect themselves. As in the fire alarm incident, they continue eating, acting as if that will make the problem vanish. Jack and Babette serve lunch, explaining that they could not possibly be in any danger: "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 uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his street in one of those TV floods?" (114).

Jack has completely given himself over to technology, and no longer knows how to distinguish what threatens him from what does not. Much like “Chance” Gardnir in Jerry Kosinsky’s novel *Being There*, who cannot perform sex without the aid of television, Jack uses television to create his reality. The dialogue between Jack, Babette and Heinrich delivers another of DeLillo’s satiric scenes that at the same time proves Jack’s reluctance to protect his family:

“They want us to evacuate,” he said, not meeting our eyes.
 Babette said, “Did you get the impression they were only making a suggestion or was it a little more mandatory, do you think?”
 “It was a fire captain’s car with a loudspeaker and it was going pretty fast.”
 I said, “In other words you didn’t have an opportunity to notice the subtle edges of intonation.”
 “The voice was screaming out.”
 “Due to the sirens,” Babette said helpfully.
 “It said something like, ‘Evacuate all places of residence. Cloud of deadly chemicals, cloud of deadly chemicals.’”
 We sat there over sponge cake and canned peaches.
 “I’m sure there’s plenty of time,” Babette said, “or they would have made a point of telling us to hurry. How fast do air masses move, I wonder.” (119)

Technology has superseded human safety and cannot get the Gladneys out of the danger they are in. The fault does not lie entirely with technology, for the Gladneys deliberately ignore the warnings given them.

As is the case with most disasters, as soon as the media finds out about them, they become significant focal points used to gain attention and boost ratings. The struggle becomes not which network can give its viewers the best information, but which one can get it to them the quickest, whether or not the information has been confirmed. As the toxic cloud spreads, its name changes once again—from “black billowing cloud” to “The

Airborne Toxic Event.” Have the people “in charge” of the spill given this name to it? Probably not. The media has almost certainly had more than a significant role in this name, for changing the name from “spill” to “event” gives the disaster the sound and feel of something good, not bad and threatening. Public gatherings that usually bring about some type of fun or enjoyment are “events.” A toxic chemical spill with unknown results is a disaster. As Jack and his family drive to the shelter they continually hear radio commercials as the media “sells” the toxic spill: “The radio said: ‘It’s the rainbow hologram that gives this credit card a marketing intrigue’” (122). Credit card companies attempt to give the image that with their card its possessor can buy the world and fix everyone’s problems. Now that everyone in Blacksmith has been threatened, perhaps this charge card will allow people to put the rest of their lives on charge with low monthly payments. Even Jack sees the toxic cloud as a consumer capitalist event when he describes it, “in its tremendous size, its dark and bulky menace, its escorting aircraft, the cloud resembled a national promotion for death, a multimillion-dollar campaign backed by radio spots, heavy print and billboard, TV saturation” (157-8).

En route to the shelter, Jack begins to realize how much technology is playing a significant role in what he is going through. He begins thinking about various aspects of his life and death, thinking to himself, “this was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control. Our helplessness did not seem compatible with the idea of a man-made event” (127-8). The Jack Gladney at the fore of the novel would never have thought this. We now see a

Jack Gladney who has had numerous conversations with Murray and who has been so heavily influenced by the media that he considers how powerful technology can be. Jack now seemingly fully understands that technology cannot only control people's lives, but end them also.

Perhaps DeLillo's most blatant statement regarding technological manipulation comes when Jack is poisoned and must give his life data to the SIMUVAC representative. SIMUVAC, the simulated evacuation center, has never had a drill, and does not even have funding to operate, so they use this disaster as a model for what they need to do in the future. Ironically, SIMUVAC is set up in a Boy Scout camp, an organization that prepares people to deal with disasters and emergencies using basic supplies and common sense. The absurdity of this situation demonstrates how much governments rely on technology to help them out of situations that they do not themselves know how to control. The SIMUVAC representative inputs Jack's vital information and the computer does not appear to be hooked into any kind of database. DeLillo leaves his readers with the fear that a computer can know everything about us regardless of whether or not it is hooked into a larger data base. The ATM that rewards and blesses Jack is now reduced to a simple computer placed on a table. Technology has advanced so much that all the information about everyone in the United States sits inside one small computer at a Boy Scout camp. The grandeur behind the computer that works hard to give Jack his bank account balance in a large room in some undisclosed location is no longer so grand for Jack. The fantasy that technology is working in his favor becomes a nightmare as he is

diagnosed and tries to deal with understanding what is inside of him and whether or not it is going to kill him.

Jack continues to talk with the SIMUVAC representative, feeling his life has become increasingly debased to computer language. Jack tells the SIMUVAC representative all the information he knows about himself, questioning whether or not the computer knows all the parts of his life he is not telling it. Jack's life has become a series of computerized dots. He is helpless against the fight to make his life a simulacra as it becomes no more than a series of numbers and stars on a computer monitor. The SIMUVAC representative tells Jack, "I tapped into your history," and Jack ponders, "I wondered what he meant that he tapped into my history. Where was it located exactly? Some state or federal agency, some insurance company or credit firm or medical clearinghouse? What history was he referring to? I'd told him some basic things. Height, weight, childhood diseases. What else did he know? Did he know about my wives, my involvement with Hitler, my dreams and fears" (140). As if hearing that the SIMUVAC representative has tapped into his personal history is not bad enough, Jack does not know if he has been able to tap into Jack's mind. Because of this scene, Jack is continually haunted by the vague information given to him about his technologically diagnosed death.

Technology is out of control for SIMUVAC and for Jack. When the computer responds to Jack's history, it tells him that he has "a situation"; Jack thinks this is a vague message that he is going to die. The scary part of this scene is that Jack hears this information from a computer, not from a person. Just like the radio and television dictating how to live a better life, a computer monitor has now told Jack that he will die.

In postmodern America, it no longer takes a doctor to tell you the one piece of information that separates people from animals—that we know we are going to die. All a doctor can do is diagnose that we might die, whereas the computer that diagnoses Jack with “a situation” is not able to tell him anything more than he already knows. In one of the novel’s many comical dialogues, DeLillo shows not only the ambiguities of language, but the way in which technology manipulates us but still leaves us questioning. Jack learns that he will die eventually:

Am I going to die?
 “Not as such,” he said.
 What do you mean?
 “Not in so many words.”
 How many words does it take?
 “It’s not a question of words. It’s a question of years. We’ll know more in fifteen years. In the meantime we definitely have a situation.”
 What will you know in fifteen years?
 “If you’re still alive at the time, we’ll know that much more than we do now. Nyodene D. has a life span of thirty years. You’ll have made it halfway through.”
 So, to outlive this substance, I will have to make it into my eighties.
 Then I can begin to relax?
 “Knowing what we know at this time.” (140-1)

Like the technology that drives Jack’s appliances, his life is now going to revolve around what he does not know. This dialogue echoes many of the ambiguous scenes that take place throughout the novel, including the literal meaning of novel’s title. Frow explains the exchange of information between the “jug-eared” SIMUVAC representative and Jack as symbolic of the many structures and systems throughout the novel: “Like so many signifying structures in *White Noise* it offers a profound interpretability but withdraws any precise meaning, or is at best deeply ambivalent. It’s nothing but data, raw and

unreadable. Its faultiness is caught in a joke about the search for contamination in the girls' school; the search is carried out by men in Mylex suits, but 'because Mylex is itself a suspect material, the result tended to be ambiguous'" (423-4).

The "deeply ambivalent" meanings Frow writes of also occur in the naming of the spill. Much like the communication between Jack and the SIMUVAC representative, ambivalency drives the various names the event is given. At the beginning of the spill, the radio calls it "a shapeless growing thing." A shapeless growing thing now exists in Jack, but the people who develop technology are obviously more concerned about the technological process and the invention of Nyodene D., so they do not take the time to find out what it can do to human and animal life, much less the environment. Jack's life has been summed up by a computer that knows more about the chemical that has poisoned him than it does about saving human life. The ambiguity of the computer system and what is known about the way Nyodene D. affects human life is proven when Jack is told that if he outlives the Nyodene D., he will be eighty, in which case he may very well be dead already. At eighty, he will be closer to a "natural" death, not further from it. Part of Moses' essay focuses on technology's power over nature: "The threat of death is both so real and utterly vague. The disturbingly funny conclusion that Jack draws—if he makes into his eighties he can 'begin to relax' – brilliantly illustrates his existential 'situation.' The airborne toxic event, though produced by a fully technological society, nevertheless replicates a primal and elementary human situation" (80-1). When his family has to leave the Boy Scout shelter because the cloud is moving in their direction, Jack states, "I recalled with a shock that I was technically dead" (158). Jack does not question what

happens around him. He even fails to attempt to understand the information just given to him.

The power technology now holds to predict people's deaths Jack recognizes as having been violently taken away from the gods. Even Heidegger comments on this advancement and unnatural approach to technology. Computers, not people, now predict people's deaths. When Jack wants to know his health status, he turns to a computer from an organization that does not have the funds to operate, but that has the resources and power to tell him he is going to die. Jack finally arrives at the realization that in postmodern America technology orders life and death, and that everything is ordered in almost cryptic symbols that most people cannot understand: "A network of symbols has been introduced, an entire awesome technology wrested from the gods. It makes you feel like a stranger in your own dying. I wanted my academic gown and dark glasses" (142). This advancement of power and loss of control is at the core of Heidegger's warnings. According to Heidegger, even God can lose his sense of place and stature when advancement moves beyond the simple and sensible, to others who do not have as firm a grasp as is needed in certain situations:

Thus where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of a cause-effect coherence, even God, for representational thinking, can lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance. In the light of causality, God can sink to the level of a cause, of *causa efficiens*. He then becomes even in theology the God of the philosophers, namely of those who define the unconcealed and the concealed in terms of the causality of making, without ever considering the essential origin of this causality. (307-8)

According to Heidegger's representational thinking, even God is not exempt from allowing his power to be lumped in with that of a number of other gods who to their worshippers are just as important as a Christian God is to His followers. At least the perception is such that God can be reduced to the level of a cause when humankind is not careful with its control over technology.

The loss of human control to technology even works its way into sex. Murray Jay Siskind, whom we would expect to find at the center of any consumer-driven activity that results from the spill, stands outside a car of prostitutes waiting for his "turn." When Jack arrives, Murray explains the odd types of clothes the women are wearing, pointing out how nature's most natural act has been replaced by technology: "Another one [of the prostitutes] says she has a snap-off crotch. What do you think she means by that?" (149). Murray can no longer discern what is natural versus what technology has influenced. Murray continues, "I'm a little worried, though, about all these outbreaks of life-style diseases. I carry a reinforced ribbed condom at all times. But I have a feeling it's not much protection against the intelligence and adaptability of the modern virus" (149-50). Murray has experienced perhaps the most dangerous, threatening chemical spill of his life, and he is afraid of catching VD from a woman with a snap-off crotch. For all Murray knows, the cloud of deadly chemicals is sitting over them, or has already contaminated the shelter before they arrived, but he is too worried about getting infected from performing nature's oldest act. The larger issue here is the "modern virus" which could be as hard to kill off as cockroaches.

Babette questions or, rather, worries about what technology is inventing, and what technology's role will be in the spill it has created, but she does not take an active role in attempting to learn about the long-term effects. When the idea of microorganisms that will eat the cloud (much like the ones used on today's oil spills) is mentioned, Babette is hesitant to accept it: "Just to think there are people out there who can conjure such things. A cloud-eating microbe or whatever. There is just no end of surprise. All the amazement that's left in the world is microscopic. But I can live with that. What scares me is have they thought it through completely? I feel they're working on the superstitious part of my nature. Every advance is worse than the one before because it makes me more scared" (160-1). Jack tries to agree with her fear—"The greater the scientific advancement, the more primitive the fear"—but Babette does not understand what he means. Her nature has been threatened, and she does not know how to deal with that. She is completely and totally enframed, unable to get out of the relationship she has with technology.

Chapter II

What Is Natural Now?

“Death is so strong that we have to repress, those of us who know how.”

“But repression is totally false and mechanical. Everybody knows that. We’re not supposed to deny our nature.”

“It’s natural to deny our nature, according to Murray. It’s the whole point of being different from animals.”

“But that’s crazy.”

“It’s the only way to survive,” I said from her breasts.

— *White Noise*

Jack’s death is not natural. When he is poisoned with Nyodene D. he tells Murray, “There is something artificial about my death. It’s shallow, unfulfilling. I don’t belong to the earth or sky. They ought to carve an aerosol can on my tombstone,” to which Murray replies, “Well said” (283). Since Jack knows he is going to die, he is faced with the reality that technology is determining how long people live, and that nature is no longer the force that determines the length of life. This reality is proven when Jack visits Autumn Farms for an evaluation of his toxic poisoning: he is restricted from seeing the documents that define who he is. As he leaves the institution he is told not to open the envelope to see what his test results reveal about him. Jack’s unnatural death represents the theme of “Dylarama.” It represents what has become natural for the novel’s characters.

This lack of specific information, this vagueness that surrounds Jack’s inevitable death, is part of *White Noise*’s theme. DeLillo’s messages—that the nature of nature has changed, and that because of modern technology people are living unnatural lives—pervade the novel, but are most prevalent in “Dylarama.” No longer can people live “natural” lives where they are born, live a life surrounded by natural elements, and then die. Jack is told,

by a computer operated by an organization that does not have the funds to operate, what he already knows. This absurdly comic scene represents the “unnatural” issues many of *White Noise*’s characters are forced to deal with. An example of the kind of simulacra that appears throughout the novel surfaces at a dinner party where Murray serves “a spectacular meal of Cornish hen in the shape of a frog” (49). Technology dictates Jack’s death, and infiltrates its way into the food the novel’s characters eat. Technology has superseded nature, leaving *White Noise*’s readers with the chilling reminder that technology is growing increasingly powerful and is ultimately changing nature.

White Noise, being true to its classification as a systems novel, is illuminated here as DeLillo leaves his readers with the fear that even Jack’s death is not his own, and that because Jack does not understand the systems that surround his death, he cannot understand the systems of the world he lives in. Jack and his own dying have been removed from the natural course they would take and have been placed in the system of techno-death. No one wants to learn that they are going to die, but Jack’s response reflects the denial of the accepted “price” that technology can do many things, amongst them enabling people to live longer lives. Moses explains this exchange, writing that the final goal of technology is to prolong death: “The more vigorously man pursues the ultimate dream of modern technological science—the conquest of the final natural limit, death—the more rapidly that dream seems to recede and the more imminent seems the historically unprecedented nightmare that technology visits upon man” (70-1). Just as importantly, Jack’s death brings about the question of what has become natural. A

technologically caused and diagnosed death is not natural, but in the postmodern world of *Blacksmith and Iron City*, technology has become natural.

This theme surfaces early in the novel when Jack writes of the pleasure of reading the letters in one of Heinrich's pornographic magazines. Jack questions the "authenticity" of sex (the most "natural" animal act) when he speaks of the people who write to sexually oriented magazines detailing their sexual experiences. Jack, noting that the writers often make the experience grander than it actually was, asks, "which is the greater stimulation?"—the real experience, or the enhanced version that is published in the magazine (30). This simple question starts a flow of statements that prove how the nature of nature has changed, and how this affects the Gladneys unnatural lives. DeLillo's postmodern America is filled with something artificial to replace its natural equivalent.

The Mid-Village Mall acts as a powerful example of a simulacrum replacing nature. Its name oxymoronically combines the natural elements of early humankind and the ultra-modern-techno-world of the Gladneys. At the same time, the mall's name places it in the middle of town so that it is centrally located and has seemingly easy access for everyone. Not to surprisingly, the mall allows people to feel reconnected with nature. Jack describes the mall as "a ten story building arranged around a center court of waterfalls, promenades, and gardens" (83). Why do people need to go anywhere else when they have the Mid-Village Mall? No one needs to go camping or hiking any longer. To go to Hawaii or Yosemite for the spectacular gardens and waterfalls is only a waste of money, for all these natural elements are right in the middle of *Blacksmith*.

Mixed with this simulacrum of nature is consumerism. When Jack writes of his satiating shopping spree, he details the mall's ability to satisfy all his needs, regardless of whether or not he needs what he buys:

When I could not decide between two shirts, they encouraged me to buy both. When I said I was hungry, they fed me pretzels, beer, souvlaki. The two girls scouted ahead, spotting things they thought I might want or need, running back to get me, to clutch my arms, plead with me to follow. They were my guides to endless well-being. We smelled chocolate, popcorn, cologne; we smelled rugs and furs, hanging salamis and deathly vinyl. My family gloried in the event. I was one of them, shopping, at last. (83)

All the world is contained in the Mid-Valley Shopping Mall. The Gladneys need to go no further than this phenomenal center of cultural and natural surroundings to feel whole once again. An insult has put Jack in the mood to shop, and shopping has replaced the insecurity of that insult. Jack is not secure enough to live with the insult, so he goes to a place where he can lose himself in the consumer capitalism that forms the seemingly natural world where he and his family will feel whole.

The Mid-Village Mall also allows the Gladneys to hide from death, providing for them the consumerism they need to ward it off for as long as they can. According to DeLillo scholar Tom LeClair, the mall symbolizes the power Jack and Babette need to master death: "The village center is the supermarket, which provides the setting for numerous scenes in the novel and stands as a symbol of a physical magnitude that can help master death" (214). While in the mall, the Gladneys can hide from everything that creates stress in their lives. Jack and Babette can hide from their constant fear of death, and their kids can satisfy all their impulse shopping that major companies rely on for profit. Even Murray can visit the mall and connect it to his *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and

at the same time evaluate the mall's impact on modern society as he so often does while in the supermarket.

Celeste Olalquiaga, in her chapter, "Reach out and Touch Someone," states that perhaps more than any other buildings, malls are built so that consumers will get lost and, like Jack and the Treadwells, experience a saturation of the senses and be unable to tell where they are:

Architectural transparency transforms shopping malls into a continuous window display where the homogeneity of store windows, stairs, elevators, and water fountains causes a perceptual loss, and shoppers are left wandering around in a maze. This induced disorientation is heightened by the few, cryptic signs to be found, and it begins in the interminable, spiral search for a parking space (a place in which to place the self). Dislocated by this ongoing trompe l'oeil, the body seeks concreteness in the consumption of food and goods, saturating the senses to the maximum. (2)

Her criticism of postmodern architecture is applicable to *White Noise*, for DeLillo has painted a clear and telling picture of how technology is changing nature and how buildings are manufactured with simulacra that give the appearance of being a "natural" setting.

When Old Man Treadwell and his sister get lost in the Mid-Village Mall, they are not found for two days. Once they are "rescued" and returned home, his sister dies from not being able to regain her sense of self. Even when she is back in her own home she cannot feel at home any longer, for the ten-story mall has so disoriented her that she never recovers. This loss of spatial boundaries reflects the technology and consumer capitalism that inspires people to design buildings where consumers can become lost, lose their sense of direction, yet somehow feel that they are in natural surroundings. The Treadwells were

so lost in the mall that they could not find their way out, and worse yet, no one noticed them sitting in a corner by themselves.

For the most part, the Gladneys are oblivious to this new technological consciousness. “Technology seems to be doing more than taking over and transforming space; it is creating a continuous state of self-doubt, hesitation, and confusion,” and this rings true for one of Jack’s former wives as much as it does for his own family (Olalquiaga 15). In an insightful DeLilloan conversation, Jack’s former wife Tweedy Browner reminds him that she wears gloves to bed because, “I’m untrasensitive to many things” (88). When Jack lists them—“sunlight, air, food, water, sex”—Tweedy proves why she must wear gloves: “Carcinogenic, every one of them” (88). Sunlight, air, food, water, and sex are the most basic of human needs. Tweedy, afraid of the many toxic elements in her own home, fears the most natural elements in her life. Technology not only produces dangerous devices, but it changes nature so that what nature has to offer is now dangerous. Tweedy does not wear her gloves in the daytime when she is cleaning with unknown chemicals, but she wears them at night when the only activity she will certainly be taking part in is breathing.

Several questions arise from this absurd dialogue. What is now produced by technology that in the past has been produced only by nature? Is technology so advanced that it now makes consumer goods totally safe and non-toxic? Has nature been poisoned by technology’s waste so that air, food, water, sunlight, and sex are now poisonous? Which is more pure—air produced through the natural process of photosynthesis, or air produced by a machine? Is technology able to deliver seemingly natural replacements for

parts of nature that were once unreproducible? Ordinarily we think of air, water, sunlight, and sex as natural elements that cannot be reproduced. DeLillo's frightening world of simulacra challenges this idea with the very real possibility that technology controls nature, and that nature can be obtained through technology.

Virtual reality was just beginning to become well-known when *White Noise* was written, but since the book's publication, the industry has grown so that people can sit, wear goggles and experience almost-real situations. Virtual reality might give Tweedy the sunlight and food she is allergic to without really having it. The technology behind virtual reality would make it seem as if she could have these elements without the dangers that surround them.

Again, it is Heinrich who realizes that life is not the exact physical science that technology is. Heinrich is less influenced by the media and advertising than the rest of his family and does not allow the urges of consumer capitalism or a manipulation of the senses to make decisions for him. More importantly, he understands the chaos of nature. When Jack asks Heinrich if he wants to go to Montana next summer, Heinrich responds similarly to when Jack tells him that it is raining:

Who knows what I want to do? Isn't it all just a question of brain chemistry, signals going back and forth, electrical energy in the cortex? How do you know whether something is really what you want to do or just some kind of nerve impulse in the brain? Some minor little activity takes place somewhere in this unimportant place in one of the brain hemispheres and suddenly I want to go to Montana, or I don't want to go to Montana. How do I know I really want to go and it isn't just some neurons firing or something? I can't control what happens in my brain, so how can I be sure what I want to do ten seconds from now, much less Montana next summer? (45-6)

Heinrich's confusion marks an important crisis in today's technologically manipulated world, for the media and advertising want us to think that we want what they want us to want, not what we really want. But since Heinrich lives the closest to *poiesis*, he understands what influences him. Jack, on the other hand, does not, and when Heinrich presents this argument it sends Jack into a confusion that simmers throughout the remainder of the novel. Jack would like to think that the world is ordered, and the way that humans think is very organized and structured. Jack does not like hearing that the universe rests on chaos, or that he does not have control over his own thoughts.

Weinstein writes that Heinrich's language reflects the lack of guidance and control in the Gladneys' media controlled world while at the same time it threatens autonomy: "It's hard to imagine individual autonomy or dignity in this view of things, for the echoing, growling world out there continually noises its presence and power. And corresponding to this verbal, tonal bullying is an entire philosophy of the human being as automaton, as complex biotechnical entity ruled by forces unknown and ungovernable" (304). This part of the book hints at the chaos that will end the novel, and Weinstein's criticism focuses on the core of the differences between Heinrich and Jack. Heinrich knows that the world is not always a nice explainable formula, whereas Jack cannot understand that it is not. Jack is lost in the chaos attempting to understand it: Heinrich is also lost, but he does not attempt as hard as Jack to control it. Technology complicates this problem as it has had a seemingly positive influence on Jack's life but since Heinrich is old enough to be wary of it and to understand its dangers, the problem is not quite so serious for him.

Heinrich knows technology's dangers and its powers, and more importantly, he knows enough about the way his brain works to figure out that life is not like the technological process. When he tells his father that he cannot know if he wants to go to Montana, he is speaking to the man who relies entirely on media images and consumerism to make decisions for him. Jack's reasoning has been so influenced by the Friday ritual that when the toxic spill occurs his own common sense does not tell him to evacuate his home. It is Heinrich who knows the danger that surrounds him and his family.

Heinrich's character naturally challenges the themes of *White Noise* and "The Question Concerning Technology." Have we so allowed technology to control humans and nature that neither of them can succumb to its power? DeLillo clearly shows technology's dominance over nature in the beginning of Chapter 31 when he inserts the epigram, "CABLE HEALTH, CABLE WEATHER, CABLE NEWS, CABLE NATURE" (231). What is so frighteningly absurd here is that all of these elements (except CABLE NEWS) are natural, but are reproduced daily on television. Worse, most of these natural elements cannot be recreated, but they seemingly are. Moses argues that technology has so dominated those elements that were once unreproducible that they overstep modern society: "What cable television actually provides is only a representation of health, weather, news, and nature. But this is DeLillo's point: It is precisely by way of technology reducing nature to a postmodern simulacrum, 'CABLE NATURE,' that man assumes sovereignty over a reality that was once understood to transcend man himself" (64-5). Technology has so manipulated nature that it takes something that cannot be

reproduced and turns it into a simulacrum, and the television viewers may never know the difference.

Nature is not a commodity. It cannot be bargained for, nor can it be bought or exchanged. The consumer-driven world the Gladneys live in, however, attempts to show nature as something that can be bought, sold and traded. At the very least it can be viewed on television. We do not need to travel anywhere anymore, for we can get all that we need by turning to a cable station. DeLillo's brilliant commentary shows how technology, in an attempt to bring nature into people's living rooms, falsely reproduces nature. Because "CABLE NATURE" is a simulacra, cable companies want their clients to believe that they have the ability to bring elements of nature they would not normally see to their living rooms. Now that people can stay at home and commune with nature, there is no need for anyone to go outside at all, for home shopping stations allow the purchase of all the necessities (and non-necessities) people need without leaving their homes. DeLillo's postmodern world now consists of two characteristics: technology and consumerism. The more consumerism and home shopping expand, the less humankind needs nature. Murray tells Jack that technology is lust removed from nature, and this statement rings true with DeLillo's simple two word statement, "CABLE NATURE."

"Like other systems novelists, DeLillo recycles American waste into art to warn others against entropy, both thermodynamic and informational" (LeClair 212). This warning comes in the Gladneys' trash compactor. The simulacra of consumer culture comes to the fore when Jack is looking through his trash. As Jack opens up the bag he is surprised with what he finds: "The full stench hit me with shocking force. Was this ours?"

Did it belong to us? Had we created it?" (258). As he searches through the trash he asks a series of questions that reflect the unnatural world his family lives in. He also finds indicators that his culture has changed to one of representation, falsehood, and simulacra:

I picked through it item by item, mass by shapeless mass, wondering why I felt guilty, a violator of privacy, uncovering intimate and perhaps shameful secrets. Does it glow at the core with personal heat with signs of one's deepest nature, clues to secret yearnings, humiliating flaws? I found crayon drawings of a figure with full breasts and male genitals. There was a long piece of twine that contained a series of knots and loops. It seemed at first a random construction. Looking more closely I thought I detected a complex relationship between the size of the loops, the degree of the knots (single or double) and the intervals between geometry or symbolic festoon of obsessions. Was this the dark underside of consumer consciousness? (259)

At the base of the universe is chaos, and this is news to Jack. As he searches through his own trash, he cannot understand what he sees. Much like the novel's final scene, where Jack finds the supermarket's contents on different shelves, the ordered chaos of the ropes' knots makes him question the larger scale of his world. Consumerism and nature are perhaps best compared and contrasted in these two scenes, for Jack is perplexed by the chaos that orders the universe, whereas the chaos he finds in the supermarket is contrived to get consumers to visit parts of the store that they usually do not go to. Jack cannot understand the randomness of the knots, nor can he feel safe in the store when the products have been moved.

The drawing of the sexually ambiguous person is symbolic of the confusion brought on by changed "nature." Interestingly, it is difficult to imagine who could have drawn such a picture. Steffie, Denise, and Heinrich are all old enough to know the basic differences that separate males from females. Wilder, at the age of four, could not possibly

know enough of the differences between the sexes, so it is impossible for him to have drawn the picture. It is unlikely that Babette has drawn it, which can only mean that Steffie, Denise, or Heinrich has. To explore the possibility of who drew the picture is important, for it represents the changed nature that someone in this family may not know enough about the most basic structure of the human body, or is questioning the possibility that even nature is flawed in producing a person like this.

The strongest example of changed nature and the effects of technology on the Gladneys is Dylar. The use of Dylar comes from a natural fear, “that we are the highest form of life on earth, and yet ineffably sad because we know what no other animal knows, that we must die” (*White Noise* 99). It is natural to fear death, but as LeClair observes, death and disaster are cyclical: “This is the disastrous knowledge in the novel, arising from disaster and leading to it” (213). Babette’s experimentation with the drug reflects how technology has so superseded nature that a small white pill can eliminate the fear of death. That someone is attempting to make this drug, and that scientists have someone to test it on, demonstrate how unnatural postmodern America has become. There are other drugs to relieve varying phobias, and it is not surprising that someone would attempt to make a drug that would repress the fear of death, but the simple idea that someone is trying indicates that we have let technology have too much control over our lives.

Babette’s fear of death is not irrational, just excessive, but if we listen to Murray and his sometimes hypocritical philosophy, he would lead us to believe that death and the fear of it are unnatural. The conversation between Jack and Murray where Murray claims that fear is unnatural resonates throughout the remainder of the book, and at the same

time echoes "Waves and Radiation:" "Fear is unnatural. Lightning and thunder are unnatural. Pain, death, reality, these are unnatural. We can't bear these things as they are. So we resort to repression, compromise and disguise. This is how we survive in the universe. This is the natural language of the species" (289). This dialogue explains some of Jack's actions when he is not sure where he stands with technology. It also explains much of what Babette says when she tells Jack about her experimentation with Dylar.

In this same conversation, Jack is again confronted with the frightening idea that life is not an ordered, peaceful whole, one he will get through if he wears his dark glasses and his robe, speaks German, gains weight, and adds another letter to his name. By immersing himself in Hitler, a man immersed in massive death, Jack believes he can escape his own fears. Murray asks Jack, "do you believe life without death is somehow incomplete?" Jack replies, "how could it be incomplete? Death is what makes it incomplete" (284). The absurdity of this entire chapter is that Jack and Murray have so convinced themselves that death is unnatural that they somehow think they are immune to it. Murray thinks that he has beat the system by joining it, and Jack would like to believe that he also has, but because he knows he carries a nebulous mass inside him, he is forced to accept a possibly premature death.

Murray asks Jack, "Would you prefer to know the exact date and time of your death?" to which Jack replies, "Absolutely not. It's bad enough to face the unknown. Exact dates would drive many to suicide, if only to beat the system" (285). Jack is so influenced by technology, and is so content in his unnatural world, that he fails to realize that death is not a system. It is another unordered part of the world he cannot understand.

Death does not sit in a secure room in some far-off city like the machine that controls his ATM. Jack is rewarded by the ATM because it gives him a sense of self and importance. Because Jack's general account balance agrees with the ATM, he can rest easily. To know that he will die causes him unrest. He is not rewarded by nature, nor technology, and sees them as the antagonists that cause continual conflict in his life.

Death is natural, technology is not. For Murray, however, technology is nature. Murray's ideology is so jumbled that he cannot see through the manufactured images of Elvis and his dynamics of the car crash seminar to decipher what is real versus what is fake. He tells Jack, "You could put your faith in technology. It got you here, it can get you out" (285). The absurdity of this statement speaks for itself. Nature, not technology, put both Jack and Murray where they are. Murray's disillusioned prophecy continues: "It's what we invented to conceal the terrible secret of our decaying bodies. But it's life also, isn't it? Believe in it. They'll insert you in a gleaming tube, irradiate your body with the basic stuff of the universe. Light, energy, dreams. God's own goodness" (285). In the beginning of this speech, Murray does have a valid point. That people invented technology to "conceal the terrible secret of our decaying bodies" is, to a certain extent, true. His rhetoric is soon weakened, however, when he states that the universe is made of "basic stuff," and that "they" will actually have the power to hold some of the universe's "basic stuff" and God's power to put into Jack's body. As this conversation continues and Jack is influenced by Murray, it is not surprising that Jack believes he can fight off death with technology.

Babette's experimentation with Dylar best proves DeLillo's point that technology allows people to experiment with one of the inevitable events of human life: death. Jack and Babette continually have conversations about who wants die first, and when Babette can no longer handle her very natural fear, she turns to an experimental drug that enframes her as a resource for a technology that in theory alters her nature. Babette has convinced herself that she must not be allowed to die, so she turns to a doctor who convinces her he can alter the pituitary gland in the stem of her brain so as to lessen her fear of death. "Dylarama" powerfully and effectively delivers the idea that technology has so controlled people's lives that even physically strong people like Babette are scared of death. This fear causes her to turn to an unnatural process in an attempt to live a seemingly more natural life. Jack's description of her leaves DeLillo's readers wondering whether or not they too could suffer such a fear from a knowledge so common: "Babette is tall and fairly ample; there is a girth and heft to her. Size gives her tousled aspect a certain seriousness. They [ample women] lack the guile for conspiracies" (5).

We all know we are going to die, but Babette represents the small number of people who cannot deal with this fact and, who are so scared by it that they can think of nothing else. The fear of death leads Babette to become enframed in the technological process of finding a mind-altering drug that relieves her fear. By taking Dylar, Babette becomes a cog in the technological process. She has been enframed and is no longer an active participant in understanding her relationship with nature and technology. At the same time, she endangers her entire family by becoming a research tool and having an extra-marital affair in order to get the drug.

Babette is so troubled by her own dying that she puts her family at risk when she offers to be a guinea pig for the testing of Dylar. To begin, she is taking a drug that has not been in existence long enough to reveal any of its side effects. In addition, no one is supposed to know about the drug because there is not enough ethical or medical support to run the testing. Furthermore, Babette lies to everyone in her family about taking Dylar. Denise's prodding and threatening and Jack's questioning of Babette finally break her, and she tells Jack about Dylar. When she finally reveals her weakness, Jack learns that she has been unfaithful to him, thus opening up an entirely new world of dangers.

Everything about Dylar is unnatural, except, of course, for using Babette as a guinea pig, something Jack responds to with, "They let you go ahead, a human test animal" (193). Evidently, at least according to Jack, humans are more important than animals. His wording defines the separation between people and nature. Scientists have continually tested new products on animals, humans included, but Jack views himself as a creature who is above nature; otherwise he would not have used these words. To find out that someone you love has been unknowingly used as a guinea pig is terrible, but for Jack, that is not bad enough. Jack is upset that Babette has been reduced to the status of an animal.

"Dylarama," the third part of the book, with a title that mirrors the glorification of consumerism and media events, reflects back on Heinrich's claim to Jack that we are the sum of our firing neurons. As Jack and Babette discuss Dylar, it is technology's effects that make the two of them act the way they do. Babette states, "they can trace everything you say, do and feel to the number of molecules in a certain region" (200). If brain

science were this exact and physical, doctors and scientists would know a lot more than they do today. Once again, the vague terminology that Heinrich relies on in “Waves and Radiation” to tell him that it is supposed to rain surfaces with the first word Babette uses in this statement. Who are “they”? Are “they” scientists, doctors, researchers, the government officials who “managed” the airborne toxic event? Or are “they” the machine that gives Jack his checking account balance? Are “they” the people who actually get their information from machines and report it to the public? Jack and Babette want to be able to control everything that affects their lives. They want to live a life where they can distance themselves from disaster, but their fear of death leaves them feeling out of control and helpless.

Jack needs more concreteness than nature and technology can offer. He begins questioning Babette about how people will live in a natural world, in a world where the uncontrollable neurons in the human brain make decisions for us as they have for millions of years. Jack asks, “What happens to good and evil in this system? Passion, envy and hate? Do they become a tangle of neurons? Are you telling me that a whole tradition of human failings is now at an end, that cowardice, sadism, molestation are meaningless terms? What about murderous rage?” (200). Jack has listed some of the most basic of human emotions, and he is frightened by the possibility that just like the rope he finds in the trash and the changed grocery store shelves the world is full of chaos and that it is not his image, technology, consumerism, or Hitler studies that dictates his life. Jack and Babette’s entire lives are controlled by chaos, and they turn to Dylar in an attempt to control some of that chaos.

Dylar does not repress Babette's phobia. Dr. Gray tells Babette that she was not the right subject, that the order was too "random," and that he was too eager to make the project work. Despite Jack's statement to Babette that her fear of death is unreasonable, he suffers from the same phobia. Jack's only difference is that someone has confirmed for him that he is going to die. Regardless of whether or not Babette was the right "human test animal" or not, if technology is ever able to develop a drug that represses this fear, it will have gone even beyond what Heidegger warned his readers of. Creating a drug that represses the fear of death may seem logical, but it is unnatural. To have this drug would be the same as having a drug that would take away the fear that one would die a slow, painful death, or that one would not have enough money to live a happy life. The only "natural" action for Babette to take is to realize that everything dies, and that she is just one microcosm of the universe's chaotic order. She must do what everyone else must do—live every day as it comes.

Ironically, Dylar increases the fear of pain and death. It heightens exactly what it is supposed to suppress, so that, as Babette says, "I could not distinguish words from things, so that if someone said, 'speeding bullet,' I would fall to the floor and take cover" (193). Babette, Jack, and Mink cannot outsmart the one element that sets humans apart from all animals. Try as "they" might, to manufacture a simple little pill to be taken every 72 hours that will settle the most basic of human fears is idealistically unrealistic and unnatural. This ironic commentary of the drug enhancing what it is supposed to repress continues when Jack goes to kill Mink. Hitting him with a barrage of terms, Jack says,

“falling plane,” “hail of bullets,” and “fusillade” to reduce Mink to a paranoid state that heightens his fear of death so that Jack can kill him (309, 311).

Once Jack confronts Mink at the Roadway Motel, his conversations with Murray echo in his mind, and Jack moves even closer to death than being poisoned by Nyodene D. Of course Jack is hoping that he might be the right person to test Dylar, so while his main mission is to get some, it is also to confront the man who has had sex with his wife. After Mink shoots Jack, the world begins to “collapse inward,” much like the Dylar tablet does once it expels its contents (313). As Jack is standing in a seedy motel room with a bullet in his wrist, he is confronted with the reason why he went to the motel, to escape death. According to Weinstein, Jack’s not killing Mink, but instead taking him to the hospital is important, for: “Willie Mink is the living embodiment of white noise, the original generator of waves and rays, the source itself of the static and babble of technology that has punctuated this text in its choral refrains. Here there is light, and at last the murk of the human lifts, dissolves” (310). Ironically, when Jack shoots Mink, he begins to understand some of the natural elements of his world. He states, “I knew for the first time what rain really was. I knew what wet was. I understood the neurochemistry of my brain” (310). While he may now think he understands these basic, natural elements, Jack does not understand nature or technology any better than he did when he arrived at the Roadway Motel.

The idea behind manufacturing Dylar combined with the manipulation of technology and nature is better understood when it is related to Heidegger’s thoughts on the function of physics. Heidegger states that technology did not invent physics, but that

physics invented technology. It was the need for the calculations to figure out the scientific aspects of our discoveries that led to the need for physics. Physics deals with the natural elements of what is known, and technology deals with what is unnatural. Physics controls technology, not vice versa. Dylar, however, is an advanced drug that has been constructed as a result of physics. The knowledge of the human body combined with physics and the technology to manipulate what is known about the human body and physics allows the “invention” of such a drug.

Jack’s consultation with Winnie Richards reveals much of what Heidegger was referring to in respect to physics and nature. Of Dylar, Winnie says, “we’ve entered the realm of physics. Once the plastic membrane is reduced to microscopic particles, it passes harmlessly out of the body in the time-honored way” (188). The remains of a tablet, or anything else leaving the human body through “the time honored way” is not physics, but nature. Discarding waste is one action that all animals cannot stop. For Winnie to even suggest that the shell of the Dylar tablet leaves the body through some action of physics reflects what Heidegger says of the Cartesian way of thinking, that the human body was not created by science. Scientists and doctors can understand what goes on inside the body, but to think that the drug was developed the way it was because the human body has been reduced to a calculation further supports both DeLillo and Heidegger in their arguments on the nature of the human body and the power of placing it in standing-reserve. This dialogue between Winnie and Jack furthers DeLillo’s theme that technology is now more powerful than nature. It also proves that technology and physics are being

utilized to manipulate, as Heidegger would say, “a way to a means” instead of exploring the human body and determining how the pill would be expelled.

The novel’s most telling indicator of the changed nature of the novel’s characters is Murray’s statement that “it’s natural to deny our nature” (296). Whether the Gladneys are fighting death, toxic chemicals, or the influence of television, their nature has been challenged, and with the exception of Heinrich, no one in the Gladney family questions these changes, nor are they even aware that they exist. A compilation of statements and actions from Jack confirms Murray’s statement, and indicates, according to LeClair, that, “the nature of individuals is described and judged” (224). Jack states, “It was my nature to shelter loved ones from the truth,” something he attempts to do, but fails at throughout the novel (8). When Steffie volunteers as a victim for SIMUVAC after the airborne toxic event and Jack finds her lying in the street with fake cuts and bruises on her body, he states that she looks “natural” as a victim. Jack once describes Wilder as “selfish in a totally unbounded and natural way” (209). Quotations like these, and others from Jack and Murray, define the tone and “natural” theme of “Dylarama,” and for the novel overall. Jack thinks he is taking the natural course of life as he is raising his children, but he does not understand that he is only furthering the way for technology to replace nature.

The focus of LeClair’s book, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, is that the Gladneys exist as part of a series of loops that define the “systems” they live in. In postmodern America, birth, life, and death are the most primitive of loops, but because of technology, the loss of spatial boundaries, the simulacra, and the fight against the naturally chaotic world the Gladneys live in, their lives are continual, ever repeating loops. In the

last chapter of his book, "Closing the Loop," LeClair ends with the sentence, "if we will match our actions with our knowledge, as DeLillo does in his novels, contemporary and post-contemporary humankind could survive, head off personal and global self-destruction, prevent a final closing in the" (235).

Conclusion

PLEASE NOTE. In several days, your new automated banking card will arrive in the mail. If it is a red card with a silver stripe, your secret code will be the same as it is now. If it is a green card with a gray stripe, you must appear at your branch, with your card, to devise a new secret code. Codes based on birthdays are popular. **WARNING.** Do not write down your code. Do not carry your code on your person. **REMEMBER.** You cannot access your account unless your code is entered properly. Know your code. Reveal your code to no one. Only your code allows you to enter the system. (*White Noise* 294)

Jack and Babette do not have a code; Steffie, Denise, and Wilder do not have codes; even Heinrich does not have a code. Because almost none of *White Noise*'s characters have codes, they cannot enter the system of what has become natural. Jack cannot live the ordered randomness of the universe that has been recreated by the rearrangement of the supermarket shelves. Babette cannot escape the natural fear of dying. Denise, Steffie, and Wilder are driven by whatever the media tells them, as is indicated by their continual obsession with the media and their catching all the side effects from the airborne toxic event. Heinrich will perhaps remain the furthest from entering the system because he understands it better than anyone else. Despite the occasional lapses into the possibility of being controlled by technology, Heinrich has come of age in this

technological era, and unlike the rest of his family, he is insightful and cynical enough to be skeptical of what hears.

Murray is the only person who has entered the system. He completely and totally believes in technology and its effects. He feels that technology got him where he is, and that technology will be able to get him out of any natural complications that may befall him. He welcomes technological change and is completely absorbed by the media and its effects. In most of the novel's scenes, we find Murray in the supermarket taking notes about the dynamics of the products. When he approaches the Gladneys, he begins sniffing their groceries. Murray is fully aware that the nature of nature has changed, and he is monitoring it like an environmentalist studies animal life. He is not skeptical of the new nature, but he is getting to know it better. His curiosity about the numerous products that drive consumer capitalism and a woman with a snap-off crotch is the same type of curiosity and acceptance the Gladneys should have, but do not. The universe has been recreated in the supermarket because of the random chaos repeated by the store owners, and it is this chaos that Murray not only understands, but appreciates and honors.

DeLillo's postmodern twist of Murray's Elvis studies course based on Jack's Hitler studies program demonstrates Murray's "buy in" to an "unnatural" image as well as the technological control. Murray has no problems with accepting that in his media dominated world, the image is the person. The phrase "It's natural to deny our nature" applies to more than just separating ourselves from animals and living in a technologically controlled world. For Murray, it means denying who we are. The person he or she is does not matter, but the image of that person is what survives after death. It is the image

of Elvis and Hitler that help in part to remind people of who they were. That Hitler appears every night on television makes him a sick postmodern role model, for through the media, he is living despite his death. Hitler is doing what Jack will not be able to, but what he and Elvis can. Jack cannot accept this; Murray happily receives it. This is natural now.

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