

**TECHNOLOGICAL ANXIETY OF THE POSTMODERN  
WORLD: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *WHITE NOISE* AND  
*AMERICANA* BY DON DELILLO**



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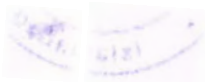
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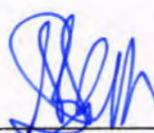
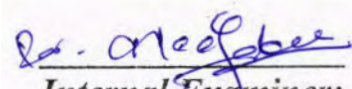
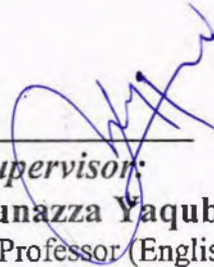
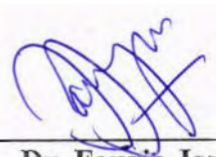
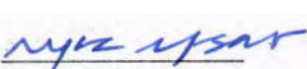
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***Dedicated to***

***Abu Jee and Amma***

***Whose affection, support, dedicated partnership and duas have  
enabled me to think, understand, express and believe in myself.***

## DECLARATION

I, Aniqaz Aziz D/O Muhammad Aziz Khan, Registration no. 236-FLL/MSENG/F11, student of MS, in the discipline of English Literature, hereby declare that the matter printed in the thesis "Technological Anxiety of the Postmodern World: A Critical Analysis of *White Noise* and *Americana* by Don DeLillo" submitted by me, in partial fulfilment of MS degree, is my original work and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in the future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

This work was carried out and completed at International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.



Signature of Deponent

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ANIQA AZIZ

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## ABSTRACT

Technological anxiety is a defining feature of the human existence in post modern world. Understanding the nature, causes and effects of this panic and anxiety is a priority. The present study examines the potential of technology to affect and alter important and meaningful aspects of human lives by delineating the paradigm which constitutes technology's essence in Delillo's selected fiction. The function and impacts of the 'device paradigm' have been closely scrutinized in different spheres like family life, religion, nature, work and employment as well as human psyche. The study also traces the undercurrents of panic, anxiety and paranoia by establishing and highlighting their intrinsic connection with technological life style. The framework for textual analysis is devised on the basis of Borgmann's theory of technology. Besides this, Melley's concepts of the 'agency panic' as well as Reisman's characterization of the human beings formulate the basis for textual analysis particularly for delineating the paranoid condition of human existence amidst technologies of numerous kinds. The research discovers that Delillo's world manifests a depletion of human agency and the prevalence of technological anxiety, attributed mainly to the technological way of life, operating as the 'device paradigm' in the selected fiction. The findings of the research also validate that an intelligent use of technology and a restoration of 'focal things and practices' can serve as a solution to the anxiety and fretfulness of technological life, creating a rich and valid way of tackling the threatening issues surrounding complex technologies.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Technology has long been a source of pride and superiority for the European and Euro-American nations. Writings on technology started in Aristotle's time, spreading out with the passage of time, especially in the seventeenth century due to industrial development. As technology diffused into different spheres of life, Modernism's belief in science and technology as a panacea and means of progress overwhelmed the society. These technological advancements have been accompanied by a great deal of convenience for the humanity in all spheres of life in terms of the reduction in the work time, effort and cost for the production of the material goods. However, since problems and potentials often go hand in hand, technology too is a queer thing. "History has shown that oftentimes technology creates as many problems as it solves" (Koukal 814).

The views on technology differ in many aspects expressed in the vast body of literature written on the topic. Some of the fiction writers like Bernard Asbell in *The New Improved American* (1963) and Erwin D. Canham in *Awakening: The World at Mid- Para Century* (1950) view technology in highly admiring terms, marking out its role in making the human life happier. In sharp contrast, some post modern theorists and writers are convinced of technology's negative potentials which is depicted in their literary works. Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society* (1964) and Stephen Hill's *The Tragedy of Technology* (1988) express the darker side of the picture, highlighting technology's negative

impacts like the environmental degradation and the growing passivity and dependence of the human beings. However, another facet of the viewpoints on technology i.e., its role as paradoxical one has been delineated by the writers like Langdon Winner (1994), denying any pure polemics regarding the role of technology and its impacts on the humanity (Mick & Fournier 124-125).

The Frankfurt school – Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and others termed the zenith of the Western Enlightenment in the early twentieth century as the domination of the technology over nature which ultimately leads to the domination of man over man. Martin Heidegger's opposition to technological domination of the world has been acknowledged by the leading theorists of post modernism including Michel Foucault and Jean Francois Lyotard. Exposing technology as fundamentally enframing, Heidegger renders it as contaminating man's authentic sense of being, pointed out in *The Question Concerning Technology* as

we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it (4).

Herbert Marcuse is of the opinion that technology restricts individuality and deprives the individuals of their dignity where the crowd reduces the individual to a "standardized subject of brute self- preservation" ("Some Social Implications of Modern Technology" 53). Timothy Melley describes this post modern condition

in terms of conspiracy thinking and paranoia. He focuses on the human restlessness and worry about the loss of authority and control, and the resulting anxiety which he terms as 'agency panic'. He takes a skeptic and paranoid stance against post modern technology, social systems and external agents. Portraying a crisis of human agency, identity and meta- narratives; Melley along with other sociologists and thinkers like Daniel Bell, David Reisman, Hofstadter and Lionel Trilling, believes that the traditional values of autonomy, individualism and rationality have been threatened by the corporate and consumer culture in America. Tracing the historical socio- economic periods, Reisman focuses on the 'other-directed' type of people, frequently present in the technological world. These people are influenced and shaped by powerful societal forces and include blind conformists who lack independent opinion and rational thinking. This passive conformity proves to be the biggest threat for the human agency, ultimately leading to anxiety and panic.

Contributing to the emerging philosophical discussions of the issues surrounding technology in the modern times, Albert Borgmann calls into question the technological shape and character of the everyday life. He employs Heideggerian notion of 'Gestell' to highlight the dangers of the commercial ways of thinking about technology. 'Gestell' is a view of technology as being fundamentally enframing where everything that exists in the world has been enframed and technology is not a means to an end but a mode of human existence. Borgmann's philosophy of technology expressed in his book, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), investigates the immensely felt frustration of the

people living in the technological world of the post modern times. Following a Heideggerian point of view, he establishes his theory of technology, highlighting the limitations and dangers surrounding it in the present era. It is based on the idea that there is an underlying pattern in the fabric of our society which manifests itself clearly in technological devices and expounds the beliefs, expectations, misunderstandings, discontents and anger of the present times, intrinsically linked with technology (3). He introduced the term 'Device Paradigm' in the philosophy of technology to explain the nature and strength of the technological devices and the humanity's reliance on them. Taking up the example of the distinction between the 'things' and 'focal practices', he delineates that our treatment of the technology as device endangers the 'focal things and practices' which according to Borgmann are meant to light up and center our lives (4). He employs these concepts to address deeper questions regarding the essence of technology such as "[i]s technology a powerful instrument in the service of our values, a force in its own right that threatens our essential welfare, or is there perhaps no clear problem of technology at all, merely an interplay of numerous and variable tendencies?" (15)

Borgmann employs a critical examination of the common world views about technology in order to expose its hidden mechanisms and impacts on humanity. He makes an effort to present a critique of the world citizenship of the present times in order to reveal its disparities and vulnerabilities, and to reinforce its most intense and pervading dreams (17). Focusing on different examples of the device paradigm, he highlights that instead of the ends, we are more inclined towards the

means in the form of technological devices leading to commodities. These illustrations have been employed to describe how happiness is in decline due to the instabilities discovered in technology. To rectify these circumstances, Borgmann recommends developing 'focal things and practices' which he thinks can help us devise and fulfill a reform of technology (155). Thus, the "affirmative and intelligent acceptance of technology" (247) is the solution proposed by Borgmann where focal practices can be seen to restore a meaning and integrity to our life by catering with the technological shallowness overpowering it at present.

Don DeLillo is a prolific American novelist who has devoted his works to portray the real gloomy side of the American life, depicting unusual skills of literary clairvoyance. The two novels considered in this thesis, *Americana* (1971) and *White Noise* (1985) deal with a particular set of concerns, affinities and sensibilities associated with the post modern world in the background of technological advancements, portraying the fears and dilemmas of the contemporary life. The shakes and shudders of the technological life style, the absurd and bizarre thrusts of the popular culture, and the constant murmuring and whispering of the uncanny devices are some of the characteristic features of his works which have been dealt with eerie foresight particularly in the selected novels. These are the spheres where DeLillo's depiction of the post modern era resonates with Borgmann's views about the technological world. The concepts and features of the 'device paradigm' have been employed as the basis of the literary investigation and analysis of the post modern condition in different spheres of life. To illustrate how DeLillo's world also delineates the psychological

dimensions of the post modern world, insights from the theoretical perspectives of Melley and Reisman have been borrowed. These standpoints reveal Delillo's novels in interesting dimensions by de-familiarizing the mindsets which facilitate the dominance of the device paradigm, combining the personal with the social. These intersections provide room for a profound and thoughtful assessment of the underlying patterns of post modern technological world and the issues significantly created by the dominance of technology.

### **1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In the post modern era, the everyday lives of people are highly influenced and shaped by technological artifacts and devices. These technologies do not only disengage humans from pre-technological ways of living but also infringe upon numerous meaningful aspects of human lives. The present study aims at investigating the paradigm on which the technological advancement in the post modern era rests and which forms the foundations of the prevalent anxiety of the post modern people. This is carried out by expanding upon Borgmann's view of the 'device paradigm', drawing attention to its implications in different arena of human life. Furthermore, it also analyzes how the feelings of individual agency have been undermined, amidst the 'other- directing' forces of technology and consumerism in the selected texts. Scrutinizing Borgmann's cautionary approach to technology, it also seeks to figure a way out from the present chaos and panic through an assessment of the relevance of 'focal things and practices' as a solution to the technological anxiety with reference to Delillo's fiction.



## 1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the research are:

- To analyze the influence of the technological life style in different spheres of life in *Americana* and *White Noise*.
- To point out the nature, causes and effects of technological anxiety in the background of the post modern world in terms of paranoia and agency panic.
- To carry out a detailed evaluation of the device paradigm operating in Delillo's selected fiction.
- To work out a solution of the anxiety and panic prevalent in technological world by focusing on the reform of technology through focal things and practices.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions guiding the present research are:

- How does the post modern existence embody the undercurrents of paranoia and agency panic in the selected fiction?
- How does the device paradigm established by Delillo influence, alter and shape human lives in the selected fiction?

- To what extent can the reform of technology via focal things and practices serve as a solution for the fretfulness and anxiety prevalent in the contemporary technological world delineated in the selected texts?

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The present research is significant as it deals with the issues surrounding the contemporary technologies and delineates its true nature operating in the post modern world. It also seeks to highlight the concealed fact that human happiness and dignity is in decline in relation to the technology's role in the contemporary world, as portrayed by Delillo in *White Noise* and *Americana*.

Analyzing the author's selected works in the technological context of practical and concrete realities, does not only provide an insightful evaluation and illustration of the deep recesses of post modern world but also adds significantly to the emerging critical discourse on the matter. Rather than presenting an abstract account of the technological society, this study helps to assess the post modern condition at a deeper level, both in the personal and societal realms. Thus re-mediating the selected works in the platform devised on the basis of Borgmann's theory of technology as well as the theoretical perspectives of Melley and Reisman, does not only dispel misconceptions about technology's role by delineating its true nature in the post modern world but will also lead to a scholarly discussion towards a way out from the present chaos of technology, disavowing the notion of passive spectatorship.

## 1.5 METHODOLOGY

The research is primarily a qualitative and analytic study. The genre of the narratives chosen for the study is fiction and the sample consists of the texts of two novels, *White Noise* (1985) and *Americana* (1971) by Delillo.

The theoretical framework for the research has been devised primarily on the basis of Borgmann's theory of technology. Following a Heideggerian point of view, Borgmann presented the notion of the 'device paradigm' to describe the nature and functioning of the technological devices operating in our world. He recommends a restoration of the 'focal things and practices' in order to deal effectively with the mitigating tendencies of technology and the corresponding anxiety. These two theoretical notions constitute the framework for the analysis of the selected fiction. In addition to Borgmann's theory, the theoretical positions of Melley, particularly his concepts of 'agency panic' and 'the post modern transference' are employed in the research to de-familiarize the exploitative tendencies and numbing effects of the technological way of life. Besides this, to assess the forces undermining human agency and the influences leading the characters to anxiety, Reisman's characterization of human beings, especially his insights on the 'other-directed' type of people, have been employed to analyze the selected texts.

Using these notions, links and strategies in the framework for analysis, the selected novels are analyzed in two chapters. The first chapter of analysis i.e., chapter 3 focuses on revealing the nature of technological anxiety prevalent in

Delillo's fiction by approaching it through Melley's 'agency panic'. For this purpose, a detailed scrutiny of the characters and their life styles in both the narratives is carried out, highlighting how the invasion of technologies and the corresponding systems lead the characters to paranoia and anxiety. This chapter also elucidates how human agency has been transferred to systems and devices which is carried out in the backdrop of 'the post modern transference' as well as the 'other- directing' influences in the novels. This serves the basis of establishing the relationship between technological way of life and the prevalent anxiety faced by the inhabitants of the post modern world.

In accordance with the features of the 'device paradigm' outlined by Borgmann, the analysis in chapter 4 is based on an investigation of the nature and characteristics of the paradigm operating in Delillo's technological world. This section also explores the relevance and applicability of the 'focal things and practices' as a solution to the anxiety and paranoia of technological world. To carry out these two steps of analysis, this chapter firstly identifies the distinction between 'things' and 'devices' and highlights the features of technological availability in the selected fiction, which form the basis of Borgmann's stance. Besides, a critical study and examination of the family lives, the status of nature and religion, the nature of work and employment, and the psychological lives of characters, is carried out systematically in this chapter by applying the features of the 'device paradigm' in these spheres of life.

After an analysis of the selected texts according to the theoretical framework devised for research; the major findings of the research, their qualitative

explanation, recommendations for future study and conclusion are presented in the last chapter.

Borgmann's *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), along with Melley's *The Empire of Conspiracy* (2000) and Reisman's *The Lonely Cloud* (1969) have been employed to develop the theoretical framework of the study. These books along with the selected novels are the primary sources of data collection whereas the secondary sources comprise of journal articles, books of criticism and reviews.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to the status of technology with particular reference to Borgmann's Theory of Technology in order to establish the conceptual background and theoretical framework of the study. It is divided into three main sections. The first section deals with the character and role of technology in the post modern era and the notion of technological anxiety, particularly focusing on Melley's concept of 'agency panic' as well as Reisman's characterization of human beings. These theoretical perspectives are valuable tools to illuminate the nature of technological anxiety in the post modern world. Since Borgmann's theory of technology is primarily devoted to the device paradigm, the second section throws light on the concept of the 'device paradigm' as technology's essence in the post modern era of dynamic changes. It delineates the features of the device paradigm and the impacts of technology in four major dimensions namely work, family relations, nature as well as religion and morality. The third and final section outlines and summarizes the concepts of the reform of technology with particular emphasis on 'focal things and practices'.

#### **2.1 TECHNOLOGY AND THE POST MODERN ERA**

Technology is the fundamental element of modernity and post modernity (Mick and Fournier 124). Generally, the change from modernity to post modernity is attributed to technological revolution, transforming the industrial world into an information technology society especially after the Second World War. In the post modern era, technology is not restricted only to machines. It is the pervading and

complex system whose features are evident in political, social, cultural and intellectual aspects of human lives (Teich 1).

The humanity has always shown an ambivalent attitude towards technology. While the technological advancements and developments were viewed as a success of mankind by the Enlightenment philosophers, strongest oppositions to technology have also been put forward in a series of literary productions from Stephen Hill's *The Tragedy of Technology* (1988) to Wendell Berry's *The Art of the Commonplace* (2002). Hence, despite the undeniable advantages and conveniences given by different technologies, one of the most defining features of the human life in technological world is the anxiety experienced with reference to technology. The cultural critics, such as Melley, indicate anxiety and paranoia as the dominant epistemology of our times. Christopher A. Sims refers to technology anxiety as the uncertainty and uneasiness characterizing humans in the technologically advanced societies which is an essential part of their psychological lives (2-3). According to Scott Bukatman, technology anxiety is nothing new. Technology always creates instability and drastic changes in culture and social life. However, the effects are higher than ever for the technologies of the twentieth century (4).

The anxiety and pessimism in the technological world is so deep-rooted in the fabric of society that from Fredric Jameson's concept of ahistoricism in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, to Jean Baudrillard's idea of hyper-reality in *Simulacra and Simulations*, the post modern thinkers have attempted to give meaning to human existence in an age of chaos and paranoia. Moky et al. in their

seminal essay, “The History of Technological Anxiety and the Future of Economic Growth: Is This Time Different?” divide technological anxiety into three main types. The first type of anxiety originates from the belief that the enormous amount of productivity and yield enabled through technology have already been completely used up. Since this consummation could only be attained once, the rate of economic productivity will eventually decline. This anxiety is recognizable in a number of writings, Vijg, 2011; Cowen, 2010; Gordon, 2012. A second kind of anxiety is an exactly opposite tendency to the first one. The use of machines, robots and other technologies have caused a manifold increase in the rate of productivity, leading to ‘technological unemployment’ and eventually, inequality in the society. The third type of technological anxiety, however, is a general one and is associated with the moral consequences of technology regarding the well-being, security and happiness of the human beings. It particularly deals with the dehumanizing effects of technology (32). Since the first two types of technological anxiety are related particularly to economy, it is the third type of anxiety that will be dealt with in the present research through the lens of Melley’s theoretical perspectives of ‘agency panic’ as well as Borgmann’s ‘device paradigm’.

The dominant web of numerous anxieties in the post modern era regarding technologies, media and communication systems as well as social and corporate organizations are often expressed through conspiracy theory and paranoia as claimed by Melley in *Empire of Conspiracy*. It articulates fears about altering technological and societal circumstances as well as recent ideas about subjectivity



of human beings (44). However, creating his own brand of this anxiety and fear, Melley employs the term 'agency panic' to refer to "intense anxiety about an apparent loss of autonomy or self- control, the conviction that one's actions are being controlled by someone else, that one has been "constructed" by powerful external agents"(12). Generally, the agency panic has two features. Its first feature is "a nervousness or uncertainty about the causes of individual action" (12) where people are surrounded by a fear that they have been controlled through brain-washing or programming by strong powers like different agencies, technology, media, corporations and other dominant structures. In this case, people are subjects acting on a pre-written manuscript prepared by someone else and they are given their characteristic features by outside controls who actually manipulate them. Hence, the first feature of agency panic mainly concerns anxiety about human autonomy whereas the other is a "sense that controlling organizations are themselves agents" (12) which work to execute complicated agendas and schemes, and include proper organizations as well as scattered systems. While experiencing agency panic, people ascribe the characteristics like uniqueness, agency and intention to these systems which they believe have been drained of themselves. This is termed as "*a post modern transference* in which social regulation seems to be the intentional product of a single consciousness or a monolithic "will" " (13, emphasis in original). Hence, Melley upholds an "all-or-nothing conception of agency" (10) where agency is viewed as an asset, transferred either to other human beings or to different systems. Agency panic,

therefore, threatens a person's sense of independence, freedom and security; breeding anxieties of numerous forms.

Several of the Melley's views of agency panic are based on the sociological studies conducted by Reisman. Exploring the influence of social structuring and re-structuring on the individual, Reisman et al. argue that the society which is in a constant state of flux has a deep relation with the type of social spirit and temperament it creates (6). Choosing the relationship between "the population growth of a society and the historical sequence of character types" (7) as the foundation of his studies, Reisman identifies three broad categories of individuals living in the United States. This division focuses primarily on the correlation of the conformity needs exerted by the society to the larger social contexts of people living in it. It divides human beings into three categories namely the 'tradition-directed', 'inner-directed' and the 'other-directed' people (7-9).

The tradition-directed people follow the rules and regulations, and are shaped and influenced by firm customs, manners and socialization. The birth and death rates are high in a tradition-directed society and the mode of conformity its people manifest is maintained through the division of society based on castes, clans and work professions. Thus the people have well-established functional and communal relationship with each other, making them socially acceptable. One of the examples of such a society is the Middle Ages (400-1500) society of the Western Europe.

The population increased rapidly between 1650 and 1900 in Europe. The decline in mortality rate occurred because of better agriculture, communication, transport

and sanitation as well as a decline in different forms of violence. Hence, due to increased mobility, people found the potential within themselves to challenge the established norms and customary ways of living. The resulting human beings were less conformists and more motivated to live their lives using their inner gyroscope. They follow what they learn from parents in childhood and form new directions for their children.

After the Industrial Revolution in America, the new middle class developed a gradual change in the way people lived with each other in society. Instead of living according to the family, religious or social codes; the increasing tendency to consumerism perpetuated a culture of conditioning where the direction comes from friends, media and the peer- groups. Thus, the 'other- directed' people in such societies exhibit a sense of insecurity as they lack confidence, doubt their ability to make decisions and constantly need the approval from others. This way of taking direction from the society is termed as 'other- direction' by Reisman and this type of people appears in the societies operating in the phase of incipient decline, possessing huge capital and technological development (10-25).

As noted by Wilfred M. McClay, the main argument in *The Lonely Crowd* is that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the society has greatly changed for Americans as a result of deterioration in fertility rates and the flourishing of consumption. This was basically a change from the 'inner- directed' persons who were self- dependent and determined, and spent their lives in the light of principles given by their parents – to the 'other- directed' type of people who depended heavily on the directions of others to lead their lives (36-37). Therefore, the paranoia and anxiety

in the post modern world originates from the people being 'other- directed', posing a threat to the agency of individual, and consequently turning out as the main cause of agency panic.

William Palmer highlights that the three peculiar kinds of societies mentioned by Frank Notestein have been closely adapted by Reisman. The societies exhibiting high birth rates and high death rates have been described as possessing "high growth potential" when the death rate declines. Secondly, Notestein mentions the societies in which the death rate has become low, ensuring population growth and he regards them as societies of "transitional growth". Thirdly, he designates the societies which have passed both these phases as embracing a period of "incipient decline" (20). It is in this period of the incipient decline that Reisman's 'other-directed' people reside and their anxieties reflect "a crisis in recent conceptions of personhood and human agency" as mentioned by Melley (14).

Turning towards the social foundations of paranoia in the post modern era, Borgmann points out the uncritical adoption of technologies in society and its fundamental operating pattern which has given rise to technology anxiety. He is more concerned with the effects of the excessive and unintelligent use of technology on the society in terms of its psychological and societal dimensions. Defining technology as the characteristic way we engage with the world, Borgmann highlights that the technological devices destroy the unified and engaging character of the pre technological world of things (*TCCL* 47). According to Borgmann, technology is so deeply rooted in our society that it is not offered to us as a choice but becomes a basis for other choices. It is grounded subtly into the

goals and aspirations of our economic reality. Technology has designed the life in such a manner that our life style is determined by consumptive intent and potentiality which is driven by advertisement. Since the pattern of technology poses a specific vision of good life, it also shapes the political system and social order. It causes a political numbing effect where we remain disconnected with civic responsibility except where the technological machinery is likely to break down. Technology has also casted a deteriorating and dulling effect on the character of work and labor by splitting it into the realms of production and commodity. Consequently, we are satisfied to bear the degradation of work and social injustice for the technological promise of liberation. Hence, the brilliant goal of technology, i.e., of attaining happiness, has remained unfulfilled even after two centuries of massive efforts. It poses a question to the desire of promoting technology because happiness is in decline and anxiety is what reigns supreme in the technological world (124-131). Thus, Borgmann views the role played by technology as responsible for the shape our world has assumed over last decades as the promise of technology has actively nourished the huge persistent efforts which have given our time its character (35). Thus, far from being neutral, technology is the key force shaping human life on the earth.

In opposition to the concept of the neutrality of technology propounded by Marcuse (*An Essay on Liberation*), Peter- Paul Verbeek also puts forward the idea that technological objects strongly influence and determine the thinking, actions, experience and existence of people in the world ("Materializing Morality" 364). This makes his position similar to that of Borgmann. Besides, as highlighted by

Verbeek; Latour and Akrich use the term 'script' to describe the influence of artifacts on human actions and activities. In the manner of the script of a theatre play or a movie, devices and artifacts direct their users how to use them (366). Mario Bunge also strongly rejects the idea of the role of technology in the post modern era as neutral. In "Philosophical Inputs and Outputs of Technology", he describes that technology is actively involved with ethics and morality, and sways back and forth between good and evil (172).

Critique and accusations regarding the role of technology were diverse and manifold which adheres to the basic stance given by Borgmann in his theory of technology as well as Melley's conception of the technological world. Marxism views technology as one of the main driving forces behind contemporary capitalism which derives its power to control human minds and societies through establishing a unity with capitalism and this is termed by Douglas Kellner as 'techno-capitalism'. In his book, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, he mentions that this alliance makes efforts to dominate new technologies in the interest of corporate monopoly and benefit (182). Marcuse also views technology and the capitalist relations helping each other. As observed by Kellner regarding Marcuse's analysis, Capitalist imperatives and technological rationality help shape and support each other (196).

In the most severe form of critique, technology has been regarded as devastating, intrusive and dehumanizing by numerous critics particularly in the post modern era. In this regard, Borgmann's theory of technology also resonates with Berry's views that hold technology responsible for the degradation of society. He argues

that although technology has highly designed patterns of quantity, quality and effectiveness, it possesses at the same time, highly negative potentials. Technology contributed to the degradation of society as well as the environment where the humans live (*The Art of The Common Place*). Samuel Florman's views presented in "Technology and the Tragic View" also bear affinity to Borgmann's stance. He regards the deterioration of human beings and their world a consequence of the technological endeavors. With reference to his research of the history, he delineates that every technological development and progress had disastrous and unwanted side effects too. Each conquest made in the technological realm brought with it inescapable proportion of death, suffering and devastation (39).

## **2.2 THE DEVICE PARADIGM**

Contributing to the emerging philosophical discussions of the issues surrounding technology in the modern times, Borgmann calls into question the technological shape and character of the everyday life. He introduced the term 'device paradigm' in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984) to show that there is an underlying representative pattern characterizing our lives, evident in the devices and procedures of the technological world. The device paradigm denotes this repeated pattern underlying technology as a whole in the technologically developed societies of the world. It demonstrates the disastrous consequences and unpleasant outcomes of the excessive use of technological devices (Strong and Higgs 27). Besides, it also explains the prevalent hostility and anxiety resulting from the hindrance posed by technologies to people in

expressing their principles through action. This is mainly because the expressive features of their actions are mixed and blended in the devices they use (Tatum 70).

The device paradigm, also referred to as the framework of technology, is rooted in Heidegger's views about technology particularly his notion of 'Gestell'. The term *gestell*, meaning 'enframing', was employed by Heidegger to explain the essence of technology. He proposed that technology is fundamentally enframing. It implies that everything which exists in the world requires an enframing first, a way to have existence in the world. Heidegger writes,

[e]nframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological (*The Question Concerning Technology* 20).

The device paradigm is a more active and well developed specification of Heidegger's notion of *gestell*. However, Borgmann's theory has moved and shifted the concept of things in Heidegger's philosophy where it was related to the question of being, towards the special things in our life (Strong and Higgs 25- 26). The most substantial feature of the device paradigm is the distinction between 'things' and 'devices' which is reflected in the means-end separation. From the Industrial Revolution onwards, our world has been changed from the one dominated by things to the one controlled by devices as highlighted by Strong and Higgs (*Technology and the Good Life?* 28). A 'thing' is never detachable from its



context, requires an active engagement of mind and body, and provides multiple commodities. For example, a thing like a wood burning stove does not only provide warmth rather it is a focus and a centering force in the house. It keeps the family members connected and provides bodily engagement which involves learning and passing on of skills. Skill is then involved with specific social contexts. These contexts of things can be seen in meals and in the celebration of major events of life like birth, marriage and death. A 'device', in contrast, provides a good without the world of relationships that exists with things. It provides a single commodity without context and engagement, and works with hidden internal machinery. It does not require any skill, capability or attention. These features of device can be traced in a central heating system which ensures the commodious availability of heat. Other examples include telephone producing communication and frozen food making up a meal (41-42).

Borgmann's distinction between the contextual things and non-contextual devices also echoes in Heidegger's distinction between modern technological enframing and the gathering power of traditional production of craft which brings people and nature close (Feenberg, "From Essentialism to Constructivism" 299). This philosophy of the distinction between things and devices has been employed and elaborated in the works of different critics and theorists including Cochran (2011), Tatum (1994), Verbeek (2002), Heikero (2005), Mullis (2013), Strong and Higgs (2000).

The validity of the division of things and devices in the device paradigm given by Borgmann has been doubted in "Technology and Values: Getting beyond the

“Device Paradigm” Impasse”. Tatum explains that since humans have a complex relationship with technology, an ‘unequivocal categorization’ of technologies as done by Borgmann does not suffice to explain their situation. An auto mobile or a bicycle could act as a thing or a device based on the relationship of humans with it. He suggests that the distinction between things and devices should not be based exclusively on technology. Rather the nature of association humans have with technology and the nature of the choices they make on how to use technology should serve as a basis to decide if an entity is to be considered a thing or a device (73).

The central insight in the device paradigm is the means-ends distinction i.e., the split of means and ends into ‘mere means’ and ‘mere ends’ by devices, which are brought together and united in things (Strong and Higgs 29). Practically, the ends (e.g., Warmth in case of the central heating system) are stable whereas the means can be changed in many ways to improve the procurement of commodities. This helps to put the means in background through opaque machinery of device where only the ends in the form of commodities remain prominent. Thus disburdenment, anonymity and commoditization of various goods are yielded by devices through means- ends distinction which is a defining feature of the device paradigm (43-44).

Eric Mullis applies the notion of the device paradigm to dance performance specifically to Chunky Move’s *Glow* (2006) which employed interactive imagery developed by Frieder Weiss. Mullis describes how non- contextual devices are employed to present a dramatic end without showing the means. This is made

available by highly complicated and active devices which are all about product and the machinery of digital technology is concealed in the background. Thus, Weiss's interactive platform presented dance movements and light as a perceptually abounding end in association with society's massive consumption of commodities as end products of devices. This is an illustration of the means- ends distinction as highlighted by Borgmann (111-117).

Borgmann claims that availability is a major part of technology. The mode of technological availability has rendered the goods "instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe and easy" which is a hallmark of the device paradigm (*TCCL* 41). However, this kind of availability has been achieved through paying a high price for it. Tatum highlights that when the whole focus is placed on commodious availability and on removing all connection with the device's mechanism, as in the technological devices, associated human qualities and values move into the background (75). Apart from Tatum, Berry also highly criticizes the greatly developed patterns of efficiency and quantity depicted in the technological development as he believes that this progress has resulted in environmental and social deterioration. After multiple generations of progress in technology, we have turned out to be people who have neglected everything important in life (*The Art of The Common Place* 72).

Similar to Borgmann's description of the characteristics of technological availability, George Ritzer in *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life* hints at the malicious and ever growing phenomenon of 'McDonaldization' which is not simply a

restaurant business but shapes a wide range of social contexts like higher education, health sector and work place. Having technological changes as one of the driving forces in its background, McDonaldization embodies all the features of technological availability highlighted by Borgmann. It is based on four interrelated principles including certainty, efficiency, calculability and control (qtd. in Mohamed Zayani 628).

The concept of engagement- disengagement is a principle attribute and distinguishing aspect of the device paradigm where a device procures a good without the engagement of people and the complex web of relationships which exists with things, ensuring a commodious availability of goods and services in a non- burdensome way (Heikkero; Borgmann). With a tendency to become hidden or opaque to the human beings, the machinery of a device does not require our proficiency, power or concentration (Borgmann, *TCCL* 42).

Verbeek diagnoses the ambiguity embedded in Borgmann's concept of engagement. Although in some ways, his position can be regarded as an extension of the classical philosophy of technology in terms of the positions of Heidegger, Jaspers and Ellul regarding the 'thesis of alienation' where technology would alienate humans from reality, yet Borgmann's concept of engagement undergoes a shift in meaning. Borgmann proposes that technological devices minimize the engagement of people with reality as they are primarily based on consumption. This engagement can be recovered when people get involved with focal things and practices. The point Verbeek highlights is that the engagement lost due to the use of technology is totally different from the one gained by virtue of focal things

and practices. The former is based upon exertion and the activities people had to do in the pre technological setting whereas the latter is concerned mainly with meaningfulness and orientation of life, and does not necessarily involve all dimensions of things. Thus, highlighting the difference between an approach to technology firstly, in terms of the 'reduction of exertion' and secondly, as the potential of people to spend a 'meaningful life', Verbeek criticizes Borgmann for shifting from the first meaning to the second in his portrayal of the device paradigm ("Devices of Engagement" 75-78).

John C. Cochran also questions Borgmann's characterization of modern technology as disengaging due to the means- ends separation which he opines is not always the case by giving the example of Tatum's Home Power Movement. It is a home electric power generation system made up of over 40,000 home owners who have made their own electric power generation systems. Most of them are not linked to the electric utility grid. It is based on the practice of engagement, escaping from the device paradigm and countering its disengaging qualities. Besides, the participants in the DIY movement like the groups behind 'NYC Resistor' and 'Make Magazine' also demonstrate a resistance to the disengaging devices of the modern times. The DIY (do it yourself) movement which was initiated in America during the 50s is a community- based effort to engage with technology and understand it in a better way. Moreover, Cochran also questions the dualistic categorization of devices as 'engaging' and 'disengaging' presented by Borgmann, emphasizing that the error does not lie with the devices themselves but is based upon the human inclination and adjustment with the design of

modern technologies. Since one's orientation towards reality shapes technology and the technological devices in turn also affect orientation, the problem of technology is based upon orientation and is not inherent with the technological devices. Thus, he regards this binary division of devices as a mischaracterization of the problem of modern technology as a problem with devices (16-25).

The German social theorist, Jurgen Habermas suggests that we can examine and make comparison among societies by observing their notion and approach to work (qtd. in Borgmann, *TCCL* 98). Labor and leisure are associated with the device paradigm through a strong connection. The division between labor and leisure, in Borgmann's device paradigm, depicts the split between machinery and commodity in the technological world. Leisure is based on the consumption of commodities and labor is composed of the development and usage of the machinery for the production of commodities. In the realm of technology, work has been reduced to mere means which has led to a degradation of the work. Consequently, liberation has slowly led to disengagement and enrichment has been displaced by distraction (114-118). Andrew Feenberg points out that this binary division represented in labor of the device paradigm also resonates with Heidegger's dualism of device and meaning. Besides, it is also structurally similar to Habermas's distinction of work and interaction ("From Essentialism to Constructivism" 299).

Giving the issue of technology and labor a slightly different dimension, Berry in *The Art of The Common Place* (2002) describes another division which created the destructive tendencies of the industrial age i.e., a split and divorce in economy

between production and consumption where the producers target at selling as much as they can and the focus of the consumers is to buy as much as possible (246). Presenting a critique of the oppressiveness of workplace in technological society, Berry highlights the specialization, deterioration, trivialization, and oppression of work dominating the masses (70). Berry's stance supports Borgmann's position on the device paradigm concerning the mindless consumption of commodities in an attempt to fill the emptiness created by the technological dominance. Borgmann mentions,

when the substructure of a society is transformed according to the device paradigm, social morality can shrink to the acceptance of the paradigm, the willingness to labor and to respect the demands of the technological machinery; and private morality is conflated with the liberty to consume whatever commodities are procured by the machinery (*TCCL* 141).

A culture of consumerism and commodity fetishism illustrates the most important losses embedded in the device paradigm and the technological society (Borgmann; Tatum; Marcuse). Commenting on the availability of commodities procured through devices, Borgmann criticizes its essence of using up and consuming a context less entity without effort, character and outcome. He also critically delineates the role of advertising in this regard i.e., of regulating the consumer culture by not allowing an insight into the substructure of technological commodities which have opaque surfaces to attract people. Advertising abstains largely from entering the technological background and from offering scrutiny and arguments which presuppose and demonstrate expertise (*TCCL* 51-53). In

“Advertising, Needs, and ‘Commodity Fetishism’ ”, Kline and Leiss too, elucidate the nature of commodities and the role of advertising as mentioned by Borgmann. Due to the growing confusion and intrinsic nature of advertising, commodity turns into a ‘projective field’ in which human feelings attainable in consumption are flexibly placed over the “non- human, physical- sensory aspects of the commodity”. The cover of the fetishized commodity which has induced the attributes of human contentment has become like a mirror, returning the indefinite and misleading images of well- being which are to be attained in the consumption of commodities (17-18).

Borgmann (*Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*) and Marcuse (*One- Dimensional Man*) both elucidate how wants and needs are created in technological societies, leading to an urge of buying different commodities which consequently flourishes the consumer culture. Expounding the features of the device paradigm by employing a cartoon where a woman stands with a shelf of frozen dinners in supermarket, Borgmann notes how the advertisement engages us by remaining within the paradigm of reality, depicting the abundance and variety of the associated commodities, and paves the way to create the necessary demand for consumer supplies (*TCCL* 51-52). Marcuse too criticizes the phenomenon by regarding the needs to buy commodities as ‘false needs’ and elaborates that even when such needs have become a person’s own, strengthened by the conditions of his living where he relates himself with them and gets contentment in them, they still remain with their status as products of a society whose dominant interest necessitates suppression (*One- Dimensional Man* 5). Besides, Berry also presents



a critique of technological society where we are unable to differentiate between our needs and our wants which he calls 'an educated confusion' as young people are supported to think of their wants as needs (*Citizenship Papers* 35).

Tracing the impact of commodities provided through various technological devices, Borgmann hints at the creation of a greatly specialized hyper reality which prevails over and replaces the reality. He divides hyper reality into two categories. The first is the 'instrumental hyper reality' which consists of an imaginary world like the one constructed by telecommunication technologies including fax machines, phones and computers. The second category of hyper reality is 'final hyper reality' which is not- yet fully realized hyper real world where we live and it involves all our senses. Hyper reality replaces physical reality because it is brilliant, rich and flexible (*Crossing the Post Modern Divide* 82-97). This account of hyper reality given by Borgmann is a further extension and exploration of the notion of 'hyper reality' propounded by Baudrillard. He proposed it as a feature of the post modern era resulting from the dominance of technology especially the mass media whose representations of the imitations of reality are given more credibility than the realities they are meant to imitate (*Simulacra and Simulations*).

The psychological dimension of the device paradigm and the impact of technological world on human consciousness have been traced by a number of theorists and critics (Borgmann; Marcuse). Borgmann, in his concepts of the device paradigm, highlights the establishment of a mindset and a conceptual agenda which enables technology to work. This peculiar way of thinking makes it

possible to deal in a technological way with the substantial limits to growth and offers the rhetoric to make the technological solutions extensively perceivable and acceptable (*TCCL* 147).

Marcuse's philosophy of technological rationality, presented in "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology", have areas of overlapping agreement with Borgmann's device paradigm. He highlights that technological rationality dissolves critical thinking where it is replaced with an efficiency based on compromise and adaptation. The authority and independence of reason is lost in the same way as emotions, ideas and activities are devised and controlled by the technical necessities of the machines and devices. Reason has lost its meaning in the system of uniform manufacturing, control and consumption (49). This extenuating role of technology has also been delineated in Georg Lukacs's theory of reification. He describes the phenomenon of controlling mind and body by different agencies at work in modern societies where commodity fetishism, mass media, bureaucracy and market capitalism as well as science and technology strive to flourish conformist beliefs, thinking patterns and behaviors in which human liberty and individuality are uprooted (Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* 40).

The primary domain of the pre technological life that underwent deterioration and downfall was the household and family (Borgmann *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*; Lasch *Haven in a Heartless World*). With the establishment of the technological machinery which promised liberation, the household chores were given up and yielded to the technology which changed the

roles of house wives as their burdens of work were lifted. The family was turned into a mere place of consumption, not requiring any discipline or skill and consequently creating a sense of emptiness. The family which was a place of nourishment, education, training, guidance and entertainment; ensuring the union of affection and discipline, underwent a severe decay in the device paradigm. Thus, in the device paradigm, the family was reduced to less than the household and the interest of the masses as well as scholars shrunk from the family to marriage and ultimately to companionship (*TCCL* 136-137).

Like Borgmann, Marcuse in "Some Implications of Modern Technology" holds technology responsible for affecting different social relationships. Technology in the machine age, including different devices, instruments and artifacts and through its numerous mechanisms; does not only shape societies but also tends to affect and rearrange different communal relationships. It signifies an expansion of the dominant mode of thinking and forms of behavior as well as a means of exercising power and control (41).

Elucidating the role of television as an important and dominant technology, Cecilia Tichi also brings to light how it changes and shapes our relationships to the world of nature around us. "We experience in its terms, begin to live in reference to it, and ratify experiences in terms of its on- screen simulation" (152). Moreover, Berry is also inclined to expound the negative impacts of technology on family ties and other social relations as he mentions that after a long way of technological progress we, the humans, have become ones unable to think about anything of importance. Commenting on the negligence exercised by parents in

bringing up their children of technological world, he mentions that technology has shaped human lives and family relations in such a manner that we have become indifferent to our roles and responsibilities towards different family members. Getting trapped in the aura of technological devices, we exhibit a great deal of capriciousness and indifference in bringing up our children. This has made the family ties weak and brought us down in the natural order of creatures (*The Art of The Common Place* 72).

Borgmann's conception of the technological world also presents severe critique on the role technology has played in giving women their place in the present world which is different from that in the pre-technological societies. The household was previously supervised by women as they performed tasks in the house that were important for the well being of the family. However, in the twentieth century, the household was decreased merely to a place for the consumption of commodities. This degraded the status of women and left them as supervisors of consumption. Today a housewife has, according to Borgmann, 'the worst of two worlds'. Her position is doubtful, if not worthless, in the technological society as she is mostly restricted to the realm of technological ends, consumption and commodity (*TCCL* 138-139).

Regarding the issue of the impact of technology on women, Berry in *The Art of The Common Place* also criticizes technology's role. Describing the tyrannization of work and the dominance of the technological world in relation to women, he mentions that women are more submissive than most housewives have been. Their characters unite "feudal submissiveness with modern helplessness" (70).

This is because they have submitted to the destruction of their rights by yielding to the loss of economic independence, consequent submissiveness to bosses, the degeneration of the family lives, the deterioration of the household and their communities as well as to the profaning of their countries. This skepticism about particular technologies as liberating for women is shared by Amy Bix in "Creating 'Chicks Who Fix': Women, Tool Knowledge, and Home Repair, 1920-2007", Linda Lyne in "The Home Pregnancy Test: A Feminist Technology?" and, Laura Carpenter and Monica Casper in "Global Intimacies: Innovating the HPV Vaccine for Women's Health". These critics highlight the ways in which these technologies are interpreted and conceptualized as useful for women but in reality are not proving helpful (Throsby and Hodges 14-15).

The relationship and interaction of technology with nature is an important concern of the device paradigm which has been explored in terms of the impact of technology on wilderness by numerous critics particularly in the post modern era (Borgmann; Sarah Pohl; John Shultis). Borgmann describes nature in its primitive and unspoiled form as a focal power. However, in the device paradigm, it lost its beauty as a result of human conquest and technological muddling, channelized on the foundations of science and the centers of technology. Wilderness was a challenge to technology and the human conquest to dominate it exhibited violence and careless endeavors. Technology is mobilized to "meet challenges, to dam rivers, drain swamps, log forests, and mine coal" (*TCCL* 185) and this driving of nature to control is associated with the idea of liberation and the enrichment of human lives and experience. Thus, technology has become a threat for the

wilderness and the scenic beauty of nature in the realm of the device paradigm (182-186).

George Sturt's observations from the turn of the twentieth century also highlight destructive and threatening tendencies of the device paradigm pertaining to nature. In the pre-technological setting, the craftsman followed a culture of cultivating, searching for timber, chopping the wood and there existed a relationship embodying love and respect between the rural landscape and the people who lived there. This esteemed interaction and intimacy with nature revealed dimensions that remain otherwise closed and the craftsman gained by virtue of it a series of skills and wisdom. However, the transformative power of technology manifested itself as the greed and lust of humans reached the wilderness and the destructive technological methodology violated the sacredness and sanctity of nature (23). This domination of nature affected not only the wheelwright but also changed the work and social relations in general as technology uproots the tradition and upsets the norms of society (*TCCL* 44-46).

Freimund and Borrie propose that there is a lack of information about how technology should be directed about and inside wilderness. Pointing out the confusion dominating the matter, they hint at the absence and need of vivid understanding regarding the management of communication and information, and about knowing the associated beneficial and harmful technologies for wilderness (22). Similarly, Berry in *The Art of The Common Place* also emphasizes the need of understanding the majestic powers of nature and of devising our actions accordingly with humility and respect to be able to survive. He also stresses the

need to have true knowledge of it, co-act with it and surrender to its limits by giving up our pride and arrogance. Besides, in order to live peacefully in the present world, we must keep into consideration the glory of nature and creation, and avoid unnecessary meddling with it (20).

Pohl in "Technology and the Wilderness Experience" establishes wilderness as a 'positive counterpart' to our technological world provided the backcountry traveler determines accurately which devices and equipment are essential and which are separating the traveler from the aims he or she wishes to fulfill in traveling through wilderness. Drawing on Borgmann's notions of 'things' and 'devices', he compares using a GPS unit instead of topological maps and compass to help find the route. Highlighting how wilderness traveling and recreation grant the opportunities to enjoy and fully accomplish both means and ends, he delineates the good intrinsic to wilderness experience if technology is used wisely which makes his approach similar to that of Borgmann (147-155).

John Shultis notes the limitations of Borgmann's stance on wilderness and technology, and highlights that if wilderness can guide us to limit technology which is Borgmann's important standpoint, it has remained unable to do so up till now. We have hoped for a long time that nature and wilderness can make us learn humility and establish a new relationship with nature. However, despite many years of wilderness use, this new relationship with nature has not been established yet probably due to the attraction and temptation of technology. Thus he regards Borgmann's understanding of wilderness Romantic and naïve (115-116).

Religion and morality and all kinds of social change are mainly linked to technological development as it has become the most important variable affecting the Western society (Borgmann; Winner). Carl Mitcham notes that Lynn White Jr. in his essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" indicated that the religion of Christianity, at least in its dominant Western form, was the main cause and driving force behind the outlook towards the world which gave birth to the modern technology. Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* also elaborates upon the role of religion regarding the flourishing of technology as he claims that the capitalist modes of production and modern technology came into existence from the Protestant efforts to apply monasteries' asceticism to the daily life. Similarly, John Nef in the *Cultural Foundations of Industrial Civilizations* shifts the responsibility to Catholic strands of religion as he mentions the part played by the Renaissance delight of the world and Catholicism's attempts to modify and add tenderness to human relationships in making technology a prominent fact (qtd. in Durbin 328).

Some critics like Frederick D. Wilhelmsen view technology in highly admiring terms focusing on its role in liberating and strengthening human beings in contrast to religion viewed as a restraining force. In his seminal work "Art and Religion", published in the spring of 1975, he exclaims that religion poses hindrances and repercussions to human beings whereas technology is a liberating force for them. Technology strengthens the human beings and helps them live with pride (85).

Borgmann delineates the negative and objectionable role played by technology in distancing human beings from religion and causing a decline in morality. In his



article entitled “Society in the Post modern Era”, he stresses that the pre modern morality which was a result of perceptible demands, has faded away and our technological devices have moved us away from the necessities and requirements of morality, loyalty, temperance, bravery, courage, charity, strength and vigor (198). The heaviest part of his critique on technology regarding morality in the device paradigm lies on the entertainment devices and technologies where the social morality shrinks as it consists of the violation of moral, social and sexual taboos where the “unmentionable is said, the strictly private is exhibited, and the forbidden is done” (*TCCL* 141). The conventional taboos are exploited and ruined, and the ‘immoral’ first appears unconventional, then absurd and ultimately boring (141).

Despite being adequately capable to deal with its drawbacks and negative potentials, the morality in the device paradigm has been turned into a resource readily available for exploitation. It is mainly due to the fact that technology has widely diminished the penalties for getting indulged in vices or transformed them into a benefit. Thus, as highlighted by Schumacher, technology is ethically questionable and also causes mental and psychological pressure which is eating away at the fabric of our society (144-145).

Hans Achterhuis, a Dutch philosopher, insists on and pleads for ‘a moralization of technology’ where he propounds the idea that instead of trying to moralize people like telling them not to shower for too long or to buy a ticket before entering a subway, human beings should also channelize their energies to moralize technologies i.e., their material environment. Thus in the design process,

technologies should be given mediating roles which will make them behavior-effecting and influential (qtd. in Verbeek, "Materializing Morality" 369-370).

The features of the device paradigm outlined by Borgmann in his theory of technology can be traced in the works of many other theorists and critics including Feenberg; Heidegger; Tatum and Berry. Feenberg, in regards to his Instrumentalization Theory, devises two steps of instrumentalization namely Primary Instrumentalization or Functionalism and Secondary Instrumentalization or Integration. The Primary Instrumentalization is based on four reifying moments of technical practice namely decontextualization, reductionism, autonomization and positioning. Similarly, the Secondary Instrumentalization, interacting with the spheres of reality from which abstraction at the primary level is made, consists of four moments including systematization, mediation, vocation and initiative. These features of the technological world and functioning share regions of overlapping similarities with Borgmann's device paradigm and his proposals for the reform of technology. However, these have been developed as an extension to Heidegger's and Borgmann's theory as Feenberg reasoned that the essence of technology is not merely those few characteristics which are commonly present in all types of technical practice as propounded by these two critics ("From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads" 304-310).

Cochran argues that Borgmann seems to defend two apparently contradictory positions regarding the nature and role of technology i.e., the Substantivist arguments of the autonomy of technology as well as the Instrumentalists' claims of the existence of human control. In *Questioning Technology*, Feenberg's Critical

Theory also expounds technology as 'human controlled' as well as 'value- laden'. Thus, these two positions simultaneously supported by Borgmann, can be made compatible in Feenberg's critical theory (34-35).

Borgmann's device paradigm, describing the conditions of the technological world, also pertains to Langdon Winner's description of the bothersome and irritating stalemate situation created by devices and technologies in the developed world. Besides, Lewis Mumford's stance that there is a certain 'delegation of life' hidden in the device paradigm, also validates Borgmann's position where both of them describe the mechanism of the device in which the action taken up by its machinery becomes unreachable and uncontrollable by humans. Consequently, with the domination of devices, human values are not expressed adequately and people are unable to get full expression of their values by virtue of their actions (qtd. in Tatum 75-76). In addition to this, Borgmann's critique of technology also depicts affinity with that of Heidegger and Jurgen Habermas. Heidegger's concept of enframing and Habermas' binary division of work and interaction are the main areas which reflect the commonalties between these philosophers' stances and the device paradigm (Feenberg, "From Essentialism to Constructivism" 299).

### **2.3. THE REFORM OF TECHNOLOGY**

Just like there is a lot of ambiguity and variance regarding the character of technology, so there is with the direction of reform and its proposals. Some philosophers and critics find the solutions to technological problems in denying and giving up the use of technology altogether (Berry; Heidegger) while others

extend different propositions like the reshaping of technology, careful use, technological fixes and reasoned understanding (Winner; Pool; Feenberg; Goodman; Strong; Kapp; Weinberg; Borgmann).

Heidegger, the famous German philosopher, demonstrates a highly pessimistic attitude towards the reform of technology. Attributing an autonomous logic to technology, he favors a resignation to and a freedom from the technological order rather than the reform of technology. Heidegger postulates that any program attempting to reform technology would cause a further stretching and extension of the modern technology (qtd. in "From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads" 296). Thus, Heidegger finds resort from the problems of technological society in retreating all the way back to the pre technological society i.e., to the stone bridges (*Technology and the Good Life?* 93). Similarly Wendell Berry is also resigned to the notion that the redemption and rescue of a technological world is almost impossible. He rejects not only technological fixes but also shuns the idea of using technological devices like computers, and reasons in his article "Why I Am Not Going to Buy a Computer" that neither he himself nor anyone else could write better or more conveniently with the use of a technological products like a computer than with a pencil. Thus, instead of proposing a reform of technology, he finds it more useful to avoid using technologies altogether (32).

The antithesis of the pessimism exhibited in Heidegger's views and Berry's approach to technology can be traced in the views of Feenberg and Marcuse who are not only convinced of technology's positive potentials but also propose certain

ideas for the reforms needed regarding it, as highlighted by Thomson. Criticizing Heidegger for not giving any constructive reform proposal, Feenberg supports the idea of a 'progressive reform' based on the political resources existing within the realms of technologically developed societies. Using the notion of 'deep democratization', he suggests in his reform proposal "a short – circuiting of the administrative 'suppression' of resistances which would 'permanently open the strategic interiority to the flow of subordinates' initiatives' ". Thus, he hopes for the formation of a 'counter- hegemony' by people from different walks of life, having a potential to democratize technological design on permanent basis and consequently, control the historical influence of technology (Thomson 212-213). He also emphasizes the integration and incorporation of technologies to nature and broader technical systems, ethics and aesthetics as well as their connection to life and the learning of workers, users and the organization of work and use (*Technology and the Good Life?* 303). Besides, Marcuse glorifies human capability to control circumstances through tactical involvement in the process of planning and also depicts hope in the betterment of the technological world (qtd. in Thomson 212). The height of optimism regarding the reform of technology, however, can be found in Alvin Weinberg's notion of 'technological fix', the firm advocate of which is Emmanuel G. Mesthene. He proposes to find solutions to the complex social problems within the realm of technology which will eradicate the particular problem without demanding a change in the attitude of people as in the traditional methods, or it will change the problem itself in such a way that its solution will become easier. Thus, finding the remedies for social and

technological problems through further advances in technology is what Weinberg proposes as a solution to the problems in technological world (24).

A number of other critics discover the recovery from technological problems in a reasoned understanding and an intelligent use of technology (Pool; Winner; Borgmann; Kapp). Pool, tracing the interaction between society and technology, finds refuge in a careful use of technology. Comparing modern technology with a great dane in a small apartment; he suggests that technology, like a dane, may appear to be friendly but one must take precautionary measures to deal with it and must ensure there is nothing vulnerable within its reach (15). This idea is also shared and elaborated by Winner where he emphasizes in "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" the importance and dire need of studying and deeply understanding the outcomes of technologies as well as making wise technological choices in an open and engaging way. This approach, he propounds, is very important for the working of a democratic society (148). Highlighting our negligence of some important issues like world hunger, environmental degradation and the threats of nuclear weapons in our rush to make progress, he also suggests that we should regain our lost sense of proportion and make intelligent decisions related to the selection and use of science and technology (161-162). Earnst Kapp, a left wing Hegelian as well as Mumford deems the thorough understanding of machines and technology a basic requirement for dealing with technology and its problems in the modern times. Kapp, in his seminal work, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* (1877) outlines the general principles in this regard. He points out that machines ought to be given philosophical attention and that technology requires

more refined criticism which must be more detailed and in- depth than the external judgments given by literary and social critics. Similarly, Mumford too, does not propose a rejection of all technology. On the contrary, as mentioned by Bartol, he emphasizes to recognize the distinction between two kinds of technology constructed by him i.e., polytechnics and monotechnics which will aid a thorough understanding of technology (3-5). Besides, the suggestions given by Paul Goodman regarding technological reforms in “Can Technology Be Humane?” also resemble the idea of a reasoned understanding and wise use of technology. Predicting the arrival of a new Protestant Reformation which will influence every status and institution in society, he suggests directing this reform on certain important concerns like showing wisdom and care in using technology, the environmental challenges and a wide decentralization of research and development (78-90).

Borgmann refers to the reform of technology as “the completion and justification of the analysis of technology” which must be paralleled and equated with a forthright and principled understanding of technology (*TCCL* 157). He distinguishes the reforms of technology in two broad categories namely reforms within the paradigm of technology and reforms of the paradigm. The reforms within the paradigm of technology are in peace and harmony with the way in which the promise of technology is being carried out in accordance with the device paradigm. These central reforms hold the view that the technological enterprise is fundamentally well perceived but its centre has been lost or removed. The reformers of technology, in this regard, focus to reveal the central force of

technology. The central attempts at reforms which are internal to technology include the redefining of the promise of technology, the issue of raising the value question, the program of functionalism, the enchantment with technological spectacles, the universal stretching of the device paradigm and the democratization of technology (162-163). These reform proposals are initiated, like all other reforms, from a sense of discontentment with technology. However, in a program and course of action, these reforms are directed to a shallow notion. They overestimate or underestimate the character and strength of technology and remain of little importance. In overestimating technology, the reformers believe that in the promise of technology and its implementation, there is a potential towards traditional excellence. On the other hand, when the reformers take an instrumental view of technology, believing that since it lacks a centre of its own and can be given one with some effort; they basically underestimate technology. The central reform programs, at large, have remained unfruitful so far (163).

Borgmann dismisses the attempts of the reform of technology within the paradigm and emphasizes that a fruitful reform of technology must be a reform of the paradigm itself. It cannot limit itself within the framework of technology. The appropriation of technology is possible when it is related to a centre instead of being confined to boundaries (168). Thus, the reform of technology can be brought about through a series of things and practices that sustain and orient our lives, regarded as focal things and practices by Borgmann. An effective reform of technology is possible when it is structured around focal concerns, and focal things and practices are given a central place in the technological world.



The idea of focal things and practices has been derived from the Latin word 'focus' meaning hearth. For Romans, it was a holy place where the house gods dwelled. In the ancient Greek culture, many important events of life were connected to the fireplace or hearth. It was a central place in the celebrations of birth, marriage and death occasions. Thus, it oriented and maintained the household and family. In English too, as a technical term, it suggests that a focus collects the relations of its context, illuminates its surroundings and informs them. Borgmann uses the concept of focal things and practices in the contexts of these historical and living senses of the word (196-197).

Focal things are particular, concrete and perceptible having no 'functional equivalents'. They have their own history, tradition and pattern. They engage us to the best of our abilities and potentials, and flourish in a technological setting. A firm, determined and constant devotion to focal thing is a 'focal practice'. It supports skill and discipline which are worked out in a harmony of accomplishment and satisfaction; of mind, body and the world; of oneself and others; and of society at large (219).

Bringing forth the analytic perspective to focal things and practices, Topi Heikkero discusses their important features. Commanding presence, involvement and engagement of mind and body, unification and integration of means and ends, and otherness are the main features of focal things. They stand in sharp contrast to the device paradigm where everything is made predictable and controlled (253).

As quoted in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), Medieval Cathedral was a focal point whose formal features of the world view -

richness, harmony, openness, and performance are also the features of focal things and practices (159-160). Similarly, the Greek temple having a profound orienting force which focused and reflected the divine power of land and sea, is another example (197). The traditional meal, reflecting a tradition of bringing close relations and family ties as well as regional customs into focus, is also a focal event (204-205). Besides, running is another focal practice in which the unity of ends and means, of mind and body, of the body and world, the unity of accomplishment and enjoyment as well as that of ability and fulfillment are clearly demonstrated (200-204). Other activities having a focusing power include helping others, religion, being in the company of friends, reading, games and sports for men and cooking for women (143).

The roots of Borgmann's concern for good life and his focal things and practices can be traced in the works of other philosophers like Emerson, Melville and Thoreau. His ideas are further explored and developed in the work of Henry Bugbee. Besides, many writers have titled their literary works after what Borgmann calls focal things like villages and towns, ponds, suppers, islands, neighborhoods. In addition to this, several authors focused on activities termed by Borgmann as focal practices including walking, sailing, wood working, cooking and ceremonies (*Technology and the Good Life?* 26).

George Sheehan's *Running and Being* is based on the focal practice of the 'great run' which introduces the runner to different aspects of the beauty of nature and increases the strength of his mind and body. Robert Farrar Capon's *The Supper of the Lamb* centers on the 'great meal' representing tradition, skill and love.

Norman Maclean's *A River Runs through It* can be regarded as a fly-fishing guidebook which is a practice of great focal concern. Colin Fletcher's treatise of *The Complete Walker* is also based on the instructions about the focal practices of hiking and back packing. Besides Roger B. Swain's *Earthy Pleasures* also deals with a focal practice of great significance i.e., gardening (TCCL 201-204). Carrying out an in depth analysis of the characteristic features of land, Paul Thompson describes the attributes of farming as a focal practice (*The Agrarian Vision*).

The instances of focal things and practices can also be traced in different traditions, as highlighted by Heikkero, from the traditional Japanese culture. *Kendo*, an art of traditional sword practice, was made into a conscious focal practice during the Tagukawa Period (1600- 1868). The centering force and the quest for excellence in focal things and practices is also the same as in the official statement of the Kendo Federation which emphasizes the disciplining of the human character. It aims at nurturing and fostering enthusiasm, sincerity and good will for others as well as the improvement of oneself. It is exactly the same kind of excellence which Borgmann seeks to find through focal things and practices. *Chado*, the Japanese tea ceremony, is another focal practice based on preparing, sharing and taking tea with peace, honor and purity. Besides; calligraphy, gardening, flower arrangement and brush painting are other important instances in this regard. The modern *judo* and *aikido*, developed from old martial arts also focus on knowing oneself, others and the reality in more depth; making them focal practices of great importance (255).

To present the solution to the problems of technological world, Borgmann suggests countering these difficulties through focal things and practices. He denies the idea of a return to a pre-technological situation as well as that of the annihilation and devastation of technology, and calls it the absolute disaster and the end of all hope (*TCCL* 249). The definition of a reform established in this manner is neither the alteration or amendment nor the denial or elimination of the technological paradigm but the awareness, acceptance and command of the pattern of technology which gives focal concerns a central place in our lives. This is applied in two realms. First, in the personal and private sphere of life, it will bring about a wise and critically selective attitude regarding technology, rendering a life of wealth in the true sense. Secondly, concerning the traditional and conventional excellence and the family life, a reform of the technology ensures a reinforcement of these institutions (211). Thus, the focal things and practices are not 'pre technological' and do not disregard or discard technology. Rather they reveal their true meaning and importance in an acceptance and intelligent use of technology. In this way, the technological settings enhance rather than contradict the sparkle of the focal things and practices (247-248).

Similar to Borgmann, RM Pirsig also suggests to adopt the habit of sustaining and preserving the technological objects and to break through their commodious appearances in order to reassure our power over their machinery. He opines that the tranquility of mind and contentment can be achieved in the middle of technology by a careful attendance to a technological object. In his book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, he suggests: "The Buddha, the Godhead

resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does on the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower” (26). Thus, we can attain peace and happiness not only in God’s creation but also in our own inventions which are around us all the time. Hence, ‘consciously cherished’ focal things and practices are the basis of a significant and meaningful life in a world of technological devices, without which life is deficient of meaning and reality (Heikkero 258).

Heidegger’s standpoint on modern technology particularly his concept of gathering closely resembles Borgmann’s notion of the focal things and practices. The loss of a meaningful tradition in the technological world is shown by Heidegger through the example of a jug which gathers the contexts of its creation and function. The concepts of both these philosophers tend to awaken the inherent values of things and their connection with the nature and the world around them (Feenberg, *Technology and the Good Life?* 312). Besides, the focal things of past which are humble and inconspicuous as highlighted by Heidegger, are also of similar nature in Borgmann’s approach and include bench, jug, plow, foot bridge, pond, tree, hill, brook, book, picture, crown and cross (*TCCL* 199).

As noted by Pohl, David Strong’s theory of the criticism of technological framework presented in his *Crazy Mountains*, displays overlapping agreement with Borgmann’s views. Building his theory on Borgmann’s distinction between things and devices, he too calls for an approach of being thoughtful of how we take up things and advises to abstain from replacing things with devices. In addition to this, Borgmann’s emphasis on the importance of wilderness

experience can also be traced in Strong's views where he presents it as a means to counter our consumerist behaviors and describes its potential to flourish skills, open-mindedness, modesty, respect and insight. Like Borgmann, he negates the idea of giving up technology altogether rather propagates to counter the devices with things (161-162).

Steven A. Miller, however, in his article "On Instruments and Aesthetics: A Possible Deweyan Inconsistency" looks at suspiciously on Borgmann's account of focal things and practices, charging it for bearing a traditionalistic and nostalgic attitude. He reasons that it is not necessary that a thing or a practice which was helpful in the past remains equally beneficial today. Cooking, for example, may require a lot of time and at times, causes a hindrance to meaningful life due to the amount of time it demands. Thus, he stresses on the need of thinking critically before accepting a tradition and developing an attitude of 'conscientious consideration' towards it in order to reexamine and reestablish its value (162-163).

Giving a new dimension to Borgmann's thought, Verbeek argues that technology cannot be regarded only as a cause of misguided and pointless consumption, as mentioned by Borgmann. On the contrary, it creates new possibilities of engagement which are neglected in Borgmann's description of the device paradigm. Verbeek mentions that Borgmann overlooks the amplification of engagement done by technology and concentrates only on the reduction of engagement which makes his description of technology's role in engagement incomplete. If something comes through technological availability, it does not

guarantee it to be a disengaging commodity. Also the decrease in one form of engagement is usually accompanied with an increase in another. These considerations have been missed by Borgmann ("Devices of Engagement" 80). Moreover, Verbeek also presents the possibility of a reformulation of Borgmann's theory where the role and character of technological devices in the relationship of people with the world around them can be analyzed in terms of "mediation rather than alienation" (84). Thus, he presents an alternative to the thesis of alienation.

The Home Power Movement in the USA is an illustration of the application of Borgmann's philosophy for the reform of technology and an escape from his bothersome device paradigm. It is structured on an installation of personal home electric power generation systems for a huge number of home owners. These systems are supplemented by micro hydroelectric or small wind-power production, and depend on lead acid battery storage and solar cells or photovoltaic panels. Most of them are not linked to the electricity distribution lines and do not provide electricity by flipping a switch. According to Jesse S. Tatum, this system involves an active engagement of human beings and is based on a regard for focal things and practices. The workers are encouraged by an urge to redefine the relationship of human beings with their work as well as to the natural world. The participants of the movement have engaged in 'things' in the social and environmental contexts and have broken the irksome impasse of the device paradigm (76- 80). Thus, although the Home Power Movement is not specifically based on Borgmann's theoretical model yet it can be regarded as a

refusal of the device paradigm and a reform of technology by means of focal things and practices (85).

Analyzing the current status of Borgmann's philosophy and its future dimensions, Cochran points out that his ideas about ethics in regards to technology are needed at present, more than ever before. However, since the book containing his philosophy of technology, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* was written in 1984 before the 'dot-com bubble' and the 'information revaluation'; his concern with large, disengaging technologies is surpassed by recent groups like the DIY Movement and the participants of the Green Revolution. The information revolution presents new psychological problems especially for the youth but these are strangely similar to the disengaging qualities highlighted by Borgmann regarding the modern devices as depicted in Nicholas's Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. This is high time to devise a solid ethical approach to technology through education and through suitable practices with focal concerns as their ends. This, to some degree, has been carried out in the work, *The Engineering Project: Its Nature, Ethics, and Promise* by Gene Moriarty. For future development, Borgmann's claims in ethical issues regarding modern technology can be combined with the works of other theorists and critics to deal with the increasing dangers of technology and modern devices (37- 38).



## CHAPTER 3

### **The Paranoid Community in *Americana* and *White Noise***

Delillo's success and fame as a post modern writer can be attributed to his effective portrayal of the contemporary technological and social anxieties. Through disillusionment with technology and presenting it as a cause of anxiety, Delillo perpetuates a belief which Melley calls the 'agency panic'. The selected narratives describe the circumstances of the post modern American community manifesting agency panic mostly through "large governmental, corporate, or social systems that appear uncannily to control individual behavior and in which characters seem paranoid, either to themselves or to other characters in the novel" (Melley 8). In his narratives, these spheres of post modern life become useful entry points for the purpose of elucidating agency panic as well as the influences which undermine the agency of characters.

This chapter concentrates on the individual's experience of technological anxiety by exploring Delillo's selected fiction through the lens of Melley's agency panic. It focuses on de-familiarizing the causes of the depletion of human agency which leads to anxiety. For this purpose, this chapter engages with a detailed analysis of the characters' life styles, the prevalent technologies and corresponding systems which have deprived human beings of autonomy and agency. According to the framework of study, the major causes of agency and panic are scrutinized through an illustration of the post modern transference in various spheres of human lives. An analysis of the major other- directing influences in the novel is also focused in this chapter in order to establish the connection between anxiety and the

technological way of life replete with devices, controlling systems, media, consumerism and technological events.

Before presenting the specific instances showing agency panic in the novels, it is important to trace how the characters get engulfed in the paranoia and situations leading to it. Describing the post modern American life in a paranoid light, Delillo in *Americana* and *White Noise* elucidates how people experience threats and anxieties through the invasion of technologies, institutions, organizations and different network systems. In both these works, the anxiety and paranoia come from the over-whelming power and control of the technological life style which has total autonomy over the individuals in different spheres of life. The society presented by Delillo is so deeply punctuated with technological devices and immersed in media simulacrum that the boundaries between reality and simulacra are blurred which renders it impossible to decide whether the characters are behaving independently or are commanded by the lines and codes of media and commercial jargon.

In Delillo's selected fiction; technology, consumerism and capitalism are the main spheres breeding agency panic by influencing human existence to such a high degree that even the private and personal spheres of human existence like thoughts, dreams, world views and spirituality are shaped by them. Consequently, the characters are unable to control their own behavior and social action, and the resulting panic becomes a crisis of human agency. In response to the oppressive systems and corporations, the inhabitants of Delillo's world experience various degrees and manifold forms of agency panic where they often place too little

agency in themselves and too much in people around them as well as in inanimate objects and systems, and vice versa. Thus the technological and consumerist world is the backdrop for DeLillo's literary investigation of the 'agency panic' in a world overwhelmed with 'other- directing' influences.

### **3.1 MECHANICS OF ANXIETY IN *WHITE NOISE***

In *White Noise*, the protagonist Jack Gladney along with his family constantly oscillates between media technology and the consumer culture. DeLillo situates Jack at the College-on-the- Hill as a professor of Hitler Studies whereas Babette teaches her students in the basement of a local church and reads tabloids to the blind. Jack, who is currently on his fifth marriage, is raising four children with Babette: Heinrich, Steffie, Denise and Wilder. As none of them belongs to both of these parents, the only unifying force in Jack's family is consumerism and one of the central locations in the novel is the supermarket.

The family lives in a society where the culture of consumerism, greatly shaped by media and advertisements, reigns supreme. From the opening scene of the novel where the station wagons arrive at school, loaded with various kinds of devices and consumer products, the American impulse to buy and consume is clearly evident. Mohammad Sadegh Najjarzadeha notes that the means of communication and media like radio and television are the essential components of the post modern American society based on consumerism. Media facilitates to create an image for the consumers and they get addicted to this means of representation primarily through the medium of television (273). Murray Siskind tells Jack how his life alters when influenced by TV. He claims that he had been sitting in a

room for more than two months and watching TV during the early hours of day, “listening carefully, taking notes” (*White Noise* 50-51). The unholy alliance of consumerism and media, the power of electronic replication and the outcomes of capitalism cause a diminishing of the human agency. These consumerist attributes and the resulting media- saturated consciousness plunge the characters into a paranoid state, termed as ‘agency panic’ by Melley which basically refers to a set of pervasive anxieties controlling American culture. As a result, the characters consume depending on the amount of agency they believe they can gain from these commodities.

The characters believe that commodities and wealth can protect them from environmental disasters. Jack, for instance, assures himself that the man- made as well as natural disasters cannot harm a college professor like him. These calamities are meant for the poor, vulnerable people who live in unprotected areas (114). Thus, Jack attributes strength and security to his commodious and protected life style which the poor people are deprived of.

However, the technologies and commodities which are apparently used by characters to augment their lives actually marginalize the individual agency in the novel. Engulfing into the post modern consumer culture, Jack claims that they are jeopardized by media technology. “ If our complaints have a focal point, it would have to be the TV set, where the outer torment lurks, causing fears and secret desires” (85). There is a constant intrusion of mass media on individual lives and the streets of Blacksmith are marked by the “glow of blue- eyed TVs” (281). The advertisement slogans, music, traffic noise and the loud speaker announcements

accentuate white noise in the lives of characters where these voices and media slogans are imprinted on the unconscious minds, occupying a segment of every person's brain. Jack's nine years old daughter, Steffie murmurs clearly audible words in her sleep in repetition of some television voice, "Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida" and Jack regards these words as "[s]upranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable" (155). Jack's inclination to notice the brand names everywhere around him has been viewed by Frank Lentricchia as his "unconscious epistemology of consumption" (105). Thus, technology and media serve to manipulate the American dream and is the manifestation of the important meaning of conspiracy thinking and paranoia noted by Melley i.e., the individuals admit somebody else's description of common social goodness (13). Hence DeLillo's characters lose agency to their consumerist behavior.

### **3.2 POSTMODERN IDENTITY IN THE RUINS**

According to Zygmunt Bauman, the contemporary humans construct their identities through consumption (27). In this process of identity formation, the individual agency is transferred to commodities which ultimately become the driving force of the post modern existence. In DeLillo's narratives, the characters do not have a fixed identity. Rather it can be constructed, manipulated and destructed. People usually construct their identity through what they consume. Jack, for example, assumes the role of a constructed character through a fake identity which is very different from his original identity. For him, the experience of spending money and shopping extravagantly also creates new avenues of self-

identity and perception. "I began to grow in value and self – regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me" (*White Noise* 84). This identity constructed by virtue of consumption does not last long and only remains intact as long as the characters are in the shopping centers. On return home, Jack's persona and his connection to the family shatter as he exclaims that they went to their bedrooms with a desire to be alone (84). Thus agency panic ensues when the forces of media technology and consumer culture contain the individual and the agency lies in these outside forces controlling the characters. This is an example of 'other-directedness' proposed by Resiman as the Gladney's family prefers conformity over self- motivation, seeking an approval from social standards of behavior. Almost all the characters in Gladney's world are motiveless consumers who spend most of their time at the supermarket which is an indication of the other-directed influences on them.

These other- directed influences are also evident in *Americana*. David Cowart highlights that the images from advertisement, television, film, photography, magazine journalism and from books to some extent, shape the minds and identity of characters in this narrative. The protagonist, David Bell, makes use of technology and its replicated images to relate to the world around him. This manifests one's incapability to perceive a clearly defined conception of one's self (604). All these media technologies, encountered by David, are actually the sources of agency panic because they do not only uncannily control their human owners but also deprive them of independent thinking and free living.

David is very much a part of and influenced by American commercialism and mass media. His exposure to consumerism was carried out at a very early age when his father who was an advertising agent showed his children ads in their basement. Later, after his college years, David gets a job at a television network. Thus his childhood experience as well as his job shapes his mind in attributing power and agency to film, photography and media. Later, he employs film in an attempt to find himself by making an autobiographical movie in which actors re-enact his memories and important life events of his young age. However, David's use of his scripted film as a source of finding himself ultimately fails and he remains immersed in anxiety and agency panic.

David's agency panic also manifests in the third person consciousness he adopts because of his firm belief that his first person consciousness is unable to establish an authentic connection with the world, in order to give him a stable identity. He is haunted by a constant fear of disappearance also. Constantly making an effort to separate his real life from Hollywood movies, David claims that the only problem he had was that he was living in the third person (*Americana* 58). His mindset and consciousness is basically a microcosm of the American post modern world and his rejection of first- person reflects the paranoia of a technological society. The other-directed force in this case comes from media technology. "Advertising is the suggestion that the dream of entering the third person singular might possibly be fulfilled" (270). Hence, as claimed by Robert Nadeau, *Americana* manifests the way in which the electronic mass communications in the post modern world have derogated the notion of a reliable and characteristic self

from human existence (162). Consequently, the post modern subjects like David attribute too little agency to their cognitive power and too much agency to the media technologies surrounding them which grounds these characters in the sphere of agency panic.

Cowart mentions that one's perception of self develops, to some extent, through the relationship one has with mother in the early age as described in the Psychoanalytic theory (603). In *Americana*, Delillo establishes David's identity crisis and the resulting panic in the background of his Oedipal search. Randy Laist analyzes that it is not just that the "immersion in media culture has molded his self- understanding, his character is also awash in desires which are very blatantly Oedipal" (53). David's film represents an oedipal search for mother in the form of cinematic flashbacks from his childhood. He believes himself to be responsible for his mother's illness and death, stated explicitly in his remarks: "Inside her was something splintered and bright, something that might have been left by the spiral passage of my own body" (*Americana* 196). This can be interpreted as his desire to diminish the chance of more children who could compete for his position and link with his mother. His oedipal complex also manifests in his nostalgia about his mother particularly evident in his relationship with the women around him. In David's film, the connection between media technology and psychological dimensions is manifested in the image where Sully, who is representing David's mother, is sitting on a swing which reminds of a well- known scene in Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru*. This image joins the past depicted by David's mother with the present which Sully represents (Laist 59). David's oedipal complex causes an



undermining of the human agency which manipulates his behavior, creating a situation that can only be met with panic due to psychic numbing and constant nostalgia for mother. Consequently, "David does not come to his media-metaphoricity as a tabula rasa, but as an Oedipal entity with a psychodynamic objective, even a metaphysical objective, of forging continuity between the physical world and the personal subject" (54). Hence, David's Oedipal obsessions lead him to media and technologies for the realization of his deep-seated psychological fantasies and he tries to establish his selfhood through his film and media.

### **3.3 THE DEATH ANXIETY**

The characters' struggle with agency is also expressed explicitly in the death anxiety haunting their private and social lives both in *Americana* and *White Noise*. The circumstances and events leading to this panic usually have devices, commodities or some other threatening social realities in the background which are the main other-directing forces in the selected texts.

In *Americana*, besides the clash between individual life and societal forces of authoritative control, the anxieties and fears are paramount also because of the Vietnam War and the Second World War. David's thinking is entangled between the Vietnam War during which the novel takes place as well as the Bataan Death March in which his father participated during his service in World War II. The fear of death in this narrative has also been portrayed with reference to these wars jeopardizing human agency. The Vietnam War permeated the American homes during 1960s and 1970s through regular media coverage and reporting as

mentioned by David. "The War was on television every night but we all went to the movies" (5). Thus, the characters' panic over these conflicts and the related death anxiety is manifested in David and other characters' attempt to avoid this subject in discussion and also the death it embodies. Rather than contemplating the issues regarding the War, David and his contemporaries try to seek refuge and escape in movies.

David, his parents, sisters and colleagues encounter death in their own different yet horror-stricken ways, all yielding a baffled assessment of it. During the journey David undertakes to Arizona with his friends, he asks one of the actors to read an account of what his father witnessed about the Bataan death march at the time of World War II. This highlights the torture, panic and dead bodies his father had seen vividly yet never preferred to talk about. Hence, war contributes a great deal in creating anxiety related to death where the horror embodied in Wars is at times aggravated through media technologies. Consequently, the wars and the impending fear of mortality cultivated paranoia, leading to a destruction of human agency. The agency panic generated in this case manifests the struggle between human beings and external forces as claimed by Melley.

Throughout the narrative, death enjoys a pervasive presence in different spheres of life of the post modern characters of Delillo. David's sister, Mary describes the life she had been spending as a constant battle with death and this is the reason she uses to justify her decision of running off with Arondella who is a hitman. She exclaims that she prefers his kind of death to the death she had been fighting throughout her life (163). These remarks delineate how the human agency has

been threatened in the post modern era of dynamic changes so much so that the life is connoted with death. With very different backgrounds, the common thing between Mary and Arondella which brought them closer was the impulse that death is meaningless until it is faced forcefully (280). Mary also suggests David to run away from home, warning that their mother who was seriously ill, would try to take David away with her if she dies (164). David's best friend, Tommy Valerio also got killed in the Vietnam War. Another instance of the fear of mortality messing with human agency in *Americana*, is in the character of Ted Warburton, whom David calls Trotsky. He is also overwhelmed by death as he mentions, "[w]e are endlessly dying... We begin dying when we are born. A short time later we die" (100). Besides the fatalities and paranoia of the individual consciousness of characters, the omnipresence of death anxiety is also evident in the title of the radio DJ, Warren Beadsley's show, "Death is Just Around the Corner". It presents his talks; covering lyricals about the CIA, revolutions, conspiracies and the like. This way of living and thinking is indebted to agency panic.

The narrative of *White Noise* is also filled with characters whose agency is being limited by their death anxiety but it engages this agency panic at a deeper level than *Americana*. Jack demonstrates a constant fear of death in his daily life, contemplating about its nature all the time and having continuous conversations about it with his wife, Babette as well as his friend, Murray Siskind. "Who will die first?" (30) is the deep-seated anxiety in Gladney's existence. Jack also senses death in odd numbers and sunsets. It has become an integral part of his

consciousness yet it “is rendered graphically, is televised so to speak” (142) causing a detachment between human self and human condition. This is carried out by virtue of technology which is an important factor for the existence of agency panic in Jack’s case. Technology also plunges the inhabitants of Blacksmith into the fear of mortality in their exposure to the ‘Air Borne Toxic Event’ which was termed as “a death made in the laboratory” (127). Technology, therefore, acts as a major other- directing force in the novel, turning the characters into frenzied and paranoid subjects, even to the degree where they are totally devoid of any independent thinking. These people exhibit social conformity as a result of conditioning and are devoid of any personal taste which has been pointed out as the hallmark of the other- directed type of people. This culture of blind conformity promoted by technology is clearly evident in the novel as a means to avoid and save one’s self from death. “To become a crowd is to keep out death. To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone. Crowds came for this reason above all others” (73). Hence, the characters risk their individuality in an attempt to ward off the fear of death which alienates them from themselves as well as the other people around them.

Babette’s agency panic is re- affirmed in her attempt to obtain the illegal drug called Dylar which is meant to alleviate the fear of death. In a fruitless attempt to reclaim her jeopardized agency, Babette sleeps with the project manager of the drug- manufacturing, Willie Mink, also identified as Mr. Gray, in order to get the drug. Her attempt to get Dylar is a manifestation of the belief that technologically- formulated consumer products like Dylar can evade her fear of death. However,

instead of getting rid of her death anxiety, the use of Dylar causes her memory loss, triggering another facet of panic. Even after it turns out to be ineffective rather harmful for Babette, Jack is still eager to take this drug in order to get rid of his panic. This reflects how anxiety-stricken people adhere to consumerism and technological products even when the promise of relief is a mere deception.

Besides these specific instances of agency panic in *White Noise*, the anxiety characterizing Jack's world is also evident through frequent references to conspiracy thinking all across the text. The Galdney family had a belief that something inhabited their basement (27). Jack's son, Wilder weeps constantly for hours without any apparent cause. Heinrich's early receding hairline also speaks of the threats and paranoia of the post modern culture as he has been brought up near an area reserved for chemical disposal, an atmosphere whose polluted air was capable of causing damages to human beings like the deterioration of the brain (22). Jack's former wives had a tendency of conspiracy and had connections to the intelligence services (6). One of them, Tweedy Browner, is a contract agent for the CIA who gets channelized on getting a phone call from Brazil and carries money in a suitcase through Latin America (48). Her new husband, Malcolm Hunt, is a diplomat who manages agents in a secret manner, moving them to and from hard areas (87). The Gray Research Company producing Dylar and the '[w]onder drugs' (146) produced at UFO pharmaceutical labs also refer to conspiracy thinking and paranoia in the narrative. This nuance of constant anxiety contributes directly to create agency panic where agency is drained out of people,

and attributed to these secret and often nameless forces and organizations operating under oblivious covers.

Both *Americana* and *White Noise* are then, a representation of the outside authoritative forces, messing with the agency of characters. These forces include technology, consumerism, media, advertisement industry, wars and numerous others. Most of these are the other-directing influences and function with technological endeavors of some sort in the background. Although these forces are prevalent in the two narratives with varying potentials, forms and effects yet these influences actually trigger agency panic in the characters by leading to the belief that the individual is being controlled from without, diminishing human will and agency, contributing to a panicked response. Delillo's characters can be declared as suffering from what Peter Knight terms as 'insecure paranoia' to refer to post Cold War anxieties where there is not a single perceptible enemy anymore (175). It is linked to the post modern conception of self in which the human identity develops as a result of inevident forces and influences, as opposed to the Cold War's 'secure paranoia'.

### **3.4 AGENCY FIGURED IN DEVICES AND SYSTEMS: THE *POST MODERN TRANSFERENCE***

Different characters in *White Noise* and *Americana* try to deal with their agency panic in different ways. Otto Rank, in his famous book *Beyond Psychology*, views death anxiety as the major source of neurotic behavior. He claims that some alter ego like one's mirror image or a film actor, symbolizing an everlasting life, contributes to eradicate this fear (76). The protagonist in *Americana*, David Bell,

also tries to seek refuge from his panic by attempting to identify with the media icons like Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas where he copies from them an individual manner and style which is believed to be a sign of success in America (Linardi 237). David has lost control over his agency which seems to have been transferred to the media technology, now enjoying autonomy and power over him. This is what Melley calls 'a post modern transference' where human agency is transferred to the system, leaving the individuals experiencing agency panic.

David still has the perception that he is unable to meaningfully affect his surroundings. Being the youngest TV executive making a large amount of money, he still feels a depletion of agency. Attempting to fight back what is causing other- direction in him, he turns towards different media to reclaim his agency. David's journey in the novel, from one technology to the other, signifies this perception. Shunning his job as a television executive in New York, he turns towards film- making, viewing film as a metaphor for agency and authority which he earlier attributed to media actors. David's mention of the 'hypnotic power'(Americana 86) of camera to get respect and veneration equally from both the subject and the observer serves as a powerful illustration of the agency of camera, through which he tries to alleviate his anxieties and shield himself from agency panic. Ultimately these technologies form the psychological foundations on which David's self- understanding depends, as mentioned by Laist. The media images, having powerful agency "articulate his mind, shape his personality, his values, his perceptions, his life choices" (58). Thus, in the process of post modern transference; agency, motive and autonomy which the characters have been

deprived of, are transferred to these systems. Cowart calls the panicked David 'a post modern Odysseus' who reaches not to success but to the spiritual bankruptcy of New York before finally embracing loneliness on an anonymous island (610).

The characters in *White Noise* also try to figure out strategies for autonomy and individuality to grapple with agency panic. Like David in *Americana*, these inhabitants of Blacksmith also exhibit a tendency of post modern transference where they transfer agency to contemporary technologies and consumer culture.

In Gladney's world, the human agency has been transferred primarily to technology which operates as what Fredric Jameson calls, 'a network of power and control' which is very hard to be understood by our brains (38). Mass media explicates reality for these post modern characters who lack rationality and free consciousness. The prime example of this fact is the 'air borne toxic event' during which the agency has been taken away from characters and transferred to this toxic cloud of Nyodene D. as well as to the media technologies which are responsible for interpreting the event for the residents of Blacksmith. These people have placed too much agency in technological artifacts and too little agency in themselves so much so that they no longer take their own perception as valid. This is evident in Heinrich's remarks: "Our senses are wrong a lot more often than they're right. This has been proved in the laboratory" (*White Noise* 23). Thus, during this event of toxic spill, the symptoms experienced by the characters were actually an unconscious reaction to the reports given by media. In this way, media creates and interprets reality for these characters and endorses



people's daily experiences. Television, the foremost media technology, is 'a primal force in the American home' as claimed by Murray, possessing authoritative attributes of being "timeless, self-contained, self-referring" (51). Hence the toxic event depicts that the "subjective responses are both constructed and validated by radio and television" (Wilcox 351) which embody the agency depleted from humans as a manifestation of post modern transference.

Julian Henneberg points out that in the post modern era; the complications of different technologies, media systems and international networks have increased to such a high degree that "it eludes the grasp of individual cognition" (58). Jack also has to suffer constantly from a lack of authority and deep-rooted anxieties which are the major causes of his agency panic. As a defense mechanism, he adopts a false identity – the academic persona of J.A.K. Gladney. He is the chairman of the Department of Hitler Studies yet he cannot speak the German language. Since Hitler was a powerful and influential figure in history and is a symbol of authority, strength and control; Jack believes him to be greater than death (*White Noise* 287). Powerless and frightened people are attracted towards "magical figures, mythic figures, epic men" (287), claims Murray and this fearful man called Jack Gladney tries to submerge in the aura of Hitler's strong personality. He adapts various means to be influential by gaining agency through his academic persona in Hitler Studies. As mentioned by Sevilay Yavuz, Jack thinks that he can also become greater than death and thus employs Hitler as 'a protective device' (90). However, since the personality adopted by Jack is un-influential and a mere pretence, he appears to be "the false character that follows

the name around" (*White Noise* 17). The chancellor recommended him to work on his name, looks and personality to be taken seriously. Consequently, he added an extra initial to his name and began to be known as "J.A.K. Gladney" (16). He had also prepared a list of German words which he could use when needed to uphold his pretense of knowing the language but he constantly refuses to learn the German language for the Hitler Studies Conference at the College- on- the- Hill Campus.

Sol Yurick in his article, "Fleeing Death in a World of Hyper- Babble" argues that there is a resistance which the German language poses to Jack and the language sounds threatening and enigmatic to him (366). This shows his inability to gain access to the underlying meaning of the German tongue and to know the real Hitler. Jack also names his elder son Heinrich, believing that it is an authoritative name which reminds of the German police chief, Heinrich Himmler. All this is an attempt on his part to deal with his agency panic where he tries to augment himself with Hitler and the German culture, placing too much agency in them. This is his requirement basically to control his death panic (Yavuz 90).

Believing that he can gain a suitable amount of agency through his academic persona, Jack also searches for agency in his robe and glasses that he wears to appear influential. When Babette asks him to stop wearing the glasses, he exclaims that he is unable to teach when he is without them (*White Noise* 221). In part one of the novel, Jack encounters his colleague, Eric Massingale while shopping with his family at the Mid- Village Mall. As Jack happens to be without his academic robe which signifies the agency for his academic persona, he

appears a totally different person, a “big harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy” (83) as exclaimed by Eric. These are the instances of post modern transference where agency and motive have been transferred to external objects like academic robe and glasses.

When Jack senses his academic persona threatened, he turns towards consumerism with a hope to regain his lost agency. In the novel, the motivation to consume is strongly related to characters’ feeling of agency panic. This is the reason why consumerism is a defining force of life in Gladney’s world. By filling their lives with all sorts of commodities, the characters get integrated into the consumer culture. Jack explains his experience of shopping as, “I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake” (84). Linardi elaborates that consumerism has invaded the personal thoughts and cognition of characters. Consuming in the novel is equated with being happy and consumerism is now the “myth of satisfaction of the character’s needs” (240). This is because of the reason that consumerism detracts the characters from their experiences for a while, bringing them a temporary relief from their anxieties. Consequently, it is incorporated in virtually everything done by Gladney’s family whether it is the family meal, visiting the supermarket or going to the shopping malls.

Tabloids are a form of product containing stories aimed at alleviating the physical and mental sufferings of human beings. The society seeks out hope by adhering to and having a naive faith in what Jack regards as the “tabloid future, with its mechanism of a hopeful twist to apocalyptic events” (*White Noise* 146). Different

kinds of stories narrated in tabloids generate illusive hopes about cures and remedies for various diseases and toxic threats in the post modern era. One of the stories claims that the cries of mice measured at a frequency of forty thousand cycles per second, recorded in tapes, are being employed by surgeons to remove tumors in human body (236). However the characters like Jack still feel a diminishing of agency as well as a sense of disorientation and bafflement. Katherine Hayles opines that the perpetual state of obscurity embodying Jack is an outcome of capitalism (409).

Instead of giving agency and power to people, consumerism offers a promise of relief from fear of death and other anxieties through the use of products like tabloids, telling the stories of the “miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity” (*White Noise* 326). Babette had discovered Dylar from the tabloids but this drug proved to be ineffective in eradicating human fear which it was meant to do. The anxiety prevalent till the end of the narrative proves that turning to consumerism as a means of gaining agency is not an effective way to deal with anxiety and panic. On the contrary, it leads to an enhancement of agency panic by distorting people’s beliefs and views about life and death. The people who are less immersed in consumerism and technological products are immune to the related anxieties also. The prime example of this fact is a society relatively unaffected by consumerism like Tibet. The way its people react to the idea of death is different from the way people do in Gladney’s consumerist world. Tibetans do not try to run away from death by making it artificial through consumer products. Rather they take it simply as an end of association with things

and do not deny it. Having a clear perception of it, they consider dying an art and thus, neither interact with life in an artificial manner, nor with death (38). Thus, the bewildering culture of consumerism deprives the postmodern people of a true understanding of life and death, and death appears less scary when people are away from the consumer culture.

Finding replenishment in technology is another way to deal with agency panic in *White Noise*. The characters think of the technological artifacts, devices and products as possessing some level of agency and therefore, try to associate with them in order to forget their anxieties. The prime example of this fact is television. Gladney's family watches television together on Friday nights as a ritual. This is also an illustration of a post modern transference where television, instead of human beings, embodies strength and agency.

Another technological product believed to possess agency is Dylar whose strength and agency lies in its ability to remove the fear of mortality from its human users. Babette risks her marital bliss to get this drug just because she was excessively panicked with the fear of death. Dylarama shows how agency has been transferred to this technologically formulated drug. When Jack is exasperated with the fear of death from the Nyodene Derivative and with the desire of obtaining Dylar for himself; his father-in-law, Vernon Dickey gives him a loaded gun. Here, the human agency appears to be parceled out to this 25- caliber Zumwalt automatic gun which had a quick paralyzing effect on his mind and was probably given to him to bless his life with "a fresh design, a scheme, a shapeliness" (253).

Jack also attributes agency to the medical equipment in the hospital. After undergoing a thorough examination of his body through scanning machines, X-rays and blood tests; he feels more anxious. These machines and technological equipments cause a draining out of his agency and he believes these are capable of transforming a healthy person into a sick one only by taking medical tests (277). His thinking reinforces the concept of agency panic linked to the post modern transference where the medical equipment displays agency while the characters lack it.

Towards the end of the narrative, Jack decides to overcome his agency panic through killing another person i.e. Mink. He equates killing another person with killing his own anxiety and fear of death. This thought process is fostered by Murray who tells him that killing a person is actually acquiring 'life- credit' (290) which increases as you kill more and more people. Yavuz argues that Jack continues to live in deception of a world of simulations. It is only after shooting Mink that he realizes the fact that killing someone else cannot save him from death (92).

Jack also tries to alleviate his agency panic by seeking refuge in the transcendental and soothing power of religion. This is illustrated in the scene when he goes to the Mother of Mercy Hospital, located in Iron City, after his squabble with Willie Mink. Jack is also disappointed here when Sister Hermann Marie reveals to him that her faith and commitment is a mere pretence to save the world from shattering. She calls the believers stupid. Jack also refers to religion,

belief system and the eternal life as 'great old human gullibilities' (*White Noise* 319) and is again left baffled and lost in agency panic.

As discussed above, the characters in Gladney's world probe numerous ways to shield themselves and get rid of a series of anxieties broadly termed as agency panic. Jack adopts an academic persona in Hitler Studies, turns towards consumerism along with his family and friends, tries to reclaim agency through technology, strives to become a killer instead of a dier and ultimately makes an attempt to seek refuge in the religious beliefs. However, he remains unable to get rid of his agency panic till the end where all these media, technologies and narratives prove to be unrewarding, failing to give a meaning to his life and existence. This is a manifestation of the breakdown of what Jean Francois Lyotard calls 'Grand of narratives'. In his seminal book, *The Postmodern Condition*; he argues that meta-narratives, the untold stories serving to unite and totalize the world and to rationalize the power structure in society, can no longer be applied to all aspects of human existence. He claims that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses" (37). *White Noise* also shows that the period of meta-narratives has ended and the meta- narratives like religion and Marxism cannot explain and rationalize human experience any more. Babae et. al also argue that Delillo depicts the failure of meta- narratives in the post modern age where one day media is the most powerful thing, the next day authority shifts to consumerism and shopping malls, and then science appears dominating in the form of Dylar. Consequently, the focus of the human beings keeps shifting from one to another (31). Melley, in theorizing his concept of

agency panic, also validates that in today's world; conspiracy theory serves as a 'master narrative' (8).

Hence, the post modern subjects like David in *Americana* and Jack in *White Noise* are depicted by Delillo as a product of conspiracy thinking and paranoia. The unlimited number of devices and situations in technological world contribute to the surrendering of human agency to uncanny devices and the controlling systems. This can be further explicated by discerning the underlying pattern of the technological world, which Borgmann describes as the device paradigm.



## CHAPTER 4

### **‘Focal Things’ Wavering Outside the ‘Device Paradigm’**

#### **in Delillo’s *Americana* and *White Noise***

*Americana* and *White Noise*, the novels discussed in this thesis, are primarily concerned with post modern ideas, particularly a preoccupation with technology. The narratives are a true depiction of the American post modern life, manifesting the influence of technology on the individual lives of people as well as on the society as a whole. The world portrayed in these two novels is characterized by the abundant use of technological devices and machines. Modern technology asserts itself through regular humming of different machines, powerful electronic images and complex media networks.

Different technologies, functioning in the form of a deep structural pattern, serve as a template for bringing nature, society, religion and culture under control. The anxiety and chaos prevalent in the selected fiction can be attributed to these devices and technologies because in the post modern world technology is ‘visceral’, ‘pervasive’ and ‘utterly intimate’ as claimed by Bruce Sterling (346). This chapter concentrates on illustrating how Delillo’s world functions on the basis of the device paradigm by exploring the characteristics of the paradigm prevalent in Delillo’s selected fiction. Besides this, it also engages with sorting out a solution to technological anxiety through an investigation of the relevance of Borgmann’s focal things and practices in order to illuminate how panic and anxiety can be dealt with effectively through adopting an intelligent use and

approach to technology. For this purpose, the argument in this chapter consists of seven parts.

The first part examines how the features of technological availability are fostered in the paradigm prevalent in the selected fiction. Particular instances from different spheres of Gladney's world are traced to delineate its relevance to Borgmann's stance. In the second part, the distinction between 'things' and 'devices' which forms the basis of the paradigm explored by Borgmann, is focused in order to determine the important characteristics of technological 'devices' as opposed to 'things'. The third section explores how the technological availability and the features of the devices shape Delillo's world in a larger pattern called the 'device paradigm'. It illustrates how technology and its offshoots work as a defining force behind the pattern our world has assumed in the post modern era. Discussing the novel's dramatic core, the air borne toxic event, this section also highlights the potential dangers of the device paradigm, erupting in numerous instances of human suffering and anxiety. It also traces the deleterious effects of giving up focal things and practices as portrayed by Delillo. The fourth part of this chapter focuses to reveal the impact of the device paradigm on family life and the household. The next two sections trace the mechanism and impacts of the device paradigm on the status of nature and religion as well as on work and employment respectively. The last section brings to light the new patterns in which the device paradigm has designed the human consciousness and psyches. The resulting condition of the characters of technological world, presented in the selected novels, along with the extent to which the reform of

technology via focal things and practices can serve as a solution to their anxiety, is also explored in this section.

The gradual succession of the world from the pre-technological settings of focal things and practices towards a world replete with technological devices resulted in a collapsing of the belief system, emotional instability of the characters, psychic numbing and nostalgia punctuating the scenes in the novels. Stumbling through life in the midst of technologies, David Bell, the protagonist in *Americana*, is portrayed as a perplexed character in search of the truth of his own restless and tortured soul, portraying how the excessive use of technologies have changed the consciousness of people and their relationship with the world. Whereas Gladney's world in *White Noise* also exhibits the tyrannical authority of atomic weapons and the pervasiveness of technology evident from the constant buzzing of media sounds and mechanical voices of all sorts which have not only gained a threatening authority over the senses of human beings but also over their unconscious. The cacophony of human voices and artificial sounds occupies a segment of every character's brain, manifested as anxieties of numerous forms. Thus, *Americana* and *White Noise* both reflect what Knight has termed as, "an everyday low- intensity paranoia" (45).

Although published more than a decade apart, *Americana* and *White Noise* are closely related to each other in these thematic concerns. However, *Americana* reflects the gradual development and progression of the world from mid-twentieth century, reflected in David's childhood era which was less influenced and shaped by technological dominance, towards the later decades marked by the

pervasive and influential presence of the devices and technological anxiety. Whereas, *White Noise* portrays a fully established technological society, developed on a specific pattern, putting focal things into the background. Hence, *White Noise* has been primarily employed to delineate the features of technological availability, the distinction between things and devices and the paradigm operating in the social, religious, domestic and psychological lives of characters. The narrative of *Americana* is used to give a side by side comparison of the pre and post -technological world in order to fully describe the attributes of Borgmann's device paradigm in relation to Delillo's selected fiction.

#### **4.1 TECHNOLOGICAL MODE OF AVAILABILITY: INSTANTANEOUS, UBIQUITOUS, SAFE AND EASY**

The impacts of technology in various spheres of life and particularly the working of technological society in the post modern world can be extensively delineated through examining the characteristics of the technological mode of availability. The affluence of devices, technological products, commodities and packages has led the direction of the establishment of the device paradigm manifested primarily in the technological way of life and availability of products. Consequently, it has enormously affected human lives by shaping people's beliefs, motivation and behaviours.

An analysis of Delillo's works depicts that the notion of the availability of things in the device paradigm, having the features of being instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe and easy, is evident in all the devices employed by Jack and other characters. Different materials and products used in *White Noise* for different purposes, from

food items to information seeking devices, ensure the instantaneous availability of the required goods and services without any perceptible duration of time. Eating and meal time have been structured around ordering and consuming prepared food. Hunger is accommodated with the commodious availability of standardized and processed food items like “onion-and-garlic chips, nacho thins, peanut crème patties, Waffelos and Kamboos, fruit chews and toffee popcorn; the Dum-Dum pops, the Mystic mints” (3). The characters in the novel including Gladney’s family and the students at College-on-the-Hill mostly consume food stuff which is readily available without any context. Jack, Babbette, Murray and others are mostly found in the super market, looking for instantaneous food items. It offers and entertains the customers with ‘generic food and drink’ and a series of processed food like processed and canned fruit items, packed dry fruits as well as a variety of frozen food (18-19). This mode of eating has replaced not only the customs and manners of the traditional culture of having a meal but also the skill and effort needed to present it. In this way, the instantaneous availability of food has caused the focal practices of traditional meal to disappear. The tasks of preparing meal, setting the table, gathering the whole family, greeting each other and eating with a feeling of warmth in the relationships, were the characteristics that made meal a focal practice in the pre technological world as mentioned by Borgmann. These features are totally absent in the ways Jack, his family, friends and students eat; marked by grabbing a processed food item and consuming it anywhere like in front of a television set or in the car. Jack describes this sort of practice at one point as, “I pulled in at a place that specialized in chicken parts

and brownies. We decided to eat in the car” (231). This has given the practice of eating in *White Noise*, the ‘social and cultural anonymity’ by making food a context less commodity which only requires a mindless consumption as established by Borgmann (*TCCL* 205).

Apart from food manners and customs, the banking system is also based on instantaneous availability of its products and services. Jack uses an Automated Teller Machine in which the electronic banking outlet system facilitates the instantaneous inquiry of his bank account balance as well as the basic transactions. It operates with an invisible system like many other technological devices with “[t]he networks, the circuits, the streams, the harmonies” (*White Noise* 46). Jack readily receives the information he requires regarding his balance but the machinery of the system at work in it is hidden, making no demands on his knowledge, skill or engagement which is a hallmark of the device paradigm.

Besides the information about banking system; the facts, data, news and advice about daily life events and happenings also manifest an instantaneous availability in *White Noise*. The National Cancer Quiz telecasted on the television provided important facts about the disease without demanding an extensive study or research regarding it (214). The Air-borne Toxic Event in the novel released a deadly poisonous burning chemical in the air which could be highly dangerous for the people. Information in this regard was readily and instantaneously available to the public through various media like radio and numerous other technological devices used by the disaster management authorities, as the fire captain’s car announced, “[e]vacuate all places of residence. Cloud of deadly chemicals, cloud

of deadly chemicals” (119). In this way, information in various spheres of life is readily and instantaneously available to the people in the post modern society depicted in the novel. All these instances manifest the instantaneous nature of the technological products which is the first feature of technological availability.

Most of the technologically available goods in the *White Noise* are ubiquitous, which is the second important feature of the devices and products available in the device paradigm, as highlighted by Borgmann. The means of telecommunication used, for example, are present everywhere at the same time and are constantly encountered. Babbette talking to her father, and the aggregate of siblings and step-siblings in Gladney’s family talking continuously to their separated parents on the telephone are a clear manifestation of the fact that technologically available communication in the post modern era is omnipresent in the society. Besides the telecommunication systems and devices; television, providing information and entertainment, punctuates numerous scenes with its tyrannical authority, manifesting its ubiquitous nature as Murray regards it a primary force shaping American families (51). This portrays the ghastly impacts technology has produced for its users.

Technologically available goods and devices used by various characters in *White Noise* are safe in all respects which is the third feature highlighted in Borgmann’s theory of technology. The most revelatory part in this regard comes along in traveling described in the novel. Traveling through airplane is a prime example which ensures the safety, comfort and easiness of its passengers during flight and is danger- free even for children. Twelve years old, Bee travelled extensively and

“spanned time zones, land masses, vast oceanic distances, days and nights, on large and small planes, in summer and winter, from Surabaya to Iron City” (93). Bee’s mother, Tweedy Browner, flew from Washington to Iron City planning to go to Boston the next day. Traveling safe through planes is an important part of the characters’ daily routine in *White Noise* and it is termed as their ultimate protection as Tweedy remarks, “an aircraft traveling at the speed of sound may be the last refuge of gracious living and civilized manners known to man” (93).

Another illustration of the safety lying in the technologically available goods and services is the facility of automated banking operated through a ‘secret code’, used by Jack, providing integrated technology systems. It renders the withdrawal of cash, account balance inquiry, fund transfer and bill payment safe, protecting one’s money and wealth against theft and other potential dangers. The safety ensured by this system is depicted in the instructions Jack received for using his account saying, “REMEMBER. You cannot access your account unless your code is entered properly ... Only your code allows you to enter the system” (295). The safety yielded in technological availability of products and services is not restricted to travelling and automated banking only. Rather, it dominates all spheres and services required to make human life easy through technology. For example, the advancement in the food technology represented in the novel show the safety it has provided to the usage of different products. Various materials like ‘cartons’, ‘tinfoil’, ‘shiny bags of potato chips’, ‘flip- top rings and twist ties’ and ‘individually wrapped slices of orange cheese’, show how the preserved and



packaged food items have made the foodstuff safe to be used whenever needed, removing the danger of expiring or getting contaminated.

In *White Noise*, the availability of things is easy because they are technologically available in a non-burdensome way through different kinds of machinery. The characters in the novel have an easy access to all kinds of knowledge through the use of television. It is a custom for the Gladney's family to gather around the TV set on a daily basis which provides them with the news of all significant happenings across the globe including earth quakes, floods and volcano eruptions (64). Television viewing is an obsession for them and it does not require any effort, skill or working to get information rather provides it in an easy, trouble-free and effortless way. This easiness of getting information about the important events and news around the globe has made watching television a deep-rooted practice in the post modern American culture as Alfonse Stompanato comments, "[f]or most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set" (66). Television, in the novel, has also been employed to make teaching and learning easy as Babbette's class lecture in the basement of the church was being transmitted through television by virtue of the local cable station (104). Another manifestation of the easiness brought through technological availability is the development in the facilities of travel and transport. 'Planes' and 'taxis' widely employed in the novel have made transportation easy and convenient where people travel at a fairly high speed, without facing the harmful effects of weather, extensive fatigue, safety threats, and excessive time consumption (217).

This analysis shows that technology promises to liberate us from toil which is connected to the notion of technological availability. This mode of availability, having specific characteristics manifested in Delillo's works, situates it in the realms of the device paradigm.

#### **4.2 MAGICAL ARTIFACTS POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY: 'DEVICES' REPLACING THE 'THINGS'**

Borgmann describes life in the ambit of the device paradigm through presenting a comparison of 'things' and 'devices', and this distinction is the hallmark of his Theory of Technology. The features of devices need to be distinguished and analyzed in order to trace their workings in the technological settings presented in the selected fiction. In *White Noise*, as the society depicted is a post modern world; the characteristic features of 'devices' are fully apparent throughout, standing in marked contrast to the features of 'things', as explained by Borgmann. The most important feature of a device is that it provides a good without bodily and social engagement and also lacks a complicated network of relations associated with things. This feature depicts in the example of music for which the students of the College-on-the-Hill campus use devices like 'phonograph records and cassettes' (3). This availability of music through the use of devices does not require any human effort, attention, skill or practice of playing musical instruments or singing. Consequently, it produces music as a commodity without any involvement or participation of people which characterizes the device paradigm. This stands in sharp contrast to a thing which is inseparable from human engagement as well as its pertaining social relations. Music produced

through devices deprives the students in the novel of the social relations and connections which are likely to be formed when a group of people gathers to sing and play musical instruments together.

The lack of human engagement, attention and skills which signifies the device paradigm is also evident in the meals described in *White Noise* served by Babbette to her husband and children in the family. These meals lack physical engagement and preparatory effort, and are usually context less as they are usually bought as packed items or are ordered from a restaurant. These are the features of 'devices' as opposed to that of 'things' requiring close attention and engagement at various levels and forms. Lunch time in Gladney's family where Jack, Babbette, Wilder, Denise, Steffie are all present, is described in the novel as follows,

We entered a period of chaos and noise. We milled about, bickered a little, dropped utensils. Finally we were all satisfied with what we'd been able to snatch from the cupboards and refrigerator or swipe from each other and we began quietly plastering mustard or mayonnaise on our brightly colored food. The mood was one of deadly serious anticipation, a reward hard-won. The table was crowded and Babbette and Denise elbowed each other twice, although neither spoke (6-7).

Eating, which was a focal event in the older times, has been devastated and split up into snacks or ready-made food items in the post modern era presented in the novel, depriving it of all the features of a thing and grounding it into the sphere of the device paradigm as described by Borgmann.

The hidden and opaque machinery of the devices, delineated at a number of places in *White Noise*, is another important feature of the devices as opposed to that of things. The refrigerator, electricity, light, artificial hearts used in advanced medical science, atomic energy, TV shows, radio, computers – are few of the numerous technological devices and products extensively used by Jack's family members and other characters in the novel but as opposed to things, these devices neither require a skill or constant involvement nor are their machinery and workings known to their users. Rather they are depicted in the novel with concealed machinery, ensuring the commodious availability of whatever they are designed to produce. Jack's fourteen years old son, Henrich's remarks vividly describe their condition as he mentions,

Can we make a refrigerator? Can we even explain how it works? What is electricity? What is light? ... Name one thing you could make. 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. Moon landings, artificial hearts (147).

He further says, "What is a radio? What is the principle of a radio? Go ahead, explain ... What good is knowledge if it just floats in the air? It goes from computer to computer. It changes and grows every second of everyday. But nobody actually knows anything" (148-149).

These characteristics of devices demonstrated by Henrich exactly resonate with the features of the device paradigm highlighted by Borgmann and stand in opposition to what he describes as things, requiring a constant bodily engagement

as well as knowledge, usage and passing on of skills to the next generations. In this way, the features of things as well as the complex web of social relations they form are missing in the post modern world depicted in the novel.

The guaranteed provision of 'what a device is there for' is another important feature of devices exhibited in the novel. Telephone sets used by Babbette, Jack and the children ensure telecommunication; cars and planes make transportation easy; frozen foods make up meal while the cassettes in stereo sets provide music whenever and however needed but all these entities provide one commodity at a time. This is in sharp contrast to the features of things which furnish more than one function at a time.

By means of establishing this contrast between things and devices; it can be argued that due to lack of mental and physical engagement, the devices deprive human beings of their relationship with the world which is replaced by concealed machinery. Due to this threatening role of devices and technologies in the post modern era; the device paradigm serves to clutter with human lives and societies, in all spheres, at multiple levels.

#### **4.3 DREAM OF PROGRESS COMES TRUE: 'DEVICE PARADIGM' REIGNING SUPREME**

In *White Noise* and *Americana*, technology is the crucial force that contours the activities of people in all spheres of life as they are permanently intimidated by media and other technologies. Technology determines the ways they eat, play, learn, communicate, socialize and take up reality, structuring them in a specific pattern underlying their society. It is technology that devises and shapes the

information, entertainment, memory, identity, emotions and even death for the people in DeLillo's world. Although the characters usually have direct and undeviating ways to reach an end through devices but they lack its consciousness and insight, leading to technological anxiety surrounding every character in the novel.

This mode of using technology excessively and unintelligently, with a negligence of the focal things and practices, shapes human lives in a pattern termed as the device paradigm by Borgmann. This pervasiveness of technological devices has caused all the characters to suffer physically as well as mentally, in one way or the other. Consequently, they are in a perpetual state of crisis flourishing from techno-scientific weapons, highly developed devices and ecological devastation.

The Airborne Toxic Event in *White Noise* caused by a train derailment, around which most of its plot revolves, shows the technologically induced dangers. Jeopardizing the human lives and safety, it released a highly toxic chemical, Nyodene D. in the air and became a source of dread and anxiety for all the people. Causing the evacuation of Blacksmith, this generated such a high level of insecurity in people that since this event took place, Gladney's neighbours, the Stovers, kept their cars in the driveway instead of the garage with the key in the ignition so that it could help them escape in case of any emergency situations (302). Heinrich highlights the potential risks in the toxic, technologically induced spills which happen in the novel quite often. These contain cancerous liquids, arsenic and radioactive materials which could be seriously dangerous due to the toxic ingredients they possess hence referred to as

a death manufactured in the laboratory (127). Later in the novel, these technologically induced events lead inexorably to the collapse and dispersal of the characters' minds and selves, draining life out of them. Jack, after becoming aware of his body developing a 'nebulous mass' as the after effects of insecticide, exclaims that he is 'technically dead' (283). But he feels a sense of artificiality about this death in the device paradigm surrounding him and calls it 'shallow' as well as 'unfulfilling' (283).

Some other American novels of the 1980s like Walker Percey's *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987), Paul Theroux's *O- Zone* (1986), T. Coraghessan Boyle's *World's End* (1987), and Richard Russo's *Mohawk* (1986) also reflect the anxiety of the common people about a denaturalized world (Deitering 196-97). This common theme links these novels to Delillo's narratives.

The 'electrical and magnetic fields' have been described by Jack as highly threatening so much so that the suicide rate is fairly high in people who reside near high- voltage power lines due to its tendency to cause sadness and depression among people by affecting the brain cells. This throws light on the causes of the restlessness prevalent in the post modern society of *White Noise*. Apart from this, Heinrich also mentions other potential dangers and threats like the 'headaches', 'fatigue', 'nerve disorders', 'strange and violent behavior' and the deformities in babies caused by radio and television. The radios, TVs, microwave ovens, power lines, radar systems constantly emitting radiations, have caused the characters in the novel suffer from multiple disorders and instabilities of mind and body (174-175). Thus, the world populated by Delillo's characters is dominated with anti-

technological sentiments primarily because of the anxiety technology breeds in all spheres of life.

In *White Noise*, during the Air Borne Toxic Event and at numerous other instances, the media technologies including radio and television are given voices like characters and the lives of the characters are subdued with their presence. The response given by the characters to the chemical spillage is also technologically induced as the children began to feel all the symptoms of its harmful effects only after they were described in a radio broadcast. Thus, in the city of Blacksmith, people rely more on media reports dispensing with reality rather than their own senses to interpret the happenings in their surroundings.

The electronic images and media information obliterate objective reality. Even the experience of death is technologically mediated and converted into an artificial phenomenon. When Jack undergoes an examination of his body for the effects of Nyodene D. to which he was exposed during the SIMUVAC, he comments,

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

Therefore, the devices have changed people's relationship with their world, breeding turmoil and anxiety of the most contemporary varieties due to haphazard technological expansions in the absence of critical thought which reflects the most prominent threats of the device paradigm.



These technological endeavors also affect the life in *Americana* which represents the journey of the post modern man in the technological era through different mediums including television, films, photography, magazine journalism, advertising and even books. Screening through the lens of his 16 mm camera, Delillo's protagonist walks clumsily through life where psychic numbing and nostalgia reigns supreme. Leaving his television- dominated life in New York, David shifts to another electronic medium i.e., film and finally to literature which represents his quest to seek peace and harmony by making his fantasies come true. However, letting him down these media leave him baffled and the substitution of a new order in place of the older one of the pre-technological world remains unfulfilled. Thus the post modern human being, who has redesigned his landscape in the realm of technological dominance and is living in 'Mega America', has grown manifolds in anxiety and restlessness. This is the essence of his journey from the world of focal things and practices towards the device paradigm in which he lives as "the cortical nexus of a profoundly complex play of advertisements, media bombardments, and shadow realities" (Coward 608).

The world of the device paradigm Borgmann delineates bears a striking resemblance to Delillo's world also with reference to media technology. Delillo's narratives are diversified with media slogans, electronic data and consumer advice as the television describes the "trends that could dramatically impact your portfolio" (*White Noise* 61). This gives rise to a media-saturated consciousness which eclipses the reality. This is manifested in the novel when Murray and Jack

drive together in the country around Farmington to visit “the most photographed barn in America” (12). It is surrounded by a large number of tourists, cars and tour buses. Devices for image capturing like cameras, tripods, filter equipment and telephoto lenses intersperse the scene with the authority and omnipresence of technology. Noticing the tourists “taking pictures of taking pictures” (13), Murray exclaims to Jack the post modern condition where images by virtue of technology dominate and often times overshadow reality. Hinting at this fact he mentions, “[o]nce you’ve seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn” (12).

Manifesting the relationship between technology and simulation, the most photographed barn in America also becomes a classic example of Baudrillard’s notion of simulation in the contemporary world which displaces the real thing represented by it. Baudrillard claims that the image or simulation has no relation to the reality (*Simulacra and Simulation*). It creates an aura of hyper-reality as in the example of barn where Murray observes, “[n]o one sees the barn” (*White Noise* 12). He further exclaims about the strengthening of the aura created through technological photography of the barn, “[w]e’re not here to capture an image, we’re here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura” (12). Just like the representations of Los Angeles and Las Vegas in *Play It As It Lays*, *White Noise* also reflects how a trivial thing like a barn can be made wonderful and hyper real in the technological world.

Murray also validates Borgmann’s claim that the excessive use of technology causes a decline of the focal things and practices. Murray regards his visit to the

barn and being there amid technological culture as some sort of 'spiritual surrender' (12). Thus technological dominance and media culture has led to deterioration of the spiritual values of the characters. The post modern people turn to technology and its products as a replacement of focal practices like religion. Jack's German teacher, Howard Dunlop for instance, tells him that after losing faith in God due to a death in his family, he "turned to meteorology for comfort" (55). Later on, he derives a sense of harmony and serenity from weather and nature which speaks of the focal power of nature as claimed by Borgmann. "Dew frost and fog. Snow flurries. The jet stream" (55) enriched him with tranquility he had never experienced before and consequently he started to come out of his shell. At another occasion, Jack goes for a walk with Murray around the campus where the trees cover the surroundings and the chirping birds add to the natural beauty of the scene. He expects it to be a 'miscellaneous meditation' (282). This also hints at the focal power of being with friends as well as that of wilderness, as argued by Borgmann.

#### **4.4 FAMILY: "THE CRADLE OF WORLD'S MISINFORMATION"**

Lalor et al. claim that family is absolutely necessary for young people as it is the most significant source of safety, affection, relations and selfhood for them (76). The device paradigm has, however, changed the family dynamics, resulting in a deterioration of the family values. The traditional nuclear family has eroded, converting the family into a household. Lalor et al. define the household as, "a

greater range of living arrangements” (58) which implies that people live together in a home and share basic facilities but are not essentially related to one another.

In *White Noise*, Jack’s family is an unfastened collection of himself, his fourth wife Babbette and a series of siblings and step- siblings rotating in various temporary groupings. Jack has been married five times and his family has witnessed greatly the influence of his various divorces and re-couplings. He has four children. From his first and second marriages to Dana Breed- Love, he has Mary Alice and Steffie; Heinrich is from his marriage to Janet Savory whereas Bee is from his marriage to Tweedy Browner. Besides, his wife, Babbette has three children: Denise, Eugene and Wilder. Among Jack’s children, only Heinrich and Steffie live with him. This is a representative family of the post modern technological world where the fundamental institution of marriage and family, which forms the basic unit of society, is under attack. It depicts a weakening of the family bonds causing the family members to act in non-traditional ways. Wrapped up in their anxieties, the children are at a distance from each other as well as their parents, in a world replete with modern devices and technology. They visit their separated parents in their leisure time or talk occasionally to them on phone. It is due to this permanent shuffling of relationships in the family, testifying to unsuccessful marriages, that Jack regards his family as “the cradle of the world’s misinformation” (81).

The evolution of a family living with focal things and practices in the pre-technological world, towards a decline in technological settings, is evident in *Americana*, depicting the marked contrast between David’s childhood as

compared to his adult life characterized by the device paradigm. The family and household in the pre-technological setting embodied quite different set of values and norms as compared to the ones in a highly technological world. "A family nourished, educated, trained, and entertained its children in a tradition that was alive in the parents' competence and represented to the children in the parents" (Borgmann, *TCCL* 136). This passage almost explicitly corresponds to the characteristics of David's childhood where he lived in a close aggregate with his parents and siblings.

Simple devices and practices which were prevalent in David's childhood gave him and the family a sense of security and happiness. He mentions the warmth in his house where his mother and the older sister prepared food for them. He ran to his father to greet him as he entered home. They ate homemade cookies, Mary cleaned the dishes for them and Jane drew a picture of her mother which shows the child's affection towards her. All these practices which were all soothing and important, according to David, gave him a sense of safety. David's parents enjoyed a relationship of love and warmth. When his mother suffered from cancer, his father showed towards her an attitude of extreme affection and care, and was trying his very best to ease her pain as David describes, "[a]ll this time, he told me, he had been trying to steal death from her body. By confronting it himself, he would keep it away from her" (*Americana* 171). David's father did not only care for his family in his life but also worried about his family's future if something happened to him. He also prepared for such unpredictable happenings as he had bought about nine different kinds of policies that would suffice for the

needs of David's mother, sisters and himself in case the father did not live (152). The parents- children relationship was also based on mutual love and respect. When David was alone with his mother, he sat on the stairs with her and chatted (139). As a young boy, he was affectionately attached to her (138). David also enjoyed a friendly relationship with his father as he got a junior driver's license with his father's willingness and favor. During snowfalls in winters, he went for shoveling snow with his father and wanted to do some shoveling himself but as they had only one shovel and he knew his father loved shoveling, he repressed his desire for his father's happiness. They made little jokes with each other, depicting their frankness and affection. When David was playing tennis with Bob Davidson, his father arrived at the court and showed an encouraging and friendly attitude towards him. He patted him on his back and greeted him. Later, they walked into the room with their arms wrapped around each other's shoulders. David regards it as "bursts of blood love" (151). He also went driving with his father every weekend. His mother knitted clothes, talked about the blessings of cleanliness and they watched the television together. The family ate the home made food and table manners were an integral part of their life style (132-136).

Besides parents, the siblings also enjoyed a close relationship of love and harmony. David and his siblings, Mary and Jane did not have high technology games and play stations. So, they played simple games as they would sit in the porch and guess the kind of vehicle which would pass them next (180). David mentions playing checkers with his sister, Mary (161). The children exhibited respect for their parents as they had a feeling of gratitude for every simple thing

done by their parents (137). The children did not only receive care and kindness from their own parents and elders in the family but also from other acquaintances in the surroundings. David mentions the loving treatment he used to receive from his best friend, Tommy Valerio's mother. Whenever he went to visit Valerio, his mother would show great love and hospitality towards him. David mentions, "his mother would squeeze my cheeks and rub her knuckles on my head" (134). Thus, the early years of David's life are plentiful of a large number of different focal things and practices as highlighted by Borgmann such as "being with friends, helping others, religion ... sports and games (by men), and cooking (by women)" (TCCL 143).

With the growing prevalence of the technological devices, the most important arena of life which underwent deterioration step by step was the household (136). In *Americana*, the adaptation of the technological life style was accompanied with disastrous consequences and the devastating behaviors of the characters. The web of social relations and family ties started disappearing as David moved towards adulthood which was accompanied with a destruction of the pre- technological characteristics of life. The fact that this change in life style is based on technology is highlighted through a close analysis of the characters' daily life and engagement with their world.

In David's childhood years, the advanced technological artifacts were missing. People had to engage themselves with different chores and tasks related to the household. In pursuing them, they remained woven in a fabric of social relations and close ties with parents, siblings, neighbours and other people around. They

shared their love and kind sentiments with each other and were generally joyous. However, with the advent and gradual dominance of new technology in the novel, the social web of relations associated with different tasks was surrendered to the machinery of devices. The people, who were connected to each other in David's childhood with relatively less technological advancement of his world, diverted their attention to multiple technologies in the later years. This technological environment gave rise to broader conflicts for the characters particularly in their family lives. This is illustrated in a number of instances in the novel.

The haste depicted in making relationships also exercised in breaking them, rendering them unstable. David inquires Warren Beasley about his marriage's timing and gets the reply, "It's on her lunch hour" (95). It is the third dental hygienist Warron has married which reflects how easily marriages and divorces take place in his world. David's relationship with his wife which comes to an end when it loses its charm also shows the shattering of family ties in the technological world. Even after he withdrew from the bond and got divorced, he is unable to live a satisfied life and exhibits strange behaviors as he describes, "for no reason at all, I slid my foot several inches across the rug, and kicked over the empty coffee cup beneath Richter Jane's chair. I put my heel on it and crushed it. Nobody seemed to notice. I felt sick and exhausted" (71). At this point, he feels a strong urge to be with his former wife, Meredith (71). Meredith also remains discontented and reveals to David that she was not happy in her new life either (30). She has to face trouble in sleeping peacefully and tells David that she dreamed about him (55-56). This flux and instability in the relationships and the



absence of marital bliss is reflected in a number of divorces taking place frequently in the novel which has not only made it a matter of routine life but has also rendered it customary and commonplace for the characters. Austin describes it as an amazing invention which removes tension as she exclaims, “[d]ivorce is the most educating route to a deep understanding between two people. It’s the second and most important step in arriving at a truly radiant form of self- donative love. Marriage, of course, is the first step” (285). Besides the temporary nature of marriages which do not last long, extra marital affairs are also very common in the technological world of the novel as David mentions his one – month old affair with Tana Elkbridge who is a secretary in the news division and is married seven years (87).

An obsession with technology and the anxiety created by the device paradigm, as reflected in *Americana*, can be termed as the driving force behind the thinking pattern and actions of its characters. David’s consciousness, as a New York television executive, is wrapped up in the currents of media technology which also affects the thoughts and aspirations concerning his personal life. On the night when he first meets his ex- wife, Meredith, he connotes the scene with cinematic imagery as being captured through the lens of a camera, describing the scene as follows,

each couple sculpted in the dim light, almost motionless, and the distances between them absolutely right so that the whole scene obeyed an abstract calculus of perspective and tone, as if arranged for the whim of a camera

... Once again, as on so many occasions in my life, I was stirred by the power of the image (30-31).

Thus, different technological products like the television and movies have a drastic influence on David's personal life as they provide motives for many things he does in his life or aspires to do, and have also created disturbance and turbulence in it. The everyday life of characters is grounded in media technology and David behaves in accordance with the media codes. He copies his personal style from Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas and at times, confuses and mixes the scenes of films with his own life. Thus, media hyper-reality has replaced reality for characters in the novel which illustrates the most important consequence of the device paradigm. It also depicts the potential of media technologies to distort human cognition and perception as claimed by Borgmann.

David holds technology responsible for the destruction of his marital bliss as he mentions, "the celluloid peril of those movie roles with which I challenged the premise of my marriage" (113-114). At another occasion also, he renders the technological devices and products a cause of anxiety and unrest in his personal life, "[t]he movies were giving difficult meanings to some of the private moments of my life" (35). Thus, leaving focal things and practices behind, and entering fully in the realm of the device paradigm was accompanied with severe consequences as the family has become less than the household and the common interest got limited "from the family to marriage and finally to companionship" (Borgmann, *TCCL* 137).

The anxiety and depression prevalent in David's life keeps him nostalgic, making him think about his parents and siblings time and again where his childhood memories strike his mind. "When I command snow to fall once again on the streets of Old Holly, my father's hands curled about a shovel ... A second too soon and there is mother sitting in the rocker; too late and the memory subdivides, one part straying into fantasy" (*Americana* 299).

David also displays a failure to encounter any situation related to death and exclaims that his obsessive anxiety is rooted in extreme sorrow at his mother's death (237). This irrational fear can be attributed to the absence of focal things and practices in his life as Borgmann asserts that people who have focal practices to illuminate their lives can bear the loss of dear ones without getting themselves shattered. The resulting life in the device paradigm is one where people live as tortured and agonized beings, irritated from their past relationships, having devastated psyches and traumatized selves. The media technologies which are an integral part of the device paradigm operating in the novel have weakened the thinking abilities and mental stability of its inhabitants. One of the most revelatory illustrations in this regard comes along when David's former girl friend, Wendy requests him to talk about old times and he replies, "[t]here are no old times, Wendy. The tapes have been accidentally destroyed" (25). This demonstrates the unreliability of his consciousness and the excessive influence of technologies which are hall marks of the device paradigm and have degraded family lives as well as the human relationships at large. Additionally, Wild's comments about his divorced life and former wife also reveal the torment he has

been through, as he says, “[s]he was a bitch. I was a bastard. Good riddance to both of us. I hate my life. I really hate my life” (263).

The scenario of the paradigm operating in the family spheres of *White Noise* is not different from that of *Americana*. There is a communication gap between parents and children which can be termed as the influence of what Babbette calls the ‘narcotic undertow’ and the ‘diseased brain- sucking power’ (16) of television and technology in general. This is primarily because of the reason that the characters are immersed into media technologies, causing a weakening of the family bonds. The wide gulf between parents and children requires some accident or tragic event to get filled. Jack and his son, Henrich who are not comfortable talking to each other normally, start conversing while watching the insane asylum burning down. “Evidently fathers and sons seek fellowship at such events. Fires help draw them closer, provide a conversational wedge” (239). Here they talk about the equipment, fireman’s performance and tactics used by them without clumsiness or hesitation which otherwise marks their conversation. Steffie, on visit to her distant parents, is surrounded by various fears and insecurities. She doubts her mother would not allow her to come back and consequently, her father will have to ‘kidnap her back’ (269). She also fears the failure of recognition of her mother as she says, “[h]ow do I know I’ll recognize my mother?” (269). The kids in the novel are doubtful and uncomfortable with all relatives due to their cracked relationships and fragmented psyches. Such unstable relationships in the post modern world have caused the belief in the strength of human ties fade away, leaving people mistrustful and apprehensive towards them.

Eating and meal time, which is a focal practice embodying great social benefits, has been made ridicule in the technological world. The device paradigm has given birth to new ways of eating. The family used to eat at a table, in a pleasant atmosphere of conversing with each other in the pre technological setting which has been replaced with a commercialized and commoditized way of eating as described by Jack, “[w]e certainly didn’t need to face each other across a table as we ate, building a subtle and complex cross- network of signals and codes” (231). Thus, discipline in eating and table manners have vanished in the mode of eating employed in the novel. This differs greatly from eating in a focal setting. Such practices in *White Noise* are so deep- rooted in the realm of the device paradigm and technological dominance that televised courses are presented on the basic human skills like eating and drinking. While riding home from church after teaching at the church, Babbette tells Jack and Denise that her class wants her to teach them another course titled, “Eating and Drinking: Basic Parameters” (171). These were the skills children used to learn from their parents and older siblings as a part of their fundamental training of civilized behavior in the pre technological world. This depicts the most important losses and the height of pessimism where the inhabitants of the technological world have reached with instable families and broken relationships in the background. Thus, in the device paradigm, home and the domestic family sphere is no longer a symbol of tradition and culture as in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* (1910).

#### **4.5 'DEVICE PARADIGM' ENGULFING NATURE AND RELIGION: TECHNOLOGY AS THE NEW RELIGIOSITY**

The post modern perception of technology and the device paradigm essentially suggests a deterioration and dissolution of religion as well as a rejection of the supremacy and sublimity of nature. The status of nature in a society is one of the most important parameters to assess the impacts of technology. Nature in its pristine form has been regarded as a focal power by Borgmann. An analysis of *Americana* shows that Old Holly, located in the periphery of New York where the protagonist spent his childhood in the mid- twentieth century, was an unspoiled beautiful town in the pre- technological settings. The scenic beauty of nature was intact in the wilderness and the town was free from the catastrophes of human muddling termed as a 'manicurist's artistry' (130). There were many old ragged houses with high roofs and open porches along with a large number of hills in the surroundings. The sunlight, wind, fog and rain with trees in the background depicted the intimacy of its residents with nature. The smell of mellow tobacco, clove and mint further punctuated the scenes with serenity and reverence (129-131).

The pivotal impact of the human encounter with technology has been delineated in great detail by Delillo. Driving nature to submission was flourished primarily on the centers of technology. From the mid- twentieth century, the technological devices began to dominate the American landscape as depicted in *Americana*. An indefinitely large number of different artifacts, instruments and gadgets surround the characters with an influential presence in all spheres of life during later

decades of David's life which is the hall mark of the device paradigm and refers to the technological era of the post modern times. Air conditioner (39), helicopters for airlifts, makeshift hospitals (48), eight- speaker stereo system, E- type Jaguar (55), elevators (81), the electrical transmission (94), hidden TV cameras (103), radar scanning systems (105), heaters (111), F-4 fighter- bomber (114), electric razor (124), monstrous freezers (207), 16 mm Canon Scoopic Camera (210), submarine paratrooping (239), exploding device operated through phone (247), vacuum cleaner (335) and luxury automobiles like Cadillac equipped with "air conditioning, deep- pile carpeting, padded instrument panel, stereo tape system and a burglar alarm" (348), are the examples which reflect the extent to which life is dominated and shaped by technology in the post modern era.

Borgmann claims that wilderness becomes a challenge to technology under the influence of the device paradigm. This is exactly what happens in *Americana* and is revealed in the hills of South Dakota by Black Knife. The woods have been eradicated, the mountains removed and the landscape reshaped. As future prospects, he further warns about the destruction of American cities, coasts and hills for the purpose of construction and the flourishing of technology centers (117-119). Thus, the darkest fears of this wise holy man of Oglala Sioux come true in the novel as the drastic effects of technology appear and the things of the pre- technological world are replaced with uniform structures regarded as the 'boxes of cancer cells' (18). The realization of these anticipated threats and dangers become more and more evident in the novel as David reaches his older years of life. Cowart establishes the allegorical identification of the violation of

landscape in *Americana* to the drastic spoilage of land presented as Pocahontas by the hands of the Europeans (603).

Likewise, the paradigm portrayed in *White Noise* also illustrates the dominance of technology over nature. A sense of artificiality has been attributed to images of nature as well as various natural phenomena in Gladney's world. Jiann- guang Lin claims that the domains of Nature and Unconscious which used to be opposing forces for civilization during modernism, have been converted into 'civilization's replicated images' in the post modern world of *White Noise* to an extent where "a non- synchronous experience tends to lapse into a homogeneous, empty experience" (4).

An illustration of the replacement of nature by technology in the post modern era is the expressway. Jack mentions that he lives in a street which used to be covered with trees but now an expressway has taken its place where "the sparse traffic washes past, a remote and steady murmur around our sleep, as of dead souls babbling at the edge of a dream" (*White Noise* 4). This nostalgic description points out that the expressway, symbolizing technological endeavors, has drained peace out of the human characters in the sphere of the device paradigm. Henneberg points out that the gloomy image of dead souls questions the apparent naturalness of the expressway. He further mentions that if we associate the expressway to a small river, it reminds of the river Styx. It is situated below the house and the sounds coming from it are scary and frightening. The "duality of benign surface and latent threat" (66) refers to the dangers and threats embodied in the device paradigm.



The sunsets and even the sun described in the novel seem unnatural and artificial due to technological muddling as depicted in the air borne toxic event in the novel. The sun, while moving down, seems like a ship in burning water whereas the spectators see it as “a surge of florid light, like a heart pumping in a documentary on color TV” (*White Noise* 227). Hence, the experience of nature for the residents of DeLillo’s world is technologically- mediated which produces anxiety and fear, as claimed by Lin. “In the face of technologized nature, or naturalized technology, a typical human response is fear” (5).

Religion, which has been regarded a focal thing by Borgmann, has become a mockery for the people in the turbulent environment of *Americana* and *White Noise*. None of the practices of any religion seem to be followed or performed seriously.

During the initial years of David’s life in *Americana*, religion occupied a central place and was a defining force for the family. It is one of the most important spheres of life which was greatly affected by the authority and supremacy of technology. A number of memories and flashbacks from David’s childhood surround different religious practices. His mother spent a lot of time in the Episcopal Church in Old Holly which was known as Calvary. She also used to tell her children stories about Jesus. The church had arranged a permanent fund-raising project to collect donations for the orphans of Asia (137). The Church in *Americana* which occupied an important position in the society during David’s childhood era, did not only lose its power and charisma with the passage of time but also got a number of strange implications attached to it and to the religion in

general. Religion, in the device paradigm presented in the novel, does not surround religious practices like praying or attending church rather is displaced in other acts of worldly concerns. David regards his intention of traveling through American landscape as a religious act as he decides to explore America in night when he wants to do something religious (10). David and his fellow human beings derive a sense of religiosity from using technological artifacts. In the post modern world of the novel, technology has replaced religion as the main source of transcendental experience. The protagonist describes some of the automobiles and means of transportation more religious than others as he regards cars as religious while planes are yet not religious in his opinion (49). He also refers to his red Mustang as an infinitely more religious vehicle as compared to T-bird which he possessed in his college (111). In his life obsessed with media technologies and constant images, David also attributes religious power to camera while looking at a person taking photograph of a photo. Talking about the magic of a camera, he calls it a religious power (86). Film, an important part of the media technology, also carries religious connotations for David. He remarks while going to the movies that he was happy he had not invited anyone to join him because he believes it was religion and 'needed privacy' (135). The practice of chanting and repeating 'the god saves' also becomes a mockery even after Eldred refined it. David describes it as a religious ceremony embodying satire. Thus they sometimes laughed thoroughly through the chanting (281). These illustrations refer to what Laist terms as 'technologically- mediated meditation' and 'a brainless meditation' (56), lacking insight and tranquility.

Borgmann regards the religious institutions like the Medieval Cathedral and the Greek Temple as the focal points which give meaning to human existence. In contrast, the religiosity for Delillo's characters of the post modern era lies in other institutions, like that of media technologies, as Drotty while giving his anticipation for the next five years opines that American theatre and the Broadway will become semi- religious institutions in the assistance of the government (*Americana* 314). This shows that religion which occupied a main place in American society in early times slowly lost its hold and importance in the technological world of the post modern era. People have surrounded themselves with numerous other activities regarding work and leisure which has left no space for the things of past like religion. Consequently, they have distanced themselves from this focal thing of past as Warburton exclaims, "Theology is a bit out of my line" (99). People, like Sullvian's uncle who had left Dublin for Belfast, giving up and shattering all associations with church and family, are very commonly present in the paradigm dominated by technology.

The absence of focal things amid the supremacy and unintelligent use of technology has made people sink in the flow of media and image culture propagated through media technologies. This has caused a decline in focal things like religion. This proposition given by Borgmann is validated in the narrative through David's identification with Hollywood actors like Burt Lancaster. When David sees him in *From Here to Eternity*, he connotes him with a city in which they were all living. Regarding him as "a crescendo of male perfection", he further exclaims, "Burt in the moonlight. It was a concept; it was the icon of a

new religion” (12-13). Thus, the post modern people of *Americana* have attributed religiosity to media technologies and images which has deteriorated the traditional practices of religion.

Delillo’s narrative also delineates in great detail the consequences of shunning focal things like religion amid technologies through the character of David Bell. It has caused for him a diminishing of the possibility of a rooted kind of life, like the one he enjoyed in his childhood with his parents and siblings. This can be best regarded as one of the implications of technology. Thus, having attached strange connotations to religion in his corporate technological world and feeling nostalgic of his peaceful childhood, David travels extensively in search of some new dispensation. He travels from New York to Massachusetts to Maine and then to Fort Curtis. Then he undertakes a second journey westward in order to ‘match the shadows’ (341) of his image and his self, reflecting an urge from within to gain some peace. Further moving through New Mexico with the hitchhiker, Clevenger he reaches Arizona. Back through New Mexico, he travels to the town of Rooster in West Texas. Then departing from Clevenger, he hitchhikes to Midland, then drives to Dallas from where he catches a flight back to New York. Hence, the existential distress surrounding David and many other characters that remains unresolved till the end depicts how the paradigm of the technological devices has shaped the world of *Americana*. Cowart compares this journey of David with Clevenger to the “nine fold circles of Dante’s Hell” (610).

The decline of religion amidst the device paradigm, in case of *White Noise*, is represented in the life style of Jack, his family, professional colleagues as well as

other minor characters like the nuns. For the people in Gladney's world, technology has replaced religion as a form of transcendental experience. Karen Weeks exclaims about the situation, connoting technology with religion, "[t]he Holy Trinity of Christianity is debunked in favor of the 'existential credit' to be gained from "Mastercard, Visa, American Express", and the devaluation of religion is epitomized in the nun who reveals that she simulates her beliefs (289). Even for the nuns, who are expected to be the most dedicated and committed religious people, religion is a façade. Sister Herman Marie, a nun from the Germantown, exclaims about religion on Jack's inquiry, "[i]t is for others. Not for us ... If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse" (318). Jack's comment about religion, however, depicts its focal power and the sense of comfort and serenity it offers to its followers, as he says, "[w]hen we see a nun, it cheers us up, it's cute and amusing, being reminded that someone still believes in angels, in saints, all the traditional things" (317). Despite knowing the healing and comforting tendency of religion, Jack and his family have neglected it altogether and try to obtain spirituality in commercialized products like brand new vehicles. When Steffie mumbles the names of different models of Toyota automobiles, Jack is mesmerized and experiences a spiritual feeling, instead of trying to find it in God, Jesus or church as a follower of Christianity. He remarks, "the utterance struck me with the impact of a moment of splendid transcendence" (155). Jack's colleague, Murray excitedly performs shopping and watches television as sacred religious duties. Focal practices, replaced with a fascination

of technological devices as in Jack's case, highlight the causes of the anxiety and terror prevalent in the post modern world of the novel.

#### **4.6 WORK AND EMPLOYMENT FALLING INTO DECLINE**

The nature of work and employment, and the condition of people and life, underwent a dramatic evolution and change as the world moved from its pre-technological settings of focal things and practices towards the device paradigm. It is mainly due to the fact that technology, particularly the media technology, for the post modern characters of technological world is no more a choice but has become a way of life.

Delillo sketches out work and labor as one of the most important spheres of life that underwent deterioration in the device paradigm. For the television executive cum film maker, David and his colleagues in *Americana*, media technology constitutes the psychological foundations on which their self understanding and world views rest. These media images shape their perceptions, thinking patterns and personalities. Thus, David repeatedly uses metaphors which portray his mindset and consciousness as a media set up or equipment as he mentions, "[a]ll the impulses of all the media were fed into the circuitry of my dreams" (30). At another occasion, he senses his head as a technological device exclaiming, "[m]y head seemed to be a telephone delivering an endless busy signal" (81). Elsewhere, he connotes himself with a movie camera as he says, "I was like a movie camera catching documentary glimpses of everyday life in a prison" (101). Thus, in the realm of the device paradigm, David reconstitutes himself as a movie- being

embedded in a technological world regarded as the 'videotaped being' and the 'tevisual self' by Randy Laist (55).

According to Borgmann's theory of technology, one of the most important characteristics of the device paradigm is the conversion of work into a mere means of production. This is the most traumatic disruption which corresponds exactly to the kind of work prevalent in the corporate world of *Americana* particularly represented in the commercial life as well as the television and other media networks. As David grows older, he gets entangled in the advertisement and media industry, and keeps descending into chaos along with other employees and workers around him. All of these people are in a constant struggle of outshining others in making more money and achieving a higher status in the society. Bell explains this scenario as follows, "[e]verybody's bucking for my job. It's a contest to see who stays later" (10). Reeves Chubb sleeps in his office about three nights a week. Besides him, there are a number of other workaholic people around. 'Volleying typewriters' (20), the 'multilith operators' (21) and girls talking to themselves while typing (26), punctuate many scenes with the presence of technological devices. It reflects the nature of mechanical work prevalent in their workplaces which has caused a degradation of work and workplace due to the reduction of jobs to a mere means as mentioned by Borgmann (*TCCL* 114). It has made the work exhausting and boring which is only good for making money but is incapable to provide satisfaction to the people. David, as the youngest executive making the largest amount of money, is one of the most restless souls in the novel whose work does not grant him any happiness and he keeps exploring

different media from television to films and then to books to gain some peace of mind. His spiritual yearnings and widespread traveling to attain harmony also throws light on the need of some focal power in his life. The concomitant losses of giving up all focal things and practices including gardening, family meals, running, sports, religion, being with friends and many more, as done by the workers of the corporate networks in *Americana*, are manifested in a number of dilemmas they face like their health problems and psychological issues. This is illustrated in the following lines,

“How are most businessmen killed?

Their hearts fail and they fall down on the rug” (310).

Strobe also died while attending a meeting where he had a heart attack at his table (13). Warburton, too, fell down suddenly on his desk and collapsed (223). This kind of work and business in the corporate and technological world has reduced the human beings to the status of some machine signals and the height of successful career and a large amount of money people make cannot give them any satisfaction and pleasure. Consequently, the workers get caught up in the mechanical life style. This has been termed as the ‘dog-eat-dog scramble of corporate life’ (Laist 54) and has been widely criticized in Borgmann’s theory.

After portraying the decadent work environment in *Americana*, DeLillo pokes fun at the US academia in *White Noise*, particularly through the protagonist, Jack’s character. He is a professor of Hitler Studies at College-on-the- Hill campus but strangely cannot speak the German language. To hide this shameful fact, he uses a series of words that are pronounced alike in English and German languages. He



constantly remains in a struggle to uphold his persona of a qualified and well-educated professional through his uniform, robe and the glasses. Thus oscillating between media technologies and the super market, Jack remains an embodiment of anxiety in the novel.

Karen Weeks draws an interesting analogy about Dickey, Babette's father, to show the lack of respect for labor in the technological world. According to him, his name 'dickey' can designate a piece of clothing that used to be trendy in the past but no longer exists in modern day fashion, "a false shirt front or fabric insert that fill in a neckline and gives only the impression of a substance" (290). This was the person who had always worked hard with his hands but seems outcast in the era of technology where machines and computers have taken control over the work and employment (290-291). This kind of the degradation of labor and de-contextualization of work by means of technological devices and gadgets, as evident in *White Noise* and *Americana*, vividly manifest the most important losses latent in the device paradigm.

#### **4.7 SHATTERED LIVES, ABNORMAL PSYCHES: THE LATENT THREAT OF UNCANNY DEVICES**

An obsession with technology and the resulting absence of focal things and practices have caused the people in the selected texts suffer in a thousand ways due to the lack of a centering force to give their lives meaning. Fear and anxiety generated through technological devices and processes is so integral a part of the Delillo's world that it deserves to be telecasted in news in case of *White Noise*. During the air borne toxic event, the man with a tiny TV set exclaims, "[o]ur fear

is enormous. Even if there hasn't been great loss of life, don't we deserve some attention for our suffering, our human worry, our terror? Isn't fear news?" (162). The anxiety and dissatisfaction with life is also evident in Jack's behavior when he throws away literally everything in his home exclaiming that it was a labyrinth of old and worn out things. After spending an hour to hurl everything down to the sidewalk, he rested on the front staircase, trying to get a sense of relief (262). This abnormal condition of a traumatized person shows the damage caused to the human beings in the technological world of devices and machines. Tom LeClair notes that "Jack's fear of dying is intensified, rather than relieved, by the objects he has collected over the years" ("Closing the Loop" 13).

As mentioned in Borgmann's theory, the unintelligent and excessive use of technology has given people a lot of pain, anguish and unrest. The characters in *White Noise* also hold these devices and technology responsible for their sufferings as mentioned in the text, "[i]f our complaints have a focal point, it would have to be the TV set, where the outer torment lurks, causing fears and secret desires" (85). Jack also believes that a person without an exposure to the television like Eugene, living with his father in Western Australia, 'make him worth talking to' (50). It is because of these devices and material he has been accumulating for himself that Jack reaches a vindictive and wild state, and feels a personal resentment against them. Throwing away things like picture frames, cork coasters, key tags, bottles, correction fluid, magnetic clipboards; he holds them responsible for his misery (294). The technological devices are so deeply infused in the fabric of society presented in the novel that its characters are unable to live

a happy life as it is gradually causing their peace of mind fade away. This becomes clear through textual evidence as mentioned, “[m]an’s guilt in history and in the tides of his own blood has been complicated by technology” (22).

In Delillo’s world, life is characterized by boredom. The chaos and emptiness caused by the deterioration of the household and the mechanical nature of work is to be filled with extravagant and thoughtless consumption of commodities in all forms and shapes and at all levels of existence which breeds a culture of consumerism, as pointed out by Borgmann.

Supermarket is a central place in the novel where most of the characters spend a lot of time. At the Mid-Village Mall, Jack tries to find comfort in buying the things on display. The experience of shopping for its own sake, “looking and touching, inspecting merchandise” (84) enhanced his sense of self-worth temporarily. A large number of people also shop at the newly arranged supermarket, “trying to figure out the pattern” and “discern the underlying logic” (325). Despite shopping extravagantly for all the commodities available in the markets, the characters in the novel are still unable to get their lives settled and make themselves happy. This represents the deleterious outcomes of the consumer culture flourishing amid technologies where characters like Janet try to get “[p]eace of mind in a profit-oriented context” (87) but remain unable to get it.

In a world of the device paradigm as presented in the selected novels, the media, television and the advertisement industry which are the hall marks of technology, channelize almost all the actions of the human beings as well as their thought processes particularly in relation to consumerism. Jameson traces the

parallelism and deep relation between the changes in culture in the post modern world with the changes in technology. He claims that the post modern technology is a “distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present- day multinational capitalism” (37).

Among the post modern technologies and devices, the television with all its advertisements, play a key role in making the people of *Americana* what they are. The television set is ‘a package’ loaded with ‘products’ like automobiles, detergents, breakfast cereal, cameras and other television sets. “Programs are not interrupted by commercials; exactly the reverse is true”(270). A television set is “an electronic form of packaging” and the “limitation of dreams” has been exploited through advertising (270-271). As a result, the post modern world in the novel is loaded with consumer products and branded stuff. David’s description of his apartment throws light on this fact as it contains,

furniture from John Widdicomb, Suits from F. R. Tripler and J. Press, art books from Rizzoli, rugs from W&J Sloane, fireplace accessories from WM. H. Jackson, cutlery from Bonniers, crystal by Steuben, shoes by Banister, gin hy House of Lords, shirts by Gant and Hathaway, component stereo system by Garrard, Stanton and Fisher, ties by Countess Mara, towels by Fieldcrest, an odd and end from Takashimaya (353).

All these consumer products employed by the characters substantiate Zayani’s description of the features of McDonaldization including certainty, efficiency, calculability and control (628).

Regarding the consequences of the device paradigm in an environment where focal things and practices are neglected and rooted up, Borgmann mentions that the resulting life is neither dignified nor blissful. Work becomes tedious and mechanical which can help to make wealth but makes no demands on human skill and competence. The leisure and entertainment, as in *Americana*, “declines in nobility” and revolves around “shallow activities energized by excessive consumption and entertainment” (Heikkero 252).

Tracing the link between technology and consumerism, Bruce Bawer in his article, “Don DeLillo’s America” holds technology responsible for depriving the characters in DeLillo’s novels of their ‘humanness’ (35). The complexity of technological artifacts and media networking systems in the device paradigm has risen to such a high degree that the human consciousness is unable to understand and control it by escaping its potential dangers and harms as depicted in *White Noise*. This horrifyingly shocking post modern condition and complexity has been portrayed by DeLillo through his first person narrator from the high technology world. The protagonist’s bewilderment and confusion is evident throughout the novel and is manifested in his efforts to uphold a pretense of professional authority which is continuously being challenged. Besides, his bafflement in family relations and his emotional instability also delineate the challenges of the inhabitants of technological world. On finding out Mink’s affair with his wife and getting the information about Babette using Dylar, Jack makes efforts to get hold of the drug himself. Then in an attempt to assault his wife’s lover, he shoots Mink. As a result, Mink gets wounded and also shoots Jack in the wrist. However,

Jack suddenly feels sympathy for Mink and takes him to the hospital for medical treatment. Jack's self-delusional behavior and a sense of being at loss in the midst of technologies depict his troubled mind. Thus, Jack serves as a prime example of the post modern helplessness and anxiety in the device paradigm where he pathetically strives in a world dominated by technological devices and patterns. His world is a world of chaos and anxiety in which he describes himself as a false character (17). These types of false characters also saturate a lot of scenes in *Americana*.

David, the protagonist in *Americana*, mentions about people in a diverse gathering at Quincy's place that out of thirty one people in the living room, almost three out of four exhibited hostility (4). Isabel has been portrayed as a woman "who might attack at any moment, making no concessions at all to the etiquette of office combat" (18). Trotsky is another such character who has undergone a lot of hopelessness in life (21). The purpose of having people around was to give company, love, care and a sense of security in the times when David was a child. It also underwent a change in his adult years marked by pervasive technology. In the post modern American life style, as portrayed in the novel, the crowd is necessary to be around people so that they can vent their anger, feelings of unrest and annoyance to it. This gives them the satisfaction that there exist other people who are lonelier than themselves (29). People in the corporate world of *Americana* spend a life characterized by "lunch, drinks, dinner, inter-office phone calls, office parties and so forth" (38) where they are surrounded by a huge number of people all the time yet fear and anxiety are an integral part of their

lives as described with reference to Jennifer, “[s]he was afraid of everything – subways, strangers, high buildings, the number nine, plastic, smoke, air planes, snow, pigeons, insects, parties, cab drivers, elevators, suburbs, Bergman films, Spanish cuisine, men in Gucci loafers” (39). The love and affection which people extended not only to their own families but in general to all the people around them in the pre- technological world of *Americana*, are missing in the device paradigm of David’s adult life. The people who were generally ‘joyous’, busy with their families and chores, using simple tools and machines, are also hard to find (132-134). On the contrary, people are nourished with fretfulness, anxiety and constant disappointments coming from the corporate and technological world as its girls in general have been exposed as, “neurotic rag dolls ... who fed on rejection as if it were a nipple” (40). Thus, most of the people depicted in the novel have abnormal psyches and are emotionally unstable like most of the regular customers at Zack’s place in New York.

The changing social conditions and a decline of focal practices have led to the alienation of human beings, putting them at war with their own selves as David exclaims that the war is not between Black and White, North and South, rich and poor, young and old, crusader and heathen, God and the devil or war hawk and pacifist. The real war as he describes is between ‘Uncle Malcolm and Uncle Malcolm’ (331) i.e., with one’s own self. Thus people stumble through life in the device paradigm of *Americana* and *White Noise* which is replete with television, film, photography, advertisement, consumerism and innumerable technological devices.

Delillo believes that in a world abounding chaos, anxiety and panic; it is the responsibility of a writer to present some logic. "I think fiction rescues history from its confusions. It can do this in the somewhat superficial way of filling in blank spaces. But it also can operate in a deeper way; providing the balance and rhythm we don't experience in our daily lives, in our real lives" (Decurtis 56).

In the final chapter of *White Noise*, the youngest child in Gladney's family, Wilder rides on his plastic tricycle towards a dead end street just behind the Gladney home. Riding across the street, side walk, slope and on to the highway amidst the vans, cars and other vehicles of roaring traffic; he keeps paddling his trike. Turning a deaf ear to the screaming voices of women trying to save him from getting hit by a vehicle, he keeps moving his cycle and amazingly reaches the other side safe and sound. In between the 'endless streaking traffic' (323) depicting the menacing dominance of technology, he was erroneously thinking, "he was breezing right along" (323). However, 'mystically charged' (322), he makes it across the expressway unscathed and unharmed. Ellen Pifer evaluates this last act as a display of how the humanity, represented as a child, can deal with and prevail over the approaching omnipresence of technology which is the predominant force in our life today (212- 232). It also manifests the transcending power of humanity by virtue of child's innocence and a need to regain humanity's pure and uncorrupted state where lies the refuge from the tyrannical supremacy of technology.

What must be acknowledged here and what is essentially relevant to Borgmann's argument is that a solution to the problems and challenges prevalent in the post



modern technological world lies in establishing a harmony with technology through adopting a thoughtful and intelligent attitude towards it. Getting into the interior of the commodious surfaces of technological devices and introducing focal things and practices in human lives, through the involvement of mind and body, can serve as a solution to the anxiety and miseries caused by the technological devices. It does not require a return to the pre- technological world setting rather having a trust in technology can serve the purpose as depicted in Murray's remarks about technology, "[i]t got you here, it can get you out. This is the whole point of technology" (*White Noise* 285).

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

The study was set out to examine and determine the role of technology in the post modern world by offering an evaluative perspective to the description of the technological world given by Delillo and has identified the nature, causes and impacts of anxiety in the technological world. Attempting to address three main research questions, the study sought to figure out the device paradigm operating in Delillo's selected fiction. Besides, it also brought forth the undercurrents of paranoia and agency panic in the post modern world. Finally, the study has also focused to find out whether a reform of technology through an introduction of focal things and practices can contribute to an effective reduction of anxiety. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the technological world and its psychological issues on one hand and influence the debate within this discourse, on the other.

The framework of analysis and evaluation was mainly based on the Theory of Technology given by Borgmann, focusing on his notion of the 'device paradigm' where he considers the post modern technology a crucial and indispensable force, shaping the human world. However, the current study first identified and pointed out the nature and reality of paranoid condition of the post modern people in the first section of analysis i.e., chapter 3. For this purpose of elucidating the anxiety of Delillo's characters, Melley's concept of agency panic was employed which approaches anxiety on the basis of the undercurrents of paranoia and conspiracy thinking. The analysis of *Americana* and *White Noise* revealed that the two books

exhibit a depletion of the human agency, and this loss of autonomy and control is attributed to the technological way of life and the resulting consumer culture. For the purpose of delineating what is causing panic and anxiety in technological world, a step by step analysis of the texts was carried out keeping in with the features of agency panic outlined in *The Empire of Conspiracy*.

The study established the fact that Melley's agency panic best describes the protagonists of both the selected novels, David in *Americana* and Jack in *White Noise*. An analysis of the texts also revealed that the panic of characters is primarily rooted in the feeling of inability to take social action and even to control their own behavior. This situation has been found to gain its momentum from technology either directly or indirectly. This strong yet latent relationship between agency panic and technology was established in the research through textual examination and illustration of the family, social, religious, academic and private spheres of the characters' lives. The analysis, carried out in accordance with Melley's standpoint and theoretical perspectives, gave weight to the claim that DeLillo's world is saturated with agency panic, defamiliarized in Western technological life style.

According to the framework devised for the present research, the main sources of agency panic were revisited through Reisman's philosophical lens in order to further illuminate and fully recognize the attributes and multiple facets of technological anxiety and panic. His theorization of the other- directing forces was employed to show how mass media, technological devices and commodities serve to make the characters mindless consumers and blind conformists of the

dominant culture. The images from film, television, photography and advertisement were found to be the primary other- directing forces in *Americana* whereas the other- direction in Gladney's world of *White Noise* was found to be caused by advertisement slogans, consumer culture and the technological events. The texts of the selected fiction also displayed frequent illustrations of the phenomenon of post modern transference. The scrutiny of characters' life styles revealed that Jack's identification with powerful leaders like Hitler, his false identity in the form of his academic persona and Dylarama are the main instances that describe how the agency panic "dramatizes doubt about the efficacy of individual human action" (Melley 13) through the process of transference. This dramatization was also found in *Americana*, manifested in David's Oedipal fixations, his identification with media icons like Lancaster and Douglas, his nostalgic flashbacks from childhood as well as his externalization of human agency to technological artifacts like camera and film.

The second part of the textual analysis i.e., chapter 4 surrounded Borgmann's concept of the device paradigm described mainly in his famous book, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*. In order to determine the relevance and applicability of the device paradigm to the post modern world and to trace the possible reform solutions, two leading directions were focused in this chapter. In the first place, the features of the device paradigm were employed to mark different manifestations of its relevance to the technological world portrayed by DeLillo. Secondly, the study aimed at scrutinizing the possibilities of reform particularly with reference to the focal things and practices. The research

disclosed that Borgmann's definition of the device paradigm features evidently in Delillo's selected fiction. It was found that these narratives are effective at elucidating and presenting a fine line between things and devices which forms the foundation of Borgmann's theory. Tracing of the features of technological availability evident in numerous crucial passages of the novels pointed out how Delillo's fiction aspires to comment about real life.

A comparative analysis of the pre and post technological world as portrayed in *Americana* revealed that in the post modern era, technology has engulfed most of the focal things of past, as claimed by Borgmann. Through an examination of various descriptions in the novel, it was revealed that all important spheres of life including religion, family life as well as work and employment have witnessed a decline and deterioration. A step by step analysis of these arenas of life has demonstrated that the habituation to a fully technological world has grounded humans in a sphere surrounded by ominous forces of technology, marked by an underlying pattern termed as the device paradigm. Thus, the evaluation of the world of Delillo in four major areas approved that technology has displaced not only nature from its sublime status but has also muddled with religion, household and the work place, evidently depicting the losses embedded in the device paradigm.

The features of the device paradigm, from Gladney's world of *White Noise*, were also traced side by side by analyzing its different dimensions. The research revealed that the adverse effects of giving up focal things and practices arose in recurring illustrations of human suffering in all walks of life where Jack serves as

an exemplary figure, representing post modern anxiety and suffering, wrapped up in technological currents. The evaluation of the novel's dramatic core, the air borne toxic event and all its technologically produced dangers, was employed to make a larger connection of technology with the device paradigm. It was found that although the threats and dangers of technology remain latent, yet in the absence of focal things and practices, they get manifested in the patterns of human lives and psyches, and can be encountered only by introducing focal things in human lives through an intelligent use of technology.

The findings of the present research are chapter- specific but the evidence gathered from the study reaffirmed that although the technological devices and developments have been hailed as an icon of success and happiness yet the benefits of these advancements are neither wholesome nor totally secure. Rather they inevitably lead to various challenges and threats particularly due to the shape our world has assumed because of them. The research also showed that these challenges can and must be met through focal things and practices, and by a sensible use of technology, in order to live peacefully and happily in the technological world.

Although the selected works from DeLillo's writings by no means represent all the challenges of the technologically- dominated world, yet they serve to highlight the dominant issues in most important spheres of human lives. Due to the emergence of new technologies with each passing day and the consequent novelty in circumstances and challenges posed by them, the analytical and evaluative perspective of research can be extended to the works of most recent theorists and

scholars. Other future dimensions to this research include combining Borgmann's theory with the works of other critics in order to deal with contemporary issues emerging from technological dominance. Apart from this, in order to generate attainable strategies and reforms regarding technological usage, further studies can also be conducted based on specific technologies and their particular threats.

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