

The *Character* of Character in Don DeLillo's Fiction

A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Award of

Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Themeem T**, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “**The *Character of Character* in Don DeLillo’s Fiction**”, submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, embodies the bonafide research work carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Pramod K. Nayar**. I also declare that this dissertation has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other university or institution for the reward of any degree or diploma.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation titled **The Character of Character in Don DeLillo's Fiction** submitted by **Themeem T**, bearing Regn. No. **10HEPH01**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is a bonafide research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. The dissertation or any part thereof has not been submitted for any other degree or diploma at this or any other university or institution of learning.

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Further, the scholar has the following publications in the UGC Care-listed journals before the submission of his dissertation for adjudication, and has produced evidence for the same in the form of acceptance letter or the reprint in the relevant area of his research:

- 1) T, Themeem. "Cyber Capitalism, Speed and the Production of Waste: "Waste" and "Wasted Lives" in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*". **English Forum: A Journal of the Department of English, Gauhati University**, vol. 10&11, 2022-2023, ISSN: 2279-0446.
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INTRODUCTION

Home by the tube is where America takes place these days.... To stay in touch with America you had to stay home glued to the tube. America has been a television phenomenon for so long now that if we had the English passion for hyphens the country would long ago have been renamed Home-by-the-Tube. ...[A]nd if you weren't glued to the tube you were missing the American experience. (Baker)

If any art form can accommodate contemporary culture, it's the novel. It's so malleable... Maybe the challenge for the novelist is to stretch his art and his language, to the point where it can finally describe what's happening around him (DeLillo, "Don DeLillo's").

This study is an attempt to understand the interface between “character” and “technological culture” in Don DeLillo’s novels. The dissertation focuses on the ways in which character as an *idea* gets inscribed in the novels of DeLillo, a writer whose work has persistently continued to explore, for many decades, the role and implications of technology in American society. To understand this interface, the study assumes character not just as a term that we generally use to refer to “a fictional being”, but also as an *idea* that can embody and produce other meanings as well, such as in “character of society”, “character of the post/human”, and “character of technology”. *The inscription of ideas of character results from, the study argues, his work’s persistent portrayal of the dominance of technology in America, especially since the latter half of the twentieth century. In other words, DeLillo’s persistent concerns with the various aspects and impact of technology create in his work certain “impressions”¹ of the peculiar character of ‘the human’—especially its posthuman character—and of contemporary American society, a society that is not only steeped in endless production and circulation of media images, spectacles and information but also characterized by a culture*

¹ Note that “impression” is one of the etymological meanings of the word “character”.

of speed and “waste”, consequent upon a technologically-driven capitalist culture. This “impression-creation”, as I call it, allows us to rethink character in newer ways, and to understand how ideas of character are embedded in fiction in more than one way.

The study is predicated on the premise that technological innovations—especially media and cyber technologies—of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have radically changed the character of society, how we define ‘the human’, how humans interact with others/technologies, perceive the world, and their representation in literary works (Ong [1982]; Castells [1996, 1997, 1998], Stiegler [2015]; Mousley [2011]; Goody [2011]; Rosendahl Thomsen [2013]; Lee [2020]). DeLillo himself has alerted us to these shifts, and how technology has radically altered the character of our thinking: “[t]echnology has changed the way we think, talk. Everything was different before this somewhat abrupt technological advance. Our thinking is less meditative now and somewhat more instantaneous” (“We all”). Though DeLillo had depicted such impact on our society in his early novels such as *Americana* (1971) and *White Noise* (1985), the character and intensity of the impact of technology are more complex and pervasive in today’s digital culture, as evident in his postmillennial novels. It is so because the very *character* of technology has changed in the present condition of what we call “digital culture”. For the digital itself is, as Zara Dinnen notes, “an expansive, irreducible complex: at once something technical, socioeconomic, cultural, a logic and a subject, a frame and an object; it is imbricated in human and nonhuman nature; it is human and nonhuman nature” (213). In other words, the digital *is* the *human condition* today. Digital technology is not *something* that exists *outside us* but has become—like other material cultural artefacts, as anthropologists Daniel Miller and Heather Horst assert—“a constitutive part of what makes us human” (4). These technological shifts have also been evident in the form of their influence on the social, individual and cultural spheres, and they are so pervasive that their implications have been reflected in how fiction and

fictional characters are created, read and studied. As products of such a pervasive technological revolution, DeLillo's work offers us possibilities for understanding the implications of the increasing ways in which technology transforms and redefines everything around us to create what can be called an intensive technological culture (Laist [2010]; Boxall [2006]; Smith [2016]).

The implications have also affected the very idea of culture and society. Now that *culture* is inextricably interconnected with technology, especially digital technology, understanding the concept has become all the more difficult. Therefore, the study understands *culture*—a complex term as different theorists of *culture* have indicated²—not as an *outside* or *external force* as it is understood sometimes, but as closely linked to *the human*, as the words “techno” and “technology” suggest in the works of various thinkers and critics including Jacques Derrida, Bernard Stiegler, Arthur Bradley and Thomas Misa³ et al (Derrida [1993], [1995];

² The complex character of “culture” has been emphasized, among others, by Raymond Williams (1976), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Gustav Jahoda (1993, 2012).

³ The etymological meaning of “technology” as *techné* (meaning art or craft), says Alex Goody, “has persisted in Western thought since the philosophy of the Ancient Greeks” (2019, 15). For Plato, *techné* means an understanding of how to do certain activities, which is in contrast to *episteme*, meaning “theoretical component of that knowing”. He thereby effectively separated ‘knowledge’ from ‘technology’. Aristotle’s *Physics* reinforces this distinction in Plato when he says that there are two kinds of being, one that is “constituted by nature” that “have in themselves a principle of movement (or change) and rest”, and the other “that result from ‘craft-work’ (*techné*) which have within them ‘no such inherent trend towards change’”. *Techné*, and technology are hence considered *external* to human (body) and are conceived “as supplemental and artificial” (qtd. in Goody 15-16). This point is reasserted by Arthur Bradley in his remarks that “*technē* is a *prosthesis* (πρόσθεσις: *pro-thesis*, i.e., an addition; what-is-placed-in-front-of)”, and is considered “in relation to nature, humanity or thought” (9-10). As Goody further argues, “the supposed distinction between the prosthetic *techné* and the originary human is a philosophical sleight of hand, a corollary to the metaphysics of presence that installs the dichotomies and hierarchies that become sedimented in Western thought” (2019, 16). The dualisms thus produced in Western humanist thinking, in an attempt to create a “dichotomy of natural and essential as opposed to artificial and technical”, considered technology outside or external to “the human” (Goody 2019, 16).

Jacques Derrida has deconstructed this dualism in his critique of *Phaedrus* in “Plato’s Pharmacy” by unsettling the opposition between thought and technology, and elsewhere he calls into “question the dissociation between thought and technology” (“Plato’s” 67 and *Memoires* 108). Bradley quotes Derrida as saying in *Of Grammatology* that “the supposed plenitude of the human is actually an originary lack that requires the supplementation of the technical extension and that ‘the identity of the human is always bound up with its non-human supplements’” (Bradley 98). In “The Rhetoric of Drugs”, Derrida again deconstructs this dualism between technology and the human and says that “technology has not simply added itself, from the outside, or after the fact, as a foreign body” it “is ‘originarily’ at work and in place of the supposedly ideal interiority of the ‘body and soul’” (qtd. in Goody 16). Drawing on Derrida, Stiegler makes a similar argument that “humanity only exists as conscious corporeality in time through the presence of *technē*”/the tool, and concludes that “interior and exterior are consequently constituted in a movement that invents both one and the other: a moment in which they invent each other respectively, as if there were a technological maieutic of what is called

Stiegler [1998]; Bradley [2011]; Misa et al [2003]). Now that we are surrounded by all kinds of screens and devices, it won't be far-fetched to say, following Alexander Galloway et al., that "[t]echnology has no impact on our culture..., it *is* culture" (99). In other words, *culture* is understood in the context of digital technology not as a part of nature-culture/inside-outside dualism, but as something that is *inherently/interconnected* with the human context, as argued by Derrida, Stiegler and Bradley (Derrida [1993], [1995]; Stiegler [1998]; Bradley). Deborah Lupton also makes a similar claim when she asserts that "the very idea of 'culture' or 'society' cannot now be fully understood without the recognition that computer software and hardware devices not only underpin but actively *constitute* selfhood, embodiment, social life, social relations and social institutions" (2). In such a condition, if technology is not external to our lives but *is* culture, the very character of *technology* and *culture* itself needs to be re-assessed (Dinnen 215).

Following the above discussion on culture, this study uses the word *culture*—or rather *technological culture*—to mean not just the "whole way of life" under technological innovations but also the networked, "entangled relationality" between the human and the machinic environment which is leading us to a posthuman future whose true character we are yet to imagine (Williams 88-89, Barad [2007], Braidotti [2002]). This "whole way of life" is characterized by the increasing use of various technologies in all contexts of life as well as the networked relationship between technology and capitalism that create a techno-capitalist order in advanced societies. By technological culture, I also mean the whole *process* that involves the rationale, scientific imagination, and economic, social, military and other discourses that make possible conditions for "creating technological innovation" (Balsamo

humanity" (1998, 142). The human, according to Stiegler, is thus constituted through *technicity*: "[t]he interior and the exterior are the same thing, the inside is the outside, since man (the interior) is essentially defined by the tool (the exterior)". Thus, as Bradley and Armand observe, for Stiegler "technicity names something which can no longer be seen as just a series of prostheses or technical artefacts – which would be merely 'supplemental' (or supernumerary) to our nature –but the basic and enabling condition of our life-world" (3).

5). The clubbing of *culture* with *technology* will also help us challenge any attempt to separate culture and technology, and to suggest “an understanding that culture has always been technological, and technologies have always been cultural” (Slack and Macgregor 9). In other words, it is only when we consider technology as integral to culture and not separate from it, and that culture has always “existed *in relation to* what we understand to be technologies: from voice, stone, and fire, to clock, computer, and nanotechnology”, that we can comprehend the extent to which technology has come to be integrated to the human and social structure (Slack and Wise 9). In a similar way, DeLillo makes a subtle connection between the character of the (post)human life and contemporary techno-culture where even death has been redefined in terms of technological innovation: “people will not die. Isn’t this the creed of the new culture? People will be absorbed in streams of information (*Cosmopolis* 104). Following the above discussions on culture, it seems that, it is now apt to say that technological culture is the character of our time.

A few words about *society*, as it is used in the study. As I have indicated earlier, our society and lives have been increasingly characterized by the digital turn today. This has enormous implications in our understanding of certain concepts too. The digital has also redefined the very knowledge with which we understand the world. Consequently, most people in the advanced and advancing societies have come to live in what Seb Franklin calls in his book *Control*, “an episteme of ‘digitality’” (xviii-xxi). The “episteme of digitality” is, as he suggests, both “a logical-technical substrate through which certain machines might operate” and “a predominant logical mode with which to address both individual social actors and the body of interactions between these actors that can be dubbed “society”” (Franklin xviii). The interaction between the individual and social actors is mostly mediated through technology today. DeLillo’s persistent portrayal of the role of different technologies, I argue, addresses such a shift in the concept of the social and society as they have been presented in

the context of the technological transformation in America, as evident in his novels from *Americana* (the film, television technology) to *The Silence* (the digital/cyber technology). DeLillo places the individual and the social at the centre of all these technological transformations.

To understand the interface between character and culture and how it is reflected in the novels of DeLillo, this study also draws on certain important observations on the concept of *character* made by writers such as William Gass and Virginia Woolf, and by critics such as John Frow (*Character and Person* [2014]), Amanda Anderson et al. (*Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, [2019]), and Marjorie Garber (*Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* [2020]), whose conceptualizations of *character* reveal not just how they were also based on some reflective and perspectival shifts in the idea of the human and on their contemporary contexts but the rich interpretive possibilities inherent in the term “character” itself.

“Character” is an interesting idea to explore DeLillo’s work, as it helps us *characterize* and enter into the psychological, social and cultural effects of technology that DeLillo finds as shaping and reshaping the character of human life since the late twentieth-century. These characterological shifts in human and society, as they are presented in DeLillo work, could be best understood, if we pay attention to Gass’s interpretation of the concept of character in his essay “The Concept of Character in Fiction”. Gass’s argument that “an idea or a situation, or a particular event, an obsessive thought, a decision, a passion, a memory— *anything which serves as a fixed point...* functions as a character” allows us to rethink character. Gass’s reformulation of *character* as an *idea* can help us consider how DeLillo’s persistent concerns with technology and its impact come to *characterize* in particular ways such things as society, individuals, and technology as they appear as dominant presence in DeLillo’s fiction, sometimes acquiring even the status of character in a Gassian sense (50). Drawing especially

on Gass's reformulation of character as an *idea*, the study argues that the presence of various technologies in DeLillo's works creates peculiar *impressions* in his works that offer us possibilities of conditions for understanding *character* differently, particularly in terms of the changes technology has brought to the character of individuals and society (50). Here, "character" is not understood specifically as a product of form but as an *idea* which is a product of his fiction's thematic and philosophical concerns about such social forces. His obsession with such forces as they exist in American society creates in his works, I argue, certain impressions in the form of Gassian "fixed point" (50). It is DeLillo's interest in such unconventional construction of character that seem to foster this plasticity of character in his work. Such an unconventional approach to characterization has been indicated in relation to DeLillo's novels by David Cowart in his argument that DeLillo's unsubstantial characters are often emblematic of a linguistic and cultural identity crisis (71-110, 181-196). Aaron Smith also emphasizes the importance of this inscriptive power of DeLillo's characters while saying that "over the course of Don DeLillo's long and ongoing career as a leading voice of American letters, a unique thematic fingerprint has emerged in his writing. His characters inhabit the idiosyncratic yet uncannily recognizable space at the intersection of the author's many spheres of interest, which include technology, death, terrorism, language and history" (158).

It is also important to state how "character", often regarded as a fictional entity or a personal trait, can function as an *idea*. If one were to look at the history of character-theory, one would realize that in the context of fiction the term "character" has mostly been theorized/understood in relation to the actions, motives and the interior workings of human/nonhuman beings presented as fictional characters. Most of the theories of character—both traditional and formalist/linguistic—offer two dominant theories of the concept: 1) treating character as if they are actual people or treating character as a displaced

form of human being, revealing the representational potential of ‘character’, and 2) the formalist models which reduce character to either a textual, lexical, thematic or compositional unit, without considering character’s connection beyond the textual, intentional or semiotic profile of the narrative discourse (Anderson et al 3; Culler 179). For instance, Woolf’s discussion on character—though it sought to move away from earlier presentation of character—focused more on the inner workings of character, whereas the structuralist theories of ‘character’, exemplified in such theorists as Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, AJ Greimas, and Tzvetan Todorov paid attention only to certain “roles” and “types” of character, such as “figures”, “actants”, the “slots” or the “structural functions”, the hero, the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, and the false hero or the usurper⁴ (Greimas [1973]; Propp [1975]; Barthes [1970]; Todorov [1975]; Culler [1975]). Whatever uses and definitions these theories may provide, there has been a tendency among these theories to take “character for granted”, as Garber argues, by neglecting mostly the complexity and cultural embeddedness of the very term *character*, a word that is “richly problematic and fascinating...” (25).

Therefore, a nuanced scrutiny of the word “character” would help not only to understand how I use the term in the study but also perceive the complexity and multivalency of the term. The complexity inherent in the etymology of the term itself makes it less amenable to easy interpretation. Its various dictionary meanings include “a stamp”, an

⁴ The debate/discussion surrounding fictional character has a complicated history of its own. Since the beginning of the modern debate starting from Virginia Woolf’s 1922 famous declaration (directed primarily at Arnold Bennett) that “on, or before 1910, human character changed” in “Character in Fiction”, to William Gass and John Gardner’s debate on character, to the spawning of an exclusive seminar in 2010 to celebrate the centenary of Woolf’s declaration, and to the more recent works on *character* by John Frow, Amanda Anderson et al., and Marjorie Garber, “character” has acquired renewed attention and more complexities, and has never ceased to interest writers and critics (Woolf 38). Although books on the decline of “character” have occasionally appeared, as evident in such claims as the ‘death’/disappearance of “character” in postmodern work, character still attracts readers and writers. The clamour about the decline or retreat from ‘character’ seems to me to stem primarily from the disinterest shown by writers in the conventional ideas of character and not from *character* as such.

“inscription”, “letter” or “mark on a page”, an “instrument of marking”, “moral character”, a “person invested with peculiar quality in a fiction”, the subject of a character description, as well as the description itself (“Character”). “Character” thus indicates both the *thing* engraved and the *process* of engraving/stamping. It is character as “the act of inscription” that this study invokes throughout. The inscription of character through impression-creation is also what William Gass stresses when he says that “character is a matter of degree” to which something in a fiction attains peculiarity (50). Such peculiarities are evident in many contemporary fictional works wherein character often assumes different shades, figures and roles, ranging from such non-human entities as machines, animals and other posthuman figures. The multivalency inherent in “character” allows us to see how/that character (a fictional being/a *thing*) is *inscribed* (the process) on the pages of a novel/story with the characters (the written/taped words) that constitute the narrative. This further helps us, I argue, to see how character as a *thing* has always been related to technology, and is *inscribed* in fiction—whether it is with the written technology (with hands) or any other technologies, such as type-writer, computer, cell phone, etc., that are used to write/type characters. In this sense, it is also helpful to note how the changes in the technology of writing can also change our relation to what is written, as suggested by Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, while referring to the changes in Nietzsche’s writing when he switched from writing with his hand and pen to the technology of the typewriter (210). Kittler’s words are insightful:

writing [with a typewriter] in Nietzsche is no longer a natural extension of humans who bring forth their voice, soul, individuality through their handwriting. On the contrary: ...humans change their position—they turn from the agency of writing to become an *inscription* surface. Conversely, all the agency of writing passes on in its violence to an inhuman media. (210; emphasis added)

What Kittler suggests here is how our writing tools change our writing style, as these tools also work on our thoughts (203). The written characters (letters) in a fiction which can embody the discourses and ideologies of that fiction/author, also make an *impression* of the particular culture embodied in that fiction—whether it is the culture of postmodernism, or consumerism, technologization or globalization. Examples of such inscription can be seen in some of the words/language used by DeLillo’s characters in *White Noise* that indicate technology’s influence on human consciousness. I discuss this in detail in chapter 2.

In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter J. Ong also makes similar remarks on the close relationship between technology and human character and how technology impact the presentation of character in fiction, while stating that changes in society, human nature, consciousness and fictional character are also determined by shifts and innovations in communication culture and technologies (126-149). Among the various developments, the shifts from oral culture to literacy and then to media culture, as mentioned by Ong, have had great impact on how individuals perceive and understand things around them. By making a distinction between the effects of oral and written/print culture on *character*, for instance, Ong argued that the “heavy” or “flat” character came from primary oral narrative culture, the phase of oral culture untouched by any modern technology. The shift from “flat” to “round” character was, according to him, linked to the shift in narrative model of oral tradition to that of literacy narrative mode. The complexity of the round character was fostered by the technology of writing or written narrative with its drive towards introspection of characters as well as the analysis of their inner states. The inwardness of round characters was later intensified with the arrival of print. The interiorized and individualized thoughts fostered by writing and reading also created a private world for such round characters whose ‘essence’ and “extreme consciousness” were produced by shifts in narrative media from oral to written and then to print culture. Ong’s thought-provoking examination of the “technologization of

the word” thus suggests that even transformation in the medium of expression can alter human character and consciousness and their representations in fiction/al characters (126, 133, 149, 150).

The inscription of character in fiction seems to have acquired more of a technological character today in a highly digitized world than ever before, with all processes of inscription are increasingly being done by/through technology than what Kittler had suggested through Nietzsche’s statement that “[o]ur writing tools are also working on our thoughts” (210). Today, with the digital revolution, as Garber says, “the old idea of a character as a distinctive mark or brand has reappeared” in new avatars (17). This is evident, as she further states, in “Twitter’s 140 or 280 ‘characters’ or the ‘character recognition’ capacities of some computer software” (Garber 17). Also, the face-reading techniques that now feature in most of our everyday, technologically-mediated interactions/identification processes including for locking and unlocking devices like cell phone, have something strange to do with one of the more traditional practices of character-reading called physiognomy. This suggests that with digital technologies, *character*, especially as the *thing* inscribed, seems to have attained more complexity and prevalence.

The relationship between *character* and *culture* becomes more illustrating in the case of America, especially when we consider another word which is often used with “character”—“national character”. Elaborating on this will yield some fascinating ideas regarding the close relationship between America as a nation and the idea of character, or how “character” is understood in relation to nation, especially to the American nation as represented in DeLillo’s novels. There is a peculiar way in which character in the context of nation becomes more relevant to what many imply when they use the phrase “American character”—its possession or the lack thereof. In this sense, it seems that it is not wrong to say that “national character” has always been what defined America as a nation, as Garber insists (189-190). This national

character in the case of America is also related to the often-invoked idea of “American exceptionalism”: what it suggests is also the *American* character. This is also evident in how the idea of national character is embedded in such ideas/ideologies and notions as “American Declaration of Independence”, the “frontier theory” of Frederick Jackson Turner, “manifest destiny”, and in such often-quoted rallying cries as “America is a melting pot”, and “Make America Great”. *Character* also has a more illustrating relationship to the contemporary political discussions on America, especially after the Trump era—an era *characterized* also by the “character assassination” (of his opponents including Hilary Clinton) in which he increasingly engaged, as well as an era that is also marked by his “authoritative character” which was predictably amplified by his social media campaign, as Douglas Kellner rightly puts (*American Nightmare* 29). The crises that this era and what followed this produced, as we have witnessed, are also, as Garber rightly puts, indicative of how ‘national character’ has now become “a concept often invoked at times of stress, as a marker not so much of social progress as of social and cultural anxieties”, and how it “becomes increasingly apparent during times of change and anxiety” (123).

It is similar *crises* that many of DeLillo’s characters point to and create impressions about, especially in the context of how every individual and historic experience in the context of America—whether it is the murder of John F Kennedy or the events of 9/11—is appropriated by media and turned into what Guy Debord had called “the spectacles” (1). This particular connection between character and nation in the context of America will make more sense if we examine the character-inscription in DeLillo’s novels. His obsessive concerns with America’s transformation as a nation from the early media technologies of the late twentieth century to the more advanced, cyber technologies of the early twenty-first centuries prove my argument that it is American character and how it has been determined by a powerful technological culture that is mostly inscribed in his work. In other words, as

Michael Naas asserts, DeLillo's "work reflects, perhaps like no other, the complexities of contemporary American society from the early 1970s right up to today" in a highly technologically-mediated experiential realm (x). This complexity is a product of the technoculture which characterizes the nation today, as DeLillo portrays it in his *Cosmopolis*.

This relationship between character and nation also evokes questions. How do characters—both the letters that constitute the narrative in a fiction and the figures that appear in a fictional world—become inscriptions of the peculiarities of a culture, or nation? Jens Eder et al., emphasize this social and cultural embeddedness of *character* when they note that the cultural contexts that are embodied in the construction and reception of character point to the idea that characters "[are] signs of empirical production and reception process embedded in their socio-cultural contexts in different historical periods and (sub-) cultures" (4). For instance, the *character* of the unnamed black man in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* needs to be read against the *culture* of racism in America. Similarly, Thomas Pynchon's Herbert Stencil in *V* (the word "stencil" has more illustrative connections to "impression", one of the etymologies of the word *character*)—who speaks mostly in the third person—Oedipa Mass, and the V-2 rocket that almost assumes the status of a character in *Gravity's Rainbow*, etc. must be situated in the context of the culture of technology and the order it produce.

Even though writers have quite often used the technique of employing characters as ideas, as can be seen in the novels of writers who are concerned with such cultural aspects as racism, sexuality, disability etc., DeLillo has shown keen interest in insisting us to understand social interactions, human relationship, human actions, behavior, and the very category of the human in their networked relationship with technological environment/devices. Paying attention to this complex network of entangled relationality within which DeLillo presents his characters, such as consumerism, electronic devices, digital platforms, cyber capitalism,

information flow, etc., would reveal why he uses his characters not just as simple copies of actual human beings, or textual constructs, but also as *ideas* to prove that humans no longer exist as individual subjects but as part of a whole network of relations that include nonhuman objects as well. He constantly reminds us, as John McCarthy and Peter Wright argue, “that technology is deeply embedded in our everyday experience, in ways that are ethical and functional (iv). In this sense, his characters are comprised more of a technological nature than of human biology. This insistence on human lives’ embeddedness in technological environment becomes all the more urgent and complex in his later novels. They compel us to think about our “digital existence” today in which, as Dinnen notes, “human and nonhuman users cohere as subjects in relation to interfaces such as platforms and devices” (213). In these novels, DeLillo’s characters like Eric Packer (*Cosmopolis*) seem to remind us that “life now... is a *process* in which the human subject emerges as living mediational entanglement, always becoming-with nonhuman, technological agents (Kember and Zylinska 44; emphasis added). In such a condition, as Dinnen corroborates them, “mediation becomes a key trope for understanding and articulating our *being in*, and *becoming with*, the technological world, our emergence and *ways of intra-acting with it*” (214; emphasis added). Human life and subjectivity in such a context become a *process* of intra-action/entanglement rather than a static condition, emphasizing human’s embeddedness in the ever-changing techno-capital environment.

The inscription of characters as ideas in DeLillo also becomes all the more evident when they appear to embody certain ideologies or conditions of our existence. Critics like Tony Tanner have suggested that DeLillo’s characters can be seen as ideas. Tanner observes that DeLillo’s characters should be understood as “voices” rather than as people (204). In this sense, as humans they seem “to aspire to the condition of anonymity, an anonymity that can ironically stand for the voice of the whole of America” (204). DeLillo is not alone in offering

such “voices” instead of conventional characters, but is preceded by such earlier writers as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter, to mention but a few. In DeLillo, the most striking example of this character-as-idea can be seen in his presentation of “waste”—both material and human—in *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis* that characterizes a capitalist society’s exploitative impulse. I discuss this in detail in the second chapter. Understanding characters as ideas is also important both because there have been attempts to debunk character and character enables us to see fiction as a cultural product deeply engaging in questions about the human condition that are pertinent to discourses surrounding contemporary social realities.

How do we understand this peculiar *character* of character as ideas, especially as it gets manifested in DeLillo’s work? This is mostly evident, I argue, in DeLillo’s fiction’s *placing* of characters and contemporary social reality within an *environment* of technology constituted by devices, networks, interfaces, and images. Most of his novels situate characters and social realities in some form of technology—whether it is television or cinematic technology in *Americana*, *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Underworld* or the more advanced technologies in *The Body Artist* (Digital Voice Recorder), *Cosmopolis*, *Zero K*, and *The Silence* (Cyber Technology and Cryonics). This close proximity between the human and technological objects in DeLillo’s fiction enables a kind of carrying across qualities, which were traditionally considered unique to objects or human beings, between human beings and technological devices. While the close link between the human and technological objects in his earlier novels creates a condition in which individuals, by their constant use of technologies, *become* what they use, as McLuhan would call it in *Understanding Media*, in his later work this relation becomes all the more complex and integrated, and the difference between the two disappears in a network of relationality (114). The obverse is also true: the close relation of technological objects to human beings and their importance in their life also

enables the attribution of human qualities to machines. This is implicit in the idea of how technology has been recognized as an integral part of the human, and how technology is often considered to have agential power to act upon and with the *human*. The television in DeLillo's earlier novels, for example, sometimes assumes such a quality. These "human qualities" revealed by machines, as evidenced in the personified television sets in DeLillo's *White Noise* also remind us of McLuhan's dictum "what we behold becomes us" (114). However, these nonhuman devices need to also be seen as "vibrant matters", as Jane Bennett argues in *Vibrant Matter* (2010), as they share vibrancy, and hence agency, with humans, achieved through the convergence of human and nonhuman forces⁵.

Many of DeLillo's novels explore this entangled existence created by such technological objects like television, computer, and photography and the images, information and data they produce, affecting individual's life and perception deeply. DeLillo presents them not only as the most influential thing in their lives but also as objects whose presence cannot be resisted by individual agency. David Bell in *Americana*, for instance, offers an apt example of such situation: his attempt to distance himself from his past life, saturated with television images, fails as he later ends up in the world of cinematic production. The novels suggest this when, later in the novel, he begins to make a long autobiographical film, which also points to the transformation of the influence from the power of the screen image to that of the cinema camera with its "prestige..., its almost religious authority, its hypnotic power to command reverence from subject and bystander alike" (*Americana* 86). The more he seeks to disentangle himself from such cultural objects, the more structured his life becomes around such technologies. The available studies on DeLillo's characters points, as the following

⁵ Bennett defines "vitality" as "the capacity of things . . . not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (*Vibrant Matter* 8). Similarly, Levi Bryant argues in *A Democracy of Objects* (2011) that "humans are . . . objects *among* the various types of objects that exist or populate the world, each with their own specific powers and capacities" (20).

literature review shows, to such influences and implications that technology has on individuals and society.

Review of Literature

Although the influence of technology on determining the thematic concerns of DeLillo's work has been documented well, not many critical works have focused on his presentation of character either as an *idea* or how it is constructed in his work. Those that discuss character-presentation in his work have either tried to focus on the production of subjectivity in his work or discussed character sparsely. An important work that has examined the relationship between technology and DeLillo's characters' world is Randy Laist's *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in DeLillo's Novels* (2010). In his study of DeLillo's four novels such as *Americana* (1971), *White Noise* (1985), *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003), Laist focuses on the production of *subjectivity* through the interaction between technology and human beings, thereby raising fundamental questions about the neat distinction that is made between technological objects and the human. To examine such a symbiotic relationship and its production of human subjectivity, Laist uses new concepts such as "interphor", a concept which he derives from an analysis of Charles Feidelson's phrase "under the iron gates of life"⁶ (Laist 6). Drawing on Feidelson's analysis, Laist observes that "rather than a one-way carrying across (meta-phor) of attributes from one term to another", *interphor* can be thought of as a conceptual trope that can be described as "a bi-directional carrying-between", and argues that "in DeLillo, the relationship between individuals and their technological environment is characterized by techno-psychic *interphoricity*, a mutual

⁶ The phrase, according to Feidelson, "establishes the idea of life under the aspect of iron gates, and of iron gates under the aspect of life. ... If the two terms are seen under the aspect of each other, the real tenor is a meaning produced by the interaction of the two terms, which together form the vehicle. The tenor is at once the special kind of life that we can entertain under the aspect of iron gates, and the special kind of iron gates that are capable of being thought under the aspect of 'life' (qtd.in Laist 6).

carrying across of attributes and ontological values between psychology and electro-mechanism” (6).

The term *interphor* runs across the book as the basis of his arguments. He also mobilizes McLuhan and Baudrillard in his exploration of this interface in DeLillo, linking their theories closely with his concept of the *interphor*. He studies characters such as David Bell (*Americana*), Jack Gladney, Willie Mink, Murray Siskind and Babette (*White Noise*), Nick Shay, Matt Shay, Nick’s former lover Klara and the Nun Alma Edgar (*Underworld*), and Eric Packer (*Cosmopolis*) to examine the “interphorical relationships with their electro-material culture”, arguing that DeLillo’s characterization is predicated on a “vision of the existential interpenetration of the human subject and the technological object” (14). In his analysis of David Bell, for instance, Laist focuses on his turn from television to the film camera, and argues that “the most overarching theme of *Americana* is that of an implied *interphoricity* between technological innovations such as television and cinema and psychological disposition in regard to memory, death, sex and identity” (24). Whereas Laist reads Willie Mink (*White Noise*) as “the surreal culmination of the novel’s theme of televisualized selfhood; the endpoint of televisual consciousness”, the characters in *Underworld*, for him, are those who are “*interphorically* fused with their American environments”, and are revealing “a Freudian motif of depth psychology [that] is *interphorically* involved with a McLuhanian atmosphere of surface-psychology” (104,110). Laist reads Nick Shay as “an exemplum of the self-externalized man, lost somewhere inside the technological structures which constitute his selfhood”, and as “someone who is defined by the technology around him” (129, 134). Laist’s examining of *Cosmopolis*—which he calls the “most focused meditation on the theme of technology and subjectivity” — maintains that of all of DeLillo’s characters, Eric Packer’s “identity is impossible to consider without reference to the entirely technologized environment with which he surrounds

himself” (153,155). Though the book offers some useful insights into DeLillo’s characterization, its inclination towards neologism and its lack of a deep reflection on the linguistic production of character make the argument somewhat untenable. Also, the use of “interphor” as a central a point of his whole argumentation may prevent us from understanding the transformation that DeLillo’s own work (and his characterization) has taken in response to the impact of technological developments in America ever since the publication of his first novel *Americana*.

Laist, in a later essay titled “DeLillo’s Only Intertextual Character: Tracing *White Noise*’s Murray Siskind Back to DeLillo’s Pseudonymous Novel *Amazons*”, considers *White Noise*’s Murray Siskind—who previously appeared as a supporting character in DeLillo’s *Amazons*, which he co-wrote with Sue Buck under the pseudonym Cleo Birdwell—as “the most ambiguous characters in recent American fiction”, and “the garrulous semiotician” in *White Noise* (115). Laist argues that Murray’s re-appearance in *White Noise* is a “unique example ... of the metafictional trope used extensively ... by Kurt Vonnegut and Tom Robbins” (“DeLillo’s” 116). Murray’s intertextual characterization reveals, Laist argues, that his problematic advice to Jack to consider homicide as “a viable solution” to the latter’s “fear of death” is less “an expression of mischievousness or malice” than a strong reflection of his “own attempts to live inside a fictional world rather than the real one” (“DeLillo’s” 116). Laist also draws our attention to the contrast and similarities of the two Murrays: While the Murray in *White Noise* is a “theorist”, and “a creature of simulations and representations”, the Murray of *Amazons* doesn’t theorize or say anything about television (“DeLillo’s” 117). Murray’s unreliability as a social critic in *White Noise*, according to Laist, “is grounded in his character’s fetishization of the unreal” in the latter novel (“DeLillo’s” 118). Though Laist offers interesting reading of the intertextual character of Murray, he doesn’t provide any suggestions as to *how* we can see the intertextual transformation of Murray from *Amazons* to

White Noise in the context of the wider social and cultural transformation of the American society from the late 1970s to 1980s.

In his book *Character and Person*, John Frow discusses, though briefly, characterization in DeLillo's short story "Midnight in Dostoevsky". Frow bases his discussion of DeLillo's characterization in the story on "Type", and explores, through the prism of Type, how social personhood is constructed "across a range of legal, religious, medical, ethical, civic, and socioeconomic institutions and organizations of practice" (vii). Frow argues that "fictional character is formed on the basis of folk taxonomies, including popular psychologies, physiognomies, and characterologies, as well as models of social hierarchy and legal and religious order". He declares that "[t]wo kinds of knowledge are drawn on for the construction of an old man's character in DeLillo's story: an encyclopedic form of knowledge about social types, and knowledge about the typologies relevant to the modal worlds of genre" (125). Frow argues that the story allegorises the ways in which characters are imagined into being, "in both its self-confidence and its frailty" by drawing on already available social types. In other words, the construction of character here "depends not on invention *ex nihilo* but on filling out the details of the type,... of the stereotypes, the exemplary figures" by the other character's cultural stories, especially the two boys who construct a biography of the old man from his details and the details about his wearing of a hooded coat (125). Though Frow's discussion of the story allows us to see how character is *constructed* within the story by ascribing certain qualities based on already available types, it is surprising—despite the fact that his attempt here is to illustrate the category "type" among many other categories such as "Figure", "Person", "Name", and "Face"—why he uses this particular story from DeLillo's oeuvre to discuss character while his many other characters from his novels could reveal a lot about character-construction.

The British critic Tony Tanner, in his book *The American Mystery*, makes some insightful observations about DeLillo's characters. In a chapter titled "Don DeLillo and the American Mystery", Tanner argues that DeLillo's characters cannot be thought of as conventional characters, but as "voices" (213). He makes, in this regard, a comparison between DeLillo and Beckett's characters, and observes that DeLillo "catches and transcribes American voice as no other writer can" (213). This aspect is more evident, for him, in *Underworld*, wherein the many voices "seem just part of one, orally invariant American voice" (213-214). He even calls them "memorably differentiated consciousness" and not "well-rounded characters" (2015). Indicating the peculiarities of the characters, Tanner argues that the "real protagonist of the novel *Underworld* is 'waste'", while also making a comparison with Thomas Pynchon's use of rubbish in his novels (214). He considers Nick Shay as representing waste in the novel because "he lives it, and... thinks it" (215). However, Tanner accuses DeLillo of abandoning characters and plots, and instead focuses on history. Though he discusses DeLillo's characterization at some length here, he doesn't allow us to see *how* exactly characters can be considered as "voices" or ideas, which, to certain extent, delimits his argument for a new understanding of DeLillo's character.

In his essay "Global City Turns Local Street Theatre: The Dynamics of Character and Setting in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*" (2007), Dennis Hannemann considers *Cosmopolis* as offering "an alternative to the ruthless economic order of global capital", an alternative that emerges from the "dynamic conception of the character" of Eric Packer (295). He makes this argument on the premises that the novel exhibits a fundamental "compositional parallelism" between character and setting (295-296). In other words, the dynamic character of Packer in the novel is in close link with "the ambivalent nature of Manhattan" city, in which most of the actions of the novel take place, as it functions in the novel both as "global and local city" (296). The "utopian glow of cyber capital" with which DeLillo characterizes the order of

contemporary global capital in his essay “In the Ruins of the Future” is personified, according to Hannemann, in Packer (296). He makes a connection between the character of Packer and his ultimate death in the local area of Manhattan with the self-immolation of a protester against globalization in the streets of Manhattan. The parallel between the two, according to Hannemann, has a fundamental relation to the structure of the novel. In other words, the breaking of the novel into two parts—one mostly situated at the heart of Manhattan city and the other in the rather industrial, marginal space of Manhattan—offers a cue to the dynamics of characterization and the dynamics of setting. At the end of the first section, we get a sense of Packer’s transformed understanding of the self (“Now he could begin the business of living” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 107). This transformation is reflected in the shift of the novel’s setting from the global city to the local city (the industrial area of Manhattan) where Packer gets more of a “communal citizenship” as he happens to mingle with more local crowds there, thereby experiencing more of communal and spiritual interactions (Hannemann 297). Here in the local area, far from the glow of the global capital centre, Packer engages in a quest for his identity. Though his reading is very instructive, Hannemann doesn’t pay much attention to the “confessions” of Benno Levin, Packer’s rival, that constitute a major part of the structure and form of the novel. An attention to these “confessions” would provide a better chance to understand Packer’s character in relation to Levin’s.

In his essay “The ‘Saturated Self’: Don DeLillo on the Problem of Rogue Capitalism”, Jerry A. Varsava reads Eric Packer as a flat character who is unresponsive and insensitive to his immediate social context. He identifies Packer as inhabiting a “*self sphere*, a place defined by solipsism and ego where the libertarian credo of self-interest is taken to its logical conclusion” (87). He is a “rogue capitalist”, one who is “unresponsive to either legal proscriptions or traditional moral constraints” (89). For Varsava, Packer epitomizes

“misanthropy, malevolence, and outright evil”, and is an “incarnation of evil, a diabolical sociopath and crypto-fascist who plays out his fantasies of domination and personal hegemony in the arena of global finance” (83,104). Varsava argues that Packer represents a “cosmopolitanism that represents a false model of contemporary citizenship, and one that must be resolutely resisted” (105). These characterizations reveal the moral urgency involved in Varsava’s judgment of Packer who is much more complex a figure than befitting these characteristics, and represents the many aspects of a global cyber capital order. Varsava’s moral judgment also avoids the subtle and incisive self-reflections of Packer that otherwise would allow us to see him as a product of the capitalist system he represents.

The existing studies—however limited they are—on “character” in DeLillo’s work have emphasized the importance of DeLillo’s work in portraying the impact of technology on humans’ consciousness and their lives. Though such studies are rather limited, the potentialities for understanding the complexity and cultural embeddedness of his characters are many. His fiction’s inscriptions of the characteristic features of contemporary American society accord him the highest position as the true transcriber of contemporary American culture and life. In this sense, it won’t be wrong to argue that character, whether it is of a society or the human, is what his work seeks to unravel and examine. A focus on the idea of character in his work can shed light on the importance of his critique of technological reason and determinism—which may even help us understand how *well* we can live with technology rather than completely abandoning it—especially at a time when we are surrounded by ever more advanced technologies. His work’s insights into the working of technologically-driven capitalism and their constant reminders about the dangers of complete colonization of the human mind and body by technology, as well as the increasing integration of technology into more of human life/bodies demand rigorous studies. More of such studies are important because only then will we fully understand his work’s investment in attempting to reveal the

features of such a society whose symptoms he diagnoses with the power of fiction. In an interview, DeLillo himself has emphasized his work's investment in the real world outside: "When I work, I'm just translating the world around me in what seems to be straightforward terms. For my readers, this is sometimes a vision that's not familiar. But I'm not trying to manipulate reality. This is just what I see and hear" ("I'm not Trying").

The available critical works on DeLillo often downplay the important role of his characters, or neglect his fiction's inscriptions of the *character* of society or the human in the context of capitalism and technological culture, in helping us understand his work's implication in the larger discourse around the (post)human condition of our time. In an attempt to contribute to the existing scholarship on DeLillo, this study, as I have argued, recasts character differently and use its potential to reveal and illustrate larger social and cultural meanings as well as technology's implications on humans and its increasing integration into the human, as they are presented in DeLillo's work. The study, in other words, reads character from the perspective of the social (to examine the character of society as it is presented in DeLillo), and the human, or posthuman (to understand the nature of the human/posthuman in his work), as well a from the perspective of culture (to examine the culture of waste and speed that characterizes much of DeLillo's work). In keeping with the above-mentioned aims, the present study is organized into 5 chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, each discussing the *idea* of character differently in relation to DeLillo's work.

Plan of the Thesis

The first chapter attempts to situate the study by way of a discussion of character, culture and technology, and the interface between them, linking them with earlier and contemporary discussions of technology in the works of Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler, Marshall

McLuhan, Jacques Derrida, Bernard Stiegler, Paul Virilio, etc. and by lining them with discussion surrounding posthumanism in the works of Rosi Braidotti, Katherine Hayles, Pramod K Nayar, and Stefan Herbrechter. The discussion of these three important terms and their interconnectedness in the context of the study is informed by the observations and arguments made by the above-mentioned theorists of technology and posthumanism. It is important to do so because their works have helped us in understanding concepts like *technology* and *technological culture* more closely and how *technology*'s character itself has been shaped and reshaped by innovations that have become inevitable because of humans' constant drive to expand their capacities and environments. Exploring the interconnectedness of *technology*, *character* and *culture* through their works is also important because they have shown us how technology has changed the *character* of our society as it advanced from agrarian society to industrial to post-industrial/information/digital society. The transformation also indicates the changes in the *character* of technology. The chapter posits character both as an *idea* and as a concept that is used in the context of fiction to refer to human/nonhuman entities presented in fiction. *The chapter argues that discussions, both theoretical and fictional, on various technological innovations from the twentieth-century onwards increasingly emphasize on character—whether it is of society, the human or technology itself—as something that has been defined and redefined in relation to technological innovations. This compels us to rethink, as the chapter further argues, character in the context of DeLillo's work as an idea that creates certain impressions about the peculiar character of our society and the human under what Herbrechter calls “posthumanising technologies” (13). Telephone, television, film, computer, cyber technology, images, data and information, I argue in the chapter, function not as objects without any agency but as the ambient contexts—not external, as Harvey would characterize it, but as a closely linked*

nodes in a network of relations that work with the human—that influence character’s life, actions, and subjectivity in so many ways.

The chapter uses the term *context* to refer to the nonhuman devices, networks of relation, platforms, information, etc. that constitute the technological environment in DeLillo’s work. The idea of how the contiguous *things/entities* in a fictional world affect a person’s character has been discussed by W J Harvey in *Character and the Novel*, though his focus is more on material *things* such as dresses, furniture, etc. (34; emphasis in original). The impact that such objects, especially technological devices, create on individuals can sometimes take so great a dimension that they become either completely dominated by the objects that surround them, or become integrated to them making an entangled relationship with/to them. This chapter, in other words, seeks to situate my argument that in order to understand DeLillo’s work in relation to their technological-cultural contexts, we need to posit “character” not only as a fictional being but also as an *idea*, so that we will be in a better place to understand his work’s concerns with the impact and implications of technology and read them in the context of contemporary American social realities which, as the study will demonstrate, are *essentially* technological in nature.

The second chapter examines DeLillo’s presentation of the *character* of American society in relation to the technology-enabled capitalism and the technological culture that he presents in *White Noise*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Falling Man*. The chapter discusses the implications of the production of “the spectacle” in these novels, which, the chapter argues, *characterize* contemporary American society. Drawing on Guy Debord, Douglas Kellner, Marco Briziarelli, Emiliana Armano, and James Compton, the chapter reads the select novels to understand how the production, circulation and repetition of images and information turn events—including real events like the John F Kennedy assassination in

Underworld, the attack on the World Trade Centre in *Falling Man*—into “spectacles”. The chapter argues that DeLillo’s persistent concerns with media’s production of such spectacles create in his works certain impressions of the peculiar character of contemporary American society in a media and image-saturated world. The spectacles in these novels need to be understood both as static and objectified, as well as alienating the witnessing subjects and as according agency to them, compelling them to participate in a performative act of entangled relationality between the actor/performer of the spectacle and the viewer/reader. The impression-creation also reveals the production of a culture of speed and “waste”—both material and human largely by technologically-mediated consumerism and the logic within which techno/cyber capitalism operates. DeLillo’s reflections on these two important consequences of advanced capitalism and techno-culture point to, as the chapter further argues, the excess that such a technologized society produces. The excessively information/cyber technology-dependent Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis*, and the waste manager Nick Shay, the recyclers of waste Klara Sax and the Moon Man in *Underworld*, for instance, represent such a culture of excess/waste. They also embody the excess of a culture that produces waste in various forms, including in the form of humans. Examining the case of Benno Levin in *Cosmopolis*, the chapter argues that he is not only an “Other” to the cosmopolitan Eric Packer but a residue of a culture of excess. He is also a human-waste in a cyber culture world in which he is destined to live offline, unlike his “other”, Packer, who embodies technological excess with his access to and indulgence in advanced technologies and information.

The third chapter considers DeLillo’s presentation of character—referring to “fictional being”—in *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis* and examines how his conception of ‘character’ reveals/embodies certain “imprints” of the networked, entangled human-non human convergence in our digital culture. The chapter looks at the peculiar character of his

characters in an attempt to understand how they are presented in the select works as both ideas and copies of human beings. *In this chapter, I argue that the character of character in these two novels needs to be understood both as formal/textual effect and as a product of DeLillo's representational strategy whereby he conveys certain "impressions" of a "posthuman" life that most humans lead today in advanced societies in a highly digitized context. The chapter argues that a close reading of his characters in his later novels and their concerns with the impact of more advanced technologies on the humans reveal his novels' "impressions" about the posthuman character of our life today in a highly digitized, cyber technology world. The "impressions" that these characters create suggest not only DeLillo's fears about human's expansion of their bodily capacities fostered by advanced technologies, and human's complete surrender to technology, but also humans experiential world as being constituted by a mutual interaction of human and nonhuman agencies. I also argue that their posthuman characteristics, especially of Lauren in *The Body Artist*, can be best understood as products of a process of what Karan Barad calls as "intra-action".* The entangled lives of these characters and the complex interaction, or rather "intra-action", between organisms and technological objects present in these novels also help us understand the processual nature of the identity of the characters in a technologically mediated cultural climate (Deleuze and Guattari [1987], Braidotti [2002, 2013], Hayles [1999], Barad [2007]). Drawing on the recent works on "character" and "posthumanism", the chapter examines the concept of character in these novels from both the perspectives of its linguistic constructedness and cultural/ethical underpinnings that reveal DeLillo's ethical concerns with the power that technology, especially digital technology, has come to possess in altering and determining the character of the human/life today. In other words, the chapter, drawing on the theoretical works on posthumanism by Neil Badmington (2003, 2004), Braidotti (2002, 2013), Nayar (2014) and Herbrechter (2021), aims at a 'posthuman' reading of his later

fiction/characters in the light of the “posthuman turn” that fiction has taken in the last two decades.

The concluding chapter reflects on some possible ways through which the concerns discussed in the previous chapters can be taken further in the light of his questions and concerns with technology’s integration into the human body and life in his more recent novels. *The chapter argues that in these more recent novels such as Zero K (2016) and The Silence (2020), there is not only a critical posthumanist strain that questions the dangers of the transhumanist project in the Convergence in which Zero K is set, but also the presence of a certain ambiguity in his approach to technology and the condition it creates as it gets manifested in The Silence. This ambiguity arises primarily from his presentation of an apocalyptic, post-technological condition in the novel in which it is not just the very idea of the human (life) that is in question but also the future of the world itself in the face of a complete break-down of the technological system on which human lives depend mostly today. The Silence compels us to ask if such a condition, if it ever becomes a reality, is an indication of a new posthuman(?) age without technology? And if so, what would the condition of the human in such a scenario be?* The chapter also puts forward some new pathways in DeLillo studies in the context of contemporary technological advancement (*Zero K*) and in a post-technological moment (as it is imagined in *The Silence*) as peculiar/potential conditions of our time. The chapter, in other words, examines DeLillo’s more pressing questions about certain apocalyptic turn in technological culture, as evident in the transhumanist, cryonic life expansion project in *Zero K*.

Conclusion

“Character” is the single idea with which I attempt to explore and make certain arguments about technology’s impact at social, individual and cultural levels as they are delineated in

DeLillo's work. My aim, in the end, is to offer a different reading of the *idea* of character that can shed new insights into the work of one of the most provocative writers of America today. For this, the study reads the impact through different technologies from media such as television, voice recorder, the internet to cyber technologies, as well as the images, spectacles and information that media constantly circulate, influencing human consciousness, behaviour, perception as well as how humans' very ontology is negotiated through a network of relationality between the human and the nonhuman entities.

The insights and visions that DeLillo offers, and the provocative questions his novels induce, have compelled us to think of the condition in which we live not only with contemporary technology but with a sense of our self, identity and society being redefined as *digitized*. Fiction is an important medium to explore such ruptures that redefine the condition under which the human, society and culture exist, because fiction—as DeLillo himself has argued—“comes from everything you’ve ever done, and said, and dreamed, and imagined. It comes from everything you’ve read and haven’t read... [It] comes out of the culture of the world around me” (“Exile”). His novels compel us to think about the *human condition* today. Thinking about our own techno-cultural condition has become ever more so important today because as his work rightly suggests the questions concerning technology have become ever more so complex, important and urgent today than it was when he wrote *White Noise* (1986) or *Cosmopolis* (2003).

The present study contends that character has to be understood in the *context* of various cultural forces that go into the making of the peculiarity of a fiction, the society it presents, and its characters, rather than in isolation from these, what is wrongly understood as, “external” concerns (Anderson et al. 1). Paying attention to context is important because it is only when we take such a closer look at how “fiction connects to ordinary life” that we can

better understand fiction “as potential sources of insight” into our culture, society and world at large, “rather than understanding it as examples of unknowingness” (Anderson et al. 1-2). In other words, if we do not pay attention to the moral, political, ethical, social, and ideological investment of character, we do not fully understand not only how character *connects to* the world outside but *why* character is still an important category and idea in fiction. The deeply intimate way in which fiction and characters connect to the everyday life has been emphatically expressed by DeLillo himself when he observes how events like 9/11 can be understood better through fiction: “[with] literature, you can cast light on the inner life of these kind of events”, because fiction “can describe a different truth, one that is no less valuable [than history]” (“I am Not Trying” 31).

In sum, the study will examine some of the issues discussed above and look at “character” from some “unconventional” perspectives and try to answer such questions as what constitutes the *idea* of character in DeLillo’s fiction? How differently can we understand *character*, if not exclusively as “an imaginary/fictional figure”? What does it mean to think character as an *idea*, as in character of society, of the human, and of technology? DeLillo’s novels compel us to ask many such questions about our time: questions such as what it means to perceive/experience/understand something in a technology-driven, *media*-ted, image/information saturated world? how one defines oneself against the backdrop of a plethora of movie or television images? how are the peculiar “impressions”/characteristics of a culture—whether technological or consumerist— *inscribed* in character? The study will also address some, more “human” questions in a posthuman context: What kind of perspectives of the *human* do DeLillo’s work offer in the context of cyber culture? And how can we understand them as reflecting the *character* of the human, of society, and technology today? What does it mean to be ‘human’ in an entangled/networked relations in a deeply mediatized environment?

The following chapters seek to explore and answer some of these and other questions about character in relation to DeLillo's work. In conclusion, this study attempts to show that the extraordinary insights, inventiveness, and understanding with which DeLillo's novels explore contemporary techno-realities not only reveal technology's powerful impact on society and individual lives but also its irreducible and inevitable presence in our lives as the air we breathe, constituting techno-human networks, interrelations and convergences that constitute much of our identity today in a digitized world order. It is this ingenious exploration of our contemporary techno-realities that has made DeLillo one of the most impressive and powerful writers of American literature.

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CHAPTER—1

Character and Culture: Technological Culture and *Ideas* of Character in DeLillo

I) Introduction

No other contemporary writer seems to have addressed the question of the role and impact of technology in society so persistently and evocatively as Don DeLillo has. His work stands out from those of others in that they repeatedly show the role of technology in determining and shaping not only the *character* of his characters but also the *character* of contemporary American society which he presents in many of his novels as a product of technology, media spectacle, (cyber)capitalism, consumerism and the concomitant production of waste. Most of his novels—particularly *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, *Cosmopolis*, *Falling Man*, and *Zero K*—cast technology in a decidedly negative light, revealing the impact of a technological culture at the individual; psychological; and social levels, as well as the dangerous potential for redefining ‘the human’ and extending human life beyond death. In other words, his work depicts characters and events that reveal the social condition in which *human life* has come to exist today in relation to the techno-capital environment, revealing the character of such a social condition.

To understand this peculiar *character* of DeLillo’s work, it is necessary that we consider the different “contexts”—‘the (post)human’, social, technological and the bodily contexts—within which his novels seems to make more sense to us as a body of work that often engages in what I call an “*impression-creation*” of the peculiar condition of our technological realities. DeLillo has often indicated this cultural and social embeddedness in his work: “When I work, I’m just translating the world around me in what seems to be straightforward terms” (“I am Not Trying”). It is assumed that it is in the contexts of contemporary technological realities that his oeuvre makes more sense to us as a body of work that has immediate stake in the real world around us, a world characterized by high consumerism,

speed, information flow, cyber capitalism and pervasive digitization of very aspects of human's life. *This chapter argues that discussions, both theoretical and fictional, on various technological innovations from the twentieth-century onwards increasingly emphasize on character—whether it is of society, the human or technology itself—as something that has been defined and redefined by various technological innovations. This compels us to rethink character, in relation to DeLillo's work, as an idea that can create certain impressions of our society and the 'human' condition.* To understand this aspect of *character* in DeLillo, it is important that we examine the relationship between character, technology and culture as they are interrelated in DeLillo's work. Mapping the various discourses, commentaries and “questions” concerning technology, the following pages will try to demonstrate the interface between the human, technological culture and character. This will help us, it is assumed, understand the larger context in which DeLillo's fiction makes sense to us as truly contemporary.

The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are marked by a watershed of transformations in the wake of various technological innovations that have had great implications for our understanding of most aspects of human life. In the American context, this shift, introduced especially in the 1950s by television, has been characterized by Lynn Spigel and Max Dawson as *fundamental* and as changing the very character of consumer culture that has radically altered every-day human life: “the growth of the new medium at mid-century was part of, and also helped precipitate, fundamental transformations in everyday life, and it also contributed to shifts in consumer habits, political campaigns and civic engagement, and society more broadly” (275). However, the convergence of television with digital technologies at the turn of the millennium, the coming of multi-channel Television systems, as well as the rise of multinational media companies such as Viacom and News Corporation created a more complex cultural condition in America. DeLillo, since his

very first novel, has been very conscious of this shift in society and has shown great interest in depicting the implications of such radical shifts. In *White Noise*, for instance, he presents a very thoughtful meditation on television as, as John Duvall rightly observes, “a medium constructive of postmodernity” (130). In the context of an airborne toxic event, the novel presents television not as “a mediation; [but] the immediate, [and as] the intertextual grid of electronic images [that] creates the Real” (Duvall 130). His observation captures the power of the medium in influencing the perspective and consciousness of individuals.

Theorizing such shifts from the mid twentieth century, the implications of technological innovations and their impact have been well articulated, among others, by Walter J Ong (*Orality and Literacy*); Marshall McLuhan (especially in *Understanding Media*); Jacques Ellul (*The Technological Society*); Friedrich Kittler (*Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*); Bernard Steigler (*Technics and Time* and *Automatic Society, The Age of Disruption*, in particular); Paul Virilio (*Speed and Politics, Art of the Motor*, etc.); and Manuel Castells offering brilliant insights into the character and dominance of technology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The conceptualization of the features of such a social order can be found, in an advanced level in what Ellul called “technological society”, in Steigler’s use of “Automatic Society” (2016) and “Society of Hyper Control” (2016), in Castell’s use of “Information Society” (2002) and “Network Society” (2004), and in the various ways in which Virilio has examined experience in the context of high technology and its creation of a culture of speed (2001, 2006). What is evident in these different terms with which they have sought to capture the social temperament can be thought of the *idea* of character—of society and the human, in particular. In other words, all these phrases that attempt to capture the peculiarity of our social condition invariably invoke the *character* of society under high technological culture. In addition to these theoretical works, fiction, from the latter half of the twentieth century, has also been especially concerned with new innovations in technology

and their impact on society. However, it doesn't mean that there were no earlier works that captured the influence of technology on human and society. These later twentieth century writers have often dwelt on the dangerous and positive potential of technology in societies in the developed and developing countries, and revealed not only how these societies are increasingly becoming *technological* in nature, but also, how technology affects people in different ways. The fiction of Philip K Dick, William Gibson, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo, among others, occupy a central place in the category of such works. Of these writers, both Pynchon and DeLillo have explored technology's role and impact in America, placing the human among devices and in relation to them in conditions that such a technological order creates.

On a closer reading, DeLillo's novels can be found to constantly echo—through their characters who manifest the psychological and other impact of technology's dominance—some of the implications of technological culture that the above-mentioned philosophers have alerted our attention to. His work constantly reminds us that technology is not something that lies “out” there as discrete “objects” in the life-world of characters without affecting them in any way, but that it not only influences the consciousness, perceptions, behavior, and subjectivities of his characters but also relate to them in an entangled relationality. They also compel us to think that technologies are closely integrated to humans and their everyday lives (Laist 117). They shape the identities of his characters in such a way that these objects sometimes even assume the status of character, as DeLillo himself shows in his short play “The Day Room” (1987) in which a character *is* a television set. DeLillo has explicated this unusualness in his characterization and television's force in *White Noise*:

[television] is a primal force in the American home. Sealed-off, timeless, ... self-contained, self-referring. It's like a myth being born right there in our living room, like something we know in a dreamlike and preconscious way TV offers incredible

amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras. (137)

DeLillo's observations on television not only echo Russell Baker's statements on television's role in America that I have quoted in the introductory chapter, but also reflect the enormous power TV has in influencing social life in America in the late-twentieth century. DeLillo and Baker's characterization of television as altering the *character* of social life in America is a good starting point in thinking about the production of a technological culture that began in the late-twentieth century with mass media like television. It will also help us examine DeLillo's work's implication in America's technological realities, as well as the inscription of *ideas* of character in his work. Such an enquiry would help us, the study deems, understand not only his work's interest in character but also his insights into the human condition.

In order to understand the centrality of character functioning as an idea in his work, it is important that we examine the term "character" by untying it from its exclusive use in the context of fiction to refer only to a "fictional being endowed with certain qualities", and considering the other dictionary meanings of the word, such as "marking", "inscription", "impression" and "the act/instrument of/for marking/inscribing" ("Character"). The rest of the chapter seeks to construct such an *idea* of character as central to understanding DeLillo's concerns with the technological culture in America and how the persistence of these concerns across his novels creates certain "impressions" of our posthuman present.

A nuanced understanding of the word "character", its use in the context of fiction and its invoking of certain social and cultural meanings/connections will reveal how

the interface between “character” and technological culture works in DeLillo’s novels. DeLillo himself has alerted our attention to such a relationship in some of his interviews and non-fiction writings. His assertion of speed as technology’s foremost character in his widely quoted essay, “The Power of History”, written in the wake of 9/11, can be read in the light of such a consideration of the interface between character and culture: “[t]he microwave, the VCR remote, the telephone redial button, and the other time-collapsing devices make us feel that our ordinary house-hold technology reflects something that flows through the deep mind of the culture, an important craving for time itself to move forward”(62). The idea of speed and how humans are forced to adopt it, emphasized in these words, is one of the characters of contemporary technology and society, as argued by Virilio (2000,2001, 2006), Mark Taylor (2014, 2021), Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuerman (2009). To understand this interface, it is important that we examine *how* DeLillo’s work *relates* to the world outside.

In many of his novels, one can find a close relationship between the fictional and the real world, though the connection is not direct or simply that of an imitative kind: the John F Kennedy assassination in *Libra* (1988) and *Underworld* (1997), the events of 9/11 in *Falling Man* (2007), the Iraq war in *Point Omega* (2010), as well as the general concerns regarding the implications of technological culture in these and other novels. It’s this interconnectedness that DeLillo subtly suggests when he comments on the role of writers in our time in his essay “In the Ruins of the Future” while observing that at a time of destructive “world narratives” of cyber-capitalism and terrorism that control us, “it is left to us [as writers] to create the counter-narratives” (4). Critics such as Peter Boxall (2012), John Duvall (2018), and Stacey Olster (2002,2011) have indicated such a relationship between DeLillo’s fiction and the world outside. In their discussion, his novels are also read as counter-narratives against cultures of violence,

terrorism (*Libra* and *Falling Man*), technology and consumerism (*White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, and *Cosmopolis*), speed (*Cosmopolis*), and waste (*White Noise*, *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis*) which DeLillo calls as the “dark side of consumer consciousness” (*White Noise* 256). They constantly remind us—and DeLillo himself has reasserted it—that at the heart of his work is an engagement with culture, and that at their most elemental level, his novels offer a unique set of perspectives and a clear prism for perceiving and understanding contemporary American culture (Tanner 2000; Knight 2000, 2008; Boxall 2012; Duvall 2018; Olster 2011). Concurring this, DeLillo states: “my intention [is] to use the whole picture, the whole culture” of America (“Art” 278). In other words, his interest seems to lie in delving deep into the heart of contemporary culture whose character is constituted primarily by rampant consumerism, technological culture and cyber-capitalism.

As these critics have indicated, DeLillo’s fiction enables us to see *how* and to what *effect* it is that we perceive and experience the world around us today in an *environment* of various technologies that surround us. One of the most important questions that recurs and finds expression in DeLillo’s works is *how* and *to what effect* technologies impact society and individuals? From *Americana* (1971) to *The Silence* (2020), DeLillo offers perspectives through which readers get a better understanding of the technological reality—be it the postmodern, constructed nature of reality mediated by film and other mass media images in *Americana*, *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mao II* and *Underworld* or the representation and translation of reality by the Internet and cyber technologies in *Falling Man* and *Cosmopolis*. These novels shed light on the reality in which we live today: the posthuman condition—both in the sense of transcending anthropocentrism (*Point Omega*) and the transhuman possibilities brought in by new technologies and development in science (*Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*).

The film technology and its chief media—television and cinema—technologies that he refers to and makes use of in his earlier novels such as *Americana*, *Libra*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld* provide examples for exploring how important they were for translating reality to us in the twentieth century. His character Frank Volterra in *The Names*, for instance, asserts film's crucial importance to us: "[f]ilm is more than the twentieth-century art. It's another part of the twentieth-century mind. It's the world seen from inside. We've come to a certain point in the history of film. If a thing can be filmed, film is implied in the thing itself" (200). In an interview with Adam Begley, DeLillo affirms this central role of film in altering our perception (of the self) in the twentieth century: "[f]ilm allows us to examine ourselves in ways earlier societies could not – examine ourselves, imitate ourselves, extend ourselves, reshape our reality. It permeates our lives, this double vision, and also detaches us, turns some of us into actors doing walk-throughs" ("Art" 105). Though what DeLillo seems to insist here is on the new ways of *seeing* that film technology had introduced, he is also clearly alerting our attention to technology's ability to influence our behavior, making us "actors doing walk-throughs" on screen and outside ("Art" 105).

In his post-millennial novels such as *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis*, *Point Omega*, *Zero K* and *The Silence*, the perspectival changes introduced by new technologies such as digital technologies and their production of a new sense of time and space have come to occupy a central place. DeLillo himself has identified such an epochal shift characterizing what is called "the Anthropocene". This shift has also introduced a new perception of our current age, characterized especially by climate change and digital technology and constituted by what DeLillo himself has called a "deep time, epochal time" (*Point Omega* 92). While listing different kinds of concerns that contemporary fiction reveals, including its urge to register and create a new "temporal awareness", a

long-time exegetist of DeLillo, Peter Boxall, in his *Twenty-First-Century Fiction*, includes *Point Omega* among contemporary fiction that provide “the glimmering outline of a new kind of temporality” that is aware of and shapes a “new measures of speed and slowness”, and that is concerned with “how to understand the transition from one time zone to another” (39, 207, 22). Such epochal shifts also require, as DeLillo has shown in *Point Omega*, new ways of seeing/experiencing influenced also by new cinema technology and temporal awareness. DeLillo points our attention towards such a shift by presenting an anonymous character watching Douglas Gordon’s experimental film in the form of an installation titled *24 Hour Psycho*, in an attempt to understand the experience of watching a film and its transformative effects on our sense of self in a highly mediated experience that characterizes contemporary life. In the novel’s presentation of the film, “cinema no longer offers”, according to Lewin and Ward, “aspirational images of perfection”—as we see DeLillo exploring it in *Americana* by presenting nostalgia and desire for wholesome, healthy bodies as represented by mass culture—“but becomes a marker of duration, making palpable the temporality of watching” itself (8). Here, the desire to watch is fostered rather by new *ways of seeing and experiencing* at a time of high speed of modern technology than *what* is seen/experienced.

Unlike in some of his earlier novels, where the images endlessly supplied by media are consumed for their own appeal and their psychological effects determining the consumer-behavior of individuals, the character’s watching of the movie for many hours in *Point Omega* is influenced by “a pathological need to watch and re-watch (Lewin and Ward 8). As DeLillo says, “[t]his was the point. To see what’s here, finally to look and to know you’re looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registers of motion” (*Point Omega* 19). The character

becomes absorbed in the meta-cognitive process of marking his own watching perpetuated by a desire to not identify with the images anymore, as in *White Noise* or *Libra* where the images supplied by media colonize the mind of the characters, but to think about how and why you watch in an attempt “to feel time passing” (DeLillo *Point Omega* 19).

Readers experience the extremes of such cultural and social shifts—fostered especially by more advanced cyber technology—when we come to his more recent work including *Zero K*—which is set in the hinterland of Kazakhstan and around a cryonic project called “The Convergence”—and in *The Silence*, where he imagines an apocalyptic moment of all screens and devices shutting down abruptly in what DeLillo terms as a moment of “global silence”, or the end of the world, as we may now think it in a world of a plethora of various screens and devices (*Zero K* 6; *Silence* 42). *Zero K* focuses on Ross and Jeff Lockhart’s attempts to come to terms with their differing views on the promise of life extension offered by new medical and cyber technology, “a scientific process that will keep . . . body tissue from decomposing” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 43). *Zero K*’s critical examination of a posthuman vision of enhancing and perfecting the human body in order to be “reassembl[ed], atom by atom,” and then “reborn into a deeper and truer reality” is a response, as Peter Boxall states, “to the emergence of new prosthetic and information technologies” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 47; “Leap Out” 544). The Convergence, where the cryonic experiments are based in *Zero K* dismantles and reimagines the terms in which we conceive of ‘the human’ and human life and how humans will inhabit this world saturated with advanced technologies and climate crisis in the near future. As one of the scientists in the novel says, the novel presents contemporary culture’s wish to “stretch the boundaries of what it means to be human, [to] stretch and then surpass”, because in a world where

technology can decide everything from how we live to how and when we die “[w]e want to do whatever we are capable of doing in order to alter human thought and bend the energies of civilization” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 71).

In *The Silence*, the silence of the screen and the failure of entire communication system leaves DeLillo’s characters frightened and less interested in communicating than to desperately throw disembodied words and sentences into the void created by the dead screens. As a result, as Tom LeClair says, the words uttered by characters “often come as lists, floating phrases[and] not parts of sentences”, which suggests an “effect of media fragmentation” (2021, 10-11). In the novel, DeLillo portrays Max and Jim as individuals who have, as Jiena Sun observes, “unconsciously objectified themselves into talking machines” due to the techno-silence, and as individuals who are “uprooted from their familiar world”—the technology-saturated world—with an unknown future awaiting” them (8). The novel goes beyond the “white noises” and “spectacles” of television and other media that characterize his earlier novels and the plethora of information, images, and cyber capitalism that saturate his postmillennial novels to enmesh his characters in an apocalyptic techno-silence to explore and understand the fate that humans may have to face in the event of such a sudden void.

To understand this transformation that DeLillo’s work has taken from *Americana* to *The Silence* in their response to the technological innovations and their implications in the social and individual spheres of America, it is necessary that we look at the intricate relationship between character and culture, the complex nature of technology—as it has been *characterized* by various theorists—as well as how our understanding of these ideas has changed especially since the second half of twentieth century, influenced also by various technological innovations. In the following sections, I will discuss, in relation to DeLillo’s work, some of the implications of the

technological innovations of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in order to understand the nature, role and place of technology in society that has helped us not only in reimagining our lives in unimaginable ways but also in creating conditions wherein humans are often said to be subjugated/“subjectified” by, and made highly dependent on, and closely integrated into technologies of various kinds (Laist 11).

II) Technology, Culture and Character in DeLillo

Vilém Flusser, in a prophetic declaration, claimed that today’s human being, equipped with digital apparatuses, is already living the “immaterial life” [*undingliches Leben*] of tomorrow. “Manual atrophy” characterises such an existence. Digital technology is making human hands waste away. For Flusser, this is a happy event: it means liberation from the burden of matter. In the future, he claims, human-kind will no longer need hands. The new man will no longer have to *handle* or *work on* anything: he will have truck not with thingly things but only with unthingly information. Fingers will take the place of hands. The new man will *finger* instead of *handling*—or *acting*—and seek only play and enjoyment. (Han 32)

Byung-Chul Han’s explication of Vilém Flusser’s prophecy indicates a crucial stage in technological innovation (32). This shift can have very serious implication in our understanding of the human too. In a technological culture, in which we do most of what we do *googling* them, from cooking; dating; learning new things and about our health problems; to watching movies/series; doing business; and socializing—because we have more “faith in” *google* than in anything else and because it “delivers knowledge”—technology *becomes* the way we live (Vaidhyanathan xii). The ever increasing dependency on technology and the integration of technology into more aspects of human life, especially since the latter half of the twentieth century, have also enabled us to live with the “multiple identities” that various thinkers and philosophers have thought we have come to embrace in a highly technologized, digitize world as ours, from “cyborgs” (Haraway 1991), to “netizens”⁷ (Hauben (1995), to

1 “Netizens” are, according to Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben, “people who understand [that] it takes effort and action on each and everyone’s part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and

“posthuman” (Badmington [2004], Hayles [1999], Braidotti [2013], Nayar [2014], Ferrando [2019], to transhuman (Nick Bostrom[2004,2006], Raymond Kurzweil [2005], Max More and Natasha Vita-More [2013]), to “digital citizen⁸” (Mossberger *et al.* [2008]; Hintz *et al.* [2019]), and to such more recent categories as “algorithmic identities”⁹ (Cheney-Lippold [2011]). Such “potential life ways”, as they are often termed, are also sometimes referred to as a kind of ‘culture’, created via Advanced Information Technology (AIT) (Hakken 1).

Drawing on various discourses around (cyber) technology, posthumanism, transhumanism, and the body this section argues that the radical innovations in technology, as evident also in DeLillo’s work, in the last few decades have altered the character of both ‘the human’ and technology, leaving us with important questions about the future of humanity and technology. To understand the various “impressions” of such shifts in the character of the human and society, as they are presented in DeLillo’s work, one needs to look at the ways in which technology has integrated itself into more aspects of human life today, thereby radically altering our conception of the techno-body and the human body, and the neat distinction that has conventionally been drawn between the two, and between nature and culture.

Apart from bestowing such new forms of identities on humans, the various technological innovations since the late twentieth century have altered the very *character* of

resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place”. However, “not everyone”, as they quickly add, “who comes online” are Netizens, nor are they “people who come online for individual gain or profit”. Neither are they “people who come to the Net thinking it is a service” (1).

⁸ Karen Mossberger et al define “digital citizens” as those who use the Internet regularly and effectively—that is, on a daily basis”. It “is the ability to participate in society online”, they assert. “Digital citizens are those who use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfil their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain” (1-2).

⁹ Algorithmic identity”, according to Cheney-Lippold, is the product of a “networked infrastructure of the internet, with its technological capacity to track user movements across different web sites and servers”, giving “rise to an industry of web analytics firms that are actively amassing information on individuals and fine-tuning computer algorithms to make sense of that data. The product of many of these firms is a ‘new algorithmic identity’, an identity formation that works through mathematical algorithms to infer categories of identity on otherwise anonymous beings. It uses statistical commonality models to determine one’s gender, class, or race in an automatic manner at the same time as it defines the actual meaning of gender, class, or race themselves. Ultimately, it moves the practice of identification into an entirely digital, and thus measurable, plane” (165).

technology itself, as it was understood by traditional theories/philosophies of technology. To understand DeLillo's work and its implication in the larger discourse around technology and its impact on society, it is important that we understand these changes that characterize the technological evolution since the late twentieth century. The changes have also brought in far greater implications and new forms of subjectification and imagining of our being, as suggested by the increasing growth of a number of discourses such as Posthumansim, Transhumanism, Digital Citizenship, Big Data, Cyber culture, and Surveillance Culture, as well as the increasing pace with which individuals are now thought to embody *posthuman* characteristics. Such new studies have also suggested how the category of the human can also be made 'useful' by turning them into data, or into *datafied* individuals on digital platforms, whereby "all things under the sun [can be turned] into data format" in an attempt to "quantify them [in a] datafied society" (Schäfer and van Es 11; Cheney-Lippold 1).

As a writer who has shown great interest in understanding how societies function and transform and how humans live in an environment of a plethora of technological devices and systems, DeLillo has taken keen interest in presenting readers with experiences and characters in such conditions. DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, for instance, presents a datafied character (I examine this character in detail in chapter 3) whose sense of self, subjectivity and existence as a *person* depend mostly on the data he generates, accumulates, and becomes connected to, as he chauffeurs through Manhattan city. This datafication, though it is thought to be "a legitimate means to *access, understand* and *monitor* people's behavior", as José van Dijck states, can also be used to surveil and monitor individuals and their behavior for different purposes (198). What I have indicated here is just one example of the many changes that have been brought in by various technological innovations and how DeLillo has used his fiction to show such shifts. To understand the larger extent to which the impact of technological innovations has taken our society and us, and how fiction has addressed

concerns regarding the impact, it is important that we understand technology, its character—both earlier and contemporary—how it has evolved with human beings, and how DeLillo has constantly alerted our attention to these transformations through his oeuvre.

Martin Heidegger, whose insightful ideas on technology in “A Question Concerning Technology” (1954) and “The Turning” (1961), have paved way for the modern philosophical foundational perspectives on technology, has argued how technology poses itself as an “extreme danger” that “threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (“Question” 333). Heidegger’s theorization of technology’s essence as *pharmacological* — or *techne* as “both the start and the finish of the contagion and the cure for the most profound threat to human existence”, seem to make more sense today¹⁰ (Tabachnick 337). The indication that technology’s essence is *pharmacological* strikes us ever more prominently today because it returns in different ways in Stiegler as well, who proposes that technology is “*pharmacological*”—both a cure and poison (*Automatic* 129-130). I will return to Stiegler’s *pharmakon* later. This double role of technology is what DeLillo also suggests in *White Noise*: “You could put your faith in technology. It got you here, it can get you out. This is the whole point of technology. It creates an appetite for immortality on the one hand. It threatens universal existence on the other. Technology is lust removed from nature” (220). What DeLillo and these thinkers suggest is also the peculiar “character”, or changing character, of technology whose full potential—whether it is dangerously transformative, as Heidegger suggests, or beneficially transformative—can only be understood in its relation to the human/context.

¹⁰ Explicating Heidegger’s use of *Enframing*, William Lovitt argues that technology “necessarily and intrinsically rules not merely as danger but also as that which saves. In this twofoldness of Enframing as danger and saving power, and not in any merely human effort, lies the possibility that technology may be overcome”. It is not done by abandoning technology completely but by revealing the truth “concealed in the rule of technology” about man. (“Introduction” xxxv-xxxvi).

The *character* of technology is all the more obscure and pharmacological today. As societies get increasingly connected and *mediated*, the use of technology has become more obscure and pervasive. In characterizing technology differently, we have now come to understand ourselves not entirely distinct from our technologies. As Kember and Zylinska argue, “*they* are not a means to *our* ends; instead, they have become part of us, to an extent that the *us/them* distinction is no longer tenable. As we modify and extend “our” technologies and “our” media, we modify and extend ourselves and our environments (13). As a consequence, our relation to technology has become more complex, and our self has been constituted more by data now than biology. DeLillo had recognized this in early 1980s, well before theorists began to formulate data’s dominating role in human life today, in *White Noise* in which his character Gladney remarks: “we are the sum total of our data...just as we are the sum total of our chemical impulses” (232). As a result, “the ‘we’ of today”, as Edward Lee emphasizes, “is a mash up of technology, biology, and culture.” (430). This is a consequence of the “computational turn” which began in the 1950s with the arrival of electronic computers, the advanced forms of which continue to emerge unabated even today (Berry 2012; Braidotti 2013). This revolution in technology also suggests the datafication of everything: all domains of the human life have been transformed into quantifiable data today (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier 2013; Karin van Es and MirKo Schäfer 2017). As a result, the social has been transformed and the data about it are used to predict human behaviour and human decision-making processes (van Es and Schäfer 13).

The pervasive and obscure nature of technology today finds its somewhat complex expression in Gianni Vattimo’s conceptualization of technology in his essay “The Question of Technology Today”—itself a reappraisal and *questioning* of Heidegger’s “questioning of technology”—where he considers technology as an “integrated system” rather than any

discrete device or instrument¹¹(108). Vattimo's perceptive articulation of the concerns that technology raises today finds an almost similar reverberation in DeLillo's characterization of it as a *system* that controls, monitors, and shapes individual's life and being:

technology is our fate, our only truth. *It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet...* We don't have to depend on God or the prophet or the astonishments. We are the astonishments. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the *system* and *networks* that *change the way we think and live*. ("Ruins" 37; emphasis added)

Technology as a "system" or a "network" is "so powerful and so sophisticated, as DeLillo further emphasizes elsewhere, that we tend to lose some of our self-confidence in an almost imperceptible way" ("Conversation").

Conceiving technology as a system would help us understand its changing character in a globalized, networked society as ours. Though technology developed quite rapidly in Europe in the nineteenth century, the technological "system" was of a different kind in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as evident in such inventions as electricity, trams, cars, lifts, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, radio, telephone, sound recording, and photography. It was different because these technologies were mostly discrete "systems" and were developed only as tools which were capable of making human life easier by producing certain objects for human use and for bringing in certain modifications in the material world (Vattimo 109). However, the more radical changes with the invention of computer, the

¹¹ Vattimo argues that "the real question of technology has become [more] urgent [today]; ... it became possible when technology became an integrated system.... [W]hat constitutes the question of technology today is not a problem connected to the fact that human beings invent and develop tools and ways of making useful objects or new life conditions; [instead] it is its *character* as an integrated system.... [T]echnology as an integrated system appears to elude [our] very assessments and has become something of an autonomous world, so much so that it is outright difficult to find an appropriate noun: body, connection, machination ... [T]echnology appears to us as a "world" that increasingly eludes the possibility of our controlling and understanding it. Paradoxically, due to their global integration within a system, technologies—the sum of the apparatuses created for the purpose of transforming the material world – become more powerful and effective. [T]he problem of technology [today] is that *it hides and dissolves problems*" (108-109; emphasis added). His conceptualization is very relevant for us today in that it (re)addresses the question concerning technology *today* in a highly digitized, datafied world.

Internet, and digital technologies have produced an entirely different “system” that has already become highly inscrutable and pervasive. As technology transcended the limits of production and its somewhat distance from the human body—distance because earlier technologies were not so integrated into the human body as they are today—and got into direct contact with human, the way human performed their duties; perceived things around them; and their lifestyles began to change (Kittler; Haraway, “Cyborg”).

The integration of technology into the human body has transformed humans into either what Kittler and Haraway and many others would later call as “silicon microprocessors”¹² and “cyborgs”, respectively, or “posthuman”. However, human’s relationship to technology has been a crucial site of debate. The debates often surround questions regarding whether technology is in fact an index of the corruption and alienation of the human subject or whether it is possible for human to be fully realized as human outside of its “irreducible imbrication in the technical”, as asked by Steigler and others (Lechte 104). Stiegler has argued that humans cannot be separated from their inherent “technicity” as what makes humans *human* is their *technicity*, and through a process of what he calls *epiphylogenesis*, or *exteriorisation*. *Epiphylogenesis* is understood as our consciousness’s extending of it beyond our bodies into technology, to tools, art, writing and technology (*Technics* 17, 141-143).

DeLillo has often alerted our attention to this mediating power of technology, as can be seen in his assertion that “we live in an age of rapid mass media, television, Internet. They determine our tempo” (“I don’t Know”). In the beginning of *Gramophone, Film and Typewriter*, Kittler also makes a similar observation regarding the role of media: “Media determine our situation” (xxxix). In his early novels such as *Americana* and *White Noise*, for instance, mediation occurs mostly between the super market and the television—as evident in

¹² For Kittler, media inaugurated the death knell of the authority of the alphabet and subsequently the death of the autonomous human subject whose “essence escapes into apparatuses”, transforming her “into silicon microprocessors”, with the introduction of such technologies (16).

Gladney's family's identity as both shoppers and television viewers—and the real events and television broadcast. The following remarks by Babette in *White Noise* points to the effects of such mediation and television advertisements 'shaping of individual's unconscious: "Every day on the news there's another toxic spill. Cancerous solvents from storage tanks, arsenic from smokestacks, radioactive water from power plants. How serious can it be if it happens all the time? Isn't the definition of a serious event based on the fact that it's not an everyday occurrence?" (DeLillo 174).

Mediation has assumed a more complex character and intensity in today's digital technology. Digital culture points to the changing character of the interaction between media and the human and the former's new ways of *mediating* life. Unlike these earlier instances of mediation, the effects of which DeLillo has portrayed so well in these novels, in the digital culture of today it has become very difficult for us to recognize "life" except through the prism of *mediation* because of the intensification of the experience of mediation. According Dinnen, digital media has created a condition of "digital banal", a situation where "we don't notice the affective novelty of *becoming-with* digital media. In such a situation, "the way we use media makes us unaware of the ways we are co-constituted as subjects *with* media (*Digital Banal* 1). This is a situation of us "becoming-with" technology, as Kember and Zylinska note, where "we exist through the mutual co-constitution of 'media' and 'us,' in ways that are ordinary and perpetual rather than novel or notable" (qtd. in Dinnen 4).

In the current digital culture, our situation has become more complex as media has ceased to exist only as discrete objects that we use at our disposal and have become something that exist as system of "interlocked and dynamic processes of mediation" which compels us to think of our entanglement with "media on a sociocultural as well as biological level" (Kember and Zylinska 1). This is precisely what DeLillo suggests in *Cosmopolis*, a novel that exemplifies the integration of cyber technology and capitalism and cyber

technology and human biology: “[Cyber] technology ...is “an evolutionary advance that needed only the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory. It would be the master thrust of cyber-capital, to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment” (83). In such world order, mediation becomes, as Kember and Zylinska rightly point out “a key trope for understanding and articulating our being in, and becoming with, the technological world, our emergence and ways of intra-acting with it, as well as the acts and processes of temporarily stabilizing the world into media, agents, relations, and networks” (xv). DeLillo depicts such a reality in his later novels, *Zero K* and *The Silence*, too. I discuss the implication of such condition in detail in chapter 3.

Mediation has been central to DeLillo’s imagining of the human-technology interrelation from the beginning itself, especially from *Americana* (1974) to *The Silence* (2020). The interrelation between media and the individual is very strikingly manifest in his *White Noise* in which DeLillo takes us through the Gladney family’s lives which are steeped in the realities constructed by advertising and mainstream media like the television. Duvall has explored this interrelation in his essay “The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo’s *White Noise*”, arguing that American public’s “masochistic desire to be exploited” by media is evident in *White Noise*’s characters’ attempt to “seek affirmation through television” (436). For them, in order for an event to be ‘real’, it has to be ‘covered’ by the media. This desire to be supplied with such *mediated* reality is reflected in Gladney’s admission of such a process: “I am eager to be humored, to be fooled” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 251). The integration of digital technologies into all aspects of human life has been well predicted by DeLillo in his millennial novel *Cosmopolis* where, through the cyborgian character Eric Packer, DeLillo shows us the pervasive aspects of the ways in which

digital technology has been integrated into the everyday life of humans in a cyber capitalist world.

The lives of characters like Packer suggest that the digital turn has deepened the process of mediation to the extent that mediation has taken an altogether different level of technological advancement where we now live in what Andreas Hepp calls “deep mediatization”, which is “an advanced stage of the process in which all elements of our social world are intricately related to digital media and their underlying infrastructures” (5). It is a condition of most of human lives in advanced societies today, a condition in which our everyday is saturated with digital and other technologies in a social life of technological entanglement. What characters like Gladney, Packer and many others in DeLillo suggest is this deeply mediated experience of the human in a highly technological age as ours. If these two novels, as do some others of DeLillo’s work, suggest this deeply connected mediation of life by technology and the issues it creates for the production of reality and characters’ subjectivity in a posthuman way, it is the abrupt loss of such a mediated experience with the shutting down of all screens and technologies that worries the characters in his latest novel *The Silence* (2020). In other words, while some of DeLillo’s late novels like *Cosmopolis* focus, as Rosendahl Thomsen states, “on the ability of information to dominate and create its own world... [where] information seems to lead its own life, detached from the control of human subjects, and whose own capacity for self-inspection and control are undermined”, in *The Silence* he predicts and dwells on the anxieties that may arise from the possible, sudden and complete collapsing of the entire technological system on which our lives and world depend today (198-199). In the novel, the characters assume the techno-apocalypse as akin to the condition of a possible third World War. Departing from his usual depiction of characters’ implication in techno-culture and mediated experiences, *The Silence* presciently imagines a post-technological condition the implications of which we are yet to even assume.

Technology becomes the lack in this new novel, and in which the panic-stricken characters ruminate on the fate that awaits them in a condition of blank screens and noiseless television sets.

a) DeLillo, Technology and the *Idea* of Character: From the *Character* of ‘Technology’ to the *Character* of the (Post)human

In an interview with Thomas DePietro, DeLillo makes a perceptive connection between technology and human behavior: [t]here’s a connection between the advances that are made in technology and the sense of primitive fear people develop in response to it (“Interview”, 2005). As evident in these words, his novels have often tried to dwell deeper into the interstice between human (nature) and technology by presenting characters who are surrounded and “subjectified” in particular ways by an environment of technologies and the images and data that they generate (Laist 135). As a writer who, as he claims, constantly “searched out his subjects in the... immediate present”, DeLillo’s novels from his early period have shown very keen interest in examining this intimate, binding relationship between humans and technology and technology’s effects—whether it is the film technology in *Americana*, or the television and advertising media in *White Noise*, or the power of media images in *Libra*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld*, or the more advanced cyber and other technologies in *Cosmopolis*, *Zero K* and *The Silence* (DeLillo, “Conversation”). Randy Laist calls such a symbiotic relationship as “techno-psychic interphorcity”, a bidirectional carrying-between, or “a mutual carrying across of attributes and ontological values between psychology and electro mechanism” (6).

In this section, I will examine both the *character* of technology and the *character* of the posthuman in relation to DeLillo’s work to understand how changes in technology that lead to ever-increasing integration of technology into the human body affects the character of both ‘the human’ and technology. *The section argues that the new discourses that come in the*

context of such interrelations and technological innovations such as posthumanism, transhumanism, and cyber-capitalism help us understand not only the altered character of technology and our society but also of the human in a highly digitized, datafied world. Situated as it is in the middle of such discourses, and being a product of his keen interest in such character-shifts, DeLillo's work is both a product of and partakes in such posthuman discourses.

Ashford Lee, in his book *The Coevolution: The Entwined Futures of Humans and Machines*, makes some fascinating observations about the nature of human (and Machine) life in an intense phase of digital technology in which we live today. Characterizing this technological culture as constituting what he calls the “synthetic age”¹³ in which what we see, according to him, is the “coevolution” of humans and machines, with the latter “having a life of their own, sharing our ecosystem and coevolving with us” (8). He further remarks that in the digital age humans “have come to depend deeply on technology, to the point that we would not exist without technology And as a result, the “‘we’ of today is a mashup of technology, biology, and culture” (270). In such a condition, “machines will change the very essence of our being, what it means to be human” (Lee 271). In a similar vein but going a bit further, Mark C Taylor claims that we live in a period of “*Intervolution*”¹⁴. Unlike Coevolution, *intervolution* “involves a developmental process in which seemingly distinct

¹³ Lee argues that apart from the three distinguished ages in the evolution of humans identified by the evolutionary biologist Kevin Laland in his book *Darwin's Unfinished Symphonies* such, such as genetic, genetic-cultural and cultural evolution, “we have entered a fourth distinct age, one that we might call the fourth ‘synthetic’ age”, characterized by what is effectively the emergence of a new life form, one based on silicon rather than carbon” (271). He further argues that “unlike cultural evolution, where the intelligence is applied to evolve itself, in the synthetic age, human intelligence is being applied to evolve symbionts, the machines, and human intelligence, in turn, is evolving as the machines increase their capabilities.” (271-272)

¹⁴ According to Taylor “*Intervolve* derives from *inter+volvere*, to roll, wind, and means to wind or coil together. In contrast to *evolve*, which means to unfold or roll out (*e, ex+volvere*), and *coevolve*, which means to evolve jointly or in parallel (*co, joint, together + volvere*), *intervolve* means to intertwine. As a result of this intertwined relationship, he further stresses, “in the years to come human beings and machines will become even more closely interrelated until the so-called natural and so-called artificial become indistinguishable. AI will become part of “my” mind, and what had been prostheses will become organs of “my” body. At this tipping point, the form of life that once was known as human will intervene into something we cannot imagine.” (370)

entities are braided together in such a way that each becomes itself in and through the other and neither can be itself apart from the other” (3-4). This results in what Taylor calls as “the interplay of smart bodies and smart things in the proliferating webs and networks that constitute our world” today (4). In a sense, DeLillo’s oeuvre can be read as revealing such a trajectory of human evolution with technology. His deep knowledge about such human condition has enabled him to convince us that what these thinkers are saying is not utopian, science fiction realities but our present reality the complete materialization of which, perhaps, is approaching us very fast. It is not surprising, if we focus on DeLillo’s interest in the interface and symbiotic relationship between technology and the human, why he is not interested in presenting a conventional idea of character or person in many of his novels¹⁵.

For a nuanced understanding of DeLillo’s work and its implication in the larger discourse of the posthuman, it is important to look at the co-evolvment of technology with humans, as it can throw more light on our understanding of the changes that technology has brought in in our conceptions of the human and persons¹⁶, and how such changes have produced certain strong arguments for considering the present as a period of the posthuman. Technology has

¹⁵ Tony Tanner, for instance, opines that DeLillo’s characters are mere “voices” (211), while Harold Bloom argues that DeLillo’s characters are “irrelevant” and “ideograms” (11). Tanner’s observation becomes very relevant, when we analyze the characters in *White Noise*, and the character presentation of Lauren and Mr Tuttle in *The Body Artist*—both of them, especially the latter who, it seems, merely appears as a voice inside the head of Mrs Lauren—often tend towards assuming the status of voices. Jonathan Yardley argues that DeLillo’s characters do not “acquires any genuine humanity” because he is “interested in ideas and institutions ... but not in people” (10). In his review of *Players*, Stephen Koch laments that “[t]here are no stockbrokers, terrorists, or wives – dehumanized or not in *Players*. There are only words, inky squiggles on a page, telling us things we do not believe” (89).

¹⁶ (a) Indicating the human-machine symbiosis as far back as in 1991, Haraway argued that “we are all...theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (“Cyborg Manifesto” 150)

(b) In his recent book, *The Coevolution: The Entwined Futures of Humans and Machines*, Ashford Lee argues that “technology is coevolving with humans”, and suggests that, “contrary to the hype and fear, [human-machine] symbiosis is a more likely outcome than either annihilation or fusing”. He further asserts that “this is not to say that there are no risks or that the risks are small. Rapid coevolution is inherently unpredictable, and pathologies will emerge as both technology and humanity change”. He sums up it by posing a crucial question: “The essential question is, are we humans defining technology, or is it defining us?” (1).

(b) Robbie Davis-Floyd’s book *Birthing Techno-Sapiens* not only introduces a new term, “*techno-sapiens*”, in an attempt to challenges us to re-think the very category of the human in the context of human reproductivity but also argues that this new category of species is a product of human’s continuous co-evolvment with the technologies that surround them (1).

always evolved with human beings. DeLillo has been, in a sense, concerned with this co-evolution. Mark Hansen points to the coevolving character of technology and how this is in sync with certain limitations of the human body and cognitive system thus: “[w]hat the massive acceleration of the evolution of technics makes overwhelmingly clear is that human evolution is necessarily, and has always been, co-evolution *with* technics. Human evolution is ‘technogenesis’ in the sense that humans have always evolved in recursive correlation with the evolution of technics” (299-300). Understanding this co-evolution is important because, as he suggests, humans have also evolved according to the requirements of technology, or as technology wanted them to. In this way, technology functions, for him, as a medium, or “as an *environment for life*, as media necessarily involves the operation of the living, the operation of human embodiment” (Hansen 299-300; emphasis in original. See also David Nye iv). Going a step further DeLillo asserts this symbiosis in *Cosmopolis*: “[h]umans and computers merge... Why die when you can live on a disk?” (105). Identifying the dominant role technology plays in our society, DeLillo says in *Zero K*: “[t]echnology has become a force of nature. We can’t control it ... there’s nowhere for us to hide” (245).

Although DeLillo—himself a staunch opposer of new technologies and someone who has often confessed in interviews that he still uses a land phone and an old type-writer to write novels¹⁷—has often commented on the inevitable role of technology in today’s world, his work continues to critique some of the impact and rationale of technological development and technologies’ use by capitalism including for human life extension, as evident in *Zero K*¹⁸ (DeLillo, “We All Live”). This understanding of the interrelation between humans and

¹⁷ DeLillo has even asserted in one of his interviews that “I don’t use a cellphone, because I want to keep thinking in a traditional manner” (“We All Live”).

¹⁸ Despite his continued critique of technology and the order it creates, DeLillo, in one of his recent interviews with David Marchese, sees technology as part of human progress and an unavoidable thing: “I don’t think of it as degradation. It’s simply what happens. It’s a form of progress. This is the path of technology. I don’t necessarily long to go back to pre-computer days. I accept what we have and in many ways; I’m astonished by it (“We All Live”). His further observation “[w]hatever technology is capable of doing becomes what it must do”

technology becomes deeper when we come to his *Zero K* and *The Silence*. In *The Silence*, for instance, he prompts us to ask: “Do a select number of people have a form of phone implanted in their bodies?”. He asks: “Have our minds been digitally remastered?” (DeLillo 80, 82, 88)). In these novels, DeLillo even considers human, as we understand it, as an obsolete category: “We’re being zombified... We’re being bird-brained”, with only “human slivers” remaining (*Silence* 84, 90). In a recent interview with Peter Boxall, DeLillo shares this anxiety about the obsolescence of human consciousness, while talking about a “novel without humans”, a novel that will “write itself” in an advanced state of technological progress: “Will advancing technology revitalize human consciousness or drown it forever? (“Edge” 126).

DeLillo and other commentators’ consideration that technology is not something that humans only *use* as an object to fulfill their needs but a symbiotic “other”, and how this symbiotic relation affects the character of the human in different ways will make more sense if we closely examine the term ‘technology’, its various meanings, and how differently the concept has been imagined in the philosophy and theories of technology. This shift is also reflected in DeLillo’s own work, especially if they are understood in their chronological order from his early fiction, which has followed with great interest the historical development of technology—from film, to mass media to cyber-technology—and its impact in American society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The meaning and nature of the term “technology” has changed over time, as emphasized by Heidegger, Stiegler, Thomas J. Misa etc¹⁹. Technology as a system or a set of devices and complex networks came later. However,

is very important because he seems to also suggest here how human nature changes and evolves with each technological innovation (“We All Live”).

¹⁹ According to Daviv Tabachnick (2006), “the ancient Greek word *techne* is translated as ‘craft’ or ‘art’ but also ‘technical knowledge.’ While sometimes used interchangeably, *techne* is distinct from *episteme*, which means ‘scientific knowledge.’ Where *episteme* may be ‘knowledge for the sake of knowledge,’ *techne* is instrumental, [and] oriented towards the deliberate production of something. Furthermore, not only are products wrought via *techne* different from things produced by nature (*physis*), but they are also different from things produced by chance (*tuche*). While something could be made of the etymological meeting of the compound *techne* and *logos* (reason) in the modern word technology, the Greek sense of *techne* already implies the

the current meaning of technology as an abstract system, as “systemic and symbolic”, became popular only after the second half of twentieth century (Misa 7). A peculiar connection between ‘character’ (meaning “impression”) and culture could be seen embedded in this meaning of ‘technology’ as “useful arts”, as these technologies can leave traces of the impressions of their makers or practitioners. The ability of technology to determine the character of things has been emphasized by DeLillo too in one of his interviews:

The world is becoming increasingly customized, altered to individual specifications [by technology]. The shrinking context will necessarily change the language that people speak, write and read. Here is a stray question: Will language have the same depth and richness in electronic form that it can reach on the printed page? Does the beauty and variability of our language depend to an important degree on the medium that carries the words? Does poetry need paper? (“Interview”, 2010).

Though he is not referring here to the forms of useful arts’ embeddedness in technology, he is surely suggesting the changes that technology brings forth in the field of these practices. It is also worth-noting that DeLillo, in his novels, especially in *Underworld*, *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man* makes use of artists as a medium for producing counter-narratives as part of an attempt to create an ethical consciousness and responsibility in individuals against the force of capitalism and techno-culture. In *Underworld*, for instance, it is the recyclers of waste who create such counter-narratives against capitalist forces. It is in

application of reason. Aristotle, for example, defines *techne* in the *Ethics* as ‘a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning (*logos*)’ (107).

Also, in ancient Greece, the word *techné* (τέχνη), notes Francois Fedier, was “used largely to indicate the attitude, the methodology, or the skill aimed at the practical creation of a material thing and the practice-oriented concept was later appropriated by the Romans under the umbrella term *ars* (art)” (qtd. in Gualeni 1). In English, the attitude towards “making” that the Greeks identified with the word *techné* is commonly translated as “craftsmanship”, “technology,” or “art.” Etymologically, “technology” refers to a “body of knowledge about the useful arts” (Misa 7). Heidegger had already alerted our attention to this close link between technology and art as it existed in the Greek root word, “*techne*”, which has been translated as “art,” “skill,” or “craft”. As he asserts, “it was not technology alone that bore the name *techne*” for the Greeks, but art too “was simply called *techne*” (34). This close relationship has always been, for Heidegger, the basis and essence of technology “even when the *conception* of technology has been explicitly posed”, as it was in the “modern, instrumental conception of technology... in contrast to art, to the aesthetic sphere” (Rutsky 3-4).

his later novels that we see a more powerful effort in creating such counter-narratives. These counter narratives are aimed at the posthumanizing tendencies of the techno-capitalist complex that govern life today, as DeLillo presents it in *Zero K*. I discuss this in chapter 2.

These later novels are characterized by an urgency to ask certain philosophical and fundamental questions about the *posthuman* condition in which we live today, where the integration of the human and machine has reached an unimaginable level. These novels, especially *Zero K*, also seem to imagine human-environment relationship in newer ways, as DeLillo has claimed in an interview with Boxall (“Edge”). This reconceptualization is demanded by an understanding of the “planetary woe”, as Jeff Lockhart calls it in *Zero K*, hastened also by advanced technologies and climate change, that DeLillo thinks characterizes our posthuman period. The concerns with such “planetary woes” also produce a kind of ambivalence in his later novels such as *Zero K* and *The Silence* with regard to his approach towards technology’s role in society, which takes a different shift in these novels, in which, especially in *Zero K*, there is a strong critique of the transhumanist project enabled by advanced technologies. This ambivalence is evident in DeLillo’s words: “when I was working on [*Zero K*] I had to remind myself once or twice that the Convergence [where the novel is set, and where the cryonic project is underway] is not only the site of life-extension ambitions but also a refuge from environmental disasters of one kind or another” (“Edge” 163).

These planetary woes also compel DeLillo to “imagine the Convergence as a possible model for future inhabitation of the planet” (“Edge” 164). However, he is also doubtful about such a possibility: “But can it be more than a model? The complexity of competing interests, corporate and national, and the realities of war, terror and poverty and the refugee status of enormous numbers of people – these make it hard for me to see an enterprise such as the Convergence assuming more than an isolated role in society” (DeLillo, “Edge” 164).

DeLillo's words point to not only the complex networks that digital technology perpetuates in today's world marked by such "planetary woes" as climate change but also the threats that projects like the Convergence can give birth to for future generations. The complex and advanced techno-environment that DeLillo presents in these post-millennial novels is part of his attempt to understand the *character* of contemporary technology, especially the implications of the close relationship between digital technology and the networked relations it creates, making individuals nodes in the global network of capitalism and cyber technosphere. This also points to the contingent nature of his characters' identities and actions. DeLillo asserts this in an interview: "my work is quite three dimensional; by that I mean I describe people in relationship to what is around them. I want the reader to know what something looks like and sounds like and feels like" in its context ("Interview", 2010).

The intricate and complex networks of relationship that exist between humans and technology today are evident in the diverse ways in which this 'posthuman condition' under technological progress is imagined and theorized by various philosophers and critics of posthumanism and contemporary technology²⁰. These new approaches to our technological realities and the different terms that are used to define and characterize the 'true' nature of the human condition result from an "inherent compulsion", as Robert Pepperell states, "in the human... to try and understand our own existence" and "to make sense of what we are, and how we relate to the world" in the context of contemporary technology (iii). Such re-imaginings and reconceptualization of the human/condition are also evident in contemporary writers such as Octavia Butler (*Xenogenesis*, in particular), Ian McEwan (*Machines Like Me*) Kazuo Ishiguro (especially, *Never Let Me Go* and *Klara and the Sun*), Nicol Barker (H(A)PPY), and others. However, DeLillo's novels are more realistic in their approach to

²⁰ Look at the proliferation of such terms as "cyborgs" (Haraway [1991]), "posthuman" (Wolfe [2010], Badmington [2004], Braidotti [2013], Nayar [2014], Ferrando [2019], etc.), and "digital" and "biological citizens" (Mossberger et al., [2008], Rose and Novas [2005]).

such depiction than these novelists some of whose works are sometimes categorized as speculative or futuristic fiction.

b) Technology, Culture and Character: The ‘Human’ and the ‘Posthuman’

The character of human nature has always been a topic of continued discussion, both in and around fictional and philosophical discourses. As Despina Kakoudaki states, the “definitions of ‘the human’ [is] unstable and changing, fluid, contextual, and contingent in modernity” (213). A simple and monolithic definition of the human has never been attempted at any stage of human evolution. From the Medieval down to the twentieth century modernist period and to the postmodern, contemporary period, the category of the human and its nature have received the attention of many critics, philosophers and writers of fiction. To understand the multiple definitions that history has produced of the ‘human’, one just needs to look at the different philosophical discourses of the human such as the ones evident in Rene Descartes, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Sigmund Freud. Besides, the different ‘debates’ around the category of fictional character (the most important among them in the 20th century include the ones between Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennet and William Gass and John Gardner) were also dominated by questions about the category of ‘the human’. In a more persistent way, such questions have also been raised by the current discussions on the nature of the ‘human’ in the discourse of “posthumanism” and among philosophers of technology and science in the wake of various technological innovations.

As evident in many such discussions, *posthumanism* offers a radical redefinition of the human in a world where human existence is not only conceptualized in its co-evolution with other species and objects including technology but also in its role in an anthropocentric world where humans’ actions on the earth have caused unsolvable damage to the planet earth. Literature and literary studies have also been central to addressing questions concerning, and defining and redefining ‘the human’ in relation to cultural specificities, industrialization,

modernity, technologization, and such historical facts as colonialism, racism and world wars. *This section argues that as products of a highly technologized time, and as a body of work that stands in close relation to various discussions on the nature of 'the human/posthuman' in an era of cyber capitalism and digital culture, DeLillo's novels take great interest in addressing such questions about 'the human'. While his earlier novels, especially the 80's and 90's, were more interested in exploring technology's power in colonizing human mind and psyche, his postmillennial novels are invested in persistently and obsessively asking new questions about the category of 'the human' in a radically changed world. In these novels, 'the human' (body) becomes a site for various discussions of technological disembodiment, transhumanism, posthuman bodies, and the tension, as well as the increasing erosion of the distinction, between matter and information and the real world and the virtual world.*

As products of an increasingly changing world, DeLillo's novels have, especially since *White Noise*, addressed questions regarding "the human" in the context of technology and capitalism. In his novel *Zero K* (2016), DeLillo reiterates this question that finds different articulations in many of his novels, especially in *White Noise* and in his post-millennial novels: "It's only human to want to know more, and then more, and then more'...But it's also true that what we don't know is *what* makes us human. And there's no end to knowing" (*Zero K* 131). Though this is a question that has been central to posthumanism as a discourse, DeLillo, at an early stage, had recognized the importance of such questions in the context of a techno-capitalist, *media*-ted social condition of the late twentieth century. In other words, he has been concerned, ever since his *White Noise*, with the "ends, limits and transformations of the human", as Herbrechter notes, in the "posthumanizing" contexts of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' techno-capitalist environment (21). *White Noise*, for instance, revolves around a toxic spill, consumerism, addiction to visual images, thoughts on death and disease in the context of not just the protagonist Gladney's possible exposure to the toxic

spill, but his wife's fear about her impending death. Gladney's wife Babette's fear makes her become part of an experiment with a drug called Dylar, a drug that she takes to ward off her anxieties about death and dying. The inclusion of Dylar as something that can ward off (the fear of) death has a posthuman prescience to it, as it anticipates DeLillo's transhumanist concerns in his later novel *Zero K* (2016). Babette and Gladney believe that modern technology can prolong death and ask: "what do I do to make death less strange?" How do I go about it?" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 226).

Technology's potential to disintegrate the self and to produce a posthuman subjecthood is very insightfully presented in the novel in a scene where Gladney watches on Television Babette teaching a course on posture at a local church basement. When he sees her on television at first, Babette's image is unrecognizable to him, because she seems to be cast into a "mysterious realm" of

waves and radiation. Something leaked through the mesh. She was shining a light on us, she was coming into being...as the electronic dots swarmed. We were being shot through with Babette. Her image was projected on our bodies, swam in us and through us. *Babette of electrons and photons, of whatever forces produced the grey light we took to be her face* (DeLillo, *White Noise* 105; emphasis added).

Gladney is surprised to see Babette as some immaterial, ghostly presence in these visual data. He feels that the television set is emanating waves and radiation which is very distinct from Babette's material body that is far away. Asserting the construction of Babette's posthuman subject, the novel defines "the waves and radiation" that constitute her persona on television as "psychic data". Gladney wonders: "Was this her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology, set free to glide through wavebands, through energy levels, pausing to say good-bye to us from the fluorescent screen?" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 36-37, 51, 104).

While the basis for Gladney and Babette's embodiment of such a modern identity can be found, as David Cowart argues, "in the erosion of religious belief system that marks the twentieth century", other characters also embody instances of the production of a modern self, influenced by external forces such as media and consumerism (78). For instance, their daughter Steffie's chanting of advertisement slogans ("Toyota Celica") in her sleep suggests individual's surrender to the lure of capitalist ideology, and the colonization of human consciousness by technology as a result of too much exposure to television (DeLillo, *White Noise* 150). This colonization of the mind, as it can be called, by technology was well articulated in McLuhan's prediction of how various media technologies, which he also termed as "extensions" of the human, possess within them an intrinsic potential for creating profound psychophysiological and mental changes in human beings (*Understanding* 108-117). Echoing McLuhan, Teresa de Lauretis reasserts this: "technology is now not only in a distant, science fiction future, as extensions of our sensory capacities; it shapes our perceptions and cognitive processes, mediates our relationships with objects of the material and physical world, and our relationship with our own or other bodies" (167).

Any discussion on technology and its construction of a posthuman identity would invariably need to refer to Marshall McLuhan's important contribution to social theory. Critics have always drawn a comparison between DeLillo's work and McLuhan's theorization of the technologization of the world. An earlier discussion of the posthuman or the human-machine symbiosis could be found in McLuhan's influential studies on different media. Media, as he preferred to call technologies, have shown the profound impact of technology on human beings and their relation to and perception of the world. Echoing McLuhan's argument in *The Medium is the Message* that "the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance, DeLillo's character David Bell—a filmmaker and

television executive—in *Americana* asserts that “images move him from first-person consciousness (I) to third- person” (We) (McLuhan 41; DeLillo 270). Bell’s consideration of himself in terms of media metaphors and his third-person consciousness as metaphors, as evident in his statements such as “I was just beginning to go black, in-network parlance.... “My head seemed to be a telephone delivering an endless busy signal“, and “I was like a movie camera catching documentary glimpses of everyday life in a prison“, seem to echo McLuhan’s statement in *Understanding Media* that “all media are active metaphors”, and that “we see ourselves as being translated into the form of information” (DeLillo, *Americana* 60, 80, 101; McLuhan 64).

Literary discussions of ‘the human’ have been strengthened by fiction’s presentation of such character models that have not only questioned the understanding of the human but also blurred the neat distinction traditionally made between the human and the non-human. Alongside these ‘fictional’ or ‘imaginative’ reflections on character, there have also been continued reflections and rethinking on the category of ‘the human’ nature and what constitutes it—whether it is constituted by internal factors or external or both. The different notions of ‘the human’ are evident in discussions related to the different ‘turns’ that we have witnessed, especially since the late 20th century, such as the postmodern, ethical, posthuman (Wolfe, 2010; Braidotti, 2013; Badmington, 2003; Nayar, 2014, etc.) information (Woodward, 2008), inhuman (Lyotard, 1991), nonhuman (Grusin, 2015), neuro-scientific (Littlefield and Johnson, 2012), and other such “turns”. Such reflections on the ‘new human’ have only been amplified by the digital and information ‘turns’ as the more advanced ‘turns’ in a series of such turns, as can be seen in the following observation made in a book, *The Onlife Manifesto*:

The deployment of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their uptake by society radically affect the human condition, insofar as it modifies our

relationships to ourselves, to others and to the world. The ever-increasing pervasiveness of ICTs shakes established reference frameworks through the following transformations¹: i. the blurring of the distinction between reality and virtuality; ii. the blurring of the distinctions between human, machine and nature; iii. the reversal from information scarcity to information abundance; and iv. the shift from the primacy of entities to the primacy of interactions. (Floridi 7)

As evident from the above quote, it has now become a truism to say that we are living in an ‘information age’ that Luciano Floridi calls a product of the “fourth revolution”, a computational revolution that uses data to sort everything (*Fourth Revolution*). It is the coming and dominance of such an informational age that DeLillo has been concerned with in his later novels.

Though DeLillo’s concerns about the changing notions of ‘the human’ in the context of technology are rather implicit, are less focused and are mostly around media technologies in his earlier novels such as *Americana*, *White Noise*, *Libra* and *Underworld*, these questions become more urgent and explicit in his later novels in the context of digital technology, cyber capitalism, terrorism, anthropocentrism, cryonic experiments and techno-apocalypse, as evident in *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man* (2007), *Point Omega* (2010), *Zero K* (2016) and *The Silence* (2020), respectively. While in some of these novels—especially in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*—the concerns and anxieties with technology’s integration of the human find a very vocal representation, in others they are subtle and varied.

Drawing on the new possibilities created by a technological imperative, fiction from late twentieth century in particular has shown us how humans can transcend their biological organism and assume new forms of life that were unthinkable in the previous era. DeLillo’s novels are no exception; however, his concerns have been inclined more towards the impact of technology at individual, cultural and social levels. Mass media such as radio and

television were important objects that surround and influence the characters in his early novels such as *Americana*, *White Noise*, *Libra*, and *Mao II*. These novels have also explored how technology has been evolving, especially since the twentieth-century, not as a neutral force but as a phenomenon that has political, social and cultural causes and implications. These and his later novels increasingly compel us to think that we do not just use technology but, as John McCarthy and Peter Wright observes, “we live with technology”, shaping and being shaped by it (IX). This new knowledge about technology also points to the profound impact of the transgression of technology into our cognitive, emotional, sensual, and intellectual faculty. Among the writers whose work began to explore such issues, DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon’s works have stood apart. DeLillo often compels us to think that as much as technology is ingrained to human culture, technology is inherent to human nature. His recent novels reflect the current developments in technology and science in as diverse areas as the genome project, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence which reveal not just technology’s “extensions of man”, as McLuhan preferred to call it, but human’s symbiotic or networked relation with it, as Katashi Nagao, Lee and Taylor argue in the context of AI and digital technology (2019; 2020; 2021). The fusion of the two, as DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K* show, seem to have eroded the clear distinction between human organism and technology, and has made it impossible for us to draw an absolute distinction between the organic expressions of human nature and the technological processes.

The question of what sort of posthumanist thinking figures in DeLillo’s work is very pertinent, given the complex and multifaceted ways in which posthumanism as a discourse itself is discussed by many thinkers. Posthumanism as a concept needs to be understood, as Nayar asserts, in two broad categories:

[It], on the one hand [,] merely refers to an *ontological condition* in which many humans now, and increasingly will, live with chemically, surgically, technologically

modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms (such as body parts from other life forms through xenotransplantation). ‘Posthumanism’, on the other hand, and especially in its critical avatar, is also a new *conceptualization of the human*. (13; emphasis added)

The first frame of understanding of posthumanism seems to fit well with DeLillo’s project in some of his later novels where his critique of technological culture and its logic is couched within a posthumanist language of the first variety, while also suggesting a certain tendency towards the ‘critical’ in posthumanism, but not specifically related to a deliberate *questioning* of conventional concept of the human—though this strain is evident in some of his later characters such as Eric Packer (*Cosmopolis*), Ross Lockhart and Artis (*Zero K*)—but as a general critique of the pervasive effects of technological culture. In these works, however, there doesn’t seem to be any celebration of a new posthuman reality in which we live today, but a critical reflection on the new human introduced by technology. As Herbrechter states, “[i]n narrating the accelerated posthumanization of “late” (contemporary) culture, DeLillo now finds a new role for the new century—namely that of a *critical* posthumanist, or a critical observer of the current redefinition of the human” (and its limits) (6). As critical posthumanist of this variety, DeLillo seems to suggest a new role for contemporary writers in creating a counter-narrative to the “posthumanizing technology” of the contemporary era that prides on the “utopian glow of cyber capitalism”, as he himself had stated in “The Ruins of the Future” (Herbrechter 7; DeLillo, “Ruins”).

To understand DeLillo's construction of the category of new human/posthuman²¹, one just needs to look at his later novels such as *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis*, *Point Omega*, and *Zero K*. However, it doesn't suggest that his earlier novels do not discuss any "posthuman" character of the human. It is that in the former the concern about the category of the (post)human is comparatively less, except, maybe, in *White Noise*, than in the latter. In some of these later novels there is not only the convergence of global information, cyber technology; media; finance capitalism and social networks that emphasize that "every thing is connected", but also characters who live with "screens, keyboards and other devices" surrounding them all the time (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 27). In *Zero K*—which provocatively begins with a typically "posthuman" slogan that "[e]verybody wants to own the end of the world"—his "underworld" is an ultra-techno-space (the Convergence) that allows humans to escape to a "posthuman" future (DeLillo 3,7). This, however, turns out, for DeLillo, to be a dystopian and apocalyptic future which is created by human's desire to transcend their inborn capacities and live an extended life through cryogenics.

What these later novels foreground is both a realization of the erosion of any meaningful and tangible experience and a shock of the unimaginable transformative power that technology has created in radically changing the very category of 'the human'. In some of these works, DeLillo seems to move closely around the theoretical and philosophical propositions laid out by posthumanist and transhumanist thinkers. This is best exemplified in his novel *Zero K*, a novel set in The Convergence, where human life extension experiments are underway with the aim of producing "superhumans by retooling evolution and genetically

²¹ In his discussion of DeLillo's *Point Omega* and *Zero K*, Herbrechter sees in DeLillo a "neohumanist, or rehumanising task for contemporary writers of fiction in providing a counternarrative to the combination of posthumanising technology and "nostalgic" terrorism so as to rise from "the ruins of the future" (Herbrechter 5; DeLillo, 2001). Herbrechter argues that such a "neohumanist counternarrative in the face of technology and terrorism is at the heart of DeLillo's oeuvre" (5).

reconstructing the species” (DeLillo 5). The human body is kept in the tube “until the year, the decade, the day when it might be safely permitted to reawaken” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 9).

Though DeLillo presents the Convergence as a utopian space that aspires to “stretch the boundaries of what it means to be human, stretch and then surpass” the limits on the human subject, such posthuman/transhuman claim at ‘saving’ humans from the pathos of death are met with severe critique in *Zero K* (*Zero K* 71). In the novel, DeLillo seems to put forward the idea that such claims can ruin human nature and can alienate them from their true worth of being mortal. DeLillo has Zara, a spokesperson for the cryonics institute, spell out the fear of such a transhumanist project at the Convergence: “That world, the one above is being lost to the systems. To the transparent networks that slowly occlude the flow of all those aspects of nature and character that distinguish humans from elevator buttons and doorbells (*Zero K* 239). The lack of such an ontological status—of human’s nature defined by its ultimate embrace of death, as DeLillo seems to believe—can lead to not only “dismal nightmares” but also meaninglessness and inhumanity in a world controlled by capitalist forces (*Zero K* 1). It seems that it is because of his strong belief in the dangers posed such modern technologies of life extension that he constantly presents and invoke death in his novels. Death, and paradoxically the fear of it, is everywhere in his novels.

The posthuman subjecthood of some of DeLillo’s characters such as Packer (*Cosmopolis*), Ross Lockhart and Artis (*Zero K*) affirms Hayles’s assumption about the posthuman condition: “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (*How* 3). In *Zero K* DeLillo presents the cryonized humans, and their “bodies-in-waiting” before they become the “dormants” in capsules or pods waiting for “cyber-resurrection” (238). Following such reconceptualization of the human, DeLillo asks in *Point Omega*: “Do we have to be humans forever? Consciousness is

exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field” (52). It is necessary that these later novels of DeLillo are understood in the light of posthumanism’ conceptualization of new human subjectivities that seem to have already entered, instead of being only as objects of speculation, our world today. As “a novelist of the ultracontemporary,” as Randy Laist’s characterizes him, DeLillo’s characters in these later novels exemplify the incorporation of such posthuman subjectivities and assemblages (14). Through the “posthuman” characters in these novels, DeLillo seems to echo, with a tinge of pessimism, the transhumanist view of the erosion of the embodied person, “the loss of autonomy,” and the inauguration of “a consciousness that merges with the environment” (*Zero K* 239). *Zero K* also articulates the concerns of human’s “sense of being virtualised,” and that “all the linked data [are] designed to incorporate you into the megadata” (64).

The intrusion of external forces into the human that constitutes the (post)human self has been emphasized by DeLillo in an interview: “I don’t think any attempt to understand the way we live and the way we think and the way we feel about ourselves can proceed without a deep consideration of the power of the image” (“Interview”, 2005, 125). His later novels (*Cosmopolis*, *Zero K* and *The Silence*, in particular) reflect deeply on the materiality and implications of the flow of information that governs and influences human behavior and actions, as well as the transhumanist project. The dominance of information is so intense in these novels that even characters sometimes are reducible to information flows, while their bodies acquire mechanic characteristics and often function as “transparent networks that slowly occlude the flow of all those aspects of nature and character that distinguish humans from elevator buttons and doorbells” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 239).

The questions concerning the human and the need to redefine it in the context of more advanced technologies is expressed by DeLillo’s Ben-Ezra—the mysterious

figure who is in charge of the Convergence—while explaining the aims of the project that include a complete redoing of the human, and creating a new human that is completely unhinged from its historical moorings: “We’ve fallen out of history. We’ve abandoned who we were and where we were to be here.... Those who eventually emerge from the capsules will be ahistorical humans. They will be free of the flat-lines of the past, the attenuated minute and hour” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 129–130). The convergence represents, as he further states, a “future beyond imagining”, and its “idea of life extension will generate methods that attempt to improve upon the freezing of human bodies”. It “re-engineer[s] the ageing process, to reverse the biochemistry of progressive diseases”. The Convergence’s “tech centres in Europe are examining strategies for change [in the conception of the human]. We’re getting ahead of ourselves. This is where we want to be” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 126).

The question concerning the (post)human takes a slightly different turn in his novel *Point Omega*, one that—though doesn’t specifically differ from the technocentric environment—moves toward an acknowledgement of our Anthropocentric present characterized by climate change and the insertion of a new posthuman time to human experience. Acknowledging the shift that the human is undergoing Elster, one of the characters in the novel, observes:

We want to be the dead matter we used to be. We’re the last billionth of a second in the evolution of matter. When I was a student, I looked for radical ideas. Scientists, theologians, I read the work of mystics through the centuries, I was a hungry mind, a pure mind. I filled notebooks with my visions of world philosophy. Look at us today. We keep inventing folk tales of the *end*. Animal diseases spreading, transmittable cancers. What else? (DeLillo, *Point Omega* 64; emphasis added).

Elster sounds like a representative of a post-anthropocentric agent who is concerned with issues of the “end times” of which many posthumanist discourses warn us today. In his study of slowness, Lutz Koepnick also affirms DeLillo’s assessment of a movement towards this new posthuman time in his later novels (251). Commenting on DeLillo’s posthumanist critique in *Point Omega*, Koepnick observes that the novel’s “poetic plays out the finite and frail vectors of existential time against the oppressive and ever accelerating logic of social and technological temporality” (262). Juxtaposing ideas of slowness and technological speed, DeLillo presents a character’s experiencing of *Gordon’s 24-Hour Psycho* in its slow movement. The slowness that the character experiences while watching it works against our accelerated movements through screen culture, and,

invite[s] the subject to recognize its own limitations, while exploring the unstable space between the unique and the reproducible, between the ephemeral and the seemingly timeless, between the fickleness of human time and the deep or steady temporality of geological formations and modern machines of information storage (Koepnick 273).

To counter the posthumanizing speed, DeLillo incorporates—by emulating the slowness of the movie—slowness into the text of the novel through the use of what Koepnick calls a “minimalist language”, a language that is jammed and elliptical. The slowness that characterizes his later novels (the traffic in *Cosmopolis* amidst technological speed, *Gordon’s 24 Hours Psycho* in *Point Omega*, the stuttering language in *The Body Artist*, *Zero K*, *The Silence*, etc.) also suggests how DeLillo’s later novels engage in a critique of speed that defines contemporary screen/culture (Koepnick 275).

The novel also affirms the idea that the turn to digital culture has radically altered our perception of time. As I have pointed out earlier, time occupies an important space in his late

novels, and in different ways points to our posthuman present in these novels. The posthuman time in these novels is closely related to the human and to such ideas as the cryonic project, “deep time”, life-extension, and “end-times”. Acknowledging the complex experience of time in such an epochal shift, a character in *Zero K* remarks that “[t]ime is too difficult” (DeLillo 68). This shift in the conception of time—which refers both to the cyber techno-time and a new geological time or “deep time”, as DeLillo calls it following the path of some Anthropocene scholars—that is forced upon us by climate change create in these novels, I argue, a posthuman(izing) time. The novel also emphasizes the timeless quality of the Convergence—because no one can predict when the bodies that are preserved “in the cryonic chamber” can wake up to life, as “the idea of continuum—past, present, future ... diminishes and dies” in the chamber, and where no one knows “days, year and minutes” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 68). Time as it exists in the chamber affects the character of human too, for “how human are you without your sense of time?”, as Artis asks in the novel (DeLillo, *Zero K* 68). DeLillo presents such a time in relation to the body as well—whether it is the body that experiences the slowness of the movie in *Point Omega*, or the body that keeps functioning in tandem with the data and cyber-capitalist temporality in *Cosmopolis*, or the body that is preserved in the cryonic tubes in *Zero K*. This body-time relation in the Convergence is imagined in the novel as not only the deep time inside the Convergence but also the *future*, a future that will not have to look back to the past “dire times”. DeLillo’s character emphasizes this:

We have language to guide us out of dire times. We are able to think and speak about what can conceivably happen in time to come. Why not follow our words *bodily* into the future tense? If we tell ourselves forthrightly that consciousness will persist, that cryopreservatives will continue to nourish the body, it is the first awakening toward the blessed state. We are here to make it happen, not simply to will it, or crawl toward it, but to place the endeavor in full dimension. (*Zero K* 253; emphasis added)

What is also important here is that time in the Convergence is closely connected to and is about the body in the cryo-preservative, the time within which the preserved body can resurrect. The body—not just these posthuman bodies—has been a central concern in DeLillo's work. Paying attention to different bodies—bodies on cryopreservation, bodies that are entwined with machines, bodies that are in the process of *becoming*, and bodies that suffer and falling—that are present in DeLillo's work will provide us a better understand of the post/human condition in DeLillo's work. The next section will narrow the focus of posthuman themes in DeLillo to the centrality of the body in posthuman thinking.

c) Technology, Posthumanism and the Body in DeLillo

The changing ideas of the body and body's relation to larger social and cultural factors including technology have reconfigured our understanding of the body. The body is also at the centre of much of contemporary discussions around the human, and as Nayar asserts “in its most popular articulation, [posthumanism] often focuses on the body as a site for the new interpretations of the human” (Nayar 80). In posthumanist thought, body has acquired a central position in (re)imagining the human either as a perfect or imperfect category. Innovations in technology have redrafted the human body as a site of technological grafting, as evident in body augmentation, human genome project as well as in advanced military technologies such as that of America wherein “*technology* [often] embodies *masculinity*”, as Don Ihde argues (115). This integration of technology into the ‘human’ body for augmentation and modification has created a condition of both body's emancipation and its enslavement, and present potent danger to human life, especially in the context of military force as argued by Ihde. The different ways in which bodies are modified thus point to, according to Hayles, the fact that human's turning to other species such as cyborgs and posthumans

are not utopian realities but are things that have become part of our everyday reality (How 20). *This section argues that the increasing integration of technology into human body in the context of cyber and medical technologies, as evident in DeLillo's post-millennial novels, not only reflects the changing notions of the body in posthuman/transhumanist discourses but also redefines the very idea of 'the human' as it appears in these late novels. Although DeLillo's early novels were interested in the changing concept of the body, especially in body's relation to media technologies and consumerism, his post-millennial novels focus more specifically on the increasing erosion of the border between the techno-body and the biological body, as well as on the enhancement of the human body in the context of transhumanist projects, raising serious questions about the dangers of human life-expansion.*

Situated as they are in the larger context of such discussions on the body and its networked relation to technology, especially cyber technology, DeLillo's novels—particularly from *White Noise* to *The Silence*—have expressed concerns regarding technology's integration of the body and its potential for transcending the confines of traditional concepts of the body, and present characters who assume bodies that are interrelated to the techno-capitalist environment that he presents in many of his novels (*White Noise*, *Cosmopolis*). DeLillo's later short novels such as *The Body Artist*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Point Omega* seem to take special interest in the philosophy of the body. The bodies in his work include bodies that are in the process of *becoming* (*The Body Artist*), bodies that are perfect examples of transhumanism (*Cosmopolis*, *Zero K*), and bodies that are suffering/in pain and falling. They present issues of the body, space, and time—an interest that has been particularly well developed since his *White Noise*—as Katrina Harack, Rebecca Harding, Anne Longmuir, and Linda Kauffman have noted (2013; 2019; 2007; 2011). While Longmuir focuses on DeLillo's

rethinking of the concept of the body in *The Body Artist*, stressing that in the novel, “like individual subjectivity, [body] can be determined and controlled by a dominant power” outside, Linda Kauffman asserts that DeLillo’s *Falling Man* “is a novel obsessed with the corporeal body” (Longmuir 528; Kauffman 135). Some of these bodies in the novel are, according to Kauffman, “spiraling downward psychically, [while] others are slowly dying, or in motion, in bed, [or] in suspense” (135). Continuing with his interest in exploring bodies in different spaces and in relation to nonhuman entities, in this novel also DeLillo presents these different bodies in relation to technology.

These novels also focus on how characters’ experiencing of such things as city spaces (*Cosmopolis* and *Falling Man*), time (*Cosmopolis* and *Point Omega*), technology intersects with the body. Some of these novels (*Falling Man* and *The Body Artist*, in particular) also present body as something that experiences pain or trauma and disembodiment, and as a site of mourning. In most of these later novels, DeLillo also juxtaposes death squarely with the body. It is because, as Glavanakova observes, DeLillo positions death at the centre of most of these novels’ discussion about the human body (102).

In *White Noise*, *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*, DeLillo stages a tension between matter and information that are in close connection to the human body (through medical diagnosis of the body in *White Noise*, The technologically embodied body in *Cosmopolis* and the cryonic bodies in *Zero K*). This also produces, as argued by Thomsen, a new form of dualism in these works that is different from the conventional dualism between mind and the body (39). This dualism, introduced especially by the cybernetic age between “information [and] matter”, data [and] flesh”, often functions as the basis of the subjectivities of most of DeLillo’s later characters, including, as I

argue in the third chapter, that of Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis* (Sheehan 253, Thomson 39). Artis, “the clinical specimen” for the transhumanist project in DeLillo’s *Zero K*, points to the creation of a posthuman body that is the future vision of many rich people in the world. This is reiterated by a character in the novel: “I know that research is being done here [in the Convergence] on future models of human vision. Experiments using robots, lab animals, who knows, people like me” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 45).

However, DeLillo considers such possibilities with a deep sense of doubt and fear: “What will it be like to come back [after death]? The same body, yes, or an enhanced body, but about the mind? Is consciousness unaltered? Are you the same person?”. “What is the self?” ... “Isn’t death a blessing?” (*Zero K* 48, 67, 69). However, the complex ways in which the body is now bound up with technology do not seem to provide any easy answers to such questions that DeLillo raises.

The recasting of the body within the context of such transhumanist project or biotechnology and cyber technology in DeLillo produces inscriptions of posthuman characters whose identities and bodies are not only constituted by, but evolve with, technological environments, and can be best exemplified as networked bodies or as assemblages. In such a recasting of the body, not only does the body *become* the repository of information as a consequence of the convergence between cybernetic technology and biotechnology, but it is also characterized by a particular understanding of human embodiment, creating a category that Hayles and Sheehan call “cybernetic posthumanism” (Hayles, *How* 4; Sheehan 254). Such genetic coding of the body also suggests the emergence of a new ‘essence’ in the form of the uniqueness of the human being (Hayles, *How* 1999, 5; Sheehan 254).

As early as *White Noise*, DeLillo has foregrounded the body in relation to media and medical technology. Babette’s tele-visualized body as seen by Gladney in *White*

Noise is a body that is made up of “electrons and photons, of whatever forces produced the grey light we took to be her face (105). In following a posthuman/‘new human’ reading of Babette’s body, Thomsen has identified her use of the pill(Dylar) and its misunderstood potential for warding off anxiety of death as transforming her body into an experimental body (196). And the “battery of [medical] tests” that Gladney undergoes in a clinic for possible exposure to the toxic spill turns his body into “information and a televised picture” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 88; Olster 88). This episode bespeaks of his body’s interaction with the medical/technological system. In that dehumanized space, as Gladney stresses, “we are the sum total of our data” (286). At the test centre, which is curiously called Autumn Harvest Farms, Gladney undergoes some medical tests in which ... instruments were strapped to [his] thighs, electrodes planted on [his] chest. They inserted [him] in an imaging block, some kind of computerized scanner. Someone sat typing at a console, transmitting a message to the machine that would make my body transparent” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 320-321).

The close interrelation of Gladney’s body with the diagnosis technologies here not only reduces his body into a repository of data but also turning it into an interface between his flesh and computer. The implications of body’s augmentation and the medical use of technologies inside our bodies were pointed out by Ray Kurzweil as early as 2003²². These new technologies are not only presented as futuristic realities that transform the human but as technologically-mediated medical practices that, as very evident in his advanced treatment of such concerns in *Zero K*, alienate humans from such technologies. However, in a characteristically DeLillian way, some of these

²² Kurzweil remarked that “our species has already augmented the ‘natural’ order of our life cycle through our technology: drugs, supplements, replacement parts for virtually all bodily systems, and many other interventions. ... As we’re learning the principles of operation of the human body and the brain, we will soon be in a position to design vastly superior systems that will be more enjoyable, last longer, and perform better, without susceptibility to breakdown, disease, and aging” (“Human Body” 4).

characters are caught between experiencing the disembodying threat of technology and the ineluctable pain of the material body, a conflict that DeLillo inserts into some of his narratives, as can be seen in my discussion of it in chapter 3.

The increasing pace with which the body is integrated into technology in diverse fields as medicine, nanotechnology and cryopreservation has not only redefined it as a circuit to the virtual, interfacing with the environment—thereby creating reworked relation between devices, human and environment—but also transformed it into a spectacted “human bodies in gleaming pods” in transhumanist projects (DeLillo, *Zero K* 256). This both fascinates and frightens us because what we call the human undergoes the most radical revolution here. It is such a posthuman reality that DeLillo presents in his *Zero K*, in which the vision of “after-life” in the cryostorage that the character Jeff Lockhart gets a glimpse of both fascinates and frighten us all:

There were rows of human bodies in gleaming pods and I had to stop walking to absorb what I was seeing. There were lines, files, long columns of naked men and women in frozen suspension. ... All pods faced in the same direction, dozens, then hundreds, and our path took us through the middle of these structured ranks. The bodies were arranged across an enormous floor space, people of various skin color, uniformly positioned, eyes closed, arms crossed on chest, legs pressed tight, no sign of excess flesh. ... Here, there were *no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle*, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing. It was a form of visionary art, it was body art with broad implications. (256; emphasis added).

The body here also becomes an object of “spectacle”, a spectacle that is different from the media spectacle that DeLillo’s work is well known for. This is a spectacle of the twenty-first century—bodies suspended on the cryonic tube. Though DeLillo’s aestheticization of the body on the cryonic pods through his euphemistic reference to the body-spectacle as “art”

work may confuses us, he seems to present it, I argue, as the most horrifying spectacle of human life, a spectacle that both fascinates and frightens us. It fascinates because it is not only “human’s ultimate fantasy” or “the final solution”, as Baudrillard would call it²³, but it also has the potential for redefining the very idea of the human, and it frightens because it portents the end of ‘the human’ as we have come to understand it (DeLillo, *Zero K* 256; Baudrillard 3). In *Zero K*, the posthuman bodies that so await “cyber-resurrection” is unrecognizable as bodies to Jeff Lockhart (DeLillo 245). This difficulty arises from the impossibility of distinguishing between “life” and “death” at the Convergence, “the point at which death and life join” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 255). Jeff wonders: “The other thing I didn’t know was what constituted the end. When does the person become the body? The body withdraws from one function and then possibly another, or possibly not – heart, nervous system, brain, different parts of the brain down into the mechanism of individual cells” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 139-140).

In the Convergence, the “crypto-preservatives will continue to nourish the body ... for the “awakening towards the blessed state” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 253). Here, the body loses its singularity and the very idea of “life” itself, as it “is striped of everything that might mark it as an individual life” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 251). Jeff sees a “prediction implied in this spectacted “display” of posthuman bodies, of them becoming commodities in the future:

Human bodies, saturated with advanced preservatives, serving as mainstays in the art markets of the future. Stunted monoliths of once-living flesh placed in the showrooms of auction houses or set in the windows of an elite antiquarian shop along the stylish

²³ In his *The Vital Illusion*, Baudrillard calls the quest for immortality through projects such as cryonics and cloning as human’s “ultimate fantasy” or the “final solution”, and asserts that this fantasy is embedded in modern science and technology too. He says: “We all want immortality. It is our ultimate fantasy, a fantasy that is also at work in all of our modern sciences and technologies—at work, for example, in the deep freeze of cryonic suspension and in cloning in all its manifestations” (3).

stretch of Madison Avenue. Or a headless man and woman occupying a corner of a grand suite in the London penthouse owned by a Russian oligarch. (DeLillo, *Zero K* 232)

The Convergence houses bodies that are preserved “on the subject’s willingness to make a certain kind of transition to the next level” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 112). The novel also presents what it means to be a human/body post-cryopreservation in a short chapter titled “Artis Martineau”. The chapter is titled after Artis, wife of Ross Lockhart, whose illness makes them think of her body to be suitable for cryopreservation. Artis experiences an intense feeling of disembodiment and loss of humanness in the Convergence, and loses her capacity to smell, taste, and see after waking up on the pod: “But am I who I was. I think I am someone. There is someone here and I feel it in me or with me. But where is here and how long am I here and am I only what is here” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 157). In the post-cryonic state, she is “first person and third person both”, a fact that is conveyed in the chapter through her use of language, voice and consciousness that oscillate between first and third person (DeLillo, *Zero K* 157). She feels complete disorientation and disembodiment: “I feel something outside me that belongs to me. Where is my body. Do I know what this is. I only know the word, and I know it out of nowhere. I know that I am inside something. I am somebody inside this thing I am in. Is this my body. Is this what makes me whatever I know and whatever I am...a woman’s body in a pod” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 160-162). Her posthuman subjectivity is nothing but “the residue, all that is left of an identity” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 160). Jeff, who opposes the idea of the Convergence calls such bodies “prehistoric artefacts”: “Those were humans entrapped, enfeebled, individual lives stranded in some border region of a wishful future (DeLillo, *Zero K* 256).

Herbrechter calls Artis “the impersonated posthuman (body) artist [musing] over the disembodied identity of a ‘woman’s body in a pod” (17). Artis’s condition can be best understood from an analysis of Ross’s musing in the novel over the futurity of such human life extension projects: “What happens to the idea of continuum—past, present, future—in the cryonic chamber How human are you without your sense of time? More human than ever? Or do you become fetal, an unborn thing?” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 68). The destruction of her former self compels us to reflect on Boxall’s reminder about the posthumanizing technologies of the contemporary period: “the technology that extends the reach of the human, that helps humans to master their environment, also works to weaken the human itself as a category” [T]echnology amplifies the human only to the extent that it dwarfs it” (“Science” 127, 130). DeLillo’s transhumanist imagining of human life-extension and his critique of such a project in this novel compel us, as it does Jeff, to wonder what “define[s] *person*, ... Define[s] *human*, define[s] *animal*” in such a condition (DeLillo, *Zero K* 103).

DeLillo’s “critical posthumanist” view, as Herbrechter calls it, of cryopreservation in this novel makes more sense when we realize that the Alcor Life Extension Foundation’s Cryonics facility in Scottsdale, Arizona has 144 bodies stored in liquid nitrogen, bodies that await “cyber-resurrection” that would radically challenge or even end the idea of the human as we know it today (Herbrechter 15, *Zero K* 238). Such radical transformation brought by technology will end, as Ross Lockhart asserts in the novel, “one version of [human] life to enter another and far more permanent version[s]” (DeLillo, *Zero K* 111). Such a prospect would raise questions that may not have any end, as Jeff’s questions indicate in the novel:

What will it be like to come back? The same body, yes, or an enhanced body, but what about the mind? Is consciousness unaltered? Are you the same person? You die as someone with a certain name and with all the history and memory and mystery

gathered in that person and that name. But do you wake up with all of that intact? Is it simply a long night's sleep?. (DeLillo, *Zero K* 48)

The questions that such a condition would beget would be difficult and complex, as such possibilities will lead to the annihilation of more of human nature because such endeavors are already under the control of cyber-capitalists, as DeLillo suggest: "Give the futurists their blood money and they will make it possible for you to live forever" (*Zero K* 117). DeLillo brings out in *Zero K* our posthuman future's convergence of cyber-capitalism and transhumanism in human's wish for immortality through freezing human bodies and keeping them until future technologies find a way to resurrect the dead bodies to 'life'.

DeLillo takes up in these later novels, as Herbrechter observes, "a current cultural anxiety *and* promise, namely the fear *and* desire of becoming somehow *transhuman*" at a time when capitalism is at its "ultimate phase" marked by the commodification of human body and, in fact, life itself, and when, as DeLillo himself proclaims, "[ev]erybody wants to own the end of the world" (Herbrechter 16; *Zero K* 3). As this section has indicated, these novels point to the transcending character of the body as well as its reconfiguration, expressed through medicine-enabled life expansion (in *White Noise*) and advances in biotechnology and cyber technology (in *Zero K* and *Cosmopolis*), that have radically redefined the body not only as something that is networked with technology and the environment but also as something that is not a finished entity but as that which is in the process of *becoming*. The examples I have cited so far also stresses that DeLillo's novels, especially from A(*Americana*) to Z (*Zero K*), have foregrounded the body as something that is mediated by and through film, electronic, media and cyber technologies, and in the process have revealed body's vulnerability and plasticity in a world of mediated experiences. Through the example of *Zero K* in particular, DeLillo also seems to suggest, as he does in a

different way in the context of a technological collapse in *The Silence*, that we are fast approaching an apocalyptic turn where the very category of the human as we understand it today will—if not become “a face drawn in the sand by the edge of a sea”—undergo more radical alterations in its character (Foucault 386-387).

III) Conclusion

The above discussions on technology and on the close relationship between “character” and the “technological culture” evident in DeLillo’s work show how discourses around technology have also been surrounded by implicit or explicit references to character—of technology, society and the human body—as something that has not only been produced but redefined by technology and its inherent drive to innovate. In other words, what I have tried so far in this chapter is to assert the idea that there has been an emphasis on the *idea* of character—the posthuman character—in discussions about technology, culture, the human, and the body. This emphasis on the idea of character is more evident in contemporary discourses that attempt to define, or the failure thereof, the ‘actual’ nature of the human in the context of technological innovation. This urge to define or the failure to do so manifests itself, as the chapter suggests, in contemporary fiction too.

The chapter has also tried to emphasize that in order to understand the “impressions” that DeLillo’s work creates about our present epochal time, it is necessary that we look at the posthuman ‘character’ of his novels, characters and their bodies. It is also important that we understand this impression-creation from the perspective of the other possibilities for interpretation inherent in the word “character” itself, as well as from the perspective of the way the word has evolved with technology, society and human culture and nature. It is argued that without any consideration of these various ‘contexts’ within which “character” often takes shapes and makes sense, we will be reproducing the same character-analysis or theories in relation to fiction that give prominence either only to the taboo that understands

character only as fictional *being* and not as *ideas* that get inscribed in fiction. An examination of the ways in which the *idea* of character works in fiction will also enrich our understanding of fiction which is sometimes taken to be mere “stories” without any active stake in the actual world.

The next chapter will examine the various ways in which DeLillo’s novels such as *White Noise*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Falling Man* present the *character* of American society through their persistent concerns not only with the creation of technologically-induced “spectacle” but the production of a culture of “waste” and speed. The spectacle as *the* character of contemporary American society, as it is presented in these novels, is examined in the chapter using studies on “the spectacle” by Debord, Douglas Kellner, Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano, James Compton etc. The chapter will also examine some of these novels to understand the implications of the reconfiguration of notions of space and time consequent upon the arrival and spread of more advanced technologies and the creation of a culture of speed since the late twentieth century as DeLillo’s later novels indicate.

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CHAPTER –2

Technological Culture and the Character of Society in DeLillo

Technology has changed the way we think, talk. Everything was different before this somewhat abrupt technological advance. Our thinking is less meditative and somewhat more instantaneous”“I don’t think of [technology] as degradation. It’s simply what happens. It’s a form of progress. This is the path of technology. I don’t necessarily long to go back to pre-computer days. I accept what we have and in many ways [but] I’m astonished by it.... (DeLillo, “We All Live”)

I) Introduction

DeLillo’s statement above succinctly captures not only the influence of technology in altering human character but also its role as an inevitable *system* that has come to occupy as a “natural” phenomenon in our society whose very character has been shaped, to larger extent, by it. Scholars whose work focus on the shifts in society under contemporary digital technology have compelled us to think of society’s transformation into “information society” (Lyon 1988, Webster 1995) and “network society” (Castells 2000, 2004, 2006; van Dijk 1999). Such new ways of conceiving contemporary societies reveal, as Frank Webster asserts, that “information [is] a distinguishing feature of the modern world” (2). Information predominates contemporary society so pervasively that “the character of information”, as Webster further states, “is such as to have transformed how we live” today (11). Moving a bit further, other scholars have also argued that as societies are getting increasingly connected and mediatized as well as platform-driven and data-fueled, contemporary societies have transformed into “datafied society” (Schäfer and van E S 12). In such a condition, data has become the determinant factor of human life and identity in advanced and advancing societies. DeLillo had alerted us, as early as 2000s, to this shift that the predominance of data has brought in our society: “Data itself [is] soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. [T]he eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the

planet's living billions (*Cosmopolis* 24). From his early novel itself, DeLillo has been well conscious of these social transformations that technology has brought about in society.

This chapter examines the ways in which DeLillo's persistent concerns with such social transformations produce in his work certain impressions of the peculiar character of contemporary American society in a media and data/image-driven world. *This impression-creation, I argue, is a result of his work's presentation of the dominant effects of a technological culture such as media spectacle, time-space compression, the consequent culture of speed, and the production of "waste"—both material and human—largely by technologically-mediated consumerism and the logic within which cyber capitalism operates. The spectacles in these novels, the chapter argues, need to be understood not just as static and objectified, as well as alienating the witnessing subjects but also as according agency to the audience, compelling them to participate in a performative act of entangled relationality between the actor/performer of the spectacle and the viewer/reader. "Waste" and "waste lives", the chapter further argues, can be best understood as residues of the 'excess' that cyber capitalism and high technology, with its great emphasis on speed, produce in the form of human, technology and information. DeLillo's persistent concerns with such a social order often render his work a powerful insight into and diagnosis of contemporary American society enmeshed in technological realities.*

A close reading of DeLillo's novel would reveal that at the center of his novels is a concern with the transformations that American society has undergone since the more advanced technological innovations of the late twentieth century. This concern is also informed by an awareness, and an attempt to make sense of, the impact and transformations in American social history in the wake of the assassination of John F Kennedy, the Cold War, and 9/11 events. His work as a whole often appears to map the technological transformations in America from the early mass media to the Internet, and to the more advanced, digital

technologies since the second half of the twentieth century. It is his consistent mapping of a genealogy of contemporary era as essentially a product of the historical progression of technology in America that distinguishes his work from other writers who have also reflected on technology's effects. Such a persistent concern in DeLillo's work with contemporary time is what David Marchese refers to when he sums up the dominant character of DeLillo's oeuvre thus:

[f]or nearly 50 years and across 17 novels, among them classics like "White Noise," "Libra" and "Underworld," DeLillo... has summoned the darker currents of the American experience with maximum precision and uncanny imagination. His enduring sensitivity to the *zeitgeist* is such that words like "prophetic" and "oracular" figure frequently in discussion of his work. (DeLillo, "We All Live")

DeLillo's work often engages—rather than *just portraying* them—and in turn engages us too, with the dominant cultural and social forces of our time such as technology, capitalism, consumerism, and terrorism, offering powerful critique of the order they create in society. Among these concerns, the dominant power of media technology in proliferating images, information and data in our society occupies a central place. His fiction compels readers to not only see (and see through too) but question the rampant culture of consumerism, an endless production and circulation of media images and information and humans' total surrendering to these forces.

To understand DeLillo's work closely and how it connects to the world outside, it is important that we understand its placing within the material conditions of contemporary America. Society is constituted not only by its people but also by the various forces, objects, relations, and structures which create it. Technology, one of *the* most important *forces* of contemporary society—as Paul Virilio, Bernard Stiegler and many others have pointed out in different ways—controls, regulates, defines and conditions everything from the character of

society to social relation to individuals' perception, consciousness, and behaviour in most parts of the world today²⁴ (Stiegler [2015, 2019], Virilio [2000], [2007]). DeLillo shows us the powerful role that technology—in its old avatars and in its contemporary integration/intersection of communication and information technologies—plays today in transforming the character of American society to a distinctly *technological* one. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to understand how DeLillo's novels inscribe certain impressions of this peculiar character of contemporary American society produced by such cultural forces as media spectacle, speed, and the production of both material and human waste.

II) Media “Spectacle” and the Character of Society in DeLillo’s *White Noise*, *Mao II*, *Underworld* and *Falling Man*

Guy Debord and his later interpreters' conceptualizations of “the Spectacle” find their apt fictional representation in some of the mediatized events in DeLillo's novels. The presentation of spectacularized events in these novels compels us to view contemporary society as a society of spectacle—if not of the exact model conceptualized by Debord but a more advanced stage of it. The media spectacles that DeLillo's novels offer provide instances of the particularities of the process of spectacularization in our society. In an attempt to understand this process at the interstice of society, spectacularized events and their

²⁴ In *Automatic Society*, Stiegler says that “[t]he current infrastructure is rapidly evolving towards a society of hyper-control founded on mobile devices such as the ‘smartphone’, domestic devices such as ‘web-connected television’, habitats such as the ‘smart house’ and ‘smart city’, and transport devices such as the ‘connected car’.... The automatic society of hyper-control is a society founded on the industrial, systemic and systematic exploitation of digital tertiary retentions. All aspects of behavior thereby come to generate traces, and all traces become objects of calculation”, creating a condition of algorithmic governmentality (1:16).

In *The Age of Disruption*, he further stresses that the digital or what he calls, “reticulated society ... contains unprecedented powers of automation and computation... [as it] becomes *the global cause of a colossal social disintegration*.... Digital reticulation penetrates, invades, parasitizes and ultimately destroys social relations at lightning speed, [and] it exploits... psychosocial energies —both of individuals and of groups—which, however, are thereby depleted. These individuals and groups are thus transformed into data-providers, de-formed and re-formed by ‘social’ networks operating according to new protocols of association. In this way, they find themselves disindividuated: their own data [*données*], which also amounts to what we call *retentions*, enables them to be dispossessed of their own *protentions*— that is, *their own desires*, expectations, volitions, will and so on” (7).

viewers/consumers and the production of their subjectivity, as well as to understand the social and individual implications of the spectacle, this section examines the working of “the spectacle” in the select novels of DeLillo. *The section argues that these novels help us understand the social role of the spectacle in not only influencing individual selves in surrendering to media images but also making them desire for more of such images of catastrophes and violence, rendering individual voices to die out and creating what Eugene Arva calls a “mass subject” (7). DeLillo depicts such a social condition as determining the character of late twentieth-century American society in an image-saturated world. However, unlike the earlier, Debordian spectacle, its contemporary manifestations in the digital age entail the potential for exercising certain agential power in the viewers to actively participate in an interactive negotiation of its meaning, especially when it is presented in fiction, as can be seen in some post- 9/11 fiction. The agency-according capacity of the spectacle results from the performative aspects of the spectacle involving the actors, viewers and readers, as evident in the performance of the “falling man” in DeLillo’s Falling Man.*

DeLillo’s works show how in a media-culture the spectacle has come to dominate almost all spheres of contemporary life, shaping the character of social and personal life, of everyday realities, human subjectivity and perspectives. In an earlier instance of spectacle in *White Noise*, DeLillo reflects deeply on the power of the spectacle and individual’s inescapable immersion in it. The episode concerns Murray Siskind and Gladney’s visit to “see” the “most-photographed barn” in America, as Siskind calls it. The scene bespeaks of the power that images have in the development of collective social consciousness that Debord had conceptualized:

Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn ...

We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph

reinforces the aura. “Being here is a kind of spiritual surrender” ... We see only what

the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism (DeLillo, *White Noise* 31-32).

The episode convinces us how, when one enters into the realm/reality of the spectacle, the mediation of seeing by images already produced by technology affects how one sees it. One doesn't see the barn, but only the images of the barn already produced by others/media. The inescapability of entering into such a mediated experience is termed by Debord as "lived reality materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle" (8). Debord defines "the society of spectacle" as a society organized around high consumerism and the production and circulation of commodities, images and dramatized events of socio-political import by the media (6). In such a social order, "all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles... [and] everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (Debord 7). To understand the current manifestations of the spectacle and its peculiar presence in DeLillo, it is important that we go beyond the notion of the spectacle presented by Debord. It is important because, as Briziarelli and Armano argue in their introduction to *The Spectacle 2.0*, "the mediation logic that drives current conditions of life in many societies has gone beyond [Debord's] spectacular images, and is increasingly subsuming more spheres of social life to the total and integral Spectacle: capitalism" (15-16). The spectacle now permeates the everyday experiences of individuals that are marked by the conjoining of capitalism and cyber technology, creating certain social orders such as rampant consumerism, a willful surrender to the images, information and data circulated through various media, screens and technologies. In contrast to Debordian spectacle, today's spectacle forms "colonize most spheres of social life by the processes of commodification, exploitation and reification" (Briziarelli and Armano 17). Issues and incidents of social and political import

become instances of media spectacle through their repetitive circulation across different media.

As a hegemonic system, the spectacle succeeds in the “fragmentation of both human consciousness and society”, subsequently creating a “successive re-integration” of individuals in a different sociality devoid of any humane aspects through its “mediating and articulating power” (qtd. in Briziarelli and Armano 26). Drawing on Debord, James Compton has also re-examined the spectacle in his *The Integrated News Spectacle* by looking at the news and arguing that the news’ aestheticization of everyday life constitutes “the central logic of the spectacle” (qtd. in Briziarelli and Armano 31). He argues that in the context of live news, the manifestations of the integrated spectacle, “need to be understood as a result of the practical use of the spectacular commodity, marketed as both production and promotion” (qtd. in Briziarelli and Armano 31). McKenzie Wark’s *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (2013) reappraises the spectacle in the context of digital culture where the spectacle, far from disappearing as a dominant ideology, has transformed its experience. Spectacles in the digital culture, which are also fragmentary in nature, “are frequently produced not by digital platforms but by their users and therefore constitute” a participatory and more pervasive spectacle²⁵ (Wark 15; Briziarelli and Armano 33). This participatory/performative aspect of the spectacle makes it a more complex phenomenon, and as something that can not only be negotiated by the agential participation of the spectators/readers but also instantaneously produced by the permeation of digital technology into every sphere of human life.

The new media culture, consequent upon the pervasive presence of media that DeLillo’s ‘80s and ‘90s novels invoke, indicates the fact that individuals’ very existence is

²⁵ In their book *The Spectacle 2.0*, Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano notes “[w]hile in the original conceptualization the spectator represented the passive actor, recipient of Spectacle agency, passively consuming cultural products, thus being more and more object, the spectator of the Spectacle 2.0 is the interactive subject who socializes through language tools and flexible digital technology, characterized much more ambiguously by initiative, creativity, exploitation and precariousness (34).

inextricably linked up with the spectacle. DeLillo's novels offer several instances of the production of both conventional and new spectacles. One just need to think about spectacularization of the toxic spread in *White Noise*, the assassination of John F Kennedy in *Libra* and *Underworld*, the murder of a person which is captured from a movie car in *Underworld*, the death of Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis*, the 9/11 events, and the iconic figure of the "falling man" to understand how DeLillo has been interested in media's spectacularization of real and horrific events and their implications. I now turn to some of these examples to argue that it is his persistent concern with the production and power of such spectacles and their impact on individual experiences that are often inscribed in his novels as constituting the peculiar character of American society and its changing nature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

I) *White Noise* and the Spectacle of Television/Disaster

This section examines numerous instances of the spectacle as they get represented in DeLillo's influential novel *White Noise* (1985). The novel depicts, among other things, the power of the spectacle in affecting the perception and social lives of individuals in a period of television images in America. *The spectacle in the novel, I argue, not only colonizes the individual mind but also makes individual desire for images of catastrophes that television endlessly supplies, causing individuals to willfully surrender to the power of images. Drawing on Debord, Arva and others, I argue that such media-ated experiences, as they can be called, cannot create a society of victims and empathizers because the most important impact of the spectacle is alienation of humans from their humanness* (Debord 16; Arva 5; Briziarelli and Armano 34) *The spectacularization of such images by television also creates, I argue drawing on Arva, a "mass subject", obliterating individual self, voice and autonomy in the process* (7).

An earlier DeLillo novel that presents spectacle in its brilliant manifestation is *White Noise*. DeLillo's insights into the working of media influence in this novel are very telling, especially when we realize that he could show us this with its powerful impact on individuals in the 1980s itself. To examine the implications of this addictive surrendering to the images and spectacles that are forced upon individuals by media, it is good to begin with an example from *White Noise* that, though has already undergone many brilliant interpretations, still forces us to think how we feel disasters are so fascinating, so involving that we want them more when they are mediated: it is because they are spectacularized by the media:

That night, a Friday, we gathered in front of the set, as was the *custom and the rule*. There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes. We'd never before been so *attentive to our duty*, our Friday assembly. *Heinrich was not sullen; I was not bored*. Steffie, brought close to tears by a sitcom husband arguing with his wife, appeared totally absorbed in these documentary clips of calamity and death. Babette tried to switch to a comedy series about a group of racially mixed kids who build their own communications satellite. She was startled by the force of our objection. *We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping.* (DeLillo 29; emphasis added)

The entire family is so glued to the television set that they even seem to enjoy the very sight of the calamity, because, as Neil Postman—whose publication of *Amusing Ourselves to Death* strangely coincided with that of *White Noise*—says it is the essential quality of visual media like television to turn every serious news and horrific experience into entertainment, vacating such experiences and events of their seriousness, complexity and depth (159-160). This is so because, as Debord says, in media spectacle which is predicated primarily on sight/seeing—because *sight* is “readily adaptable to the generalized abstraction of present-day

society” in experiencing such a spectacted-event, rather than *feeling*—the real-world changes into simple images, [and] simple images become real beings (*Society* 6). This is so because, as Debord further argues, “the spectacle’s job is to use various specialized mediations in order to *show* us a world that can no longer be directly grasped”, elevating our “sense of sight to the special preeminence once occupied by *touch* (6). Spectacles make individuals passively and submissively consume such events and news items that are readily available on the screen 24/7. The spectacle’s ability to “colonize social life” is echoed by Gladney when he suggests that the continuous telecasting and replaying of such events by media takes off their human side, because the spectacularisation of “[e]very disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping” (Debord 16; DeLillo, *White Noise* 76).

The ritualistic and addictive watching of television has also its effects on how individuals experience actual events outside the white noise of television, as brilliantly shown by DeLillo in an episode that involves the most important event and a brilliant example of the spectacle in the novel—the “air-borne toxic event”—which produces much the same response in the Gladney family as the above-cited televised disaster. DeLillo stages this example as a social order wherein the representation of actual events and disasters on television not only changes the way we perceive actual events outside television sets but creates in the mind of the viewers a desire for more spectacle because, as Alfonse Stompanato, a professor of popular culture, says in the novel “only a catastrophe gets our attention, ... we want them, we need them, we depend on them. As long as they happen somewhere else” (*White Noise* 76). Upon seeing the “black billowing cloud” through the windshield of their car, Gladney recounts the strange fascination they felt while watching it: “[w]e weren’t sure how to react. It was a terrible thing to see, so close, . . . But it was also *spectacular*” The whole thing was *amazing*. They seemed to be *spotlighting* the cloud for us as if it were part of a *sound-and-light show*, a bit of mood-setting mist drifting across a

high battlement where a king had been slain” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 156-157). It is very telling that his words and phrases are intrinsically *media-influenced*, and the metaphors he uses—which appear to be inherently cinematic—to refer to the event seem to mimic Hollywood movies, as Kevin Rozario suggests (12). It is not just about how television becomes “the death throes of human consciousness”, as Gladney says in the novel, but also about what we watch on television can affect and *mediate* what we witness as real events outside television (DeLillo, *White Noise* 61). The very inscription of the experience in the language of the media also finds its echoes in Baudrillard’s provocative assertion that in contemporary society with the omnipresence of various visual media social life is “organized according to a script for a disaster film” (*America* 56).

The spectacle that finds, as we have seen, its most apt expression in the presentation of the toxic, “black billowing cloud”—which is in a way the technological waste *par excellence*—also controls/changes the lives and psychological conditions of several characters in the novel as it shatters any firm belief on man’s ability to control it (DeLillo, *White Noise* 113). This also suggests that whatever new technology humans invent, certain things are beyond their control even in a highly technologized world. The initial absence of news coverage of the cloud also points not only to the rather selective nature of the media that dictates what is important and what is not but also why we *need*, as DeLillo seems to think, such images to even convince us that what we experience *is* real. This is emphasized by another character in the novel when he complains about the absence of any news report about the event at first, while carrying a television set:

There’s nothing on network, he said to us. Not a word, not a picture. On the Glassboro channel we rate fifty-two words by actual count. No film footage, no live report. Does this kind of thing happen so often that nobody cares anymore? Don’t these people

know what we've been through? ... Are they telling us it was insignificant, it was piddling?... don't they know it's real. (DeLillo, *White Noise* 162)

The grudge of the character is also very characteristic of media's construction of reality in such a society where not only is the access to reality made possible by the images that media circulate but the experience itself becomes a highly *media*-ted one. The comments of the character also suggest that the 'realness' of the toxic leak does not seem to qualify it for television coverage. In a society where the media dictates and determines the norms and terms of 'reality', the real does not seem to have any place at all. In such a social condition, the real and the unreal, it seems, are what the media/image 'offers', often subsumed and legitimized by the power of spectacle. However, later the experience of the toxic spread not only loses its realness, but it is transformed into a mere image that spirals across media, an image that is endlessly consumed by viewers (DeLillo, *White Noise* 212). As a result, it is not the commodity (the image) itself, as Arva rightly puts it, that has become dominant but "the system of mediation by representation [that] has come to bear more relevance than the commodities themselves" (7). The complaint of the character has to be seen at another level too: it shows another dimension of the society of spectacle—anything, even a disaster, is unbelievable or is not a reality in the absence of technological mediation. In other words, its meaning seems to lie in its being *re-presented* or repeated on television screens.

Examples of *media*-ted experience in a mass media culture in the novel can also be found in the way characters recount certain events. For instance, a crew member of an airline narrates an event occurred during a nose-drive session in the third person, as if it is a media report: "airline going down. Simulators did not prepare crew for this terror feeling of death" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 90). Likewise, Jack Gladney's daughter in the novel asks why they experienced fear of falling from the sky, if the news did not cover it (DeLillo, *White Noise* 92). 'Reality' here is not only mediated by television/the media but also has to be mediated

by it in order to be ‘real’. As Mark Osteen observes, in a society of *mediation* individuals cannot “understand their own experience without electronic mediation, without the knowledge that they are being observed. Stripped of the universal third person, they are trapped in the first person they no longer recognize” (181). The mediation of such events through television also takes such events off the power to create a society of victims and empathizers because the most important effect of the spectacle is alienation of the human from their humanness, as Debord and Briziarelli and Armano have argued (21; 8). Mediation does not allow for any collective human relation other than the one produced by the media. As Derek Merrill says, a “disaster prior to being framed by media allows for collective social relations to form since all involved must begin constructing a story to understand what they experienced. Disasters are moments when we acutely detect what is otherwise undetected: the loss of authorship over our lives” (185). The interest in the images offered by “the bombardment of information” by media spectacle, as the character Alfonse Stompanato in *White Noise* explains, is not only a “natural” response to “brain fade,” but also the desire of the media-addicted and benumbed individual for “an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information” (DeLillo 66). This “bombardment of information” is produced by the always-on television sets with weather casts, news, public programmes, and entertainment (DeLillo, *White Noise* 66).

In another instance Murray Siskind, who also theorizes the workings of capitalism and the spectacle in the novel, echoes Debord when he says that: “to get beyond the grasp of the spectacle is to understand how it organizes social relations” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 97). The social relation in such a society is organized around and through media/images, and this is what another character in the novel suggests while referring to the supremacy of the spectacle in society, “[f]or most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 94). The ritualistic watching of the television fostered by

the circulation of the spectacle by media also creates a community of viewers by providing them, as Kellner argues, “material for fantasy, dreaming, modelling thought and behavior and identities” in relation to such spectacles (*Media Spectacle* 1). Debord also points to this community-forming character of the media when he says that the spectacle “is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (12). For such a community of viewers, the world offered by T V seems to be more real as it also organizes the actual world in which they live. The only way-out for individuals in such a social condition is to resist such an order either by consuming products and the images offered by technologies or by resisting their influences, as suggested by Siskind while referring to the theory of the market: “one can maintain a more meaningful relation to the images that television offers by learning to read them” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 133). Siskind’s comment seems to concur with the television critic John Fiske and John Hartley’s argument that individuals can build agency through consuming images²⁶ (134). But this seems rather a redundant claim now in the globalized, cyber technological scenario, as DeLillo suggests in *Cosmopolis*, wherein images circulate in unprecedented ways and speed, and even individuals’ attempts to build agency often seem to be mediated through new technologies and media.

There is yet another, or rather a self-reflexive level, at which the spectacle works in the novel through an invocation of Fascism and how it can also function through/as the spectacle. This strange but thought-provoking invocation of Hitler/Fascism is through the character of Gladney and his professional affiliation to and interest in, Fascist studies in the “College on the Hills” where he teaches Popular Culture. His christening of his son “Heinrich” seems to be a continuation of his obsession with Fascist spectacle created by media. His son’s name,

²⁶ Fiske and John Hartley argue that “Television is itself a major agency for the daily enactment of ‘common co-existence of cleavage and continuity’ between communities, however divided they are (88).

which chimes with the name of Hitler's close ally and *Reichsführer*-SS, Heinrich Himmler suggests not only Gladney's fascination with the spectacle of Fascism but also how such figures are reproduced again and again by various media including fiction. It is this fascination with the representation of Fascism on media and the enduring 'aura' that it creates through its re-production that is reflected in Gladney's words: "I thought it had an authority that might cling to him. I thought it was forceful and impressive... I wanted to shield him, make him unafraid. ... There's something about German names, the German language, German things. I don't know what it is exactly. It's just there. In the middle of it all is Hitler, of course" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 64).

Gladney regularly screens a documentary in his class that resembles, as Michael Shapiro says, the Nazi Propagandist Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 documentary *The Triumph of the Will* which documents Hitler's visit to Nuremberg (25). Gladney's documentary, like Riefenstahl's film, is characterized by its presentation of "mass, people surging, massing, bursting through the traffic. Halls hung with swastika banners, with mortuary wreaths and death's-head insignia. Ranks of thousands of flag-bearers arrayed before columns of frozen light, a hundred and thirty anti-aircraft searchlights aimed straight up" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 26-27). Gladney is interested in this powerful crowd scenes of fascist regime that "resemble[s] a geometric longing, the formal notation of some powerful mass desire," which obliterates individual "narrative voice," and promotes "only chants, songs, arias, speeches, cries, cheers, accusations [and] shrieks" (DeLillo, *White Noise* 26-27). The documentary's portrayal of the crowd that both *enables* and *constitutes* the fascist regime creates, as in the case of the representation of the toxic event on television, what Arva calls a 'mass subject', a subject that is constituting and constituted by a "world of consumers, a mass of undifferentiated voices", by media (7). This mass subject is created by the spectacle through an obliteration of individual self and autonomy. In such a condition of the production of a

“mass subject”, it doesn’t matter “[w]hether it is Jack’s (the narrator’s) voice that we hear or Heinrich’s (his son’s) or that of Murray Jay Siskind, there are no specific tone; diction; dialect or age characteristics that would normally give away each individual’s personality” (Arva 7). It is only a mass subject’s voice that we hear.

White Noise also shows how the repeated watching of television spectacles and advertisements colonizes the deepest recesses of human consciousness, as evident in Gladney’s daughter Steffie’s repeating “Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida ...”, an advertisement slogan that she often hears on television. Gladney is both astonished and uplifted by these words that flow through her mouth as if in a re-production of actual sounds by television (DeLillo 155). There is some kind of a spiritual transformation that they feel when they utter these “computer generated words” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 155). The television “noise” that enters the unconscious of his daughter also invades Gladney’s head when he ponders over the real meaning and implication of such invasions: “How could this be? A simple brand-name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child’s restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence. She was only repeating some TV voice: “Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida ...” (DeLillo, *White Noise* 155). This is, it seems, not merely a mimicking of media sounds that results from a habituated watching of TV, but an indication of the powerful effects of the characteristically tantalizing promises of consumer culture circulated by media advertisements. These words/noises and “chants” that television often emits are also, as the author Stephan Clark observes, the “detritus of American consumer culture” (par. 2). The mimicking, which also acquires a ritualistic character as Gladney himself admits, I argue, also interpolates Steffie and Gladney to what Arva calls as the ‘mass subject’ that such a consumer culture creates through a forceful submission of individuality and autonomy to the power of the images and noises of mass media like television (7). As evident from the ever more proliferation of media images and

information that surround us now in a culture of 24/7 news hours/channels, nothing seems to have quenched our thirst for such images and live news updates on events of horrific nature since then *White Noise*, because we have been made so by the ever more omnipresent screens in our lives today, lives that are spent more online than offline.

b) *Mao II* and the Spectacle of Crowds and Terrorists

In this section, I discuss DeLillo's *Mao II* to understand the working of the spectacle in the context of media images. The novel deeply reflects, among other things, on the waning of the role of writers in the wake of media's spectacularization of the images of terrorists and crowds. *The spectacle in the novel, I argue, helps us understand—both structurally and thematically—the role of the media in influencing individual and social consciousness. By presenting the dominant role of photographic and television images in American society in the late twentieth century, and numerous references to the endless supply, consumption and circulation of media images, the novel also suggests, I argue, the dangerous role of media (spectacle) in reducing the role of books/authors by according terrorists the status that they never deserve.*

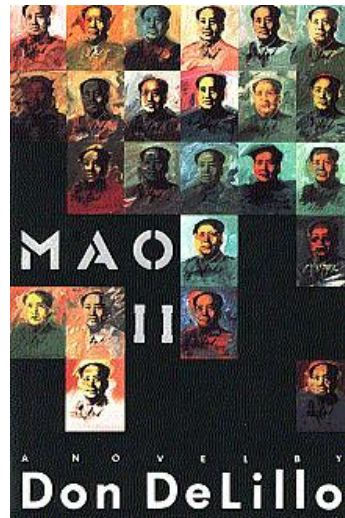
Through numerous instances *Mao II*, a novel that dramatically adds episodes around the hijacking of a Swiss author by terrorists, suggests how images can supersede 'reality' and irradiate them with media spectacles. The novel narrates the story of a writer, Bill Gray who loses not only his creative zest but also his life to a media saturated culture. The novel's narrative is weaved together through the staging of and discussion around issues of image-simulation, terrorism, the role of the author in society, as well as the workings of the representational strategies of television, photography and painting. Through the character of Bill Gray who tries to save the Swiss writer made hostage by terrorists, the novel suggests, as Mannes-Abbott argues, that "the terrorist has replaced the writer as a shaper of consciousness in an age defined by the mass visual litter of 24-h history" through the repeated circulation of

their images and acts of violence across different media (36). Consequently, writers become mere cogs in the wheel of media and advertisement-driven corporate production. This condition is well explained by Gray while expressing his fears that:

[t]here is a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence ... Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we are all *incorporated*. (DeLillo, *Mao II* 14; emphasis added)

As Gray suggests, it is the repeated (re)presentation(s) of terrorists and the spectacularization of their heinous acts by media that influences the human /American consciousness. Media creates a cult status around terrorists and turn those who follow them into dehumanized victims and copies of their heroes, while rendering the viewers incapable of expressing any true sympathy towards the victims of such acts (Knight 34-40).

The multiplication of images and the subsequent erosion of individuality and singularity are both structurally and thematically explored in the novel. They point to the repletion of singular and individualistic experience and perception in the context of “mass” media—an idea that is well captured in DeLillo’s prophecy in the novel: “[t]he future belongs to crowds” (*Mao II* 17). Corroborating images of this “crowd” can be seen in the mass scenes in the novel, such as a vast gathering in Tiananmen Square, a mass wedding and the Hillsborough stadium soccer disaster. As Olster rightly observes, the loss of individuality, suggested by the multiple images, is so well expressed, first of all, in “the seriality implied by the title of the novel itself” (50). This is further emphasized by the repeated images of Mao on the cover of the novel (see fig. 1).



(Fig. 1. *Mao II*. 2006, Wikipedia)

As the multiple photographs of Mao on the cover of the novel reveal reiteration, reproduction, and multiplicity—which are so central to media spectacle—are built into the very structure of the novel itself (Olster 50). This idea is *repeated* inside the pages of the novel too, where each section is initiated by different photographs that include one of Ayatollah Khomeini as well, a figure whose particular status was largely made possible by the repetitive circulation of his images across different media during the controversy around him and Salman Rushdie. However, the mere ‘copies’ of charismatic leaders have neither individuality nor agency. This is subtly suggested by Bill Gray when he says that “the boys who work near Abu Rashid” (the terrorist-leader who kidnaps the Swiss writer) have no face or speech. Their features are identical” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 234).

Whereas characters in *White Noise* demonstrate the influence of massive and continuous exposure to television, the dominant readings of *Mao II* points to the role of broad-cast journalism, photography, and visual arts media and television in reducing the role of books/authors in an age of endless supply, consumption of media images, and the production of the spectacle. This idea is suggested by Bill’s unpublished novel’s photographic disclosure: “the book disappears into the image of the writer” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 71). “We

don't need the novel now", instead "we turn to the news" because news provides—with its repeated "reports and predictions and warnings"—an "emotional experience not available anywhere", says Scott, who is habituated to "quoting Bill" in the novel (DeLillo, *Mao II* 72). As Bill further says, "[f]or some time now I've had the feeling that novelists and terrorists are playing a zero-sum game.... What terrorists gain, novelists lose. The degree to which they influence mass consciousness is the extent of our decline as shapers of sensibility and thought. The danger they represent equals our own failure to be dangerous" (DeLillo, *Mao II* 156–157). This idea is further emphasized by George Haddad, the political theorist and a close ally of the Beirut terrorists in the novel:

In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the *only meaningful act*.

There's too much everything, more things and messages and meanings than we can use in ten thousand life times. ... Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith. Everything else is absorbed. The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is *absorbed and processed and incorporated*. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only the terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn't figured out how to assimilate him. (DeLillo, *Mao II* 157; emphasis added)

Haddad's observation suggests that the only people who are not *absorbed* by the media and who can influence individuals through an aura that they never get in real life, and that the media accords to them, are terrorists and not authors whose influence has now been completely drained by the power of the visual media. The significance of Haddad's comments lies in that it echoes, or rather anticipates, Jean Baudrillard's observation on terrorism in the wake of 9/11 that power and horror are so intricately embedded in technology itself. He provocatively asks: "[w]hen [the] world has been so thoroughly monopolized, when power has been so formidably consolidated by the technocratic machine and the dogma of

globalization, what means of turning the tables remains besides terrorism?” (“Spirit” 14). In a Baudrillardian spirit, DeLillo seems to reveal the actual character of a society the reality of which is both *constituted by* and *characteristic of* media images.

In the novel the role of the media in creating such individuals who lack any essence is suggested by Rashid: “we make and *change history minute by minute*. History is not the book or the human memory. We do history in the morning and change it after lunch” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 235; emphasis added). This “minute by minute” creation of history by such perpetrators of violence is made possible through the instantaneous circulation of images across the world, which has acquired more speed now with digital and cyber technology. This instantaneous creation of history that DeLillo draws our attention to in the novel becomes simultaneously a very compelling and a terrifying reality of our contemporary age, an age where the images circulated on the omnipresent screens create history in seconds. This complex creation of instant history is made possible, I argue, through what Virilio’s categorizes as the “pure war” or “info war” which, for him, is a war of images and information as “it incorporates the ‘weaponry’ of new information and communications technologies, interactivity and the Internet” (qtd. in Armitage, *Virilio* 5). Virilio himself has alerted us to this new, “pure” form of war (metaphorical too, as we are now “bombarded” with various kinds of images including those of catastrophes and calamities by media) in the media saturated age where “[I]mages have turned into ammunition (“Speed-Space” 38). Although Virilio’s discussion of the import of image in our culture is immediately related to the new-age war which, for him, is different from the old era of war, there is an important way in which his comments also become relevant for understanding contemporary culture of media spectacle where the circulation of images itself acquires the vibrancy of (metaphorical) war.

As Virilio suggests, the terrorists feed on the image that the spectacle creates, thereby turning images themselves as ‘mass’ weapons for garnering maximum force on global public opinion. For Virilio, “international terrorism” is “inseparable from this *media front* [“communication weapons”] and, as he further argues, terrorist attacks make sense and have political value *only because of the televised publicity they invariably have at their disposal*” (qtd. in Armitage, *Virilio* 24). The info war that characterizes the contemporary culture for Virilio is relevant in *Mao II*’s context too as the novel stages a ‘war’/contrast between the media-created terrorists and the writer/novel. Bill points to the ties that bind terrorists and media thus “[t]here were the camera-toters and the gun-wavers and [he] saw barely a glimmer of difference” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 197). The incursion of media into every aspect life signals, as DeLillo says in the novel “the end of individuality because,

There’s something menacing and violent about a mass of people which makes us think of the end of individuality, whether they are gathered around a military leader or around a holy man [as captured by media]. The photographic image is a kind of crowd in itself, a jumble of impressions . . . There’s something in the image that seems to collide with the very idea of individual identity. (*Mao II* 87–88)

In another instance, Scott, Bill’s employee, conveys the idea of how images can transform Bill’s perception of himself: “the photograph might make [Bill] look older. Not older in the picture but older as himself, after the fact of the picture. The picture would be a means of transformation. . . Pictures with our likeness make us choose. *We travel into or away from our photographs*” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 141; Emphasis added). The power of images in transforming a person’s idea of herself is further emphasized by Scott: “[w]e’ve learned to see ourselves as if from space, as if from satellite cameras, all the time, all the same” (DeLillo, *Mao II* 89). DeLillo’s reflection in the novel on the power of images in transforming one’s perception of self and the world compel us to consider images as a

medium that construct late twentieth century American culture, often promoting and sometimes resisting the media practice of repeated production and reproduction of images. In conclusion, DeLillo's work should be read and appreciated, as *Mao II* compels us to do, for the uncanny insights it provides into the nature of contemporary American society in particular and of the human condition in general in a world of simulated existence. As in his other novels, in *Mao II* too DeLillo dwells deeper into the psyche and character of American society in an image-saturated age, and diagnoses the disease that America is afflicted with by exploring its symptoms.

c) *Underworld* and the Spectacle of Death

This section examines DeLillo's depiction of the spectacle in his 1997 novel *Underworld*. *This section argues that both the depiction of the repetitive circulation of images of violent events such as John F Kennedy assassination and the mere inclusion of the Zapruder movie in the novel suggest, in a peculiar way, the working of spectacle in a mass media society. I argue that the repeated circulation of the images of the two murderers across different media makes it difficult for the viewers to distinguish the actual from the copies. Drawing on James Compton etc., I also argue that the spectacularization of such events needs to be understood as "the aestheticization of everyday life" that is central to the logic of the spectacle (49).*

DeLillo's *Underworld* depicts, across its narrative span from 1951 to 1999, contemporary American realities in a consumerist and technological society. Although the novel's technological concerns mostly surround military technology, especially the nuclear bomb, across the novel are present the 'realities' and spectacles produced by media. The most compelling examples of the spectacle in the novel involve two episodes: 1) the repetitive playing on a number of television screens of the Zapruder movie on John F Kennedy assassination 2) and the repetitive showing of a video-taped image of the Texas highway killing. These two examples reveal, I argue, how even acts of brutal violence and political

import are not only transformed into mere images of consumption and entertainment but also get wider ‘approval’ and detached response when they are *mediated*.

The difference between *media*-ted experience of an actual event of historical import in a “society of spectacle” and the feeling of togetherness and community felt while experiencing an actual event is summed up by Brian Classic in the novel. Distinguishing between the two, he says, “[w]hen JFK was shot, people went inside. We *watched TV* in dark rooms and *talked on the phone* with friends and relatives. But when Thompson hit the homer, people rushed outside. People *wanted to be together*. Maybe it was the last time people spontaneously went out of their houses for something” (DeLillo 94; emphasis added). The Thomson home run, which took place without media intervention, was experienced as a “moment of binding power” and as a community event signified in the phrase “rushing out” (DeLillo, “Power” 61; *Underworld* 94). As DeLillo himself has pointed out elsewhere, this “power of history” evident in unmediated events has been eroded in the case of John F Kennedy assassination. The technological mediation of the event made individuals recede into oneself (signified in the phrase ‘going inside’, thereby creating a community of viewers in the virtual space (DeLillo, “Power” 61). Instead of wanting “to be together” as in an unmediated society, the people in an ersatz or isolated community of global television stay indoors and watch/consume such events without any direct participation. This is so because the principal effects of the spectacle are alienation and the eroding of “social collective”, giving way to individualism and solipsism, as Debord and Briziarelli and Armano have argued (21). The direct witnessing of the unrepeatable and unmediated game of the 1951 takes on a “clarity and intactness that”, as DeLillo suggests, “amounts to a moral burnish”, and stands in comparison with the mediated event of the John F Kennedy assassination which is reduced to the repetitive playing not of the actual event itself but of the repeated images and copies of commodified versions of it (“Power” 63).

The scene involving a short video (the Zapruder movie) of the assassination is indexical of the society of the spectacle. This scene is presented in an episode where the renowned artist, Klara Sax and her lover, Miles go to visit an installation at a video artist's studio with a TV wall that has "a hundred identical [TV] sets banked floor to ceiling" (DeLillo, *Underworld* 221). The sets repeatedly show a short movie of 20 seconds or so on John F Kennedy assassination:

The footage started rolling in one room but not the others and it was filled with slurs and jostles, it was totally jostled footage, a home movie shot with a Super 8, ...[T]he force of the shot... killed [the president], unexpectedly,... and people in the room *went ohh*, and then the *next ohh*, and five seconds later the *room at the back went ohh*, *the same release of breath every time, like blurts of disbelief*, and a woman seated on the floor spun away and covered her face because it was completely new, you see, suppressed all these years, this was the *famous headshot* and they had to contend with the impact--aside from the fact that this was the President being shot, past the outer limits of this fact *they had to contend* with the impact that any high-velocity bullet of a certain lethal engineering will make on any human head, and the sheering of tissue and braincase was a terrible revelation. (DeLillo, *Underworld* 221)

Even though the instantaneous reaction of the viewers is one of shock and horror, with each repetition the viewers become more distanced. The reiteration of the images on the screen divests the event of its shock/horror and turn it into a mere object of aesthetic contemplation and entertainment, and a wonder of technological innovation, even of the gun used to shoot the president. This is nothing but, as Compton argues in the context of television news, "the aestheticization of everyday life" that is "the central logic of the spectacle" (49). This art installation also suggests something of the character of a society in which even real/horrific events are aestheticized, as Mark Poster suggests in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, by media

spectacle (128). The multiple television sets that constitute the circulation of the images here seem to also point to the dominance of television as a spectacular commodity and commodity producer, as Jonathan Crary argues in *Eclipse of the Spectacle* (1984). From the mid-1970s, television shifted, Crary argues, “from being a medium of representation to being the centre of mass distribution and regulation of cultural commodities” (qtd. in Briziarelli and Armano 32). What also occurred with such a shift, as he further argues, is the collapsing of the “boundary between the Spectacle and the spectators”, the latter also constituting the former (qtd. in Briziarelli and Armano 33). The intensification of mediation that we have seen in the quoted passage from the novel occurs, I argue, with the affective response/participation of the audience which seems to complete the process of the constitution of the spectacle in the scene.

The mere inclusion of the Zapruder, shaky home movie in the novel itself suggests, in a peculiar way, the working of spectacle in a mass media society. Like the *mis en abyme* process in which the images of the “Falling Man” participate in *Falling Man* endlessly mirroring the “fall” *ad infinitum*, the repeated circulation across different media of the murder makes it difficult for the viewers to distinguish the actual from the copies. The repetition of images *ad infinitum* invades the consciousness of the viewer who becomes addicted to it. If one views such “tape often enough”, as DeLillo says in “The Power of History”, “it tends to transform you, to make you variations of the armed robber in his warped act of consumption..., and it separates you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape” (63). What DeLillo suggests here is also the alienation of individuals that is at the centre of the spectacle. Such re-production/repetition of an event/object takes away its singularity, as famously emphasized by DeLillo in *White Noise* in an episode in which Gladney and Siskind reflect on “the Most Photographed Barn in America” (43). The more you try to capture the image of the barn through technology, the

more difficult it becomes for the beholders to see the actual barn. They see only the photographed image of the barn.

Underworld also presents another event, in the section titled, “Elegy for Left Hand Alone”, providing a chilling example of the production of spectacle (DeLillo 65). This event involves the *media*-ted murdering of a man on the Texas highway which is spectacularized in the novel in a dehumanizing way. A videotape of the shooting of a man by a serial killer named Richard Gilkey and its repetition on T V screens later illustrate the dehumanizing nature of the spectacularization of violence on the media. The incident is accidentally captured from a moving car by a girl who later becomes “the Video Kid”, a name that has been given to her by media as “they have to call her something”, which in itself is characteristics of an age of media spectacle (DeLillo, *Underworld* 68). As DeLillo puts it, the spectacularization of the girl’s act of shooting the murder live makes her, the victim and the murderer “famous in the modern manner of people whose names are strategically withheld”, as they are without names or faces, [like a] spirit living apart from their bodies, the victims and witnesses, the underage criminals, out there somewhere at the edges of perception” (*Underworld* 68). Such *mediation* of actual events with advanced technologies and increased use of mobile phones have become so common now that they become sensations and are repeatedly played, “shared” and “forwarded” across different media in seconds, with the events ultimately becoming some kind of hyperreal things. Such unrelenting presentation of “footage that rolls on and on” on television screens, as DeLillo asserts “has an aimless determination, a persistence that lives outside the subject matter” (*Underworld* 156). This endless circulation is endemic to the spectacularization of such events, as DeLillo asserts:

there is something about [the] videotape[d] crime... This is a crime designed for random taping and immediate playing. You sit there and wonder if this kind of crime became more possible when the means of taping an event and playing it immediately,

without a neutral interval, a balancing space and time, became widely available.

Taping-and-playing *intensifies and compresses the event*. It dangles a need to do it again. (*Underworld* 67-68; emphasis added)

He elucidates the effects this video and its relentless repetition have on individuals who turn numb to the shocking incident, if watched continuously. The reiteration of the image performed when it is co-opted by media capitalism to transform it into a form of entertainment. The tape has a “realness” that outdoes that of an actual event:

there is something about the nature of the tape, the grain of the image, the sputtering black-and-white tones, the starkness—you *think this is more real, true-to-life than anything around you. The things around you have a rehearsed and layered and cosmetic look*. The tape is superreal, or maybe underreal is the way you want to put it. It is what lies at the scraping bottom of all the layers you have added. And this is another reason why you keep on looking. The tape has a *searing realness*. (DeLillo, *Underworld* 157; emphasis added)

The “more you watch” such a tape, as the novel suggests, “the deader and colder and more relentless it becomes”, and it “sucks the air right out of your chest but you watch it every time” (DeLillo, *Underworld* 69).

The novel’s connection to images and the social implications of their reiteration across various media are also implied in the section-titles of the novel which suggests the influencing power of images in a technological culture. The title of the novel itself suggests something of this: *Underworld* is a distorted title of the long-lost movie *Unterwelt* by Sergei Eisenstein. The prologue of the novel borrows the title of Pieter Bruegel’s painting *The Triumph of Death*, the title of the fourth part of the novel is the advertisement slogan “Better Things for Better Living through Chemistry” for Dow Chemical, and part five takes as its title the 1972 Robert Frank documentary on the Rolling stone “Cocksucker Blues” (DeLillo,

Underworld 1, 43, 166; Dini 178). DeLillo seems to suggest through these titles not only the power of the image and media in shaping the consciousness and perception of writers but also how images and society are interconnected in a consumerist culture.

d) *Falling Man*/9/11 and the Spectacle of the Fall

This section discusses DeLillo's treatment of the spectacle around 9/11 as it is present in *Falling Man*, a novel that deals with the after effects of the events on survivors. The novel's inclusion of the image of "falling man", captured by Richard Drew, and the various images of the attack circulated by media constitute the spectacle in the novel. *Drawing on Paul Virilio's observation on the "militarization of television" in the context of "new age terrorism", I argue that the circulation of the image of the fall and media's spectacularization of terrorist acts need to be understood in the context of what he calls "a landscape of events" that involve big cities (qtd. in Armitage, Virilio 2012, 179). Analyzing especially the images in circulation and the different outtakes of the fall captured by Drew, I argue that the repetitious circulation of these images of destruction, of terrorists, and people dying that constitute the spectacle in the novel prevents individuals from retaining their affective complexes such as empathy, while also weakening their own capacity to know and feel the horror of such event (Virilio 2000, 21). Drawing on the reinterpretations of the Debordian spectacle, I also argue that contemporary spectacle entails the active participation of the viewers and actors, as the novel suggests, in order for it to be fully actualized. The spectacted event—the performance of the "falling man"—in the novel needs to be understood not just as an alienating event/image, but as allowing agency for the audience, as it is presented in the novel as a performance, and compel them to participate in a interactive, performative act of entangled relationality between the actor/performer of the spectacle and the viewer/reader.*

Media spectacle and the implications of the repetitive nature of images in society form part of one of the themes of *Falling Man*, a novel that puts at the centre stage the image of the

“Falling Man” that has been circulated across different media and cultures since the attack on the World Trade Centre. The image of “Falling Man” from one of the twin towers taken by Richard Drew is perhaps one of the most horrifying, circulated, and discussed images in the wake of 9/11 (Junod, “Falling Man”, 2009). The media that covered the event created a huge spectacle that was unparalleled in the history of America in that the live and repeated supply of images attracted the vehement criticism of cultural commentators and theorists such as Fredric Jameson—who accused the media of staging a “dissociation of sensibility” through supplying an array of “unrealistic visuals”—and Jean Baudrillard who attacked the media saying that the media took “hostage” of the 9/11 events through the images that, for him, “consumed the event” (Jameson, “Dialectics” 297; Baudrillard 27).

Though the novel does not contain within the text the image of the falling man—as in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* with its illustrations of “Falling Man”—the falling image is the most indexical of the circulation, repetition, and spectacle of the media that form part of the reality of contemporary (American) society. The original photo taken by Drew seems to create, as Francesco Pontuale puts, “a *mise en abyme* of the fall” created by the actual jumper, Drew’s photograph of it, the Falling Man’s (David Janiak) recreation of it as a performance in the novel and by DeLillo’s own re-creation of the “Falling Man” in the novel (187). The image is so reiterated and reproduced *ad infinitum* that it also seems to form part of what DeLillo himself has described in “The Power of History” as “the means [that culture] has devised to disremember the past”, means that are evident in “the rerun, the sequel, the theme park, the designer outlet”, in a culture that “continue... to imitate itself endlessly” (63). The media spectacle that 9/11 as an event involved and that DeLillo represents in his novel will make more sense if one were to look at how the very circulation of the images seems to have hijacked the event, as Baudrillard has suggested. Virilio’s comments on the “militarization of television” seems to be very pertinent here. Contemporary

terrorism, which he calls as “new age of terrorism”, needs to be understood not from the perspective of the strategies of old age terrorism but within the context of what he calls “a landscape of events” that also involve big cities (qtd.in Armitage, *Virilio* 179)²⁷. The repetitious circulation of images of destruction, of terrorists, and people dying that constitute what Virilio calls as “militarization of television”, I argue, also prevents us from retaining our affective complexes such as empathy, while also weakening our own capacity to know and feel the horror of the event (*Landscape* 21). In order to process what really happened outside this experience of such spectacularization, it seems that we need, as Richard Gray reminds us, to “defamiliarize” ourselves from what we already knew through media’s circulation of the images of the events (30–40). Drawing on Virilio I argue that the consumers of such events/spectacle, as presented in *Falling Man*, “inhabit” not only the spectacle but also the actual process of the Western policies that sanction counter-terrorism measures like the “war on terror” that also has killed thousands of innocents. This is made possible through a “militarization of television” that occurs through a “telegenic quality of such atrocities constantly reinforcing their evocative power” through media spectacle in an “age of imbalance” where the main weaponry of war and counter war is information/image itself (*Landscape* 21).

“All life had become public”, says the protagonist, Keith Neudecker, in *Falling Man*, indicating the loss of privacy for the survivors of 9/11 whose very right to and possibility for

²⁷ Television-mediated events like 9/11, according to Virilio, “entail, and emerge from, a new era of terrorism” that does not “just change a situation but destroys it” (qtd. in Armitage, *Virilio* 179-180). The mediated event of 9/11—both the terrorist act and the mediation of it through live broadcasting—is an example, according to Virilio, of a new “era of terrorism [that] is not driven by a state’s military interventionism”, as much as it is inhabited by the people of great metropolises. It is so because “[the] terrorist criminal acts shown on television escalate our fears, and therefore we are habituated to and come to have faith in the government’s counter-terrorism policies, or at least accept and are forced to lead a terrorized and fearful life” (qtd. in Armitage, *Virilio* 185). The “fears” and the expectation of the government from the public to have an investment in their policy of counter terrorism, and their need to have trust in governments, as well as to support its anti-terrorist policies all were generated by the spectacle in which media engaged. This is what DeLillo seem to suggest in a later novel when he says: “[w]e tried to create new realities overnight, careful sets of words that resemble *advertising slogans* in memorability and *repeatability*. Those were words that would yield *pictures eventually and then become three-dimensional*. The reality stands, it walks, it squats” (*Point Omega* 28–9; emphasis added).

narrating the experience is hijacked and silenced by media's spectacularization and hyperreal coverage of the event (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 182). People have to shut their television sets, as the estranged wife of Keith—a lawyer who works in the World Trade Center and who has just escaped from the collapsed tower—does in order to “protect” her husband from the “news he’d just walked out of” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 87). The compulsion to shut the television, I argue, doesn’t seem to be an act of resistance against the spectacle—as resistance functions in some of DeLillo’s novels—rather it stems from the shock of a realization, as Baudrillard puts, that the “media are part of the event, they are part of the terror”, as “they work in both directions” (*Spirit* 31). This is so because, as he further states extending Debord’s idea of the spectacle, the “spectacle of terrorism forces the spectacle upon us, and it is the purest form of spectacle” (30). Baudrillard’s provocative observation on the new form of spectacle seems to rhyme with Virilio’s explication of the power of the “militarization of television” in the context of new age terrorism (*Landscape* 21).

There is a brilliant contrast that DeLillo stages in the novel using Keith and Lianne and their two different kinds of experience of the events: Keith’s is a direct experience, while Lianne’s is a *mediated* one. While Keith lives and struggles with the embodied memory of the event, for Lianne—who has to process the images of the spectacle on the TV to “experience” it—it is like what Baudrillard calls “an image-event,” an event which is ‘staged’ by the “instantaneous worldwide transmission” by the media of the horrific images of the attack (*Spirit* 27). For Lianne, the witnessing of the whole event, especially the destruction of the Twin Towers, on television seems more ‘real’ than the ‘reality’ that Keith or any other victim can provide, because the images circulated by the media in the form of spectacle is, as Baudrillard asserts, “the primal scene”, for her “it is [the] real” event, and the “*frisson* of the real is added to the image” rather than it is the other way (*Spirit* 28-19). In other words, what constitutes the realness of the event for her is the image that is imprinted in her mind as the

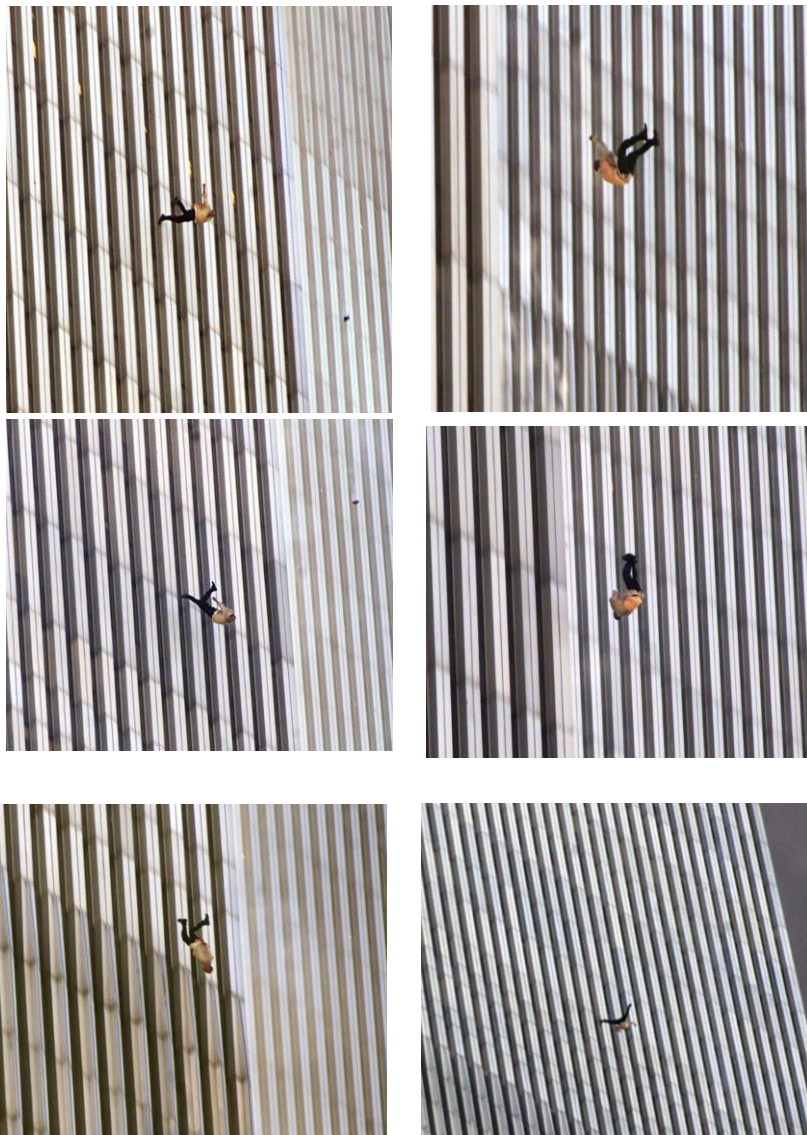
real, the realness of the event is only superadded to this image-reality. The is so because the *character* of such a social order is determined by such images and information circulated ad infinitum.

A very compelling instance of this compulsion forced upon individuals by the spectacle to believe the image-as-the-real (event) can be seen in the episode where both Keith and Lianne sit to watch the events on television. She imagines Keith as already dead, and thinks that Keith holds her hand to “console her for his dying”: “They would all be dead, passengers and crew, and thousands in the towers dead, and she felt it in her body, a deep pause, and thought there he is, unbelievably, in one of those towers, and now his hand on hers, in pale light, as though to console her for his dying” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 135). Even Keith, the one who watches the events with his embodied memory cannot believe it because that is “[t]he way the camera sort of shows surprise” (DeLillo. *Falling Man* 135). DeLillo’s reflection on and Lianne’s response to, Richard Drew’s famous photograph of the ‘falling man’ in the novel provides yet another example of the power of image in an age of spectacle. As Lewis Gleich observes, astonished “by the symmetry of Drew’s photograph”—in particular, by Drew’s ability to capture the man as he falls ‘almost precisely between’ the two towers — Lianne concludes that the man is a “falling angel’ whose beauty is horrific” (165). The passage that captures this experience of Lianne is worth quoting here as it also reveals how the spectacle created by media images not only makes one numb and “make[s] a hole in [one’s] mind’, but also invites one to aestheticize such a horrific scene:

[t]he man falling, the towers contiguous, she thought, behind him...the man set almost precisely between the rows of darker and lighter stripes. Headlong, free fall, she thought, and this picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, *he was a*

falling angel and his beauty was horrific. ... It is the ideal falling motion of a body (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 221-22; emphasis added).

The logic and the working of the spectacle is also embedded in the back story of how this particular photograph of the falling man—who, for Lianne, “appears relaxed”, [and] “comfortable”— became famous and not any of the many other outtakes that were not revealed to the public, as Tom Junod has observed (see the outtakes given below).



(Figs. 2-6. Tom Junod, *Falling Man*. 2021, *Esquire*)

In most of these outtakes the tragedy, horror and shock of the fall—embodied in the “twisting and turning of his body’s chaotic trajectory downward”—through which he was “trying to

“hold on to the life he was leaving”, are shockingly etched on (Junod, “Falling Man”, 2021, 7). The selective inclusion of only one particular photograph, sanitized of all shock and horror, suggests the brutal aestheticization of such a tragedy by media spectacle. As a counter-force to this media spectacle DeLillo employs the performance artist, David Janiak, (“Falling Man”), as he has used such artists as Bill Gray, Klara Sax, and The Moon Man in some of his earlier novels.

As I have argued, the media-circulated images of 9/11, especially that of the falling man, constitute it as a spectacle that is removed, static, objectified and alienating for its viewers because of the events’ mediation. However, as some critics have pointed out, literary re-presentation of the events have been able, to a certain extent, to not only challenge the alienating, static spectacles circulated by media but also produce agential-actants whose active participation in the ‘performance’ of spectacted events also changes the meaning of the spectacle in the digital age (Silva). This is mostly made possible by the insertion of performativity—as the re-inscription of “the falling man” in the figure of a performance-artist in *Cosmopolis*—into the narrative fold of some of these novels. The inclusion of the fall—the most terrifying act—as performance function, I argue, as counter narrative to the “objectified, static ‘spectacle’” of the media²⁸ (Silva 3). This critical potential of ‘performance’ in viewing horrific events like 9/11 has been suggested by John Bell while arguing that events such as 9/11 can be better approached in terms of their “performativity,” as it can lead to a deeper understanding of the event²⁹.

²⁸ In here discussion of post-9/11 novels’ re-presentation of the events, Christine Silva argues that “considering post 9/11 texts as ‘theatrical’ involves analyzing the way they offer themselves up as dramatic focal points and stages of ideas and counter-narratives. They do this in their dynamic exchanges between actors and audiences which promote identities defined by *relationality* rather than inert distance and polarization” (6).

²⁹ He argues that “using the tools of performance studies to analyze how calculated violence is employed in media-saturated society is not an insult to the memories of those who died, but an essential means of understanding the undeniably symbolic level at which global conflict is now being played out. It is clear that such vivid terms as “Axis of Evil,” “Homeland Security,” and “Weapons of Mass Destruction” have been put into play with full cognizance of their semiotic value, and we will only understand the actual implications of

Falling Man's inclusion of Janiak's performance not only emphasizes the idea of "terror-as-theater metaphor" but also accords agential power to the audience/readers in that the performance demands an active and dynamic relationship between the performer (here Janiak) and the audience (here Lianne) as it produces "movement" and "interaction", rather than distance and alienation (Silva 4). Instead of thinking the fall-as-spectacle as media perpetuates it, one may consider DeLillo's engagement with it—and his urge to us to engage with it—as constituting a relationality network between the victims, actors and audience. In this way, the performance can allow us to rethink 9/11 as an event and the very character of contemporary "spectacle" in the digital age as participatory. Janiak's very enactment of the fall requires the participation/performative participation of the audience as it is a performance intended to be witnessed. His performance is met with vehement disapproval, as evident in the initial discomfort in Lianne, from the viewers in the beginning because of the horrific act he is performing that reminds them of the original tragic fall:

Traffic was barely moving now. There were people shouting up at him, outraged at the *spectacle* . . . It held the gaze of the world, she thought. There was the awful openness of it, something we'd not seen, the single falling figure that trails a collective dread, body come down among us all. And now, she thought, this little *theater piece*, disturbing enough to stop traffic and send her back into the terminal. (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 33; emphasis added)

The passage not only reveals the shock that the performance incites but how Lianne's response to it changes from terming the act as "spectacle" at first and then as a "theater piece". It is because it is at this moment/movement that Lianne is able to reflect deeply on the

these concepts and the actions connected to them—performatives all—if we are able to comprehend them on an equally sophisticated level of analysis. The concept of performance, and our studies of performance, can help us understand and respond to these new exigencies (Bell 7).

symbolic dimension of the performance, “a reinterpretation and re-confrontation of the “dread” of 9/11” (Silva 8). Rather than leaving him, she begins to understand that he is trying to communicate/interact with her/them:

This was too near and deep, too personal.” ... *She did not think of turning and leaving.*” ... “*She did not think of walking away*” ... “She watched him, her shoulder jammed to the brick wall of the building” ... “Then she began to understand.” ... “this is what he *wanted*, an audience *in motion*, passing scant yards from his standing figure...” . (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 162-165; emphasis added)

Her “interaction” with the performance/performer compels her to deeply reflect on her fears, and connect to the original event as she experienced it at the time of the fall of the tower. Instead of the passive, removed and alienating character of the spectacle of the media, this performative spectacle incorporates her into the very depth/fold of the performance, thereby asking her to engage with it.

This interactive response attains more intensity and closeness in her next encounter with it/him: “She wished she could believe this was some kind of antic *street theater*, and *absurdist drama* that provokes onlookers to share a comic understanding of what is irrational in the great schemes of being or in the next small footstep. *This was too near and deep, too personal*” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 163; emphasis added). As I have already noted, Lianne has only a *media*-ted experiencing of the original fall of the tower and the victims, which she is not able to stop watching, however alienating it is: “Every time she saw a videotape of the planes, she moved a finger toward the power button on the remote. Then she kept on watching” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 134). However, the falling man’s performance is different because, as Silva argues,

there is no “remote” to distance herself from the action. She is also unable to emotionally distance herself because of the extremity of the falling man’s act. His performance is close, personal, and meant, Lianne thinks, to recreate the frantic response New Yorkers had to 9/11 as they are reconfronted with the haunting image of a falling stranger that could just as easily be a friend, coworker, or relative. (8)

Reasserting the relational connection of the audience to the performance/performer, Lianne states that what the performer “wanted [is] an audience in motion, passing scant yards from his standing figure” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 164). The crucial moment of connection occurs when “she wonders “if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 165). This intimate connection between her/the viewer and the performer is what is lacking in a media-spectacularized acts. Also, this connection is affectively *moving*—between her/the audience and Janiak/the performance—than in the stationary witnessing of the original event on television, not only because of her *intimate/“personal” connection to it* but also it reconnects her with the original event in a deeply critical and ethical way (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 165; emphasis added).

In the later part of part three of the novel titled “David Janiak”, Lianne—in her attempt to delve deep into the meaning of his performance—reads the falling man’s obituary in a newspaper. Looking for the image of his second performance that she witnessed, she realizes that “there were no photographs of that fall” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 223). However, DeLillo says, making the connection/interaction between the two more vivid, “she was the photograph, the photosensitive surface” (onto which the meaning of the real events can be etched). “That nameless body coming down, this *was hers* to record and *absorb*” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 223; emphasis added). Her connection to the performance is so strong that she

has been “absorbed” into its fold. In other words, in her attempt to “interpret” the meaning of his performance, she *becomes* “the photograph,” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 223). It is at this moment that she becomes deeply reflective of the original fall, especially when she finds an image of the original fall of the victim: “The picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, he was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific” (DeLillo, *Falling Man* 222).

Although this spectacle-image, circulated across media, initially distanced her from the tragedy, her re-connection to it through Janiak’s performance not only helps her relive the actual event but also connect her to the victims in a more political and ethical way. This is because of the agential capacity accorded to her by the spectacle-performance of Janiak.

In a way, readers are also implicated in this performative act as the performance in the novel is also a *theatrical space* for thinking about what constitutes the event, apart from what media circulate as reality (Bell 12; emphasis added). In this sense, the readers also engage in, I argue, a performative reading of the performance to both unravel its complexity and its ability to absorb him/her into its folder, making the relationality dynamic and intense. However, it seems that Janiak’s performance cannot be completely disentangled from the original image of the falling victim taken by Drew, thereby making him a copy/part of the circuit of the image that has already become a spectacle. Janiak, in this sense, seems to become—through his re-iteration of the fall, and his inscription into the circuit of re-iteration—another repeatedly seen “image” completing the circle of the spectacle. However, his potential to integrate the audience into the moral, ethical and political depth of the performance makes it a spectacle that not only accords agential power to the audience but connects spectators, events and victims than distancing them from each other as in the case of an objectified, static spectacle.

III) Technological Culture and the Production of “Waste”: “Waste” and “Wasted Lives” in DeLillo’s *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis*

In this section, I examine various forms of ‘waste’ as they appear in DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003). Drawing on Susan Signe Morrison, Zygmunt Bauman etc., I argue that DeLillo presents ‘waste’ in these novels as the after-effects of modernity. These novels’ concerns with the rampant culture of consumerism and cyber capitalism allow us to understand the production of new forms of ‘waste’, including in the form of human, in a highly technologized society as America, compelling us to believe if waste is the true character of contemporary society. While in *Underworld* DeLillo depicts the character of a society determined by the proliferation of material waste and presents the ‘recyclers’ of waste as creating certain counter narrative in a highly consumer society, in *Cosmopolis* DeLillo presents “waste” and ‘wasted lives’ as the dark side of modernity, and as the product of a culture of speed whose pace is constantly increased by the insertion of ideas of futurity into the present by technology. Drawing on Bauman and Morrison, I argue that ‘wasted lives’ are the products of the logic within which cyber capitalism operates, rendering ‘waste’ certain lives that are destined to live offline/on the margin of a highly technologized society as America.

Technological culture produces its inevitable residue called waste in various forms. ‘Waste’, both in terms of wasted human lives—the unfit/unsuitable produced by the logic of the capitalist market—and material wastes—things that have become obsolete either by use or uselessness or as the outcome of modernization process—has been used by cultural theorists to define contemporary society that is characterized by high technology, information flow and capitalism (Hawkins and Muecke [2003], Bauman [2004], Gabrys [2013]). As they have shown, waste is an outcome of the increasing demand for new forms of production, products and consumption in an increasingly globalized, consumerist and

technologized world the order of which is characterized by instantaneity and speed. The waste produced by ‘the excess’ and ‘unwanted’ in a society, or made thus by technologies can inform the character of a society, as pointed out by Bauman and others. This aspect of a society-as-waste or its dominant culture as “waste” has been emphasized, among others, by contemporary writers of fiction including DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace.

In his *Underworld* and *Cosmopolis* DeLillo shows, in more than one way, how various military and media technologies and the Internet produce different forms of “waste”, constituting the peculiar character of American society as it is presented in his work. Apart from the material “waste” that constantly appears in the sprawling narrative space of *Underworld*, there is also the production of figurative “waste” that includes individuals who deal with waste products—such as the waste analyst Nick Shay, the recyclers of waste Klara Sax and the Moon man in *Underworld*—and individuals whose lives become “waste/d” either by modernization or by the logic of capitalism. DeLillo’s concerns with the production of such waste that appears as the detritus of technology-driven commodity culture create certain impressions in these novels, compelling us to think that one of the dominant characteristics of contemporary American society is “waste” and the order it creates.

Waste is the most discussed aspect of *Underworld* (Boxall [2008], Kavadlo [2001], Tanner [2000], and Robson [2009]). The obsession with contemporary culture of waste is shown through the various objects, people, acts, etc. in the novel. There are not only objects as/producing waste—recycled garbage, junk, excrement, used condoms, nuclear bomb and deactivated aircraft—but also individual as “waste/d”, or rendered waste through killing and drug addiction. There is also the recycling of waste, the perfect example of which is in the art installation created by Klara Sax out of waste materials. Waste also returns to haunt those who produce it and as Nick Shay says, “what we produce will return to overwhelm, consume

us” as “we are unable to contain waste, it [instead] contains us” (DeLillo, *Underworld* 224). Through the character Nick Shay DeLillo compels us to see what happens when a consumer product is used and becomes “waste”. This process of wasting also shows how, as Duvall says, “capital through advertising is able to reify the shopping experience in consumer consciousness before the moment of purchase” (Duvall, *DeLillo’s Underworld* 59).

To examine the importance of waste in DeLillo’s novels and how its presence allows us to understand *waste* as one of the peculiar characteristics of contemporary American society steeped in technological realities, it is important that we look at some of the works that have touched upon DeLillo’s concerns with ideas of waste in his novels. Several critics have written on DeLillo’s use of “waste” in *Underworld*, and have offered various interpretation of its figuration in the novel. For instance, Ruth Helyer sees waste in the novel as the “unwanted baggage” which sullies our ability to conform to an accepted prototype. John Duvall observes that “DeLillo uses a literal wasteland, the recurring representation of massive landfills, to present spiritually wasted lives” and finds in the title *Underworld* a reference to such a world of waste created by “American consumer culture” (*DeLillo’s Underworld* 2–28). Duvall also says that DeLillo shows us the connection between “nuclear and consumer waste”, and “represents yet another underworld, the homeless of New York City, who fall outside of American consumerism” (*DeLillo’s Underworld* 28). The latter figurations of waste in the novel are human wastes or wasted humans who live outside the social border.

Jesse Kavadlo argues that the waste in *Underworld* has metaphorical and intertextual undertones with the very project of DeLillo’s writing. He reads ideas of waste in it through Nick Shay, who he considers as “an ironic DeLillo double: both grow up in the Bronx, are about the same age, and attend[ed] Fordham University” (387). He considers DeLillo as a “kind of waste manager himself, not unlike Nick Shay, sifting and sorting through the

physical, metaphysical, and spiritual excesses, contaminants, and wastes of our modernity” in the novel (387, 385). DeLillo’s attempt in the novel, Kavelo further argues, is that of a “metaphorical waste manager-reusing, re-appropriating, recycling, and ultimately redeeming language” in an engaging inter-textual manner (385). Osteen’s reading of “waste” in *Underworld* sees a parallel between the project of *Underworld* as a novel and the work of the various artist-figures in it, whose project is presented in it as an act of “resistance and redemption,” “an ecological ideal in which recycled waste represents a form of grace” (216). He sees the artists’ work as “salvage operations, recycling projects [that] redeem and transmogrify the refuse of consumerism and the Cold War” (Osteen 216). The above-mentioned critical works on waste’s figuration—both literal and metaphoric—in *Underworld* points to the significance of DeLillo’s work in understanding American society, characterized especially by the excess produced by capitalism and consumerism, and the logic within which such societies function.

The presence of waste in *Underworld* is not just the recycling part of our consumer culture, but it is the very constitutive entity of our existence today: waste defines or constitutes the modern life. In this sense, the novel *represents* waste than *recycling* it, as Molly Wallace observes (380). Through its presentation of various forms of waste, the novel alerts us to our fate in a highly *media*-ted age when everything can be easily “replayed and worn out” (DeLillo, *Underworld* 42). There is an unusual manner in which the baseball, which was the centre of Bobby Thomson’s home-run in 1951 National League baseball, appears as ‘waste’. The novel traces the trajectory of the baseball, that had managed to escape media spectacle “because [the home run] happened decades ago when things were not replayed and [easily] worn out and run down and used up before midnight of the first day” (DeLillo, *Underworld* 126). Drawing on Tod McGowan, I argue that the ball “serves [in the novel] as the object that unites all [those who watched the match], insofar as it embodies the

mystery behind the event” (DeLillo, *Underworld* 42; McGowan 126). The ball, as an object of the past, is laden with metaphors of waste [as the memorabilia from the home run], though it has survived the waning of the “aura” (that Walter Benjamin talks about) around things. The ball also becomes a material waste too, as the novel suggests, as it has been worn out and is a residue from the past: “[t]he ball was a deep sepia, veneered with *dirt* and *turf* and *generational sweat*—it was *old*, *bunged up*, it was *bashed* and *tobacco-juiced* and stained by natural processes and by the lives behind it, weather-spattered and characterized as a seafront house (DeLillo, *Underworld* 131; emphasis added). The ball, after so many handing downs, is finally in the hands of the ‘waste manager’, Nick Shay.

It is, however, also the ball’s unmediated character that paradoxically renders it a waste, a wasted object whose very existence is suspected by many in the novel as it doesn’t get *authenticated* by media representation. This idea is conveyed by DeLillo in the novel when Manx Martin, Cotter Martin’s father tries to sell it. He gets only around thirty dollars for the ball “that seems to recapitulate the whole history of the game every time it is thrown or hit or touched”, because no one can believe its authenticity:

Thirty-two dollars and change. He feels the familiar stab of betrayal. Be messing with his head. Tricked him every which way. The baseball’s bound to appreciate is the word. And the cash be worth less by the minute. He looks in doorways for the preacher because he wants to give him the money. Get it off his hands. He wants to push the money in the old man's clothes just to be done with it. Give it to someone with a scientific interest in the stuff. (DeLillo, *Underworld* 8, 298)

The ball acquires the status of a cultural detritus, as McGowan suggests, as it is “an impossible object”—impossible because “[t]he ball is *the* object... of desire..., and yet no one seems to have it (126). Even the person who has the ball is unable to *possess* it because

its value lies in its *absence*”, an absence that, that I argue, is felt and experienced not only through a desire for it but also thorough its repetitive representation on the media that creates a desire for possessing it (McGowan 126). It seems to have a value only when it is relentlessly and repeatedly replayed on mass media, as the repeatedly-shown, video-taped Texas Highway killing in the novel. The replaying of the video “intensifies and compresses the event”, as DeLillo suggests (*Underworld* 67-68). Drawing on Freud and Lacan, McGowan further argues that the ball—which is an *objet petita*, or the object-cause of desire—acts as an engine for desire insofar as *we do not have it* (126). It is an impossible object because when we do have it, we realize “that’s not it” (McGowan 126). The object that one acquires is never the object that one desires”, a desire constructed by media circulation of it, “because the *objet petit a* only exists insofar as it remains out of reach”, when it is elsewhere (McGowan 126). It is an object that can serve only as a “cause of desire, but it cannot satisfy [the] desire” (McGowan 126).

Appearing on various figurations, “waste” even assumes the status of a character in the novel, as Tony Tanner rightly observes (214). This idea is further emphasized by the fact that there are characters in the novel who, as I have already mentioned, deal with waste in some way or the other. However, waste—being the residual excess of a capitalist society—has to be expunged; but as the novel suggests, it resists all attempts to bury it. The attempt to control waste produces more waste, creating a culture of waste. These accords waste a very complex character in the novels as waste in it *becomes* something more than itself, as it produces both fear and fascination. DeLillo seems to suggest that waste, in a peculiar way, also concerns human character itself: ‘waste’ as something that *is* the product of human behavior, interactions, uses, desires, impulse, habit, uncontrollable needs, passion, excesses and so forth. To put it in psychoanalytical terms, waste results most often from human’s desires, fantasy, and enjoyment. Commodity culture and global capitalism have rendered waste the

very character of the products we use, as the novel suggests. In other words, waste is the very character of commodity itself. Waste is the *extimacy*³⁰ in Lacanian terms, as argued by Leonard Wilcox, and is the most alien kernel of a global capitalist culture of commodity.

“Waste” also appears in the form of media excess/simulacra, the most quintessential instance of which is evident in DeLillo’s millennial novel *Cosmopolis*. *Cosmopolis* suggests, through its delineation of the sublime experience of globalization and cyber-capitalism, how information technology both *becomes* and *creates* ‘wastes’ in various forms. The Information on the web, which can be characterized as waste *par excellence*, is waste not only because of its excessive nature but also because of its untenability. This is technology becoming waste, which has been emphasized by Bauman while suggesting that there is the ‘programming’ of waste carried out by new information technologies of the late-twentieth and early-twentieth-first centuries (25). According to him, the increasing rise of information technology is an excellent example, as Bauman argues, of the *programming* of waste by the Internet that itself, for him, appears as a waste-bin filled with “an infinitely capacious, and exponentially growing, waste-information” (25). In a different context, Roberto Simanowski also shares this idea of how the Internet can be “characterized in terms of ‘waste’, as it is “a byproduct of ARPAnET (Advanced Research Projects Agency network) and ARPAnET of MILnET (Military network) (iv).

The excess of information stored in the web repository both fascinates us and makes us desirous for controlling them (Bauman 25, 26). The endless amount of information in it also creates in us “an abstract need for control of information that can never in fact be satisfied” (Bauman 26). The attempt to control such “information wastes” also creates certain outcasts,

³⁰ The word *extimacy* is the rough English translation of the word *extimite*, a neologism by Jacques Lacan by adding the prefix *ex* from *exterieur* (exterior) to Freud’s word *intimite* (intimacy). The word refers to psychoanalysis’ problematization of “the opposition between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. To cite an example—the real is just as much outside as inside. The other is as much stranger to me as it is inside me” (Lacan 105).

as they fail to control it or use it to their advantages, by the more expert or powerful. The information-waste, like all other wastes, “is self-propelling” because any effort to control/dispose such waste creates more waste (Bauman 26). This is exactly the condition that both drives and ultimately destroys Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis*. The novel portrays the 28-year-old multi-millionaire, thriving on cyber-capital, taking on a Ulyssean journey—both through real and cyber space—through New York City. The journey encompasses his venturing out on an eventful day supposedly for a haircut and the various events he witnesses and people he meets—both online and offline—on his way, providing readers with strange and bewildering epiphanies about capitalism, globalization and the “technological sublime” (Tabbi 1995). His attempt is mostly to ‘control’ information (data on money exchange) on the web. However, his attempts to ‘control’/speculate fail and the rate of the currency finally crumbles, destroying his wealth and turning him too into a “waste”, even with his death, in the world of other cyber capitalists.

Benno Levin, an ex-employee of Packer and the one who kills him, is the “other” created by the capitalist excess/order in which Packer shares a major ‘stake’. He is, in a sense, a “wasted life”, to borrow Bauman’s term, produced by the excessive demand and logic of a capitalist system. This fact is asserted by the character Vija Kinski in the novel: “the force of cyber-capital will send people into the gutter to retch and die” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 38). Levin is pushed to the “gutter”, and is made “unfit” by the logic of capitalist modes of operation that promotes people like Eric Packer whose possession of wealth and technologies and his ability to predict the future of currency make him the hero in a cyber-capital world (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 38). The improvement demanded by the ever-increasing capitalist system makes Levin a ‘bad’ guy or an unfit ‘waste’. He is ‘bad’ or unfit because he is, to invoke Bauman, a “waste of improvement” (29). This condition is created by an impulse to design and redesign things and human beings in accordance with the new and

latest technologies of capitalist system. It is also an attempt to create a sort of “togetherness” or “similarity”: you should work as any other person does, otherwise you do not fit in. As Bauman rightly puts it, “[w]hen it comes to designing the forms of human togetherness, the waste is human beings. Some human beings who do not fit into the designed form nor can be fitted into it” ... become “[b]lots on the otherwise elegant and serene landscape” (30).

This ‘wasting’ of human and objects in DeLillo’s work will make more sense, if we flesh out the word ‘waste’ and its various meanings/etymological routes. The idea of exclusion is built into the word ‘waste’: the etymology of the word “waste” itself is rooted in the “Latin word for “desert’ and “desolate”” (Morrison, *Excrement* 154). “Waste”, as Morrison argues, is [only] produced within a teleological framework—something useful comes to lose its usefulness”—and also within the logic of lack—as one of the etymologies of the word, “desolate” indicates. But “waste” is understood as that which is “excess”, or waste as something that is surplus (Morrison, “Waste Aesthetics” 8). In other words, as Morrison says waste has meant desolation, pointlessness, and uselessness, but also excess and surplus; both extremes have been viewed as problematic, void of meaning, and immoral” (Morrison, “Waste Aesthetics” 8). This is further emphasized by William Viney when he says that the word “waste” derives “from *vastus*, giving it the same Latin root as the word ‘vast’ and meaning “a time and space that is void”, immense or enormous. The vast etymology of waste...includes the verb *vasto*, “to make empty or vacant to leave unattended or inhabited, to desert” (18). The earliest uses of the word ‘waste’ invariably denote an enormous and empty sense of a depopulated landscape, uninhabited (Viney 18).

There is a close link, especially within capitalist culture, between waste and the “other” or othering. As Christopher Schmidt argues, capitalism names “waste as *other*, against which value, profit, and product are then defined”, though he speaks of capitalist materials here one can identify the human side of waste here too and how it is produced by the logic of

capitalism (157). Levin is a waste created from without and within. He becomes an “Other” to the “cosmopolitan” Eric Packer—as the title of the novel suggests—whose vision of future is that human can become immortal by being encoded “in a chip, on a disk, as data.” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206). Levin is homeless and represents the other side of Packer’s wealth and possession of technology in a “liquid modern” state (Bauman 11). According to Bauman, in “liquid modernity”, “wasted” humans” are those who are unemployed or no longer ‘useful’ (10). They are redundant as they have “been disposed of *because of being disposable*” (Bauman 11). He also alerts our attention to the close connection between redundancy and waste: Redundancy shares its semantic space with ‘rejects’, ‘wastrels’, ‘garbage’, ‘refuse’—with *waste*” (Bauman 10-12; emphasis original). Yuval Noah Harari also makes similar observation in the context of a potential digital dictatorship that Big Data may introduce in the near future (12). The proliferation of data and data preservation will create, according to him, a new form of dictatorial rule in the near future when the most powerful will possess and control all the data³¹. Packer, with his monumental wealth, possession of data and the most advanced technologies, aptly fits the figure of individuals belonging to such a tiny group of digital dictators, while people like Levin will “suffer not from exploitation, but from something far worse—irrelevance” (Harari 12). In this sense, Levin being a “wasted human” is nothing short of him becoming “irrelevant” in such a world order that belongs to the rich and powerful like Packer (Harari 12).

However, the wasted human/life is a social construct because, as Mary Douglas has reminded us, the idea of waste cannot be ascribed to humans or things (qtd. in Bauman 23). For objects and people are neither ‘waste’ by their inherent qualities, nor do they *become* ‘waste’ “through their inner logic”; but they become ‘waste’ through human design or an

³¹ Harari argues in *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* that “Big Data algorithms might create digital dictatorships in which all power is concentrated in the hands of a tiny elite while most people suffer not from exploitation, but from something far worse – irrelevance” (12).

external creation of them as waste/wasted lives (Bauman 23). Levin as “the other”/the waste created by cyber-capital excess is destined to live “offline”/on the fringes of a globalized territory (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 40). Levin lives offline/on the margin of an economic system that thrives mostly on cyber-capitalism owned by people like Packer. Power assumes a different character in such a social order, in which the more powerful are the ones with unlimited access to the virtual world/cyber financial world and the data/information offered by it that enable them to capture and rule such a world. Though “Levin is too obsolete to serve an active role” as he has been rendered a waste by Packer, he is determined to kill Packer so that he can metaphorically destroy the system, that Packer has also contributed to build, that has rendered him and several others like him, a “waste” (Chandler 256). The fact that Levin’s very existence as an ‘Other’ is the condition that sustains Packer’s luxurious life is suggested in Levin’s worry that once Packer is dead his life will mean nothing as an “Other”. In this sense, as Aaron Chandler argues, “Levin is the reification of Packer’s own pathogenic nature, the otherness he suppresses in himself” (257). What one is reminded of here is the distinction that Immanuel Levinas makes between “the self” and “the other” (with the uncapitalized ‘o’) (*l’autre*). According to Levinas, the self’s very existence is predicated on the very being of the “other”: the uncapitalized “other” is that which the self-controls and on which the self’s being is predicated (39).

This close interconnection between Packer/“the self” and Levin/“the other” compels one to think that both appear as two sides of the same coin called cyber capitalism because one necessities/completes the other. In his study of the novel, Aron Chandler has discussed Levin as Packer’s “alter ego” and the “other” (2010). Packer embodies the desires and fears of finance capitalism. This aspect of Packer has been emphasized by Marie-Christine Leps when she notes that Packer is a “particular instantiation... of ambitions and desires and embodiment... of the globalizing forces of cyber capitalism (311). Both the appellations that

are used to refer to Levin, i.e., he as an “Other” and an “alter ego” of Levin, also suggest the interconnected relationship between the two. This interconnectedness is created, I argue, by the global capital and its advanced American version of finance capitalism. Such interconnectedness and networked relation between individual in such condition also produces certain inevitable outcomes. It’s such an affective, pathological, technological, social implications of this interconnection of global capitalism that Levin subtly refers to during their final meeting at the industrial area of New York city: “I have my syndromes, you have your complex. Icarus falling” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 202). The pathological and social effects—Levin being an other/outsider to the society—are what he meant by his “syndromes”, and it is Packer’s possession of the systems or networks of relations with other capitalists within the capitalist world, the cyber technology that supports the capital, and the flow of money, that constitutes this “complex”. Jagoda calls this system the “systemic assemblage” of finance capital (172).

The social/spatial *positioning* of Levin (being an outlier, he doesn’t have a home) is also very significant here when we recall Douglas’ tying of waste (though she is concerned with the materiality of “dirt”) to its relative quality or how our understanding of waste/dirt is linked to its *placing* in the environmental/social order. In other words, according to Douglas the idea of ‘waste’/dirt is closely connected to “how we think with and act in space” (Viney 1). It is also important to note here how waste is particularly a western thing, as Morrison remarks, as “Western culture has long denied waste or marked it as “other” (“Waste Aesthetics” 9). No wonder why Levin is an “Other” to the cosmopolitan Eric who, with access to everything that the West embodies, can only define himself in relation to Levin, the other who represents the ‘waste’ of technological modernity. Waste “is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (Douglas 36). In a metaphorical way, Levin can be thought of as

“waste” in Douglassian sense too, as he is a “matter out of place” (Douglas 36). It is very important to note here that Levin embodies both the extremes of “waste” as a term, as suggested by Morrison, because he is, as she states, both “no longer-useful”, and “redundant” (and hence rendered a trash by the capitalist order that thrives on perfection, maximum utility and production) and an “excess”/surplus that the social order that individuals like Packer has constructed wants to exterminate to keep the ‘order’ intact (Douglas 36).

For DeLillo, as he has emphasized in some of his interviews, some technologies themselves quite often appear to be waste, as something that exists in the world as an “excess”. He refers to contemporary technologies as “useless”, “unnecessary”, and in some way as waste, as well as something that are necessary just because they have been invented: “I find it enormously absorbing.... It makes us feel that we have to have certain things that we may not necessarily need. We need e-mail because we have it, not because it is necessary. When you have it, it is a necessary. This is one of the aspects of contemporary technology” (“Interview”, 2010). In a similar way, DeLillo characterizes certain technologies as already a ‘waste’ in *Cosmopolis*. The speed with which some technologies acquire obsolescence is mentioned in the novel when Eric Packer dismisses certain technologies as “already oppressively sluggish” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 34). He angrily remarks, while referring to certain technologies’ inadequacy in a fast-changing world where the character of technology itself seems to change according to the changes in society, that “[p]lasma screens are no flat enough; [t]hey used to seem flat, now they did not” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 34, 140). I will return to this later in the chapter. In short, these two novels present a society characterized by the production of “waste” in a consumerist, highly technologized and globalized world as ours. The presence of various forms of waste and “wasted lives” suggests our deep connection to the materiality of waste in contemporary society and how it is closely linked to

the way we live in a highly technologized world, where the very idea of waste itself gets increasingly redefined with each technological innovation.

IV) Time-Space Compression and the Culture of Speed in *Cosmopolis*

This section examines DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* to understand the changing notions of time and speed as they are presented in the novel. DeLillo's concerns with the culture of speed that the novel presents is conveyed, among other things, through his commentaries on language's inadequacy to pace up with the ever-increasing speed that insists on a constant sense of "future-present" in a highly digital cultural order. *DeLillo's reflections on speed and the order it creates in this novel, I argue, are part of his attempt to portray the peculiar character of contemporary American society in a cyber capitalist, highly consumerist and technological social order. The changes in the notions of time and the failure of language to express them need to be understood, I argue, from the perspective of the culture of speed that creates a sense of relentless present, or what Mark C Taylor calls an "omnipresent" that the novel underlines as constituting the peculiar character of contemporary period (6). DeLillo's critique of such a culture of speed is conveyed through, I argue, his use of a language of slowness, a language that is "minimal" (Koeppnick 175).*

The changes in society brought in by various technological innovations change individuals' conceptions of time and space, affecting everything from their understanding of themselves in relation to others/the world, to their sense of identity, subjectivity, historicity and reality (Harvey [1989], Heise [1997], Jameson [1991]). These changes in the conception of time and space are portrayed in DeLillo's work primarily through the texts' references to the blurring of spatio-temporal distinctions, the inadequacy of language to represent reality, the collapsing of the virtual and the 'real' world, as well as through the various ways in which ideas of futurity enter into the human world in a highly technologized social order. To understand the time-space compression and the concomitant production of a culture of speed,

it is important that we now turn to some of the important figures who have addressed the issue.

The late twentieth-century has witnessed, as argued differently by David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, Ursula K Heise and Peter Boxall (2012), a crisis in the conventional idea of both time and space, and conterminous with such re-alignment, fiction could often be found exploring experiences under such re-conceptualization of time and space. Consequent upon these realignments is also the production of a culture of speed due to new advancements in technology, especially cyber technology, and globalization. The rapid technological revolution itself is a result of capitalism's need to accelerate the flow of capital and information. The emergence of the Internet, and subsequently cyber technology, in the late 80s and early 90s have radically changed the way humans understand notions of space and time. It was David Harvey's work, especially *The Condition of Postmodernity*, that alerted us to the peculiarly postmodern condition in which we experience a second great round of time-space compression. As Harvey argues in the book, we are compelled to alter:

the objective qualities of time and space ... how we represent the world to ourselves ...
As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a
spaceship earth of economic and ecological interdependencies ... and as time horizons
shorten to the point where the present is all there is ... so we have [had] to learn to
cope with an *overwhelming sense of compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds.
(240; emphasis in original)

In the postmodern condition this time-space compression, according to Harvey, has so revolutionized "the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves.... [T]he history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us" (*Condition* 240). The

consequent speed with which multinational companies, for instance, integrate and organize their circulation of capital on a global scale has also led to the endless flow of money, capital and information—as exemplified in DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*—paving way for the end of traditional concept of geography and space, as Richard O’Brien, among others, has argued (1991).

The reconceptualization of ideas of space with the arrival of cyber technology has produced a culture of speed. In such a globalized condition, notions of time and space, as traditionally understood, have been replaced by ideas of instantaneity, speed, globality and a consequent presence of the idea of seamless present, or “future present” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 76). The accelerated production and consumption that characterize late-capitalist society, and that often inform the fragmented narratives/plots of postmodern fiction—as evident in *Underworld*—creates a “culture of time” that fosters “drastically shortened temporal horizons at the expense of long-term planning and coherence” (Heise 6). This culture of time differs radically from traditional conception of time scales and is replaced by such new notions of time as the “nanoseconds” of the computer (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 76). The weakening and re-alignment of traditionally conceived social, individual or historical time by technological advancements have great implications for both society and individuals.

The increasing speed with which almost all experiential realms of individuals and societies have been mediated as a result of technological innovations has great impact on our understanding of things situated and performed in time and space. This acceleration of social transformation is primarily ascribed to the dynamics of capitalist development. In a culture where speed has become, as Taylor says, “the measure of success [only] the quick inherit the earth” (*Speed Limits* 2). Speed creates a new order that alters everything—from how we do things, to what we value, and most importantly, to our very character as human being. Speed also affects, as Taylor further asserts:

different people in different ways; indeed, speed has become a, if not the primary, socioeconomic differentiator. As some people speed up, others slow down; as some people work more than they want, others work less than they want or even not at all; as some people get “ahead,” others fall “behind.” What “winners” and “losers” in this new fast paced economy share are the insecurity, anxiety, and discontent that speed creates. (*Speed Limits* 4)

The “losers” who cannot keep pace with the speed or its logic produced by such a technological culture become “wasted lives” that can easily be disposed off and replaced by “winners” (Bauman 24).

The acceleration that characterizes the contemporary world is closely connected to the shifts in the character of capitalism itself that has produced a new form of capital—the finance capital. This, of course, seems to be a culmination of the shifts that capitalism has undergone, as Taylor argues, through five primary stages of capital in history: agricultural, mercantile, industrial, consumer, and financial (*Speed Limits* 4). As an ironical and inevitable product of this increasing acceleration is the *slowing down* of the world on many levels—economic, physical, psychological: the global melt down, different life-style diseases and bodily conditions associated with consumption of fast food, the increasing number of people suffering from mental depression, etc. The price that we have to pay for this culture of speed is *life* itself, as Taylor reminds us:

the price of speed is time, which is of course life itself. With everything in motion and everyone on the move, there is never enough time for anything. The faster we go, the less time we have, and the less time we have, the faster we think we have to go. In the endless effort to save time, we waste what little we have left. As speed increases, losses continue to mount until we realize that once time is lost, it can never be recovered. (*Speed Limits* 5)

The acceleration of speed so characteristic of high technology also paradoxically produces seamless *presentness*. As Taylor further argues, “[t]he ecstasy of speed” also changes the present to “omnipresent(s)”, and eternity—the term we used to refer to the “timeless present”—today is called “real time—24/7/365. In real time, all times, all places, are *here and now*” (*Speed Limits* 6; emphasis added).

An important intervention in the discourse on time, space and speed is made, in some of his work, by Paul Virilio who uses the term “speed-space” or “dromosphere” in his discussion of what can be called an accelerated age in which we live (qtd. in Adams 71). His re-conceptualization of “speed” is radical in that unlike a poetics of slowness that some scholars have suggested as an anti-dote to speed, Virilio is of the view that “resistance to the present would not just be about slowing down, but also about becoming a producer of speed. To understand the speed that defines our contemporary society, Virilio introduces the concept of “speed-space”, as opposed to time-space³² (“Speed Space” 71). Virilio’s argument for a conceptualization of “speed-space” against “time-space” suggests the end of an era of technologies of transportation and the beginning of an era of information technologies of the cyberspace that enable “instantaneous communication over space”, resulting in “the fiction of distance” (Clarke and Doel 176).

In his thought-provoking meditation on slowness and the different implications of speed—a work that also seeks to reformulate the current discourse on “slowness”—Lutz Koepnick considers speed as the chief character of our life in a highly technologized world as ours, where everything that we do has come to be altered, determined and informed by the

³² Virilio observes that “[t]he new space is ‘speed-space’; it is no longer a time-space, a space where time is manipulated. What we are manipulating is no longer man’s time, but machine’s time, which I call speed-space, or the dromosphere, meaning the sphere of speed... speed is not a means, but a milieu –another milieu, and one that tends to escape us. [speed is not] the means of getting from here to there fast, [nor is it] the means of seeing the Antipodes live when there’s a game, or of watching the Olympics in Los Angeles. But [speed] is a *milieu*, and a milieu in which we participate only indirectly through the video-tape machine after recording, through information science and ‘robotized’ systems”. (“Speed-Space” 71; emphasis added)

speed brought in by technology³³(1). In such a world of speed and instantaneity, we do long for retrieving the slow pace of things, and very ironically what has succeeded in achieving some semblance of slowness that we all desire for, it seems, are by the economy (the melt-down of global economy in 2008) and a tiny virus (the current slowdown/lock down that we have experienced), whose very arrival the technology that we all believe sustains most of our life today cannot even predict, nor has its containment been so far made possible by it (Koepnick 2).

The condition of instantaneity and the sense of an unchanging present characterizes DeLillo's millennial novel *Cosmopolis* (2001). In the novel, the changes in the idea of time and space are conveyed through different objects, occurrences, and commentaries on the status of language. The presentation of ideas of time and speed in the novel echoes some of the concerns and theories put forward by the above-mentioned philosophers on time and speed in the context of technological innovation. *Cosmopolis* suggests that just as the introduction of clock time changed society into a different temporal consciousness, so too has digital time altered the sense of time and space. The novel's protagonist Eric Packer, a 28-year-old Billionaire, who lives in a forty-eight-room apartment, decide to have a "haircut in the year 2000"—the year itself is significant as it marks the significant changes that the world in general and America in particular would undergo from that moment—and takes an eventful journey in a highly technologized, customized limousine through New York's Manhattan city (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 7). Though the car is full of cutting-edge technologies,

³³ Koepnick provocatively says that "our age of electronic networks, global transactions, and rapid transportation technologies cause many to *suffer* from too much speed in their lives. We cook, eat, drink, and grow up too fast, it is claimed. We have become unable to enjoy the prolonged pleasures of a good story, a thoughtful conversation, or an intricate musical composition. ... Cell phones, handheld computers, and ubiquitous screening devices urge us to be always on and produce instantaneous responses, yet we no longer take the time to contemplate an image, develop a profound thought, traverse a gorgeous landscape, play a game, or follow the intensity of some emotion. Life is faster today than it has ever been before..., but in accumulating ever more impressions, events, and stimulations we end up with ever less—less substance, less depth, less meaning, less freedom, less spontaneity". (1)

and is “a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it”, it “move[s] at an inchworm creep” as it is caught up in the traffic (*Cosmopolis* 10, 64). Packer makes a very poor time, but performs many of his social and business roles while not moving much—making communication about his finance capital and marriage, as well as with his father, friends, enemies, and doctor. He experiences slowness not as something that soothes him in a world of speed, as the monk does in Tsai Ming-liang’s movie *Journey to the West/Walker*. Packer, though caught in the *traffic* of the city (and the cyber space), cannot afford slowness as it is not his world (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 11). However, he moves in a deadly slow motion, at a pace “that speaks in quarter inches”, as his body guard Torval says (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 14). However, the events that happen, both online and offline—such as the funeral of a Sufi rapper, an anti-capitalist protest, the visit of the president, a murder, his sexual encounters, his online activities, his stock market dealings, getting his prostate checked, and his final death—in between this slow movement of the car point paradoxically to ideas of speed, instantaneity, the erosion of the distance/border between ‘here’ and ‘there’ and ‘then’ and ‘now’. His peculiar experiencing of all these, I argue, also illustrates the chief characteristics of a contemporary American society in a cyber capitalist, highly technologized world.

The novel can be read as a critique of a culture of speed effected through DeLillo’s use of a language of slowness, a language that is “jammed and moves in fits and starts”, and that we also see in his later works such as *Point Omega* and *The Body Artist* (Goble 188). The idea of speed appears in a particular way in these short novels that are, as compared to the sprawling *Underworld*, characterized by ellipses and short sentences, characteristics that are part of what can be called his late style. Time also figures prominently as a theme in *Cosmopolis*. While everything that occurs in the cyber world—shown to us through the many screens inside the limousine—is in a fast pace and Parker himself embodies this speed in many ways, the “outside” appears very slow with the traffic created by these events. In other

words, though “[t]ime seems to pass” in a flashing speed, as the narrator of *The Body Artist* reports, it seems to be both slow and fast (DeLillo, *Body Artist*1). While there have been studies (such as Sam Anderson and Lutz Koepnick’s works) that argue that though DeLillo presents speed as the cultural logic of late capitalism and that “stasis, paradoxically, has become the animating force of” his later novels, I read DeLillo’s reflections on speed and the order it creates in his later work in relation to his concern with the peculiar character of contemporary American society in a cyber capitalist, highly consumerist and technological social order, as it is obliquely presented in *The Body Artist*, *Falling Man* and *Point Omega* and very explicitly in *Cosmopolis* (Koepnick 244).

The importance that DeLillo gives to the concept of time itself—as exemplified in his statement that “[t]he theme that seems to have evolved in my work during the past decade concerns time”—suggests that time is a “fixated” idea in his work and that it can even assume the status of a character because of his obsessive concern with its shaping and transformed nature in some of his later fiction (“Don DeLillo”, 2011). Time, as the cryogenics scientist in DeLillo’s recent work *Zero K* calls, is “multiple, [and] is simultaneous” in *Cosmopolis* where “this moment happens, has happened, will happen” (*Cosmopolis* 244-245). These multiple temporalities in his works often erase any sense of pastness and dissolve the future into producing what Taylor calls an “omnipresent” (*Speed Limits* 6).

One of the effects of the great acceleration in the present brought in by technology is in the field of language itself, and how humans use it to capture the seamless presentness and vanishing times. DeLillo’s concerns with a culture of speed in *Cosmopolis* are conveyed, inter alia, through his commentaries on language’s inadequacy in a highly technologized world characterized by speed. In some of his novels, “Human” language—as language has always been understood—quite often becomes ineffective and seems to acquire the quality of a posthuman existence, where language acquires more of technical/technological character

than of organic nature. While some of his earlier novels like *Americana* and *The Names* show the role of language in shaping one's identity, his more recent novels, especially *Cosmopolis*, both reflect and address issues related to the inadequacy of language in the age of advanced technologies. In such a condition, certain (older) technical terms become inadequate to capture and represent the "(un)reality" offered by cyberspaces/cyber-capitalism. The digital and cyber capital world of Packer transcends (conventional) linguistic representation. The most brilliant expression of the changing nature of time and language occurs in episodes where Eric Packer complains about language's inability to capture the speed of technology, including the speed with which technology gets upgraded in no time. Language, according to Packer, seems inadequate in a culture characterized by simulation, hyper-reality, and an ever-increasing speed that creates a "fleeting present" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 8). For instance, for Packer ATM and skyscraper have "an anachronistic quality", and "no recent structure ought to bear" the word "skyscraper", because "it belonged to the olden soul of awe" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 9). Packer's references to the inadequacy of the terms "ATM" and "skyscraper" in *Cosmopolis* both refer to the obsolescence of certain technologies in a fast changing world and our need to acquire a new language to capture the reality of a new world order. Even the word phone is an obsolete one for him: "it was time to retire the word phone", and the "word computer sounds backward and dumb" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 104). Even the latest technologies are, according to Packer, becoming obsolete. As Benno Levin, his antagonist says, "things wear out impatiently in [Packer's] hands" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 152). What we see in Eric Packer and others is a desire to surpass the "limited" speed with which certain technologies *work*. In such a condition where the very idea of speed itself constantly changes,

The recurring speed with which forms of technology themselves undergo changes is also suggested by Packer when he says that "[p]lasma screens were no flat enough. They used to seem flat, now they did not" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 140). It is also very strange that the

very language in which he expresses this *in the present* is in the past tense, which suggests the easily-waning character of certain technologies. Packer explains why nanoseconds are no faster because there are now new “zeptoseconds” and “yecto seconds”, “one septillionth of a second” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 79). The concerns regarding the obsolescence of certain technologies are also, I argue, an indication, as Virilio suggests in an interview, of human’s inability to cope with the *intensive* time of the machine, a time where “no human being can be [fully] present” (“Speed Space” 71). The desire expressed in the novels by Packer is also aligned with a particular time that can be characterised as posthuman. This is evident in his wish to “live on a disc”, reminding readers of some posthumanist thinkers’, such as Ray Kurzweil, prediction of the future possibilities of uploading human consciousness, mind and brain (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 22; Kurzweil 2013).

The changing notions of time, and hence the language to express them, are also conveyed through the novel’s insistence, at different levels, on the “future present”. The novel insists at different levels on the “future present” that new technologies often embody. The notion of a “future present” would make more sense if one reads it in the light of DeLillo’s own observation that “the future is intruding into the present”, suggesting that new technologies—especially cyber technology—affect our sense of temporality in radical ways (“Interview”, 2010). Kinski, Packer’s “Chief of Theory”, also emphasizes the need for a “new theory of time” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 86). She asserts that “time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. *The present* is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for *the future* of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. *The future becomes insistent*” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 34; emphasis mine). Kinski further asserts that “[c]omputer power eliminates doubt. All doubt rises from past experience, but the past is disappearing. We used to know the past but not the future. This is changing”

(DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 86). What gets “deleted” in the disappearance of past is also memory, or memory understood in a particular way.

The reorientation of temporality in the novel is also suggested by Packer’s relation to other people, things and incidents, most of which he sees on his screens inside the limousine even before they actually take place. In his review of *Cosmopolis*, John Updike has referred to this “temporal dislocation” as that which “indicates an underlying shift in the past-future paradigm” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 86; par. 2). The new/changing time frames also suggest that the failure of language needs to be understood from the perspective of “the culture of speed”, that I referred to earlier, and how the increasing speed with which the world is moving ahead in a relentless present/ “omnipresent” rendering certain technologies obsolete in no time (Taylor, *Speed Limits* 6). Slowness enters into the realm of this eternal presentness so fast that “what was surprisingly fast yesterday is intolerably slow today” (Taylor, *Speed Limits* 39). This constant change seems to be endemic to technology and its logic. That is why, as Taylor asserts, “[t]he horse didn’t seem slow until the invention of the train and automobile; dial-up modems didn’t seem slow until the introduction of Ethernet. From old to new, pre-modern to modern, pre-industrial to industrial, the direction is first from slow to fast, and then from fast to faster” (*Speed Limits* 39). In such a capitalist system and the culture it produces, the very character and form that “innovation itself takes”, as Jonathan Crary remarks, “is the continuous simulation of the new” (*Technique* 40). We see this repetition also in the continuous *updatation* of certain technologies to keep up with this “present” that constantly simulates itself.

Packer’s existence in the market world as a cyber capitalist depends on his possession of cutting-edge technologies and data that signify speed and instantaneity. In such a cyber capitalist order, what is crucial is speed itself and not *what* is contained/achieved within it. This idea is well articulated by Packer in his theorization of speed to Vija Kinski, his chief of

theory: “speed is the point. Never mind the urgent and endless replenishment, the way data dissolves at one end of the series just as it takes shape at the other. This is the point, the *thrust, the future*. We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information made sacred, ritually unreadable” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 80). In Packer’s cyber-capitalist world, time, I argue, is *located in* and *understood as* the future-present or “insistent future” where there is no past, but only the presen(t)/ce (of) future (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 79). Packer’s insistence on the importance of understanding the idea of time is very compelling in this context:

[t]he idea is time. *Living in the future*. Look at those numbers running. Money makes time. It used to be the other way around. Clock time accelerated the rise of capitalism. People stopped thinking about eternity. They began to concentrate on hours, measurable hours, man-hours, using labor more efficiently...*It’s cyber-capital that creates the future*. What is the measurement called a nanosecond? “Ten to the minus ninth power. This is what. One billionth of a second, [but] he...understand[s] none of this. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 78-79; emphasis added)

According to Packer, one has to be “rigorous [if one] need[s] to take adequate measure of the world around us” in a cyber capitalist, highly technologized world, where “[t]here are zeptoseconds”, “Yoctoseconds”, [and] “One septillionth of a second” now (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 79). DeLillo’s reflection on time here chimes with Virilio’s discussion of “speed-space” in which, according to him, human cannot live *fully* because it is an *intensely* technological time. The intensive time that Virilio suggests seems to echo in DeLillo’s use of “zeptoseconds”, “Yoctosecond” and “septillionth of a second” in the novel. As Virilio argues,

[t]oday we are entering an era of *intensive* time: that is to say that new technologies lead us to discover the equivalent of the infinitely small time.... [This] is an infinitely

short time, which is that of technology's billionths of seconds.... we'll never be present in that billionth of a second... we [need to] program our definitive absence [in this technological time.... No human being can be present in the intensive time that belongs to machines. ("Speed-Space" 71)

As Virilio's comments imply, what is imprinted in most of the comments in the novel about time is Packer's insistence on the idea of *futurity* that is constantly produced by technology.

Packer requires to constantly *update* and upgrade his technologies, data, language and his knowledge of the workings of cyber-capitalism to be fully present in this "*intense time*", and to be a winner in the finance market (Virilio, "Speed-Space" 71). This demand to speed up constantly is also emphasized—especially when we look at it from the perspective of his failure/death at the end—by the fact that even though he moves in a highly customized and technologized limousine, he cannot reach the other end *in time* because of the traffic. He takes hours even to get across the Manhattan city that otherwise would have taken for him only a few minutes. Though Packer's car moves very slowly across Manhattan Street, his money that he works through cyber-capitalism, spanning across the globe, is "accelerated" at a speed that can only be understood in "zeptoseconds" or "yectoseconds" (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 79). And what is important for Packer for sustaining him in the market is the data that he sees on the screen of his limousine. They are so important to him that they not only determine who he is but also how valuable he is—winner or loser. DeLillo provocatively conveys this idea when he says:

He looked past Chin toward streams of numbers running in opposite directions. He understood *how much it meant to him*, the roll and flip of data on a screen. He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, *birdwing and chambered shell*. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold

compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact, data itself was *soulful* and *glowing*, a *dynamic aspect of the life process*. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every *breath of the planet's living* billions. *Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole.* (*Cosmopolis* 24; emphasis added)

Packer is so obsessed with data that he even characterizes it as the “soul” of the “life process”/the “biosphere”, and not just a part of a techno-system (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 5, 12). What DeLillo seems to also suggest here is the change in the character of technology itself, as well as the environment that it creates forming the order of the world today where technology has become part of the entangled existence of a post-human condition.

As DeLillo argues in his interviews and non-fiction, language has to work as a counter history to the hyper realities created by technologies (“Outsider” and “Power”). It seems that, for DeLillo, it is only by using fiction as a form of counter-history that authors can challenge or subvert conventional or normalized narration of history, and that fiction can survive in an age of media images that make obsolete even the power that we once attached to language. He asserts in “The Power of History” that “language can be a form of counter history. The writer wants to construct a language that will be the book’s life-giving force. He wants to submit to it. Let language shape the world. Let it break the faith of conventional re-creation” (62). However, how does one make use of the “power” of language when its very possibility of being used so is mediated and informed by technology, as *Cosmopolis* rightly suggests. It’s also worthwhile to note here that DeLillo has also expressed his concern with speed and the disorientation it creates in *Point Omega* which, with its terse and evocative language, can be read as a reflection on the importance of slowness in our culture. As a counter poetics to

speed, DeLillo's novels such as *Cosmopolis* and *Point Omega* also explore, as Koepnick observes, "slowness as a means to radically question the politics of [high modern] narrative time and remake the modes of readerly attention. His writing withholds narrative riches and delays conclusive answers with the aim of awakening us from our ordinary numbness" caused by speed (601).

V) Conclusion

No other American writer seems to have shown so keen an interest in exploring the character of American society in the context of the dominance of technology and capitalism as DeLillo has done. It is this particular quality of his work that makes it both a reflection on and a critique of the dominant *technological* character of contemporary American society.

DeLillo's persistent concern with such forces compels one to think how fiction can work as an embodiment of the *character* of a society. The discussion above has demonstrated how the society his work often depicts points to certain techno-cultural realities of America produced largely by the dominance of media and other technologies. Such a social order is created, as we have seen, by media spectacle, commodity culture, consumerism, the consequent accumulation of waste, and the production of a culture of speed.

The chapter has examined how a number of DeLillo's fiction show what remains in a society in which the increasing dominance of technology has made obsolete any possibility for a direct or "authentic" experience, while also suggesting that the possibility for a direct connection to the fabric of everyday reality is only through media images and mediated experiences. As the chapter has demonstrated, the cumulative results of such a condition include the emergence and spread of the spectacle into every aspect of human experience, and a culture of speed that humans cannot in any way pace up with, but is forced to live with/in. In addition, the chapter has also tried to show how such a technological order and the emergence of new forms of capitalism and consumer culture—now in the form of information

and images—lead to the production of different forms of “waste”. It is the symptoms of such a society that DeLillo’s fiction often diagnoses with profound insights into the time in which we live. The next chapter will examine DeLillo’s employment of the concept of character and how it is presented in the select novels both as an effect of textual construction or formal features and as an idea that embodies within it certain ideas about the changes in the conception of the human in a highly technologized world as ours. This changing notion of the human in the context of posthumanism is explored in the chapter through an analysis of “character” understood also as that which signifies “characters as if they are actual people” (Anderson et al 1). Such an understanding and use of the multivalent meanings that embed in “character” while examining DeLillo’s fiction will help us understand his work’s investment in the real world that is replete with discourses on and figurations of the posthuman.

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CHAPTER—3

Digital/Technology and the Concept of “Character” in DeLillo’s Novels

I) Introduction

In an interview with Brigitte Desalm, DeLillo makes a distinction between an image and the written words/characters in a book thus: “[a] picture is like the masses: a multitude of impressions. A book on the other hand, with its linear advance of words and characters seems to be connected to individual identity” (“Masses”). While he feels that an image *belongs* to and *appeals* to a collective and creates a multitude of impressions, the characters/words on a page are more closely connected to individual consciousness. Bill Gray, DeLillo’s protagonist in *Mao II*, asserts that “[a] writer creates a character as a way to reveal consciousness, increase the flow of meaning. This is how we reply to power and beat back our fear.” (200). The character Artis, in DeLillo’s *Zero K*, in a section curiously titled “Artis Martineau”, utters the following, rather unconnected, words—whose subject position vacillate between “I”, “you” and “they”—after waking up on the cryonic pod:

She is all words but she doesn’t know how to get out of words into being someone, being the person who knows the words. “Am I someone or is it just the words themselves that make me think I’m someone.... Are the words themselves all there is. Am I just the words.... I only hear what is me. I am made of words.... Am I someone or is it just the words themselves that make me think I’m someone. Are the words themselves all there is. Am I just the words. (158-160)

DeLillo’s observations on character, and Artis’s ‘word’-play on her identity as a person (and character) in the above quotes reveal his complex construction of character as being closely connected to the words on the page, and also as ideas that can function as powerful counter-narrative against terrorism, techno-culture, consumerism, and technological posthumanism.

They also function as ideas inscribing impressions about individual's surrender to media images, as well as contemporary technology's production of posthuman subjectivity, especially the fantasy of life-extension promises of transhumanism.

This chapter examines DeLillo's presentation of the concept of character in his novels *Body Artist* (2001) and *Cosmopolis* (2003) to understand how the concept of "character" in these novels is closely linked to his thematic concerns with the reconfiguration of the human and the human body in the context of our increasing integration into the ambient techno-capital contexts. The word 'context' here refers not only to the technological-objects-world of these novels in which his characters have an entangled/networked life with the technological devices/environment but also, to the particular order that technological culture creates, controlling, defining and structuring the actions, interactions, and bodies of his characters. The word 'context'³⁴ also has its more *literary* connection here, as it appears in W J Harvey's use of the term in *Character and the Novel* to refer to the contexts of *inanimate objects* or *things* to which, according to him, characters in fiction are also related, and in their context characters and the *character* of characters need to be understood. The word "context" also invokes Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's term "character-indicators"³⁵ that she uses to

³⁴ Harvey uses the word "context" to refer to both the "the world of inanimate objects" and "the human context"—a character's web of relationship that connects her to others in a fictional world. He says that "life allows only intrinsic knowledge of [the] self, [but] it is the "contextual knowledge of others" that allows us to understand others' character in real life. But fiction, according to him, "allows both intrinsic and "contextual knowledge" of others. Both contexts, according to Harvey, "produce the density of relationships *characterizing our everyday experience*. He states that the inanimate world "constantly interact [with us]". He asserts that it is important to consider these two contexts when we study fiction because "the novel itself is nothing but a complicated structure of artificially formed contexts parallel to the world in which we experience real people", and that..."characters do not develop along single and linear roads of destiny but are, so to speak, human cross-roads" where both contexts interact with each other (30-58).

³⁵ Rimmon-Kenan argues that *character*... "can be described in terms of a network of character-traits. These traits, however, may or may not appear as such in the text. How, then, is the construct arrived at? By assembling various *character-indicators* distributed along the text-continuum and, when necessary, *inferring the traits from them*. It is these indicators that I seek to define under the heading of "characterization". In principle, *any element in the text may serve as an indicator of character*. This reminds one of William Gass's statement in "Character in Fiction" that anything that functions as a fixed point can function as character (Gass 50). There are, Kenan continues, "two basic types of textual indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation ... The first type names the trait by an adjective (e.g. 'he was good-hearted'), an abstract noun ('his goodness knew no

conceptualize character in fiction (66). *In this chapter, I argue that the character of character in these two novels needs to be understood both as formal/textual effect and as a product of his representational strategy whereby DeLillo conveys certain aspects of a ‘posthuman’ condition in which most humans live today in a highly digitized world. The posthuman subjecthood of these characters can only be understood/will only make sense if we look at them as being constituted by a network of relations within which these characters live and interact. While his Cosmopolis stages the production of a posthuman subjectivity by presenting a sublime experience of the merging of bodily organism and machine materiality/information flow, The Body Artist dramatizes the production of a posthuman “becoming” body (Braidotti, 2013). The chapter argues that these characters and their character can only be understood in the interface between human biology/body and technological environment. I also argue that their posthuman characteristics are products of a process of what Karan Barad calls as “intra-action”. The entangled life of these characters and the complex interaction, or rather “intra-action”, between organisms and technological objects present in these novels also help us understand the processual nature of the identity of the characters in a technologically mediated cultural climate (Deleuze and Guattari [1987], Braidotti [2002, 2013], Hayles [1999], Barad [2007]). The characters in these novels are “becoming” bodies participating in a posthuman agential network of relationality as a result of the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” of human and nonhuman (Barad 33; emphasis original).*

bounds’),... or part of speech (‘he loves only himself’)). The second category of characterization, on which I draw for my understanding of character in this chapter, “does not mention the trait but *displays and exemplifies* it in *various* ways, leaving to the reader the task of inferring the quality they imply”. He says that characterization is “indirect when, rather than mentioning a trait, it *displays and exemplifies* it in various ways”. He enumerates some of these elements of “indirect presentation” such as “action”, “speech”, external appearance, and environment, as well as “analogues landscape”, “analogues names”, and “analogy between characters” as entities that reinforce characterization (59-70; emphasis added). Some of these categories of “indirect presentation” of character—such as “action”, speech, (technological) environment/analogous landscapes, which he defines as the “physical or social environment of a character”, I argue, help us understand the interface between character and culture, as I use them here (66).

Since the world of fiction is constituted by and constitutes the various contexts/elements/devices in fiction, paying attention to some of these nonhuman, technological objects would yield fascinating insights into the *character* of DeLillo's characters. I argue that character as a concept in DeLillo's work needs to be thought of as being constituted by and constituting what we often think as "external" *things* such as voice recorders; telephone; television; computer; mobile phones; and the more advanced cyber technologies, all of which Michael Naas calls "American Contraband" in his book *The American Original*, that surround his fiction (ix). These technological devices in DeLillo's work are not mere objects in the world of individuals, as Frank Lentricchia (1991) and Randy Laist (2009) have pointed out, but need to be understood as material things with agencies and the power to influence and shape the consciousness, perception, behavior, actions, and subjectivities of characters in such a way that their character becomes an *effect* of the technological apparatus in his works. Also, characters who are imbricated and enmeshed in relation to these objects are influenced by *the way* these objects relate to them, or how they are in "symbiotic interdependence" with the human (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 226). DeLillo has often pointed out his characters' relation to such a technological environment while acknowledging that culture is not something his characters simply relate to, but it is what "shapes them", creates their identities, subjectivities, and individualities ("Interview", 2010). To understand the character of his characters, I also draw on some recent studies on character which are marked by an urgency to rethink "character" from new perspectives, especially in the context of contemporary social reality.

II) The *Character* of Character in DeLillo's Late Novels

This section provides a brief discussion of the *character* of character in DeLillo's later novels by drawing on some recent studies of character and posthumanist discourse. *I argue that in order to understand the peculiar character of DeLillo's characters, we*

need to go beyond conventional conception/understanding of character. Character-construction in DeLillo, in other words, needs to be understood as an effect of both the formal and the representational strategies of his fiction. Characters in these novels, to put it differently, need to be understood as both textual effects—i.e., the form of the novel informing the character of characters—and as copies of persons, or “character-as if they were real people”, as Anderson et al. propose (1). The characters’ lives, I argue, are what is traversed by and embedded in flows of information that cut across human body and technological devices/environment (Nayar). The discussion that follows will also draw on certain discourses around posthumanism that not only help us rethink notion of identity and subjectivity in the context of contemporary technoculture but also challenge conventional idea of ‘the human’.

Notwithstanding the debates on the nature and supposed ‘retreat’ of character in fiction, “character” is still considered an integral part of fiction, as evident in the recent spate of books on character³⁶. The peculiar and varied conceptions of character in fiction have often been influenced not only by social changes and differences in cultures and societies but also, by supposedly external forces such as developments in science and technology. Also, writers of fiction have resorted from time to time to presenting character-types that question and unsettle earlier or conventional notions of character and the very concept of character itself. This making and unmaking of character is evident in the various figurations in which ‘character’ has been presented,

³⁶ The debate/discussion surrounding fictional character has a complicated history of its own. From Virginia Woolf’s famous declaration that “on, or before 1910, human character changed”, to William Gass and John Gardner’s debate on character, to the spawning of an exclusive seminar in 2010 to celebrate the centenary of Woolf’s declaration, “character” has never ceased to interest writers and critics. Although books and essays on the decline/death/disappearance of ‘character’ have occasionally appeared (Scott Sanders’ 1979 book is an example), character in fiction still attracts readers and writers. The clamor about the decline or retreat from, ‘character’ seems to me to stem primarily from the disinterest shown by writers in the conventional idea of *character* and not from *character* as such. Just the surging number of recent studies on “character”, such as the one by John Frow (2014), Amanda Anderson, et al (2016), Garry L. Hagberg (2016), Megan Ward (2018), Lina Varotsi (2019), Majorie Garber (2020), and S. Pearl Brilmyer (2022) from newer perspectives indicates the new interest that “character” has spawned in the academia.

including in the realist fiction of the 19th century, the modernist fiction of the 20th century, and postmodern, contemporary fiction. Apart from these rather “conventional” changes, innovations in technology—especially since the twentieth century—have played a crucial role in conceiving, shaping and inscribing *character* differently. Hence, “character” has to be understood to have, as Frow argues, a series of recognizable codes or tropes determined by new contexts in which the concept is created or situated (24). These codes or tropes are, as he further emphasizes, determined by the social/cultural contexts of an author (Frow 24).

Though there have been different approaches to “character” as I have mentioned above, one thing that seems to have sustained over the years—ever since fictional study gained currency in the latter half of the twentieth century—is, as Amanda Anderson et al. argue, “a taboo on treating [and understanding] fictional character as if they are real people” (1). As they further argue, the notion that character is an effect of *form* is a direct product of the formalist criticism of fiction that still has some currency, albeit in a renewed fashion within fictional studies, as one could find in Frow’s analysis of character in *Character and Person* (2).

These recent works—especially Frow’s *Character and Person* (2014), Amanda Anderson et al. (*Character: Three Enquiries in Literary Studies* (2019), and Marjorie Garber’s *Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* (2020), to cite but a few examples—have attempted a reappraisal of character as an important category of fiction, providing new insights into the ethical, political, affective, and aesthetic dimensions of character in literary and other cultural texts like movies. This reassessment includes approaches and frameworks ranging from new formalism (Frow), affect theory to the ethics of fiction (Anderson et al). In this chapter, I have a slightly different approach to character as a fictional concept, though I draw on Frow,

Amanda et al. and Garber. Drawing on Frow, I consider ‘character’ in this chapter both as a formal construct—character as an effect of form—and as an idea. Character as an *idea* refers in this chapter to how DeLillo’s characters appear as embodiments of certain social conditions/concerns or characters as embedding and revealing certain concerns regarding the concept of ‘the human’ in the context of the technological culture that DeLillo’s work often presents as the human condition under digital technology. These embedded ideas, I argue, raise some important questions and concerns about what it means to be “human” in a highly technological and information age.

Even though these two ways of approaching “character” seem different, the two are connected by the concerns in his work with the technological culture within which he presents his characters. In other words, the *formalist* approach would reveal how the concept of character in these novels is informed by a technological culture that he so forcefully inscribes in his works as *a problem as well as a new reality we live in*, while the *thematic* concerns that are inscribed in the latter category of “character” would help us understand how the concept of “character” in these novels can be read as raising some important and ethical questions about the category of “the human” in a highly technologized world. Understanding this meaning of “character” is important to examine how fiction presents forms of experience that can help us understand social identity positioned in the context of technological environment (Anderson et al. 130). Such an approach to character also helps one understand subjectivity formation and present the “inner experience” of persons living in a highly technological environment (Anderson et al. 130). Character-studies focusing on the moral life of individuals can, as Anderson says, problematize conventional ideas of humanism too (131). There is a more intrinsic connection between character and posthumanism in the former’s

potential for shedding light on new understanding of the concept of person. This is emphasized by Anderson et al while observing that,

“[o]n the one hand posthumanism could be said to carry within it the enduring force of the characterological in its emphasis on the importance of how we relate to the nonhuman world. On the other hand, in characterizing this world, posthumanist thinkers cannot help but impute character to it, enacting various forms of anthropomorphism and animism. In this way, the ethically capacious aspects of post- humanism are potentially continuous with, and not opposed to, a renewed interrogation of character. (13-14)

In this sense, one can find a strong transhumanist/posthuman current—though not celebratory in anyway— in DeLillo’s conception of ‘character’, though his primary concerns seem to be with the pervasive power technology has in our society and culture.

Frow’s *Character and Person* explores character both as a “quasi-person” and “social personhood” (vii). Through an amalgamation of formalism and social analysis in the book, Frow develops a “sociological poetics concerned with the social force of representation” (x). Bringing into focus both the formal and ethical dimensions of character, he describes characters as “ontological hybrids”, i.e., they are simultaneously both “person-like entities” and “pieces of writing and imagining” (25). Frow’s proposition that character is “both . . . a formal construct, made out of words or images and having a fully textual existence, and . . . a set of effects which are modelled on the form of the human person”, and that “fictional character is a person-shaped figure made salient by narrative ground” is very helpful in thinking about character’s relation to textual forms/properties and its embeddedness and investment in the real world that help us think about such categories as the human, person, nonhuman, etc. (24, vi). In the following sections, I use some of these ideas about *character*

in examining the peculiar ways in which character—both as fictional being and as an idea—is presented in the fictional worlds of DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and *The Body Artist* in which character has a networked and entangled relation to the technological objects/environment in them.

a) Technology and the Idea of *Posthuman* Character in DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*

In this section, I discuss DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* to understand the posthuman self of Eric Packer, the protagonist in the novel. *I argue that the posthuman character of his character can only be understood as being constituted at the interstice between biological body/materiality and machine matter, and vis-a-vis his networked relation to the techno-capital environment that helps him maintain his powerful status in a cyber capital social order. The posthuman self of Packer in the novel is a product of what Luciano Floridi calls an "onlife" (Onlife Manifesto 1). I further argue that the posthuman character of Packer's self in the novel is also an effect of the novel's form and its thematic emphasis on cyber technologies' production of an entangled "inter-relationality" of the human body to other nonhuman entities of the ambient techno-capital environments (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 242).*

An important medium through which DeLillo deals with the reconfiguration of the human and the production of contemporary posthuman subjectivity by modern techno-capital forces is character. An earlier manifestation of this can be found in *White Noise* where DeLillo presents a fragmented or rather "teleself", as Randy Laist calls, that is produced largely by television medium and its creation of a forceful addiction to the images and events circulated by it (13). While the technological objects in DeLillo's earlier novels quite often tend to be more like subjects possessing what Laist calls "subjectness", and having the power to influence human consciousness, his later novels are more complex in their presentation of characters whose ontology questions

any neat boundary between the human and the machine (5). One can perceive a focused shift from this kind of a *subjectification* of individuals, programmed mostly by media technologies, in his earlier novels such as *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mao II*, and *Underworld* to a more complex integration to and entanglement of humans with more advanced and integrated technologies such as cyber technologies (as in *Cosmopolis*), biotechnology and cryonics (as in *Zero K*) in his later works. In his review of the novel, Walter Kirn observes that “the barely corporeal cerebral entities... populate the pages of *Cosmopolis*” (Review). This is because the protagonist Eric Packer’s subjectivity occurs at the interstice of what DeLillo himself calls the “simultaneous insides and outsides”, Packer’s biological body and the technological environment (*Body Artist* 48). This close interaction between individuals and technologies creates a seamless interface between the human and the machine, redefining the very category of the human, the person, and the nonhuman.

The character of Packer in *Cosmopolis* is an *effect* of the seamless connection/crossing over between the human, cyber technology and information flow. In other words, while his earlier fiction presented the human-technology interaction by focusing on the interface where human encounters—as Laist argues—otherness in the form of technology, in his later works especially in *Cosmopolis*, *The Body Artist* and *Zero K* this interface seems to give way for a more intensive overlap and interconnection, as well as “intervolution”³⁷ between the human body and technology (Laist 162-163; Taylor 3). In such an age of new technologies human’s entanglement with machines/electronic data has become “so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the

³⁷ “‘Intervolution’, according to Mark C. Taylor, “involves a developmental process in which seemingly distinct entities are braided together in such a way that each becomes itself in and through the other and neither can be itself apart from the other” (3).

information circuits in which organism is enmeshed” (Hayles 35).

The interface between human beings and technological objects in novels such as *The Body Artist* and *Cosmopolis* creates a condition in which individuals by their entangled relation to these technologies are in symbiotic relationship between “the flesh and the machine”, as argued by Braidotti (*Posthuman* 223). The constant interaction between human corporeality and non-human materiality produces an in-between ontology for individuals like Packer in these novels. DeLillo’s focus on more advanced technologies in these later works, especially in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*, seems to obliterate the interface itself in such a way that characters like Packer seem to exist in continuous/“intervolve” with the cyber capital informatics that constitute his techno-environment in the novel. These characters display the complexities of the posthumanizing aspects of contemporary technologies whose agential power goes beyond mere colonization of the human consciousness.

From the above discussion, Packer can be viewed as someone who inhabits “[t]he interaction between technology and capital. The inseparability” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 23). This entangled “inseparability” is aptly expressed by DeLillo in an early episode in the novel:

He sat in the club chair at the rear of the cabin looking into the array of visual display units. There were medleys of data on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing. He absorbed this material in a couple of long still seconds, ignoring the speech sounds that issued from lacquered heads. There was a microwave and a heart monitor. He looked at the spycam on a swivel and it looked back at him.... (*Cosmopolis* 13)

The technological environment here is so integral to Packer’s posthuman subjectivity that it is woven into the very texture of his life/self, thereby these nonhuman entities

shed their instrument/machine-like character and *become* part of human nature/body itself. Not only is such characters' ontology in these novels closely dependent on the non-human outside and algorithmic materiality of the electronic data which surround them, but these technologies—by virtue of their agentic status attained through their networked interaction with the human— also “become ensouled”, “nonhuman actants” and “incorporate themselves into the fabric” of everyday-life of the characters.

(Thompson 40; J. Bennett ix; Laist 3, 4).

The absorption of the self into the digital environment through the creation of such interfaces is further emphasized by Packer:

It is happening now, an evolutionary advance that needed only the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory. It would be the master thrust of cyber-capital, to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous reinvestment. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 83)

Here, the human (experience) becomes “a medium”, as Packer suggests, making his self a complex assemblage of technological system and the biological body (83). The data displayed on the screen seem to flow into his nervous system. The data gathered on the screens of Packer's devices inside the limo has a “vitality” of its own and can predict what he will do next (J Bennett 1). This omniscient character of technology is revealed when Packer demands it to “let it express itself”, indicating the data infrastructure that can read and write human action and feeling (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 51). Packer needs to be understood as a posthuman subject in a datafied society, the knowledge of which, as Thylstrup et al. propose, “should include focus on the relationship between data and human existence” (4). The narrator emphasizes this *posthuman* character of Packer in the following words:

[t]he things that made him who he was could hardly be identified much less converted to data, the things that lived and milled in his body, everywhere, random, riotous, billions of trillions, in the neurons and peptides, the throbbing temple vein, in the veer of his libidinous intellect. (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 83).

In such an understanding of the human-data nexus, we need to move, as Kalpokas argues, towards “de-privileging the human and re-inserting it into complex socio-technical networks as just another object with certain agentic capacities” (252). In such a posthuman context, individual and collective identities need to be conceived, as Kalpokas further argues, “as fluid, hybrid and constantly evolving – the always only temporary and partial results of continuous processes bringing together humans, objects, ... and technologies” (Kalpokas 252).

Packer, a “techno-fetishist” and hence “the most American”, has no life/self outside cyber technologies and the power they provide in the finance market (Laist 15). His possession of various technologies serves as a means that enables his identity as a ‘person’ and [his] “hegemony in the arena of global finance” market (Varsava 104). The limousine in which Packer takes his journey in the novel is full of such advanced digital technologies as “plasma screens”, “spycams”, “visual display units”, and his digital watch which constantly mediate his experiencing of reality outside and around the world to the extent that the distinction between technological virtuality and reality is very thin and blurred (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 16, 7, 83). This is so because he is seamlessly interrelated to his technological environment: “He used to sit here in hand-held space but that was finished now. The context was nearly touchless. He could talk most systems into operation or wave a hand at a screen” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 13). This deeply interrelated existence of Packer and technology creates his posthuman subjectivity that is inextricably tied to the digital technological environment only in

which his life and subjectivity make sense. For Packer the “reality” is that he constitutes the network of relation with the digital technology and that he is simply an entity in that network, a line of code within an entire system that constitutes the cyber (capital) world. It is precisely because of Packer’s deeply-interrelated existence with technology that even his wife, Elise, has to physically touch him to make sure that “he was here and real”, and that he cannot “melt into the texture of everyday life’ (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 25, 104). His tracking of others’ movements in the cyber capital world, and his own self tracking through the digital watch not only produce data on his screens but render his life more “online”, creating a condition of what Andreas Hepp calls “deep mediation”, as everything from his medical check up to sexual encounters occur in such a mediatized environment in a deeper way (6).

Cosmopolis asserts how cyber technology can transform the human body into codes, and a node in the networked relation between human, technology and the built environment. DeLillo offers an excellent and thought-provoking example of such a networked body of Packer thus:

He went outside and crossed the avenue, then turned and faced the building where he lived. He felt *contiguous with it*. It was eighty-nine stories, a prime number, in an undistinguished sheath of hazy bronze glass. They shared an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man. . . . He scanned its length and *felt connected to it*. (*Cosmopolis* 8-9)

Packer’s experiencing of this contiguity between his body and the built environment renders impossible any “distinction between subject and object” (Wesselman 181). In this networked relation to the techno-environment, Packer’s body seems to also open up to “reciprocal communication”, as Kroker says drawing on Haraway, with other species and non-human entities including machines (102-104, 132). Packer’s

limousine, which is full of sophisticated technologies and seems to function as an interface between the inside and the outside, his body and the technological environment and the real world and the global finance market, is something that *completes* his posthuman body. The limo, which is a “prosthetic extension of himself into urban space” doesn’t require the full engagement of Packer’s body because he “could talk most systems into operation or wave a hand at a screen and make it go blank” (Wesselman 183; DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 13). This “tactile dimension of Packer’s technological environment has diminished”, as aptly argued by Laist, “to zero [the body], as innovation has enabled an ever more invisible interface between the subject and his digital sensorium” (265).

Packer is a quintessential example of a body that is connected to the devices in his limousine and to the network of global finance market. He is already “one civilization ahead of this one”, and believes in cyber-capitalism’s motto “ [d]estroy the past, make the future” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 152, 93). Packer with all his technologies and data seems to affirm Hayles’s assumption about the posthuman condition: “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (3). The 28-year-old Packer is the ultimate persona of a cyber-capitalist, and an embodiment of transhumanism and information. If we consider the project of attaining human perfectibility through technology, then he is the perfect example of a transhuman figure. Packer embodies the dream of a transhuman future because his life is defined more by virtual interaction than physical one, and is more abstract, resembling the existence of disembodied data and information. His disembodied existence and the flow of information that retains his life in the cyber world reminds one of Hayles’s linking of the disembodied information to the future

form of the human: “the construction of human neural structures ... as flows of information” (50).

As the above arguments make clear, the character of Packer is built on two planes in the novel: he is both an idea that represents all that cyber capitalism stands for—the flow of money/information, speed, the conjoining of capital, media and information technology—and an effect of technological apparatus and assemblage that also render him, I argue, an “inforg”³⁸ (Floridi, *Fourth Revolution* 94). Eric’s belief in technological overcoming of death/human imperfection compels him to think that “people will not die.... People will be absorbed in streams of information”, and that human can be rewired cybernetically (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 104). He feels that the new information technology will help him transcend the bounded body and “live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206). Also, Packer’s suggestion that “consciousness saved from void” could be aligned with the transhumanist idea of uploading of the human consciousness into a computer system that Kurzweil had

³⁸ Floridi argues that with the fourth revolution—the information revolution—we have entered into an “infosphere” where humans have transformed into “inforgs”, or “connected informational organism”. She emphasizes that we “have begun to see ourselves as *connected informational organisms (inforgs)*, not through some fanciful transformation in our body, but, more seriously and realistically, through the re-ontologization of our environment and of ourselves”. She further asserts that “we are now slowly accepting the idea that we might be informational organisms among many agents ..., *inforgs* not so dramatically different from clever, engineered artefacts, but sharing with them a global environment that is ultimately made of information, the infosphere. The information revolution is not about extending ourselves, but about reinterpreting who we are” (2008, 654). Our becoming into “inforgs” also means that the transformation of the human body has not completely achieved the ontology of Haraway’s “cyborg”, but rather we, in a highly informational age, seemed to have evolved into “inforgs”, as Floridi argue. This evolution is not a bodily one, as Haraway would think, but a mental one whereby “we have found ways of augmenting our mental and informational capacities” (Floridi, *Fourth Revolution* 12; Giardino 107).

Being *inforgs* also indicates that “we are not, after all, so different from other intelligent engineered artefacts—in fact (Russo 66). What this evolution also suggests is the dominance and importance of *information* in contemporary world, where *information* is the key to our understanding of others, the world, and ourselves in relation to the world. In an Inter-networked, digital technologies of communications humans, or rather, “inforgs”, interact with others in a collective space (the “infosphere”) to produce a collective body of information—about capital, humans, the world etc., —that can be used as commodities as well. Packer’s ontology, I argue, needs to be situated within the context of this “infosphere” and “inforg” existence to understand his character as an *effect* of the large interconnected, inter-networked digital communication technologies used to speed up the finance capital world (Floridi, *Fourth Revolution* 12-13).

predicted in *The Singularity is Near*³⁹ (2005). Packer's wish to "live on a disk, as data" aligns him well with a transhumanist subject who believes that the future of technology is in achieving complete transcendence (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206). Further, Packer's wish to "live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin" renders his body not as a mediated body but a body "in technology", as Haraway notes drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ihde's phenomenological reading of the body⁴⁰ (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206; *When* 249). Parker's wish for such a physical transcendence is also connected to the exponential growth of cyber capital—in "nanoseconds", "zeptoseconds", "yoctoseconds", "one billionth of a second", "one septillionth of a second", reducing its functions into ever smaller and smaller units of time (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 79).

The body of Packer could likewise be reduced into smaller particles as it becomes increasingly dematerialized in the novel because of his connection to information that glows on the screens of his limousine. This dematerialization and disembodiment of Packer suggest the extent to which he could assimilate with the world of cyber capital and cyber technology. In other words, as his wish "to live on a disc" or his wish to become a "quantum dust" suggests, he is willing to abandon his human body/form entirely to become a disembodied, speculative agent within the machinery of cyber-capital (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206). This desire to become completely e-materialized and assimilated into the capital sphere is generated by finance capitalism and its logic, as Franco Berardi observes. In *The Uprising*, Berardi remarks that "[i]n the sphere of

³⁹ In his book *The Singularity is Near*, Kurzweil states that "the early 2030s is a reasonable time frame for the computational performance, memory, and brain-scanning prerequisites of uploading" human brain into computer. "Like any other technology, it will take some iterative refinement to perfect this capability, so the end of the 2030s is a conservative projection for successful uploading" (139).

⁴⁰ Haraway argues that humans are "bodies in technologies", and technologies are not mediations, something in between us and another bit of the world. Rather, *technologies are organs*, full partners, in what Merleau-Ponty called 'infoldings of the flesh.' I like the word infolding better than interface to suggest the dance of world-making encounters. Infoldings of the flesh are worldly embodiment" (2008, 249).

the financial economy, the acceleration of financial circulation and valorization implies an elimination of the real world. The more you destroy physical things, physical resources, and the body, the more you can accelerate the circulation of financial flows” (105). The elimination of everything real, meaningful and material, according to Berardi, is due primarily to the “acceleration of the info-flow” (105). So “the faster information circulates, the faster [Packer’s] value is accumulated” (Berardi 105).

Packer understands the importance of data in his life and in the finance market. He feels that data is the new *element* of his posthuman, digital self:

He understood how much it meant to him, the roll and flip of data on a screen. He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing and chambered shell. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. *In fact, data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process.* This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that *defined every breath of the planet's living billions.* (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 24; emphasis added)

He realizes that it is the “soulful” nature of data that defines his posthuman existence (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 24). Data is also “soulful” and is the “dynamic aspect of the life process” in the digital era because data is now, as many theorists have argued, a global digital economy (Castells [2000]; Kitchin [2014]; Lyon and Bauman [2013]; Thrift [2005]). This new digital economy is identified as “knowing capitalism” by Nigel Thrift (2005). According to Deborah Lupton, “knowing capitalism” depends both on the technologies that generate knowledge in the form of digital data in massive quantities, and on the commodification of

these knowledges. It also rests on the valuing and promotion of innovation, for which new knowledges are required (92). Packer's dissatisfaction with the limitations of existing technologies, which I discussed in the second chapter, is directly related to this insistence on "innovation" and "new knowledge", which itself, as Lupton and Thrift argue, is a commodity in the digital economy now (92).

Packer's emphasis on and use of data—both on the global finance capital and his own transaction, movement, behavior, etc.,—available on his various screens inside the limousine also render him what Lupton calls a "datafied and quantified self" (92). Packer symbolizes the existence of a person in a "datafied society", a society which is a product of the computational turn, and a society where "all aspects of life", according Karin van and Mirko Schäfer, "are... transformed into quantifiable data" in order "to predict human behavior and automate decision-making processes" (13). Datafication, according to van Dijck, "is the transformation of social action into online quantified data, thus, allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis". It is "a legitimate means to *access, understand and monitor* people's behavior" (198). Packer's posthuman identity depends partly on the data that are constantly generated and glowing on the screen. His movement in the novel is also mediated not only through monitoring, analyzing, and generating data but also through "self-tracking"—the episode of his check-up for the prostrate and his watch that records his movement across the city are all part of his self-tracking and "quantified self" (Lupton 92). However, it is this same data that also functions as a commodity in the finance market that not only separates him from his "other" Benno Levin but also, that which finally lands him in his ultimate ruin—both in the market and in his death. Data is a commodity for him, and that which sustains him in the cyber market. His attempts to outwit others in the market by possessing and controlling the data compel us to consider him among the new tribe of "digital dictators" that Yuval Noah Harari predicted a few years ago as the future group of powerful

people who can control, have access to, and possess human data to use it for their own advantage (“Will the Future”).

Though the novel is set in the year 2000, Packer is already “one civilization ahead of this one”, and is always aiming for a perpetual future, and believes in the dictum that cyber-capitalism “destroy[s] the past, make[s] the future” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 93, 152). Rather than living in the past, he wishes to float freely and disembodied within the network of the cyber-capital universe that symbolizes an everlasting *present*. There is a compelling and self-reflexive way in which Packer’s character resembles the flow of information/data/sign on the screens inside and outside his limousine. Such an understanding of the constitution of his character also helps us understand Packer’s character as an effect of the formal structure of the novel. The very journey of Packer that constitutes the totality of the novel’s structure and theme also resembles the hyper-textual, time-space compressed and disorienting experience that one gets on a cyber space. As Ghashmari remarks,

the narrative of Eric’s journey across Manhattan which comprises the novel’s plot resembles surfing the World Wide Web where the organizing principles of time and space no longer apply. Eric goes from the multicultural area around the United Nations to the Diamond district, then stops at a presidential motorcade followed by the funeral procession of his favourite Sufi rap star; he then finds himself in the middle of an anti-capitalism riot, then a techno rave and later a filming of a movie that he himself becomes an extra in. [He then] witness[es] assassinations of two important figures, [while] making a large fortune and then losing it all. These events are also punctuated with philosophical conversations with his analysts about history, politics, technology, transhumanism and death. This matrix of signs and data happens in a

place that can be considered the mecca of cyber-capitalism, New York City. (138-138)

This dizzying experience prompted by these events is only intensified into producing an experience of what Joseph Tabbi identifies as “technological sublime” created by the high-tech, customized limousine—which is “a platonic replica”—in which Packer travels, and the technological apparatus to which he is connected (17; DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 12). Packer has been so completely colonized by data that he views things only from the perspective of cyber capitalism and data. He is so obsessed with the “medleys of data [that is available] on every screen, all the flowing symbols and alpine charts, the polychrome numbers pulsing. He absorbed this material in a couple of long still seconds, ignoring the speech sounds that issued from lacquered heads” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 13). He also views others as/in terms of data, because he sees data as “the point, the thrust, the future” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 34). His views of ‘others’ on the street are also informed by his digital life or what Floridi calls “onlife”, which refers to “the new experience of a hyper-connected reality within which it is no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline” (*Onlife Manifesto* 1). Thus, Packer describes people in the street as: “*the others...*, endless anonymous, twenty-one lives per second” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 20; emphasis added). His life makes more sense as *onlife* also because everything he does have an impact in the virtual world.

Like much of the content and the language of the novel, almost everything that Packer does seems to have little depth. Language, as we know, is a medium that forms the structure and content of a fiction, as much as it informs and affects characterization. The uncharacteristic nature of language in the novel has been referred to as “jammed” by Mark Goble. The language of *Cosmopolis*, as Goble argues, is such that it “moves in fits and starts”, resembling the constantly interrupted journey of Packer across the street (186-187).

This deathlessness also seems to be embodied, I argue, in the rather disembodied “onlife” of Packer in the novel (Floridi, *Onlife Manifesto* 1). This depthlessness is manifest not only in his relation to others but also what he does: he married his wife Elise, a poet and heiress, for the sheer value of her fortune, “the history of it, piling up over generations through world wars”, and he has consideration for her only “due to her relative celebrity in the social columns and the fashion books” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 120, 116). He kills even his own security guard and has no regret over the death of his rival Nikolai Kaganovich. All of these makes him an “entity” without any depth except the one provided by the complexity and ever-changing flow of data.

The form of the novel informing the character of Packer seems more than obvious in the rather networked connection that the novel seems to make as it moves ahead with Packer’s journey. This interconnection is not only between Packer and technology/cyber capital world, or Packer and other finance capitalists, but also with the city of New York, the quintessential space of finance capitalism and high technology. The assemblage of cyber capital and the interconnected existence of Packer will make more sense if we look at how his body’s seamless and interconnectedness are *spatialized* in the novel. The information flow, technological sublime, etc. are projected onto the cityscape as well, with its bustling, global character. The city also epitomizes a space that is in crisis—the journey of Packer through the city is punctuated by a series of disruptions, “state of chaos” and an anarchist protest against capitalism (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 65).

The city in itself—with its high technological façade, the flow of capital which is visually evident in the glowing of numbers on the stock market—acquires the status of a character and is, I argue, in contiguous with Packer’s body. The city is part of a “networked cognitive system”, as W. J. Mitchell states, within the context of which Packer’s posthuman

self makes more sense. It is so because the “biological body [of Packer] meshes with the city; the city itself has become not only the domain of [his] networked cognitive system, but also... the spatial and material embodiment of that system” of which Packer is a part (19). The city of New York, which is presented as the quintessential example of a posthuman city in the novel, constitutes his networked connection because it has a global connection which cannot be contextualized/spatialized/located in New York City alone. This interconnection is most often commented on and reflected upon by Benno Levin, as Patrick Jagoda remarks (171). Frida Beckman asserts this close link between Packer and the city when she observes that Packer can be seen as a “node in a global economic system” (1389). In his rather unconnected “confessions” that make up half of the novel, Levin makes very insightful remarks about this interconnection or networked existence: “[the] world is supposed to mean something that’s self-contained. But nothing is self-contained. Everything enters something else” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 60). He adds that “in the world today everything is shared”, making his fate as the “other” as the inevitable consequences of power being concentrated into the hands of a few like Packer (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 60).

Though the spatial horizon of *Cosmopolis* is very small—the journey of Packer is from the United Nations building in the east in Manhattan’s 47 Street to his childhood home, Hell’s Kitchen, in the west, constituting nearly two miles—DeLillo has insisted that it is “a novel about New York and the world” (“Great American”). The global scale of the events depicted in the novel is suggested by both the *interior space* of the limousine—which resembles the cyber space—in which Eric travels and *the exterior*, city space/scape of New York. The numerous screens inside the car repeatedly emit images and data circulated from and to several parts of the world. These images include the murder of Packer’s rival and that of Arthur Rapp, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, who is “killed live on the Money Channel” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 33). Packer watches all these distant acts of

violence “happen again, in obsessive replays, as the car [moves] towards a choke point on Lexington Avenue” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 33). These events, he thinks, will “repeatedly [aired] into the night ... until... everyone in the world [has] seen it, whichever [comes] first” (*Cosmopolis* 34). It is noteworthy that Packer prefers to watch the riot that happens outside his car on television screens, reasserting his “onlife”, where, he thinks, it makes “more sense” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 89).

The events that take place on the street with larger/global implications and the ones circulated through the screens inside the limo as well as the acts in which Packer is engaged—including his speculations on the currency—seem to resemble new/social media technologies’ unfolding and telescoping of spatially “dispersed events so that they may be co-present in a single location” (Crosthwaite 5). This seamless overlapping of events, locations, bodies and spaces that creates an instantaneous presentness has been pointed out also by Boxall when he asserts that “in the new space and time of electronic globalization..., here can morph into there, the very possibility of distance gives way to an unboundaried, simultaneous presence” (*Possibility* 222). Like the character of the cosmopolitan Packer, the city thus also acquires a cosmopolitan character. The flows of global finance capital, data, and of various bodies of the people that are etched into the physicality of the city also render it a DeLillian vision of what Paul Virilio calls the “omnipolis”, or “‘world city’/ultracity⁴¹, presaging a

⁴¹Virilio’s develops his concept “Ultracity” or ‘Omnipolis’ in his *The Futurism of the Instant: Stop- Eject* (2010), and briefly in his *The Art of the Motor* (1995), *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (2006), *Open Sky* (1997) and in *The Information Bomb* (2000). Though not completely a physical structure, the Ultracity is a new urban space created by “communicative instantaneity, continuous connectivity and a normalization of ‘total mobilization’”. This urban space is constituted also by a complete overhauling of conventional ideas of “location, citizenship and movement” because it cannot be accessed through conventional medium of movement such as “roads and high- ways but digital devices and superhighways”. It therefore has the character of “a virtual city that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere”. This space transforms ideas of citizenship of its occupants as well, as “being a citizen of the ultracity is not a geographical experience but a social, technological and psychological condition”. Citizens can access and “inhabit the city from wherever they are: in high-speed trains, in jets, in lifts, with their mobile phones and their laptops”. An important feature of this space is “the movement and interconnectedness of its occupants”, the ‘ultracitizens’, as they can be called. As Virilio argues, the “ultracitizen’s connectedness, and, in turn, citizenship is guaranteed through their technological tools, their addiction to them, and through their increasing intolerance of older modalities of non-virtual presence” (qtd. in Davies 199-200).

catastrophic levelling of culture through the “geostrategic homogenization of the globe” (qtd. in McQuire 147). “Omnipolis” is “the world as city of the near future, in which ‘urban space ... loses ... its geographical reality,’ and those with access to the new technologies find that it is no longer necessary ... to journey, to depart, to go to things” because “everything is already there” (qtd. in Crosthwaite 5). Packer’s experience in the novel, I argue, is a good example of a citizen in such an ultracity that is constituted by his connectedness to various technologies including his high-tech limo, the cyber capital world that also requires a network of virtual relation, communicative instantaneity, and continuous connectivity to both the digital world and the city scape of New York City—especially to the stock market outside that sustains him—which itself appears to be a virtual space. The technologies he possesses and his addiction to them as well as his intolerance towards older technologies makes his life “a social, technological and psychological condition”, and not a geographical experience, as Virilio would qualify it (qtd. in Davies 200).

Both Levin and Packer are the *symptoms* and *outcome* of the monster called finance capitalism. If Levin is, as I have argued in the second chapter, the ‘waste’ produced by such an order, Packer is both a *symptom* and *raison d’être* of this system. It is built on people like Packer and Levin. It is in this way that Levin also becomes the ‘other’ of Packer. He is indeed a required *thing* in the functioning of the market. This is what Vija Kinski, an expert in the theories of finance and Marxism, suggests: “the market culture is total. It needs these men and women. They are necessary to the system they despise. They give it energy and definition... They are traded on the markets of the world. This is why they exist, to invigorate, and perpetuate the system” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 90). Though DeLillo’s direct reference here is to the people protesting in the streets against global capitalism’s control over everything, he is also alerting us to the working of cyber capitalism through people like Packer and Levin. In this sense, Kinski is also referring to the creation of individuals like

Levin as “wastes” by a cyber capitalist order, and to people as data, as individuals have now been turned into, in a highly “datafied society”, to be used by such powerful individuals as Packer (Lupton; Schäfer and van Es; Cheney-Lippold). Individuals in such a capitalist order are not only consumers of commodities but commodities themselves, increasingly being quantified and datafied (Lupton 95). Packer’s entanglement with technology not only distances him from the tangible world outside but also makes him part of a networked (cyber) world where appearances rule, while Levin, who mostly leads an offline life, seems, as Thomsen argues, to be more oriented towards simplicity and the immediacy of the tangible (192).

If Packer’s posthuman subjecthood in the novel is facilitated by the ambient technologies within which he lives and perceives things, Levin’s subjectivity is partly constituted by a lack of the same technology to which Eric has continuous access, and partly by, as Laist argues, the “confessions” he writes (173). While it is the writing technology—the “confessions”—that sustains Levin and defines his subjectivity the novel, it is the cyber technologies that control and sustain Packer’s life and subjectivity. In other words, while Levin “want[s] ten thousand pages that will stop the world”, Packer “thinks “past what is new... and “wants to live in the future (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 152). What unites them is their attempt to surpass and transcend themselves—one through the technology of writing, the other through cyber technology. This duality also finds its expression in DeLillo’s *The Silence* (2020), in which writing technology and its close relation to memory (shown through Tessa Berens, a multi-lingual poet of “Caribbean-European-Asian origins”) are pitted against the colonizing power of digital technology and its tendency towards disembodied experience (revealed through Max Stenner, a character who always repeats television voices and stares at the blank screen of a digital television set) (*Silence* 7). Levin also “suffer[s] spells of *hwabyung* (that he admits he got from Korea) [w]hen [he] tr[ies] to suppress [his] anger. This

is a sort of cultural panic which [he has] caught on the internet” (Laist 177; DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 56). He is prone to such afflictions because, as he explains, “[i]n the world today everything is shared” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 60). Levin’s immersion in the “web” of the Internet has caused him depersonalization, as Laist argues (178). This has also afflicted him with what he thinks as a discord of third person: “sometimes I hear my voice when I am speaking. I am speaking to someone and hear the sound of my voice, third person, filling the air around my head” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 58).

Packer’s wish to “live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin” renders his body not as a mediated body but a body “in technology”, as Haraway notes drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ihde’s phenomenological reading of the body (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206; *When* 249). Haraway argues that humans are “bodies in technologies”, and that “technologies are not mediations, something in between us and another bit of the world. Rather, *technologies are organs*, full partners, in what Merleau-Ponty called ‘infoldings of the flesh.’ I like the word infolding better than interface to suggest the dance of world-making encounters. Infoldings of the flesh are worldly embodiment” (*When* 249). This ‘posthuman’ experience is, as Packer feels, “the master-thrust of cyber-capital, to extend the human experience toward infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and vigorous investment” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206-7).

The fact of Packer witnessing his own death on the screens of his watch before he actually dies suggests his disappearance into the cyber technologies where his actual self seems to belong/live, as we have seen, thereby achieving his ultimate posthuman/ous “onlife” (Floridi, *Onlife Manifesto* 1). As a means of cutting-edge technology, Packer’s watch has a “camera [that] was... so microscopically refined [that] it was almost pure information. It was

almost metaphysics. It operated inside the watch body, collecting images in the immediate vicinity and displaying them on the crystal” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 204–5). The witnessing of one’s own dead body on a screen could be seen as an example of an ultimate image of technology’s absorption of oneself: “O shit I am dead. He had always wanted to become a quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in a whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206). This, however, also completes his wish to “live... as data”: “he is dead inside the crystal of his watch, but still alive in original space, waiting for the shot to sound” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 206, 209). What his ultimate fate reflects is not just Levin’s urge to destroy Packer, but also Packer’s wish to zap his corporeal self and disseminate into the cyber space as data that will benefit other cyber capitalists. This truly posthuman existence is, for Packer, “the creed of the new culture” where “[p]eople will not die... People will be absorbed in streams of information ... Microchips so small and powerful. Humans and computers merge ... And never-ending life begins” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 104-5).

Packer’s desire for transcending the conventional notion of the human and to attain a posthuman subjecthood needs to be seen as evidence of technologies’ intrusion into the human mind and the body whereby information—which now has a life of itself, independent of human—not so much as control, as Packer insists in the novel, but determines and negotiates human actions and subjective desires. This is also a reflective of transhumanist desire to transcend the limitations of the human body. This new desire towards a posthuman subjecthood also needs to be seen, as Thomsen asserts, as a symptom of a turn towards conceiving a “new human” by genetics with “a new kind of dualism in thinking about individuality ..., not between body and mind, but between code and corpus” (39). This desire for bodily transcendence reaches, as

Herbrechter argues, “a new, intensified, phase in the twenty-first century driven by nano-, info-, neuro- and biotechnologies on the one hand, and climate change, loss of biodiversity and extinction threats, on the other hand” (19).

The technologies that surround Packer, including his limousine, are not external to his body, but his body and the limousine/ambient technologies are, as Haraway argues, “entangled with each other, as “the knots we call beings” (*When* 250). Packer’s operating of most of the technologies by “wav[ing] a hand at screen” not only merges his body with technologies and his flesh with data, creating a continuum between his body, technology and environment, but also makes it difficult for us to distinguish between the technologies that surround him and his body (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 13). The conception of the body thus also transforms our ideas of the human and questions human’s limitations, as the human here is constituted by a body that networks and interrelates with other technologies and entities that cross the borders of the bodies of different entities. As Laura Beloff argues, “when the immediate, networked environment becomes firmly linked to a user and his biological body, the idea of borders, what is a part of a user and where his/her body ends and environment begins, start blurring” (85). This “blurring of borders of body and technology” in Packer is, as Verbeek suggests, hybridized by the *cyborg relation*⁴², and creates his posthuman body that intersects “the human and the technological” through “merg[ing] rather than “merely” being embodied” (388-394).

This meshing of the human/body with the ambient technologies/surrounding environment can be better understood through the relationality theory inherent in such posthuman thinkers as Barad and Braidotti who propose that the human/agency is shaped

⁴² “Cyborg relation” is Peter-Paul Verbeek’s term that refers to the merging of the human and technologies (“Cyborg Intentionality”).

through perpetual interaction with non-human agencies in a shared ontological framework. Their conceptualization of such emergent/“becoming”⁴³ entanglement, in which the conventional distinction between human and machine, subject and object become untenable, emphasizes not only the inseparability of material phenomena and apparatus but also, as Barad argues, that “materiality is discursive (i.e., material phenomena are inseparable from the apparatuses: matter emerges out of and includes as part of its being, the ongoing reconfiguring of boundaries”)(151–152)⁴⁴. In this sense, in “the ongoing materialization of [Packer’s] world”, the human/nonhuman material bodies are “agentive” and “intra-active”, making his immersion in the ambient techno-cyber capital environment productive of his agency (Barad 180). This agentive capacity of the nonhuman entities is suggested by Packer in his reference to the data on the screens inside the limousine as “soulful”, “pulsing” and “glowing” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 13, 27). This seamless entanglement of “becoming” is also reflected in Packer’s feeling of being “contiguous with...the skyscraper”. The sharing of “an edge or boundary, skyscraper and man” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 8-9). The techno-corporeal entanglement is also referred to in DeLillo’s embodying of the city as “a city of stunned flesh” that “eats and sleeps noise” (*Cosmopolis* 172, 71). This entangled corporeality is also evident, as I have already discussed, in his relation the limousine.

The novel suggests, inter alia, how the various network devices such as spycam, computer and television screens inside the limousine and the digital watch that Packer wears create not only the technological environment within which Packer acts and

⁴³ “Becoming”, argues Rosi Braidotti, “is the actualization of the immanent encounter between subjects, entities and forces which are apt mutually to affect and exchange parts of each other in a creative and non-invidious manner” (*Metamorphoses* 68).

⁴⁴ Emphasising a mutual “intra-active” process, Barad argues that “[a]pparatuses are not assemblages of humans and nonhumans; they are open-ended practices involving specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans, where the differential constitutions of human and nonhuman designate particular phenomena that are themselves implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity, including their en-folding and reconstitution in the reconfiguring of apparatuses. That is, human bodies, like all other bodies, are not entities with inherent boundaries and properties but phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and proper ties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity. Humans are part of the world-body space in its dynamic structuration (171-72).

performs his posthuman subjectivity but also, his entangled “relationality” with other nonhuman entities, including the city scape of New York (Barad; Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*). Packer’s character, as I have tried to argue, is a product of the novel’s concerns with the intersection between “technology and capitalism, [t]he inseparability” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 23). The novel’s entire narrative is projected towards suggesting this intersection, thereby forming the structure of the novel too. As we have seen, Packer is an embodiment of the intersection of finance capitalism and high technology. This intersection of the two also requires, as the narrator suggests, “the practical mapping of the nervous system onto digital memory”. That is “the master thrust of cyber-capital, to extend the human experience towards infinity as a medium for corporate growth and investment, for the accumulation of profits and rigorous reinvestment” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 207). It is the technologies that surround Packer that control and make his movements—both online and offline— possible. We cannot understand Packer’s character outside this networked existence, and outside the intersection between technology and capitalism; human body/agency and the ambient technologies: he is as much a product of this system as he produces it. It is within this interstice that Packer’s character not only is built in the novel, but makes more sense as a posthuman subject.

However, it is also important to notice here that his bodily transcendence via absorbing into the cybernetic is through an insistence on bodily experience of pain and pleasure. This is evident in his numerous sexual encounters en route, his occasional urge—especially to his bodyguard—to inflict pain on his body and his insistence to Kendra Hays to “shun [him]to his DNA” with gun (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 115). He insists to Kendra: “stun me. I mean it. Draw the gun and shoot...Show me what it feels like. I am looking for more. Show me something I don’t know. Stun me to my DNA.

Come on, do it. Click the switch. Aim and fire. I want all the Volts the weapon holds. Do it. Shoot it. Now” (DeLillo, *Cosmopolis* 115). This demand to shoot him and zap him with her teaser gun occurs immediately after his sexual encounter with her, and invokes, as Laist argues,

the techno-scientific discovery of a digital code in the inner structure of biology. The implication is that Eric will seize upon the physical experience of pain as a way of plunging down beneath the structure of corporeal morphology, toward an essential binary code of universal biology—the binary code of genetic informatics—that is naturally computer-compatible. (171)

His insistence here is not to abandon corporeality completely and become data on a computer monitor, but his vision of a cybernetic self seems to entail his bodily “experience of pain and pleasure in order to discover” the complexity of a cyber self, and to flow into the vortex of cyber capital world and to achieve a posthuman subjectivity in the “cybernetics of everyday life” (Laist 171). The constant emphasis on the materiality of the body in the novel through references to his pain, disease, sexual experience etc. needs to be seen as part of DeLillo’s counter narrative project in the novel, as Herbrechter argues in the case of *Zero K* (2020).

The emphasis on affect or bodily/pleasure can be read as emerging from DeLillo’s “neo-humanist” project in the novel, thereby he puts forward a “desire to “rehumanize, remember and reinvent” the human in the face of the “post humanizing” tendencies of contemporary technologies (Herbrechter 22, 7). This desire is also evident in Packer’s affective relation to the past in the novel—that is why he nostalgically yearns for a past time, as exemplified in his desire to have a hair cut in a salon situated far away from the chaos of the city, at a place where he had spent his childhood. This nostalgic desire can perhaps be seen as closely linked to DeLillo’s

counter narrative poetics in the novel of which Herbrechter talks about. I will return to this at the end of this section (2020). Also, in this sense, Packer's ultimate death—despite his wealth and possession of the best technologies—seems to be a DeLillian message against a portent belief in technology's ability to overcome death. He, however, critically engages with such questions in *Zero K* (2016).

b) Technology, Entanglement and the *Becoming Body*: The *Character* of Character in *Body Artist*

If we define character as a *textual effect*, constructed and reconstructed by the linguistic and textual aspects of a novel, DeLillo's characters would reveal fascinating aspects of human-machine intersection and new ideas of embodiment. In other words, DeLillo's characters, understood thus, will help us think about certain ethical engagement in which DeLillo's fiction is involved, and for which the concept of character is used in some of his novels. This section will discuss DeLillo's construction of character in his *The Body Artist*, a novel that foregrounds the construction of identity through a processual movement between the bodies of different characters and nonhuman entities, *enabled* and *mediated* by a digital voice recorder that DeLillo *places* between the networked relation between the bodies of Mr. Tuttle and Lauren, two important characters in the novels, to suggest the processual nature of *postman* bodies. *I argue here that understanding the character of Mr. Tuttle—who appears rather as a nonhuman entity in the novel—and Lauren requires us to pay close attention to not only the networked relation between the two, and Lauren's husband's character but also the “intra-action”, which is made possible by the digital recorder, that constitutes Mr. Tuttle and Lauren's posthuman subjecthood. It is only by focusing on the interface effected by these characters and the device that makes possible the interface that we can understand the processual nature of Lauren's body and the characters' posthuman identity on which DeLillo dwells deeply in the novel.*

The Body Artist (2001) is the story of a 36-year-old Lauren Hartke, a body performance artist, and her attempt to come to terms with the sudden emptiness created by the death of her husband, Rey Robles, a 64-year-old movie director. The novel opens in their kitchen, with her making breakfast for her husband. After the breakfast, he drives to his ex-wife's apartment in Manhattan and shoots himself. After his death, Lauren comes to stay in an old house the couple had rented near the coast, where a figure called "Mr. Tuttle" intrudes and lives uninvited. The remainder of the novel is concerned with Lauren's attempts to *inhabit*—through her bodily mediation with her dead husband via a voice recorder/a sonic-ghost/Mr Tuttle—her sense of loss and trauma as she mourns his death. DeLillo, as is the case with most of his other novels, returns here to one of his persistent concerns of his work: the dehumanizing as well as agency-enabling power of technology.

In the house, she becomes intrigued by the strange presence, "the voice", in the little-used room, of something like a poltergeist, someone who "was smallish and fine-bodied... a kid, sandy-haired and roused from deep sleep, or medicated maybe" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 39, 40-41). She also names him/it Mr. Tuttle. Mr. Tuttle is neither an adult, nor a man, nor a child, and is simultaneously a "ghost-voice" and a "living tape recorder" that not only remembers things of the past but "remembers future"; he is, as the narrator tells us, "outside the easy sway of either/or" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 98, 73). In other words, he "violates the limits of the human" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 108). The ghost-like figure/voice, she thinks, "had come from cyberspace, a man who had emerged from her computer screen in the dead of night. He was from Kotka, Finland" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 45). He speaks in a strange, cluttered language, and repeats, or rather reanimates uncannily Lauren and her husband's conversations most of which she had recorded when he was alive. She finds this reproduction by the figure as something like an externalized embodiment of her loss (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 57). She becomes fascinated with this figure/voice/ "noise" and starts communicating with

him/it, which she also records. Her mourning of the death of Mr. Rey is/mediated also through a body performance at the end of the novel that is curiously titled “Body Time”, a performance in which she also embodies other selves.

To understand the concept of character in *The Body Artist*, it is necessary, I argue, that we need to consider the technology around which the novel is built: the digital voice recorder that mediates, defines, (re)animates and gives rise to, the interaction between Lauren, Mr. Tuttle, and Rey as well as Lauren’s relation to the past/Mr. Rey. She also incorporates the exchanges she recorded between Mr. Tuttle and herself to her performance, “Body Time”. Lauren’s relation to and with her husband revolves around the tape recorder, as she records her conversations with him. Mr. Tuttle begins to imitate first her and then her husband’s voice that is part of the conversation that they had recorded. It is also worth noting that he doesn’t reproduce what the couple once shared or communicated *live* but Lauren’s *recording* of what they communicated with each other.

The relationship that this strange character—strange also because he speaks an ungrammatical English, and with a voice that Lauren describes as being “reedy and thin and trapped in tenses and inflections, in singsong conjugations”—has with Lauren also defines her and her performance (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 63). It is not a surprise hence that his very construction as a character in the novel is through this terse, “thin” and “reedy” language that DeLillo uses to emphasis his techno-self, as the recorder-human (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 63). In other words, he *is* (as a character) what /how he speaks/the language he utters, a language that is in bits and pieces, and what he does. He is, in this sense, very much a formal construction. However, it is not entirely his voice that he speaks with, but it can be characterized as a polyphonic voice. Mikko Keskinen also points to this peculiarity of Mr. Tuttle, saying that he “is [a] polyphonic par excellence” (34). This polyphonic character of him is, however, not in a Bakhtian vein, but instead it is “literally a multiplicity of different people’s voices. His

polyphony is that of a tape machine; he records and plays back; he absorbs sound waves and reproduces them with high fidelity” (Keskinen 34). Because of this peculiarity, Mr. Tuttle’s appears like an answering machine as his answers to Lauren “are as discontinuous and insensitive to contexts as those provided by an answering machine” (Keskinen 34).

It is also intriguing, especially when we consider DeLillo’s long-standing interest in dealing with themes related to/around time, that Mr. Tuttle is presented in the novel as someone/something who is outside (our) time, someone who is not in sync with our understanding of temporality divided into past, present and future. In his notes to the novel (in what is known as “DeLillo Papers”) DeLillo has suggested that Mr. Tuttle is a figure that cannot be comprehended within the logic of time and language. He says that “time as existential dimension [is] missing in Mr. Tuttle or [is] jangled—Time does not flow for him, sequentially, as a story, in time. Time is deeper than language or culture. It is a culture. But not for Mr. Tuttle. Not our time . . . he is what is beyond language” (qtd. in Coale 235). He adds that “Mr. Tuttle is an emblem of the difficulties that prevail in our understanding of time and our attempts to talk about time coherently. Time itself is incoherent to us. That’s why we call it God” (qtd. in Coale 235).

To understand the character of Mr. Tuttle—and hence Mrs. Lauren’s too—it is necessary that we pay close attention to the rather networked relation of Lauren to Mr. Tuttle, something that emerges through the voice recorder after her husband’s death. Lauren begins to develop an adhesiveness to Mr. Tuttle because he imitates most of the time the voice of her dead husband, as well as hers. She finds his/its voice uncannily familiar and strange: “It wasn’t outright impersonation but she heard elements of her voice, the clipped delivery, the slight buzz deep in her throat, her pitch, her sound, and how difficult at first, unearthly almost, to detect her own voice coming from someone else, from him, and then how deeply disturbing” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 50). The polyphonic character of Mr. Tuttle’s voice also

gets embodied in Lauren. She, as Keskinen argues, “not only hears voices but produces them herself”. And very strangely Lauren “articulates her own voice, Mr. Tuttle’s voice, his imitation of her and her husband’s voices, and her own adoption of Mr. Tuttle’s idiolect” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 35). This circularity of repetition/imitation also sometimes confuses us, compelling us to ask: who actually is who? whose voice are we hearing? It is unclear as to whether it is the voice of Lauren or Rey or Mr. Tuttle that we hear through the technom-mediated, but at the same time humanly mimicked voice(s).

It is the tape recorder that both constitutes and makes possible this circularity and mediation. Most of the conversation between Lauren and Mr. Tuttle occurs through the mediation by the tape recorder placed in between the two even when they sit side by side. Without this technological mediation neither Tuttle materializes fully, nor is he able to communicate properly. This is evident when Lauren takes him out—he “seemed unhappy out here” and “[s]he tried not to press him for information” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 44). The recorder plays so important a role in the novel that it not only makes possible Mr. Tuttle’s materialization as a ghostly/live/organic entity but sometimes even assumes the character of a character, primarily because DeLillo makes barely scant distinction between Mr. Tuttle and the recorder. It is so, I argue, because the recorder makes possible and *mediates* the embodied experience of the past, present and future in Lauren. Mr. Tuttle also functions, I argue, as the recorder itself in that he/it quite often reproduces what Lauren and her husband talked about. This fact is articulated by Keskinen too: “Mr. Tuttle, whatever his ontological status is, functions as a living tape recorder, as a recording and reproducing apparatus” (35). The reproductions in the novel create certain ideas of repetition but it is different from the spectacted reproduction of Lee Oswald’s murder in *Libra*, and the reproduction of disaster images in *White Noise* or *Falling Man* in that what Mr. Tuttle repeats rejuvenates, unlike those spectacted experiences of characters that we discussed in chapter 2, Lauren’s relation to

her husband, and allows her to mourn his death *properly* through the mediation of Mr. Tuttle/the recorder.

The reproduction of the past, if that is what he does, is also different because he repeats them, as Michael Naas says, with some “differences and variations”, and it is not clear what he says or “what he *is* because of his strangeness” (68). He seems to be, as Naas further asserts, “a living tape recorder or an audio book with certain capacity for innovation and invention” (68). The tape recorder becomes an embodiment of the relation between Lauren and her husband, while Mr. Tuttle “embodies” Rey not just because Lauren requests him to talk like Rey but also to “do” him: “talk like him, *Do* like him. Speak in his voice. *Do* Rey” (Naas 68; DeLillo, *Body Artist* 75; emphasis added). Mr. Tuttle also talks to her in “live” Rey’s voice, which is not, as in some other cases, an imitation of any of Rey’s recordings. Though it is a reproduction of an actual event involving Rey’s voice, Lauren is certain that it is “Rey *alive* in the course of a talk he’d had with her, in this room, not long after they’d come here” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 61). This entangled relationship among the three, made possible by the device, also enables Lauren, I argue, to process the trauma of loss. The role of the technological device is very crucial here in not only making this entangled relationship but also for the construction of the character of these three, or at least that of Lauren and Mr. Tuttle. But the interface produced by the device also suggests, as Keskinen asserts, “the dissolution of ‘natural’ subjectivity and its coherence. When mediated voice is no longer the irreducible kernel of subjectivity” (36). This makes it impossible to imagine a unified, coherent, non-mediated, and singular self that most traditional novels aspire for.

Lauren uses the “tape recorder”—both the recorder and Mr. Tuttle—to re-experience her relation to her dead husband. She prompts him/it to speak, asking questions such as:

What do you know? Who is Rey? Do you talk to him? Did you ever talk to him? Do you know who I am talking about when I say Rey? I am Lauren. Who is Rey? A man.

So tall. Look. So Tall. This tall. And moustache. A man with hair on his upper lip.

Look at me, geek. How tall? This tall. A man with brushy hair on his upper lip. But he shaved his moustache. (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 79-80).

Tuttle repeats what Rey has said but it is, as I have argued, more than a mere repetition as the utterance has some sort of *presentness* to it that makes it an event that is happening *now*, live:

Just for a drive. This is all. I will take the Toyota, he said, “If I ever find my key”.

This is what the man was saying in the doorway, looking small and weak beat down by something. It did not seem an act of memory. It was Rey’s memory. It was Rey’s voice all right, it was her husband’s tonal soul, but she didn’t think the man was remembering. It is happening now. This is what she thought. She watched him struggle in the utterance and thought it was happening, somehow, now, in his frame, in his fractured time, and he is only reporting, helplessly, what they say. (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 93)

As Lauren says, “this was not some communication with the dead. It was Rey alive in the course of a live he’d had with her, in this room, not long after they had come here” (*BA* 64).

Lauren wonders, as readers do: “what is it? Is it just a material embodiment of Lauren’s memory of Rey and their time?” Or is it, as Naas asks, “a Memorex”, that has stored the “now-dead-voice of the couple”/Rey mediating “the posthumous relationship of the couple, creating an endless permanence to the dead husband’s voice so that Lauren can return to her former self though listening to it?” (60). It seems that it is not just the aural quality of the sound that enables the relationship; it has to be bodied forth, and hence she adheres to the embodiment of the voice in Mr. Tuttle.

As is now evident, Mr. Tuttle is so complex a figure that he transgresses all limits of the human, language and characterization—he even transgresses the rules of language speaking an English that at first seems to make no sense but is mere “noise” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 18).

He is in this sense a product of the form of the novel too. However, in closer scrutiny it has meanings that are revealing. The way Lauren speaks, behaves, thinks, uses language also changes later, revealing Mr. Tuttle's influence on her, sometimes even *becoming* him, especially after Tuttle disappears: "sometimes she thought in these motive forms, addressing someone who wasn't quite her, and other times in other ways. She *thought in faces*, there in the air, *the little missing man's* when she could recall *it*, just outside the bony sockets of her eyes. *I am Lauren. But less and less* (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 123; emphasis added). The effects of this character on Lauren are so intense that she begins to record him and incorporates him/his voice into her show, *Body Time*, and repeats him while making phone calls, giving interview, etc. Like Mr. Tuttle, she imitates his/its voice "live" at the end of the novel and during the performance, where her (his?) voice is again being recorded on a "message storing digital voice recorder, the devil that makes her do it" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 114).

This performance is very fascinating because it completes the seamless body/voice trans-mediation between the three with her disembodying self "to shake off the body —hers anyway"—and body forth new subjectivities/voices, "in the process of becoming another or exploring some root identity" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 113-114). Like her being, the performance too is a mediated one since the performance incorporates the technological medium, and the body and live voice, among others, of the "Other", Mr. Tuttle too. Hartke's performance begins with the body of "an ancient Japanese woman on a bare stage, gesturing in the stylized manner of Noh drama, and it ends seventy-five minutes later with a naked man, emaciated and aphasic, trying desperately to tell us something" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 114). In between these, she enters into many other bodies too:

There is the man who stands in an art gallery while a colleague fires bullets into his arm.... There is the lavishly tattooed man who has himself fitted with a crown of thorns.... There is the woman who makes paintings with her vagina. There are the

naked man and woman who charge into each other repeatedly at increasing speeds.

...There is the man in women's bloody underwear who humps a mountain of hamburger meat. (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 114)

The “last of her bodies [is] the naked man (Mr. Tuttle) [who] is stripped of recognizable language and culture. *He* moves in curious manner, as if in dark room, only more slowly and gesturally. *He* wants to tell us something. *His* voice is audible, intermittently, on tape, and Hartke lip-syncs the word” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 113-114; emphasis added). This body performance is very *moving* in that it also embodies the processual, circular, entangled relationship she has with Rey/or and Tuttle. She switches over from her subjectivity to the “naked man’s”/Mr. Tuttle’s, to Rey’s in the performance of which we know mostly through a review of the performance/or interview—which constitutes one of the chapters of the novel—as it looks like one, by one Mariella Chapman:

She switches to another voice. It is his voice, the naked man’s, spooky as a woodwind in your closet. Not tapes but live. Not lip-sync’d but real. It is speaking to me and I search my friend’s face but don’t quite see *her*. I am not sure what she’s doing. I can almost believe she is equipped with male genitals, as in the piece, *prosthetic* of course. (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 115; emphasis added)

The focus, force and loci of the performance is her body, a body that “encompasses [in the performance] both sexes and a number of nameless states” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 115). The queer body that it is, it has, in the past, “inhabited the bodies of adolescents, pentecostal preachers, a one-hundred-and twenty-year-old women sustained by yogurt and, most memorably, a pregnant man” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 115-116). In the novel, Mr. Tuttle’s ghostly body is like a receptacle that can contain a multitude of consciousness and selves and voices, as it is “unfinished,” “elusive,” and is with “a thinness of physical address” (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 45–6). This partly immaterial body of Tuttle also finds its reflection in Lauren’s

attempt in her body performance to transcend her body and become *something else*. She tries to immaterialize and impersonalize her body by not only, as I have shown above, occupying other's bodies by transcending the subjective materiality of her own body but also by trying to "disappear from all her former venues of aspect and bearing and to become a blankness, a body slate erased of every past resemblance" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 84). And she asks Mr. Tuttle: "why do I think I'm standing closer to you than you are to me?" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 85). It is this weightlessness of her body, its "emptiness" and "vanity" that she not only seeks for in the final performance but also that helps her achieve a body that can embody other voices, bodies and consciousness, as I have pointed out above (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 104).

Lauren's performance also imitates or is a simulacrum of and a continuation of her role/voice/consciousness-changing and disembodiment acts that form part of the themes of the novel. In other words, as Keskinen remarks, "Lauren, the body artist, fictionalizes in the same manner as the novella *The Body Artist* does, conjuring personages, evoking voices, and amalgamating events on different layers of time, whose mode of existence is due to the ghostly media of the tape machine and DeLillo's literary writing" (40). While Lauren repeats Mr. Tuttle's voice of imitating her and Rey in the performance, both her body and the technological device mediate and constitute the performance. These body metamorphoses are emphasized by her friend/reviewer/interviewer, Mariella, when she remarks: "It is speaking to me and I search my friend's face but don't quite see *her*" (DeLillo, *Body Artist* 109; emphasis added). Saturated with imitation, simulacra, (dis)embodying, mediation, and mediating technologies, the characters—especially Lauren and Mr. Tuttle—represent the novel's idea of *becoming*, *entanglement*, and focuses on the posthuman intersection between human and technology, the dead and living, the material and the material.

Lauren also repeats what Mr. Tuttle *does*, or rather she "does" to Mr. Tuttle—she begins to record Mr. Tuttle and incorporates his voice to her performance and in the interview

recorded on a digital voice recorder. It is also very surprising that Lauren's imitation of Mr. Tuttle's imitation sometimes verges on echolalia, as she "adopts Mr. Tuttle's idiosyncratic discursive practices...in her own speech, thus in a way imitating her own voice as mimicked by Mr. Tuttle" (Keskinen 42). The repetition of a repetition or the imitation of a repetition turns Mr. Tuttle into, as Naas argues, "the contraband of Rey, the Rey-band, Lauren as the contraband of Mr. Tuttle—the one 'doing' the other" (98). As he further states, the novel also explores the "difference between the voice and its playback or its repetition, the voice and its electronic; robotic; or synthesized version on a tape recorder of what used to be called 'answering machine'" (Naas 99).

The novel's use of repetition, I argue, also functions as an idea to both reflect on and give rise to the spectrality of the presence of the dead/other in the world of the living. As Mieszkowski has argued, the spectral figure doesn't appear to be a figure/ation of the human as such but is in the form of a "sonic-ghost", the re-enactment of the voice of the dead Rey through Mr. Tuttle (132). The spectral circularity of the voice of the "other" is also mediated through the character of Lauren herself. The spectral "other"/Mr. Tuttle can also be read, following Stefen Herbrechter and Karolina Lummaa's argument, as the ghost that may function as a metaphor for the "other" or the "outside" of "the human" (Herbrechter 29; Lummaa 42). Following them, I argue that the liminal character of Mr. Tuttle can be read as having a posthuman "ghostly ontology" that not only questions the supposedly "human" nature of Lauren but also completes her as a posthuman being. This posthuman being of hers is further emphasized by her performance where she participates in a "posthuman" disembodying and embodying of other bodies to become *something else* other than her previous self (Herbrechter 86, 90; Lummaa 41). In this sense, it can also be said that the novel also stages a situation in which, as Boxall rightly puts it, "the human itself can only be contemplated from elsewhere, from some posthuman perspective" ("Science" 127).

However, Lauren ultimately seems to return to some semblance of a former self rather than completely inhabiting and revealing a posthuman desire for bodily transcendence. This, it seems, could be DeLillo's critique of technology and the transhumanist celebration of technologies' potential to transcend human limitations. He seems to be more interested in presenting, as Herbrechter argues, aspects of a neo-humanist subjecthood ("Posthuman/ist Literature?" 15). However, DeLillo's showcasing of this "neo-human" vs. "nonhuman" encounter falls short of, according to Herbrechter, the possibility for a critical posthumanist ideology that his fiction is capable of ("Posthuman/ist Literature?" 16). Herbrechter further argues that DeLillo's fiction fails in its ambiguous positioning "between the yearning for human potentiality and the frustration about human reality" in highly technologized world ("Posthuman/ist Literature?" 16). In other words, "posthumanism's own critical potential ultimately is denied by DeLillo's own (*neohumanist*) desire to "rehumanize, remember and reinvent" the human in the novel (Herbrechter, *Posthumanism* 7 and "Posthuman/ist Literature" 16). DeLillo's ultimate return to a liberal humanist subject based on what can be called a rooted, or as Herbrechter argues (and I have noted in Chapter One), a "neohumanist" ideology occurs in *Cosmopolis* as well, especially in showing Packer's nostalgia for a past time, evidenced in his desire to have the haircut in the outlier part of the city, as well as in his death in the end at the hands of Levin ("Posthuman/ist Literature" 16). His death is that which surpasses all claims of transhumanist future embodied in the high technological environment in which Packer lives.

The technological mediation that is at work in Lauren's posthumous/posthuman relation to Rey, I argue, also embodies within it the construction of a textual character within the structure of the novel. Each character, in this sense—especially Mr. Tuttle/and Rey—is, I argue, the product of, to use Barad's term, an "intra-action" that is at work in the novel. Intra-

action is a term that Barad uses in place of “interaction”⁴⁵ that, for her, requires already-established bodies that then interact with the other. In Barad’s conceptualization, “phenomena [are] not objects-in-themselves, or as perceived objects (in the Kantian or phenomenological sense), but as specific ‘intra-actions’” (149). Drawing on Barad, I argue that this “intra-action”—the word “action” is also pertinent in DeLillo’s case because both Mr. Tuttle and Lauren “do” each other and Rey and “act” as the other [of Rey too]—is what creates DeLillo’s characters’ ‘individual’, if such a thing can be imagined, character, and their character-role in the fictional world, which is only discernible in this relational network and qualities (49). As Barad’s notion of intra-action further emphasizes on the “ontological inseparability” of entities, the characters in the novel, especially Lauren and Mr. Tuttle/the recorder, I argue, are inseparable as they do not engage in an *interaction*, “which relies on a metaphysics of *individualism*”, i.e. “the prior existence of separately determinate entities”, but in an *intra-action* between the object/the device and the biological bodies of Lauren and Mr. Tuttle both of which, to quote Barad, “emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them (Barad 149).

Here character—both the peculiarity of a thing/human and the fictional entity—is constructed, I argue, through this process of mutual “intra-action”, providing them agencies only through the dynamism of forces—matter/recorder and organism at work (Barad 141). All the fictional entities here—the recorder, Lauren, Mr. Tuttle, Rey—are, I argue, constantly exchanging, diffracting, influencing and working through the other in an inseparable web of entanglement. This construction of ‘character’ through mutual intra-action is also very

⁴⁵ In her *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad notes that “[t]he notion of intra-action is a key element of agential realist framework. The neologism “intra-action” signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. (33)

illuminating, especially when we realize that DeLillo also *presents* Mr. Tuttle in the novel as a product of Lauren's imagination, a way for her to process the loss/absence of her husband. This *mise en abyme* quality of characterization, in a peculiarly DeLillian way, suggests the proliferation of images and entities, but not in the way in which he presents them, as I argued, in his other novels that I have discussed in chapter 2.

III Conclusion

The two novels I have discussed in this chapter present "character" in peculiar ways. Their characterization is indicative of DeLillo's concerns and his engagement with the interface between technology and the human, and how the category of 'the human' has been increasingly reconfigured in the context of new technologies. Unlike certain science fiction writers, and unlike in his more recent novel *Zero K*, DeLillo doesn't seem to have, as Herbrechter argues, a grand vision of transhumanism or posthumanism in these two novels, though one may notice a certain proclivity towards a rather incipient critical posthumanist urge against the "posthumanizing technologies" of our time in *Cosmopolis* (Posthuman/ist Literature? 17). However, he insists through these novels, especially *Cosmopolis*, how new technologies have integrated the human into its fold, revealing the interconnected existence of human and technology and its implications. In *Body Artist*— which, unlike *Cosmopolis*, is less evident of the cyber technology that characterizes most advanced societies today— DeLillo emphasizes the plasticity of the body and its "intra-action" with other nonhuman entities/technological devises, while in *Cosmopolis* he compels us to focus not only on the erosion of any 'human' quality in cyber-capital culture as well as its datafication of the human but also how the very idea of the (post)human is a construct of the networked entanglement produced by the intra-action between ambient techno-capital corporeality and the human organism/body. *Cosmopolis* also reveals DeLillo's fears about the "transparent

networks that slowly occlude the flow of all those aspects of nature and character that distinguish humans from elevator buttons and doorbells” (*Zero K* 239).

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CONCLUSION

Characterizing the Posthuman/Post-techno Future in DeLillo's Later Novels

In this thesis, I have examined how *character*, *culture* and *society* intersect in DeLillo's novels creating "impressions" of certain character-variants that reveal the character of the human, society and technology as they are presented in his work. This "impression-creation" is, as the chapters have tried to demonstrate, a product of his work's persistent concerns with the dominant role of technology in determining the character of our time. This study assumes that a nuanced analysis of *ideas* of character in DeLillo's work can help us understand his continuing preoccupation with the technological realities of contemporary American society. Though I have examined DeLillo's work from *White Noise* (1985) to *The Silence* (2020), I have not discussed his later novels such as *Point Omega* (2010), *Zero K* (2016) and *The Silence* (2020) in detail in the previous chapters. These later novels are of a different kind in that technologies are not presented as such or as discrete objects in them, as they are in his earlier novels, but as *constituting* the very ambience of his fictional worlds. In other words, technologies are not present as discrete or individual entities such as television and voice recorder wielding agential power, as in *White Noise* and *The Body Artist*, but as an absent-presence and as *system* that networks/intersects/entangle with, and defines the very idea of, 'the human' in a posthuman future/present⁴⁶.

Situated as they are in a fast-changing digital technology culture (speed is one of the characteristics of these novels!), technology is what drives these narratives. For instance, in *Zero K* there is cryonics and other cyber technologies that enable the condition for human life expansion, while in *The Silence* DeLillo reflects on the breaking down of all technologies

⁴⁶ One just needs to look at, for instance, the transhumanist strain in *Zero K*, the anthropocene condition in *Point Omega* and the presciently presented end-of-the-human condition in *The Silence* to understand what I call the *apocalyptic* turn in his later novels.

without the presence of much technological devices except a blank television set. This peculiar presence of technology needs to be understood, I argue, in the context of the *character* of contemporary technology itself. The transformation of technology from early media to cyber technology, as it is evident in DeLillo's work since its inception, reaches a climatic point in his more recent novels, *Zero K* and *The Silence*. Rachele Dini considers such a shift evident in these later novels as a product of a "speculative turn" that DeLillo's postmillennial writings embeds within them, marking a shift from historiography (evident in his portrayal of historical events in *Libra* [1988], *Mao II* [1991], *Underworld* [1997] and *Falling Man* [2007]) to "futurography" (as embedded in *Zero K* and *The Silence*) (par. 2). This shift in DeLillo and what it entails, as evident in *Zero K* and *The Silence*, needs to be examined in detail, as it may throw more light on our examination of "character" in this study, as well as in the light of the *character* of a posthuman/post-technological condition whose future is uncertain.

These later novels seem to suggest that although technological innovations in the earlier periods had greatly influenced human life and nature, culture itself is technology in today's digital era (I have discussed this in the Introduction). Technology in the contemporary world has become so obvious a phenomenon that it has become almost invisible owing to its taken-for-granted nature. Unlike earlier technologies, the *character* of contemporary technology is more complex and is of a different kind: it collects and transmits data, information, images and constructs and reduces the world to networks of images and information, creating what Stiegler calls "reticulated milieus", or a "reticulated, "automatic society"⁴⁷. Its role is also ambiguous because it serves both negative and positive purposes, and hence has a *pharmakological* character to it, as Stiegler has characterized contemporary

⁴⁷ Digitization, according to Stiegler, has inaugurated "the convergence of telecommunications, the audiovisual and computing [technologies], a convergence that leads to reticulated, automatic society" (*Age* 34).

technology (“Distrust” 32). As such, most of the people who live in the “First World” and in societies that are increasingly advancing in terms of technological innovation now mostly live online, or lead what Floridi calls “onlife” in a highly digitally inter-connected world, where we have even reached to a point that our experience/existence doesn’t make any sense if it is not “online” (1). This is a condition of life that Floridi refers to as “the new experience of a hyper-connected reality within which it is no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline” (1). It is such a *posthuman* character of technology, and the fears of losing it that DeLillo portrays in *The Silence*.

In such a condition, it is important to conclude this study by thinking about the *posthuman* character our time in the context of DeLillo’s recent novels, because not only do they show us the irreducible *presence* of technology as a *context* or *environment*, and as a embedding a powerful discourse around ‘the human’ today in an age of the promises of human enhancement. The representational dimension of “character”—looking at character as if they were real people and character’s metaphoric referencing of the world around us—in these novels may also help us understand DeLillo’s concern with such a *posthuman* present. These later novels seem to posit themselves within the current discourse of critical posthumanism as well, as I have noted earlier.

What is peculiar about DeLillo’s post-2010 novels is that his obsessive portrayal of the transformation of America’s technological realities in his early novels seems to find its culmination—or rather apocalyptic moment—in these later novels, especially in *The Silence*, and *Zero K*. *Zero K* undertakes a fascinating but frightening journey through the Convergence, where the cryonic experiments are based, offering readers DeLillo’s powerful insights into what Herbrechter calls “the transhumanist fantasies of human life extension”, or what Baudrillard has called “the ultimate fantasy” of humans (Herbrechter 6; Baudrillard 3). In the novel, DeLillo’s attempt is to construct a “‘counter narrative truth’ about the human

condition in the age of transhuman technology” (Herbrechter 6). *Zero K* offers an important case for examining the *character* of the posthuman that is celebrated in the discourses around transhumanism. In his presentation of a critique of transhumanist project of life-expansion in the novel, DeLillo shows how our rush towards a posthuman future—in which the very idea of death itself is redefined through cryonics and biotechnology—can cause serious implications on our understanding of the human. In what can be termed as a speculative Convergence of *Zero K*—the underground where the experiment on human body is carried out—human subjects are put into technologically mediated life expansion experiments. DeLillo’s concern with such a human enhancement project has its reflections in the works of such opponents of human enhancement as Baudrillard and Habermas who, in *In The Future of Human Nature* (2003), expresses certain fears that human enhancement will change the ethical self-understanding of human beings in such way “that we may no longer see ourselves as ethically free and morally equal beings guided by norms and reasons” (41).

The novel forces us to think that though the new developments in science and technology have helped humans enhance their bodily capacities and expand life span, such radical possibilities also create conditions that can suggest that “technological posthumanism ... with [its] mutating, cloned techno-bodies with their threat or promise of informational ‘dematerialization’ and mediatization” can portend certain dangers to human beings (Herbrechter 2). Because, as DeLillo seems to suggest, the potentialities opened up by such technological posthumanism can not only weaken “the human itself as a category”, as Boxall argues, but also allow “humankind to control the planet [that] has also [been] made... inhospitable to humans and to all other species” (127). DeLillo’s critique of technological futurity in *Zero K* embeds an important critique of posthumanism from a critical posthumanist stand. While DeLillo’s earlier novels populate characters who can be identified

as posthuman/cyborg figures (Gladney, Packer etc.), *Zero K* has characters erected on cryonic pods without names, as “bodies in pods” waiting to resurrect (DeLillo 162).

While *Zero K* is DeLillo’s attempt at raising some important questions that seem to echo the questions that Paul Sheehan has asked in the context of Posthumanism—is transhumanism a utopian aspiration, “an evolutionary end-point of” what we used to know as ‘the human’?, Is the transhuman project in the Convergence an escape from the most terrifying reality of human extinction that seems to be upon us in the era of Anthropocene?, or Must it be prevented with all vehemence to save humans from becoming bodies on pods?—DeLillo’s *The Silence* (2020) characterizes a techno-apocalyptic moment that humans may have to face in the near future (DeLillo, *Zero K* 245). The novel—published in 2020 during the Covid Crisis—is set in the near future, 2022. It opens on a Transatlantic airplane, and the two characters—Jim Kripps and Tessa Berens—who are in the plane, are eager to get home to join their friends Diane and Max for watching the 2022 Super Bowl. Suddenly all technologies fail at once and the plane crash lands. However, they escape with minor injuries, and leaves with the shock at this unimaginable technological failure. Cut to a different setting in an East Side one-bedroom apartment, where Diane and Max host Martina as they wait for Tessa and Jim to join and for the game to start on the “super screen TV” (DeLillo, *Silence* 4). The screen of the TV suddenly blanks out and the sound fades. Along with the TV, the mobiles; landline phones; refrigerator; stove; lights, everything die at once, and all electronic communications fail, creating what DeLillo calls “the global silence” (DeLillo, *Silence* 82).

In the novel, DeLillo engages not only with the contemporary life that has increasingly become “online” and its implications, but also with what we may all expect, in a condition of an excess of screens, of the potential apocalyptic moment of this “onlife” suddenly ending, causing much chaos. The chaos is intensified by the fact that much of what we do, think,

perceive are now mediated and made possible by this “onlife”; but the abrupt ending of such existence imposes unprecedented dilemmas (Floridi 1). The shutdown, which the narrator calls as “the mass insomnia of this inconceivable time”, not only creates panic among people but also makes people wonder whether it is a “new normal” that certain people seem to have accepted (DeLillo, *Silence* 78). As the narrator frighteningly asks: “Isn’t it strange that certain individuals have seemed to accept the shut-down, the burnout? Is this something that they’ve always longed for, subliminally, sub-atomically?” (DeLillo, *Silence* 78). The blank out represents for the characters, to borrow the character Elise Martucci’s phrase, “a radically altered environment”, an environment that is different from the image-saturated, *media*-ted environment of his early novels (DeLillo, *Silence* 5). Martin, a character in the novel, wonders whether it is “World War III” (DeLillo, *Silence* 79). Max, another character in the novel who always stares at the blank TV screen, constantly resorts to made-up live broadcasting of the Super Bowl. This act, as Jiena Sun argues, has a peculiar function as Max “has to literally turn himself into [a television set] to fill the vast emptiness accentuated by the black screen” (2).

The abrupt breaking down of the technological system suggests a peculiarly DeLillian reflection of a new form of cultural calamity, if we can redefine calamities in a highly technologized, digitized world, that his work has been pointing towards ever since *White Noise* (1985). This unexpected and hitherto-unimaginable turn the characters are forced to experience at this apocalyptic moment could be an answer to DeLillo’s claim, which he makes in the very beginning of *Zero K*: “Everybody wants to own the end of the world” (DeLillo 1). Faced with the sudden failure of the screens that define their lives, the characters in the novel begin to “sit together, understanding nothing, speaking, listening to each other” (DeLillo, *Silence* 35). A secular kind of sociality outside technology is borne at the moment, whose potential no one can assess.

This moment of rupture that produces a new paranoia, which is different from the ones that DeLillo presented in *White Noise* and *Libra*, is well expressed in one of the climactic speeches in the book given by the receptionist at a walk-in clinic where the characters Jim and Tessa visit: “[w]hatever is going on,” she says, “it has crushed our technology. The word itself seems outdated to me, lost in space. Where is the leap of authority to our secure devices, our encryptions capacities, our tweets, trolls and bots. Is everything in the data sphere subject to distortion and theft? And do we simply have to sit here and mourn our fate?” (DeLillo, *Silence* 120). If his early novels share their concerns about the omnipresence of technology, it is the lack of such an ambience that creates the fear. As the character suggests, this is also the sudden loss of technologically-mediated subjectivity which can now raise serious questions about losing on the grip of our (on)life itself in an increasingly screen-dependent and digitized world. The sudden fall from such a height of technological sublimity can precipitate not only unprecedented crisis in humanity but extraordinary paranoia in people whose lives have been made possible today at the interstice of the physical world and the virtual world. The possible outcome of such a condition is well expressed by a woman working in a clinic in the novel, when she laments that people “will have to live “E-mail-less” life” now, because “the more advanced, the more vulnerable” we become. “Our systems of surveillance, our facial recognition devices, our imagery resolution. How do we know who we are?”, once all these systems stop functioning? (DeLillo, *Silence* 61). Martin also shares the woman’s concern: “What remains for us to see, hear, feel”, if we do not have technology? (DeLillo, *Silence* 80).

DeLillo situates this crisis at the centre of human’s relationship with technology, as he does in his other novels. The condition created by the blackout, and the questions raised by the characters point to the inevitability of technology in human’s life today, which seems to echo Stiegler’s conceptualization of the human as inevitably constituted by *technics* or

techno-environment. Stiegler's understanding of *technics* as the "prosthesis of the human" suggests that the human is constituted not by some interior capacity such as consciousness but by human's prosthetic relationship with *technics* (*Technics* 17). This "exteriorization of the human", as he calls it, also indicates the end of conventional idea of genetic evolution and inaugurates the beginning of what he calls *epiphylogenesis*, by which he means that human's evolution is in fact the evolution of its technical supports/objects or "organized inorganic matter". In other words, *epiphylogenesis* is "the continuation of life by means other than life" (Stiegler, *Technics* 17). Max's repetition of television "noise"—as DeLillo had called it in *White Noise*—in the novel includes his repeated, made-up play-by-play of the Super Bowl, and is part of his attempt to counter the void created by the blackout. Its symbolic meaning can be best understood, I argue, if we look at it from the perspective of Stiegler's conceptualization of human-*technics* relationship. The television/noise that Max repeats does not seem to constitute, I argue, an external body colonizing Max's mind—as we see it in DeLillo's earlier novels such as *White Noise*—but as co-constituting the very memory archive of Max. In other words, it is, in a way, the techno-memory that is embodied in Max, as a residue of his continued watching of such games. Max in this sense can be best understood as a techno-memory impersonated, and his identity is constituted by this intersection with the device.

Though DeLillo engages deeply with the after-effects of such a techno-disaster by turning to his characters' minds and actions, his *silence* in the novel about the *cause* of the break down is intriguing. However, one can surmise that it may be because he is well aware that within the very creation of such a technological condition also embeds the prospect of its immanent destruction, especially when it reaches an excess point. This is also reflected in the novel's setting of the actions in the near future (2022), a detail that also becomes intriguing when we consider how the book is somehow imbricated in the Covid-crisis (it was published

in 2020). What *The Silence* indicates could be a post-technological moment, as Adrian Howlett notes, which is different from the technological sublimity or “speculative posthumanism” or “realism” (the cryonic preservation of the human body for life expansion) that we see thematized in *Zero K* (Howlett 310; Herbrechter, “Posthuman/ist Literature?” 2). If his earlier novels, especially the ones produced in the 80s and 90s, projected a situation where all forms of genuine human ties and relations are either lost to technology or are made possible through *media*-tion, the “[l]ost systems in the crux of everyday life” in *The Silence* are not just, as Howlett further notes, “technological systems but social and cultural ones”, as these categories have been made increasingly possible and determined by digital technologies today (DeLillo, *Silence* 55; Howlett 308).

DeLillo’s reflections on such a techno-crisis produce questions that seem to have no end or answers: What would such a situation indicate? What implications does it have on humans and their interaction with their surroundings? Now that human life depends more on technology than on anything else, what would be our conditions as humans? Does it signal a post-posthuman or a new posthuman turn? DeLillo doesn’t seem to have any clear answers to such questions. However, he seems to wish for a “prelapsarian past, for an Edenic phone-less era” that can bring back a more ‘humane’ and embodied communication (Burke). Individuals who experience such moments of rupture seem to sink into, as DeLillo’s fiction depicts, a condition of complete helplessness and meaningless communication. They cannot reconnect themselves with nature, nor can they make any genuine human contact, but instead, are more estranged from the (virtual) world. This helplessness or the real tragedy of such a situation is well captured by DeLillo in the novel’s final image of Max staring “into the blank screen”, revealing human’s emptiness in such a “post-technological” moment (*Silence* 122; Howlett 317). In short, *The Silence* portrays the character of a social condition when all technologies

die and when all the screens that control and define our life today go blank abruptly, creating hitherto unimaginable confusion and chaos.

The previous chapters have demonstrated that DeLillo presents the dominant character of contemporary American life as becoming increasingly *technological*. As DeLillo rightly observes in an interview:

We depend on [technology] much, much more [today]. We can't live without it. It's part of the air we breathe. The question is, does it enrich our lives? Yes, in many, many ways it does, of course. But are there certain drawbacks? Do people get to depend on it too heavily? And then there are those who use technology to create certain kinds of chaos and panic and violence and cause deep grief. ("We All Live")

It is such a confusion and chaos that DeLillo presents in *The Silence*. In the novel, unlike in his earlier ones, it seems difficult for characters to decide if technology is good or bad, but they are sure about one thing: they cannot live without it. As Reijers and Coeckelbergh argue, the characters understand, as perhaps we too, that "we cannot simply abandon technology and retreat to a pre-technological world; both because this "world" has never existed and because technology constitutes a condition of our existence" (3). It is also so because of technology's dual character as *pharmakon*—both cure and poison—as Stiegler had rightly observed in the 1990s. Technology today, for him, "is similar to what the Ancient Greeks called a *pharmakon*: it is both the poison and the cure, or perhaps rather: neither the poison, nor the cure" (Stiegler, "Distrust" 3). It is something which is *there*, among us, an unavoidable presence, whether we want it or not (qtd. in Reijers and Coeckelbergh 4).

DeLillo's later novels raise some important questions concerning not only technology's pharmacological character but also the complex ways in which it interacts or "intra-acts" with human beings (Barad 174). These questions are different from what his earlier novels raised:

questions such as how do we or how to live well with technology, once we realize technology's presence is unavoidable today? To what extent can we depend on technology—for our immediate uses or for all uses, including for life extension, as in *Zero K*? How do we as human deal with the “deep mediatization” in which we find ourselves entangled today? (Hepp 4). These questions are part of the peculiar character of our present. This peculiar character of our age has been emphasized by Reijers and Coeckelbergh: “the world of today is literally littered with stories about technology, about the manifold ways in which we think and express our thoughts about the giant artificial world we—together—have created” (4). These stories and the concerns they raise range from, as they say:

those that come from both optimists and pessimists of technology, [from those] who rage about the possibilities for constructing the stone of (eternal) life that Medieval alchemists dreamt of; to uploading one's mind to the machine and living forever; to the stories of today's pessimists, who see the same world as one that brings doom to mankind, through never-ending pollution and poisoning of the soul (Reijers and Coeckelbergh 4).

Inherent in these concerns and questions is the reality: it is impossible for us to live without technology, nor can we simply “abandon technology” because “this ‘world’ has never existed [without it] and because technology constitutes a condition of our existence” (Reijers and Coeckelbergh 3). DeLillo seems to suggest such an idea in his *The Silence*, as he well knows that technology is not just a *pharmakon* but an absent-presence in today's world.

DeLillo also knows that the increasing pace with which the world has developed more of a *technological* character than of *natural* one has rendered human identity unstable and dependent on a whole set of technological tools and platforms we use in our daily-life, making our lives increasingly “onlife” (Floridi 1). The contemporary fictional characters reveal such a *posthuman* character that many of us have come to embody in a world that is

marked by the depletion of the neat boundary between the real world and the virtual world, and by the excess of information revolution; data politic; genetic engineering; augmented reality; and advanced communication technologies. They constantly compel us to think that our identity is neither fixed nor pure but is an assemblage and is determined/defined, *inter alia*, by one's networked relation to the technological environment.

In an attempt to understand DeLillo's engagement with this techno-realities and human-nonhuman "entangled relationality" in our highly digitized present, the study has found "character" as a useful perspectival framework through which one can approach his novels. With this purpose, the first chapter of this study has attempted to situate the arguments by discussing three important ideas that are central to the study: *character*, *culture* and *technology*, as well as their interrelations. Drawing on the works of Heidegger; Kittler; McLuhan; Derrida; Stiegler; Virilio etc. on technology and lining them with discussion surrounding *Posthumanism* in the works of Braidotti; Hayles; Nayar and Herbrechter, the chapter has sought to underline the interface between the three terms in the larger context of DeLillo's work. It is important to discuss their works in relation to DeLillo because their works have often indicated not only how the very idea of the human itself has changed with new technologies but also how societies have embraced more of a technological character since the late twentieth century. The chapter has also discussed "character" both as an *idea* and as a *concept* that is used in the context of fiction to refer to human/nonhuman entities presented in fiction.

The second chapter has examined DeLillo's *White Noise*, *Mao II*, *Underworld*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Falling Man*, and has demonstrated how DeLillo's concern with the various impact of technological culture create in these novels certain impressions of the peculiar *character* of American society in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The chapter has argued that these novels' inclusion of media spectacle, a critique of a *culture* of

speed and its portrayal of the production of various forms of *waste* result in their *characterization* of contemporary American society as particularly *technological* in nature. Drawing on Debord, Kellner, Briziarelli, Armano and Compton, the chapter has demonstrated how DeLillo's presentation of the spectacle compels us to consider spectacle as the most important *character* of contemporary American society. In addition, the chapter has examined the production of a culture of *waste* and *speed*— both as two important consequences of capitalism and techno-culture—as they are present in the novels, and the *excess* that such a technologized society produce. The chapter has also demonstrated why it is important to pay attention to new forms of *waste*, including human-as-waste, as they are produced by the logic of capitalism in a highly technologized cyber capital world order. Drawing on the works of Douglas, Morrison, Bauman and Viney, the chapter examined DeLillo's inclusion of ideas of *waste* as that which results from new forms of marginal existence created by the logic within which cyber capitalism operates. The chapter has also examined DeLillo's critique of speed in the context of more advanced technologies, as well as his engagement with time-space compression brought about by technological innovation.

The third chapter has considered “character” as a fictional concept (meaning a “fictional being”) and examined how DeLillo's characterization embodies certain “impressions” of the technological culture that most of his novels are situated in. Drawing on the recent works on character by Frow, Anderson et al. and Garber, and on certain posthumanist discourses, the chapter has examined character both as a textual construct and an entity with representational potential. The chapter has argued that DeLillo's concerns with the recent developments in technology and their impact on the concept of ‘the human’ in his later novels reveal his “impressions” about the *posthuman* character of our life today. These impressions that DeLillo creates in these novels also point to his fears and anxieties about humans' desire for bodily enhancement and life-expansion fostered by advanced technologies.

However, this study has not discussed in detail DeLillo's later novels, especially *Point Omega*, which could have offered a more detailed understanding of the *posthuman* character of his later novels. This is primarily because of the fact that these novels did not figure in the initial scope of the research. For various reasons, these novels exemplify, as I have argued, a more intense and complex technological culture in which we now live, where questions about what it means to be human are constantly invoked in both fictional and theoretical discourses. These novels constantly remind us that the questions regarding our posthuman future (or present?) have become more pressing today than ever before with the arrival of new advancements in biotechnology and cyber technology. The study is also limited because it has not explored some of the themes related to the presence of technology in his plays such as *The Day Room* (1986)—in which a TV set assumes the centre stage and even the role of a character—*Valparaiso* (1999), which uses live performance with video projection and deals with the effects of media on individuals, and *The Rapture of the Athlete Assumed into Heaven* (2007). In both the latter plays, the setting is a TV studio. The omission is glaring but unavoidable as my focus is more on the novels that, it is argued, portray the impact of technology more persistently and intensely.

DeLillo's reflections on the cryonic project in *Zero K* can help us focus on how such new ways of looking at social realities/futurologies help us understand better our posthuman present, a present which compels us to affirm Haraway's observation that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" ("Cyborg Manifesto" 149). The urgent questions that these novels, especially *Zero K*, posit can help us explore, if not answer, some of the complex questions regarding our life today. A potential area in DeLillo studies can be the new mode of realism that he employs in his *Zero K*, wherein the mixing of realist mode and what Glavankova refers to as new "speculative mode" helps us examine the true character of our contemporary period, which in all its manifestation can be termed as

quintessentially posthuman (93)⁴⁸. The possibilities that are opened up by DeLillo's new realism also point to a new "humanism", or what Herbrechter calls a "neo-humanist" urge, that is present in DeLillo's later novels ("Posthuman/ist Literature?" 5). Herbrechter argues that through a "neohumanist, or rehumanising" perspective, DeLillo offers, and urges, in his later novels, writers to offer a "counter-narrative" to the posthumanizing technology and "nostalgic terrorism" of our time in order "to rise from the ruins of the future" (Herbrechter, *Posthuman/ist Literature?* 5; DeLillo, "Ruins").

Another direction that DeLillo studies can take is by paying attention to the "end-times" that his later novels engage with. His novels such as *Point Omega*, *Zero K* and *The Silence* in particular can be read as addressing some of the concerns regarding such end-times that posthumanist and Anthropocene scholars have raised. These include DeLillo's discussion of the end of 'the human' in *Zero K*, the Anthropocene bend in *Point Omega*, and the techno-apocalyptic moments in *The Silence*. This inclination towards such end-times, or end-of-the-world narratives, in contemporary fiction has been indicated by Marshall Kate who includes DeLillo's *Point Omega* among the "new novels of a newly self-aware geological period" (524). DeLillo himself has alerted our attention to such an end-time that marks our contemporary period: "Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back now to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field" (*Point Omega* 52-53). Paying attention to such "late concerns", as they can be called, in his novels

⁴⁸ In her review of Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Year of the Flood*, Ursula K Le Guin has also referred to such a mode as Atwood's forte in portraying the character of contemporary period. She says that in her attempt to write, Atwood has "extrapolated imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire" (2009). In *Moving Targets*, her collection of essays, Atwood herself has acknowledged that all that occur in her work are possible things; they are either possible or may have already occurred ("Dire Cartographies"). Her redefinition of speculative fiction aligns with the above statement: "stories set on Earth and employing elements that already exist in some form, like genetic engineering, as opposed to more wildly hypothetical science fiction ideas like time travel, faster-than-light drives, and transporters" ("Margaret Atwood on Science Fiction" 12).

would help us examine the peculiar *character* of our time that is marked by fears about such end-times.

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award of the degree of **M.Phil English**

son/daughter
has been declared qualified for the
after having passed the prescribed courses as follows:

Course No.	Title of the Course	Letter Grade Awarded	Credits	Month & Year of Passing
	<u>Semester : I</u>			
HE600	Research Methods & Dissertation Writing (Literature)	A	2.00	NOV 2008
HE602	Critical Approaches	B	4.00	NOV 2008
HE648	Contemporary Theory in Relation to Post - Modern Gothic	A	4.00	NOV 2008
HE649	Shared Reading of Selections	A	4.00	NOV 2008
HE650	The Fantastic and Gothic	A	4.00	NOV 2008
	<u>Semester : II</u>			
HE680	Dissertation	A	18.00	FEB 2011

S: Supplementary I: Improvement R: Repeat

Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA): 8.78 (EIGHT POINT SEVEN EIGHT)
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3.	10HEPH03	Jhilam Chattaraj	----	----	PASS	----	----	----
4.	10HEPH04	Talisunep Jamir	----	----	----	PASS	----	----
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7.	09HEPH07	Manoj Kantha Sirra						PASS

Code	Credits	Subject
1.	4	Reading Fiction in Theory
2.	4	Performance Theory and Issues in "Indian Theatre"
3.	4	The Corporate Novel and its antecedents
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2	10HEPH02	Jobeth Ann Warji	EN832- PASS
3	10HEPH03	Jhilam Chattaraj	EN833- PASS
4	10HEPH04	Talisunep Jamir	EN834- PASS
5	10HEPH05	Laldinpuii	EN835- PASS
6	10HEPH06	Anusuya Malakar	EN836- PASS

Course No.	Title of the Course
EN 831	Character: Fiction and Other
EN 832	Performance Poetry
EN 833	The Nation in Corporate Fiction
EN 834	Primary Texts: Austen & Adaptations
EN 835	Selected Folk Tales from Lushai Hills, Naga Hills and Khasi Hills
EN 836	Assamese Drama


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Themeem T <themeem@ststephens.edu>

Paper Acceptance

English Forum <eforum@gauhati.ac.in>
To: Themeem T <themeem@ststephens.edu>

Fri, Dec 23, 2022 at 10:16 PM

Dear Themeem T,

It gives me immense pleasure to inform you that your paper "Cyber Capitalism, Speed and the Production of Waste: "Waste" and "Wasted Lives" in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*" has been accepted for publication in the forthcoming issue of English Forum: Journal of the Department of English, Gauhati University which is due in April-May 2023.

Best,
Anjali Daimari
Professor, Department of English
Gauhati University
&
Editor
English Forum

The sender of this mail is an authorised user of email services of Gauhati University.



Themeem T <themeem@ststephens.edu>

Paper for Consideration

Assonance JRCL <jrcl.drclcu@gmail.com>
To: Themeem T <themeem@ststephens.edu>

Wed, Dec 7, 2022 at 12:49 PM

Dear Dr. Themeem T,

Your manuscript having title "Character and Technological Culture: Time-Space Compression, Speed and the Character of Society in Don DeLillo's Cosmopolis" has been accepted for publication in our peer reviewed UGC Care listed journal - Assonance in the issue number 23 that is scheduled for publication in January 2023.

Best wishes

The Editors
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This is to certify that P. Theameen
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in Don de Lillo's 'Cosmopolis'
at the DSA Annual Conference of the Department of English, University
of Delhi (3rd-5th March, 2014).



Head of the Department of English
University of Delhi



CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION



This is to certify that
MR. THEMEEM T.
presented a paper titled
Techno-Apocalypse and the Loss of Memory in the Digital Era in Don DeLillo's *The Silence*
at the international memory studies conference **Memory in a Digital Age**
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Centre for Memory Studies
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